

The Glory of Christ (4)

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[0 : 0 0] Charles Spurgeon was a famous English minister in the late 19th century and he once said, 'Every Christian is either a missionary or an imposter. Every Christian is either a missionary! It's impossible to be a Christian and not have a heart for mission.

That mission being the spread of the good news of the Kingdom of Jesus Christ. The question is, are we focused as individual Christians on spreading that good news, on telling our family and friends, our workmates and those who live in our city with us that Jesus Christ is Lord and that through faith in Him, as Ruth said, they can be rescued and have eternal life.

The same is true for every church. Every Christian church is either focused on mission or is an imposter. Is our church here in Crow Road focused on mission, on spreading the good news of the Kingdom of Christ?

In computer games, I'm told there's a category of character called an NPC, which stands for, Benjamin's laughing, he knows, non-playing character. An NPC is a figure who doesn't do anything. He's just coded into the game for background effect. To our considerable shame when it comes to mission and evangelism, there are too many NPCs in the Christian church. Christians who perhaps come to church but never share their faith never share their faith and never help those who do in any way. So Spurgeon's right. Every Christian and every church is either a missionary or an imposter.

Mission and evangelism began with God. God the Father, because He loves His Son so much, wants the whole world to hear and respond to the good news of Jesus. He wants the whole world to love and praise His Son as much as He does. That is the mission of God, the Missio Dei.

[2 : 3 7] To accomplish His mission, God has built the church. Christians, God has called us to be His missionaries, inviting a dark, needy, and ignorant world to know and love Jesus as He does. This is our purpose as Christians and as a church. So God's missionary purpose for His people did not begin with Jesus' great commission to go and make disciples of all nations. The Old Testament is full of God's stated desire that the whole world would come to know Him as Lord. Psalm 67 is a classic example of a missionary psalm, calling God's people away from being NPCs, non-playing characters, to become missionaries of the gospel. And that's one reason why we tend to sing Psalm 67 at the end of a missionary meeting, because it reinforces God's mission. Now this psalm is divided into two sections. Even though it's situated in the middle, the first is a picture of the world as it could be in verses 3 and 4. The second contains the remainder of the psalm and describes the church as it should be. May our study of this psalm this morning be the catalyst for lighting a fire of mission in our hearts, a fire which grows and grows until we finally see the whole of Glasgow flourishing by the preaching of God's Word and the praising of His name. Every Christian and every Christian church is either a missionary or an imposter. Which are you?

Which are us? So first of all then, the world as it could be. The world as it could be. Verses 3 and 4.

Let the peoples praise you, O God. Let all the peoples praise you. Let the nations be glad and sing for joy, for you judge the peoples with equity and guide the nations upon earth. In fact, verse 5 is included as well. Let the peoples praise you, O God. Let all the peoples praise you. This is the world as it could be.

The word utopia. The word utopia was created to describe an ideal world, the world we'd love to see, but we know isn't possible. These verses describe this kind of utopia. At the heart of this vision is a little Hebrew word, silah. Silah. Now, we do not know for sure what this Hebrew word means.

It may be a musical term designed solely for those musicians accompanying this psalm with their stringed instruments. But more likely, it is thought that the word silah means pause, pause. In effect, the writer wants all those who are singing these words to pause, to stop for a moment, to think about what he's saying. Don't just rush over these words, he says to us. Think of the world they're describing, a utopian world where all the nations are glad and singing for joy because God is their God.

[6 : 16] Think about it. Meditate upon it. Have it as a picture in your mind and in your heart. This is most definitely not the world we see today, a world of trouble and suffering, but it is a world which could be, a world we'd love it to be, a world we want to work toward if God is the God of all the nations.

Richard Baxter was a minister in Kidderminster in England in the 17th century. So profound was the impact of his ministry there that by the time he left, it was said that you could walk down every street in Kidderminster and hear the sound of psalms and spiritual songs being sung in houses. Now that's never been said of Glasgow, but surely it's our prayer that one day it would be that every street and every tenement would be filled with people glad and praising God. There are different features of this description. For example, the psalm writer speaks of God judging the nations with equity and guiding the nations upon earth.

It's a picture of how governments are guided in their policies by the Word of God. Now we pray for this in our prayer meetings, but in our hearts we know that our governments do not consult the Bible when they're passing laws or making policies.

Not just our government, but no government in the world does this. But in this utopian world which could be when governments create policies governing health care, social provision, they do so with an open Bible before them.

Again, the psalm writer describes the nations being glad and singing for joy. We live in a joyless world dominated by bad news. There are times when we've had more than enough of the news and we want to shut the world out. Suffering and tragedy and pain, they dominate our headlines.

[8 : 27] Journalists love to spread fear. Their motto is, if it bleeds, it leads. But the reality is that there are so many more good things happening in our world today than bad.

And yet, good news doesn't sell papers. However, see the difference between this world and the world the psalm writer is describing, a world filled with gladness and joy.

The mistake the world makes is to think it can have gladness and joy without God. Pause. Think of a world truly dominated by gladness and joy, by smiling, not suffering faces.

