Let the People Rejoice: A great motive for World Mission

"The Lord reigns, let the earth rejoice, let the many <u>coastlands</u> be glad." Ps. 97:1

"Let the peoples praise you, O God; let all the peoples praise you! Let the nations be glad and sing for joy!" Ps. 67:4

Introduction

My prayer is that the Holy Spirit will kindle or rekindle in our lives a burning passion for world mission. Fires die low for lack of fuel – oxygen. Ashes can clog up a fire. Our fires of devotion for world mission can also die low.

The goal of world mission is all nations, all peoples rejoicing, being glad and singing for joy at the marvellous grace, greatness and mercy of our God.

I want to remind you of four great things about world mission:

1. The promise is sure
2. The price is sacrifice and suffering
3. The power of God is sufficient
4. The prize is satisfying

1. The promise is sure

World mission – the task the Lord Jesus gave to the church – **will not fail** – not in any area! We **cannot** fail in successful mission worldwide because the Lord Jesus has promised it.

"And this Gospel of the Kingdom will be preached throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations and then the end will come." Mt. 24:14

The context of this statement is when Jesus was speaking privately to His disciples. They had asked Him, ***"What will be the sign of Your coming and the close of the age?"*** Mt. 24:3.

So we can be absolutely certain that every people group everywhere will be penetrated with the Gospel. In every group a witness will be established that is:

- **understandable** – i.e. in their own language and within their own cultural context – probably story telling
- **credible** – a credible witness to be established **everywhere** (credibility depends on the believability of the messenger).

In 2 Pet. 3 we read of ***"the coming end" – "the close of the age" – "The great Day of God"***. In the light of the inevitable return of the Lord Jesus, Peter tells us two things we should be/do:

- Be: ***"We are to live lives of holiness and Godliness"*** (v. 11)
- Do: ***"To speed up (hasten) the coming of the Day of God"*** (v. 12)

One of the great motives for world mission is to speed up the return of the Lord Jesus. World Mission will succeed **for four reasons**, but it can be speeded up or delayed (slowed down) for the Lord Jesus said in the same context, ***"The hearts (love) of many will grow cold."*** (Mt. 24:12)

Here are the four reasons:

- **The Lord Jesus never lies!**

It was Jesus, in the same context, (Mt. 24:35) who said, ***"Heaven and earth may pass away but My Word will never pass away."***

It was the Lord Jesus who gave us the promise that world mission will be completed. It wasn't the Reformers, the Puritans or some great evangelical leader, but the Lord Jesus Himself. Worldwide mission will be completed. It is going to happen. It isn't just a wishful hope.

You can either join in with the purposes of God and enjoy the eventual triumph of the Marriage Feast of the Lamb (Rev. 19) or you can opt out and effectively waste your life! I long that you would all join in.

These are the only two allowable choices. You can't argue that it won't happen, that the Lord Jesus will never come back and so you can ignore the issue of world mission. Sadly this appears to be the consensus in the present church in England. Yes, 'missions' is an issue, but it is largely marginalised and pushed to the periphery of things. It is not a pressing, urgent passion. But this isn't allowable for world mission will happen. It is a very great mistake to fail to make world mission a focus of what we do as a church and as individuals.

We must maintain this vision – this passion – and constantly fan it into flame. Emil Brunner was a German theologian who died in 1963. He wrote:

"Mission work does not arise from arrogance in the church. Mission is the cause of the church and its life. The church exists by mission just as fire exists by burning."

If passion for mission dies, the church is merely an institution. Don't allow an artificial distinction to arise in your mind between home mission and cross-cultural mission.
World mission is <u>one</u> goal. So the first reason is that the Lord Jesus never lies.

- **The Lord Jesus has already paid the ransom for all people everywhere.**

"Worthy are You to open the scroll, for you were killed and by your blood You ransomed mankind for God from every tribe and people and tongue and nation and have made them a Kingdom and priests to our God and they shall reign on earth." (Rev. 5:9)

So all people everywhere are **fully paid for** – all people past, present and future from every tribe and tongue and nation. [In Greek 'nation' ('*ethne*') implies what cultural anthropologists call an ethno-linguistic people group.] Certainly the Father will not ignore His Son's payment to ransom us from Satan's clutches!