And then he describes a world where the peoples praise God. God of the Bible is very far from the minds of most of our world's peoples. He may be cursed, but he's not praised.

The religions of this world devote themselves to the pursuit of God, but not the God of the Bible. Rather, a God of their own imaginations.

[9 : 34] Walking down the streets in Glasgow, you may hear God's name, but it's not in the context of praise. More in the context of curse.

It pains us to see the name of our Lord being dragged through the mud, to hear the name of Jesus being used as a swear. We'd love to see our churches filled with people worshipping and praising Him.

Glasgow was once called the city of spires because of the hundreds of impressive church buildings in our city. But the vast majority are now empty or they've been repurposed for housing or business.

Wouldn't it be a dream come true to see them being converted back into churches? And more besides, wouldn't it be amazing for new churches to be built in every neighbourhood in our city?

Pause for a moment and imagine the future of Glasgow like that of Kidderminster, with the sound of praise coming from every street in every city.

[10 : 42] God glorified like He deserves to be, and our city flourishing like it was designed to be. And then notice also with me how the psalm writer includes all peoples in his vision.

He's referring to all the peoples of the world, all the world's ethnic groupings. At the present time, there are vast areas of our world where the praise of God is but a whisper, not a roar.

Many people groups have proved very hard to the gospel. The church in these places is tiny, under great pressure. I've told you this before, but when I was a student, there was an old man in Aberdeen called Sam Will.

Sam had been a missionary in his younger years. When I'd visit him in his apartment in Hawburn Street, he'd spread a world map out on his kitchen table.

And he'd point to different countries and he'd tell me about the church there. The church in Mali, the church in Saudi Arabia, the church in Mexico and so on.

[11 : 49] He was so desperate to hear God being praised by the peoples of these nations that he devoted himself to finding out about them and praying for them. His vision was very much aligned with that of the writer of the psalm.

The heart of this section is the word *silah*.

Pause. Think. Stop. Imagine. Dream the big dreams of the writer of Psalm 67. A whole world where Christ is praised as Savior and Lord and all the peoples are filled with gladness and joy.

It's not a bad thing to be a dreamer. If our dreams are shaped by the pictures of the Bible. This is the world as it could be.

As we'd want it to be. As we pray for it to be. For Jesus is loved by the peoples of the world as much as he's loved by his Father. Let the nations be glad.

[12 : 55] And sing for joy. For you judge the peoples with equity. And guide the nations upon earth. *Silah*. Let the peoples praise you, O God. Let all the peoples praise you.

The world as it could be. Well, secondly. The church as it should be. The church as it should be. Every Christian.

And every church. Is either a missionary. Or an imposter. This psalm paints a picture. Of a new utopian world.

Where God is praised by all peoples. And all the peoples are filled with gladness and joy. But it also paints a picture. Of a church which is taking its missionary responsibilities.

Seriously. The church as it should be. The church as designed by its God to be. This is the church. We want to be. In the 1930s.

[13 : 57] One of our former ministers. Described our church. In this way. He said. I quote. Hope Street Free Church of Scotland. Is a missionary congregation.

In the truest sense. With a ministry of hope and restoration. To the perishing at its door. As well as of light and liberty. To the heathen. From afar.

Isn't this our great desire? That almost a hundred years. After he wrote these words. We could still describe ourselves in this way.

A missionary congregation. In the truest sense. Now if this is what we want to be. Then according to the writer. In Psalm 67.

We need to be two things. The first is difficult for me to say. Because I'm from Gospy. Be a sponge. Verses one and two. And be a sower.

[14 : 54] Verses six and seven. The church first of all. A sponge. The words of verse one. May sound familiar.

May God be gracious to us. And bless us. And make his face to shine upon us. These are words directly taken. From the famous blessing. In Numbers six. Verses 24 through 26.

We often use at baptisms. The Lord bless you. And keep you. The Lord make his face to shine upon you. And be gracious to you. The Lord lift up. His countenance upon you.

And give you peace. It's a prayer for God. To bless his people. To be gracious to them. And to show them his favor. And of course. This is the prayer of every Christian church.

That God should bless us in this way. We need. And we pray for God's blessing upon us. Because without that blessing. There's no hope. There's no future for us. We desperately need him.

[15 : 52] To fill us with courage. Strength and joy. We long for him to pour out his Holy Spirit upon us. And bring life to the spiritually dead. Comfort to the spiritually weak.

And confidence to the spiritually wavering. We pray for his blessing upon all we do as a church. From our mission. To our worship. From our discipleship. To our service. And everything else.

We pray for. We pray for. We pray for. We pray for. But is that all we pray for? In Psalm 67. The writer has a purpose in mind. For the blessing of God's people.

That your way. Verse 2. May be known on earth. Your saving power among all nations. His purpose in blessing us. His mission. His mission. His mission. The reason he prays for God's blessing upon his people.

Is so that. All the nations may know God's ways. And experience God's saving rescue for themselves. The blessing of the church.

[16 : 52] Is not with a view to the church. Hoarding God's blessings. And the gifts of salvation. But with a view to going out into all the world. And sharing those blessings and gifts of salvation.

Imagine the church. As a sponge. In these two verses. Verses 1 and 2. We're to think of the church. Soaking up. And receiving God's blessing.

And then being squeezed. We're to be squeezed out. To give out God's blessings. We are not to be a sink. Of God's blessings. Hoarding and storing them up for ourselves. We are to be a sponge.

For God's blessings. Soaking them up. So that we can engage in mission evangelism. Squeezing it out. Upon a thirsty and needy world. So rather than pray.

Lord bless our church. In light of Psalm 67. We need to pray. Lord bless our church. So that we may be a blessing to the world. God blesses us.

[17 : 54] So that we may bless others. God makes us rich. So that we may give to others. What he's given us. God fills us. That we may empty ourselves. For others. If this congregation.

Is to be a missionary congregation. In the truest sense. If it wants to see the world. As it could be. It needs to be a sponge. Church. But then secondly.

From the last couple of verses. The church as a sower. Church as sower. Most commentators think that Psalm 67 was sung at harvest time.

When crops were brought in from the fields. The bringing in of these crops. Was a picture of the bringing in of the nations. A harvest of fruit. Was a picture of the harvest of peoples.

As the psalm writer watched wagons. Loaded with the harvest. Being brought into Jerusalem. He dreamed. Of a harvest of the peoples of the world. Being brought to God.

[18 : 48] Again in verse 6. He talks of God. Blessing his people. But again. With a view to all the ends of the earth.

Fearing God. Fearing here being in the sense of knowing God. Worshipping God. Following God. So in these last two verses of Psalm 67. With a picture of the harvest in our minds.

The earth having yielded her increase. The psalm writer compares us. To those who are sowing the seeds of God's blessings. Now given that Jesus told a parable about a sower and a seed.

This is perhaps an image with which we are more familiar. The church receives the harvest of the blessings of God. With a view to sowing the blessings of God.

In his world. The church gets that it might give. The church receives that it might sow. We've been given the gospel of Jesus Christ.

[19 : 48] The good news that Jesus Christ has given himself as the sacrifice for our sin. Now it's our responsibility to sow that seed in the world. To proclaim that if anyone should believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.

He or she will be rescued. This is gospel mission. To be sowers of gospel seed. This is God's mission for us. As his church.

God's given us a harvest of spiritual blessings of the gospel. That we may sow the seed of the gospel among the peoples of our neighborhoods. Our city. And our world.

If a church wants to be a missionary congregation in the truest sense. If it wants to see the world as it could be. It needs to be a sower of seed.

If we want to see the world as it could be. We need to be the church. We should be. Psalm 67 is calling us to be sponges and sowers of gospel mission.

[20 : 49] Selah. Selah. Pause and imagine. Dream of the nations being glad and singing for joy. Because they've come to experience Christian salvation for themselves.

Dream. Big dreams. And attempt big things for God. As we close I want to briefly apply the teaching of this psalm in three directions.

First. Get interested in mission. Get interested in mission. Remember what Spurgeon said. Every Christian is either a missionary or an imposter.

Mission is written into the DNA of the gospel. Now there are courses we can run as a church. Which can help you share the gospel with non-Christians. If you're not confident to do this.

Then at least help those who are. Pray for them. Fund their mission work. Work in the background. This is what those who help at our warm space do.

[21 : 54] If they're given an opportunity they do speak about Jesus. But most often they involve themselves in mission. By befriending the stranger. Listening to their stories.

Praying for them. And making them cups of tea. Get interested in mission. Secondly. Let's take a new view of our building project here in Crow Road.

I'm being very, very direct today. Let's take a new view of our mission. Of our building project here in Crow Road. We're building on the vision of our elder Archie McInnes.

We're building on the Bible. Who sowed the seed in our hearts. Of a facility for mission here. Every room. Every space. Will be dedicated.

To learning how to be better sponges. And better sores. Every new window. Every new door. Will enhance our presence. And help equip us. Both to invite people into our church.

[22 : 53] And to go out. With the good news of Jesus. These building improvements. Which seem to be taking forever. But actually. Are not far away from being complete.

Are not a vanity project. They are important developments. Based on Archie's vision. Propelling us forward. In mission and evangelism. Into making this part of Glasgow.

A modern day Kidderminster. And that's why we're praying. For everyone among us. To catch the vision. And provide the resources. For our building project.

And lastly. Pray for Jewish people. Pray for Jewish people. I'm not talking here. About the nation state of Israel.

The conduct of which. Leaves much to be desired at times. I'm talking here. Of ethnic Jewish people. Spread across the whole world. Yes.

[23 : 53] Yes. And here in Glasgow too. The famous Glasgow minister. Andrew Boner. Speaking on this psalm. And calling upon. The church of his day.

To pray for mission work. Among Jewish people. Once said. They prayed. They prayed. They prayed. Long for us. When we couldn't pray for ourselves.

Now we can pray long for them. When they do not pray for themselves. In Psalm 67. Jewish people.

Are praying for the salvation. Of the nations of the world. Us. Now the nations of the world. Us. Can pray for their salvation. Every church.

Is either focused on mission. Or is an imposter. What then are we? Missionaries. Or imposters.

[24 : 53] Bush. Bush. Thank you.