The European Missionary Movement began in 1727 in a revival among some believers who had fled persecution in Central Europe and settled in Saxony in northern Germany. They were called the Moravians. As a result of the whole church's encounter with God, they decided to start a thanksgiving prayer meeting to praise God for graciously coming among them. They were farmers but they arranged a rota system so that twelve men and twelve women met together and prayed continuously. This prayer meeting lasted day and night without a break for over a hundred years! The result? The church became a missionary volcano pouring out red-hot workers for worldwide mission. One in five people in the growing church went into missions outside Europe.

The great motivation and driving force for the Moravian Missionary Movement is encapsulated in their motto:

"To win for the Lamb that was slain the reward of His sufferings."

With this driving passion they pioneered much that was good. There is an example of two Moravians who sold themselves into slavery in the British Virgin Islands because the British sugar planters didn't want their African slaves to hear the Gospel. This was the only way they could see to reach them.

The Lord Jesus **made** all people. They are His by His right as their **Creator**. But He also **redeemed**, **ransomed** and **purchased** back all people everywhere! It is our job to go into the world and find them by **indiscriminately preaching the Gospel everywhere**. Then the Holy Spirit will call them back to the Father as they hear the message of the Gospel.

This is the task of mission. **It cannot abort**! This mission will not fail! Why? Because the debt has been paid to set all men, all women and all children free from bondage to the Evil One.

The Lord Jesus called them "lost sheep" scattered throughout the world. They will come home as the Father calls them through the preaching of the Gospel. So world mission cannot fail!

- **The glory of God is at stake.**

In a very remarkable statement Paul says, ***"For I tell you that Christ became a servant to the circumcised*** – i.e. the Jewish people – ***to show God's truthfulness and in order to confirm the promises given to the patriarchs*** (e.g. Gen. 12:3: 'in you all the families/clans of the earth shall be blessed') ***and in order that the Gentiles might glorify God for His mercy."*** (Rom. 15:89)

So the whole purpose of the Incarnation, the Crucifixion, the Resurrection and the Ascension was to bring glory to the Father because God is proved to be trustworthy as the news of His great love and mercy was and is demonstrated in regenerating and transforming men and women from all nations. **Missions glorify God**.

This means that God's glory is at stake in the success of world missions! One day God's glory will cover the whole earth as the waters cover the sea. There will be no exceptions anywhere. When will that be? When all people everywhere know God's love and mercy! **World mission must succeed** because God will not fail to bring glory to His name!

We are God's glory-oriented people. Note the following:

- God created us for His glory – Is. 43:7
- He called the children of Jacob to be a people for His glory – Is. 49:3
- The Lord Jesus lived for His Father's glory – Jn. 17:4
- The Lord Jesus died for His Father's glory – Rom. 3:25-26
- The Lord Jesus rose again for His Father's glory – Rom. 6:4
- The Lord Jesus reigns now for the Father's glory – Phil. 2:11
- He chose us before the foundation of the world for His glory – Eph. 1:4-6
- He forgives us for His glory – Is. 43:25
- He works through us for His glory – 1 Pet. 4:11
- He calls us to do things for His glory – 1 Cor. 10:31
- In the ages to come the glory of the Lord alone will be the awesome light of endless days – Rev. 21:33

The desire for the glory of God is the inner passion that drives mission. John Piper summarised it brilliantly, **"*Mission exists because worship doesn't*"**. Mission exists so that God receives all the glory. The final goal of world mission is that white-hot worshippers – a countless number of people from every tribe and tongue and ethnic group – would glorify God. This will happen when the Kingdom of God comes in all its fullness. **Then** God will be fully glorified. This cannot fail to happen. To magnify His glory God will **exert His sovereign power** and **this** is what guarantees the victory of His cause.

- **God is Sovereign and He wills world mission!**

In Heb. 6:3 we find a sentence that occurs often in Scripture, "***And this we will do if God permits"***. The same sentiment is expressed in the common Arabic phrase, *"Inshallah"*.

Does God permit world mission? Yes, He has commanded us to, "***Go into all the world and make disciples of all nations ……."*** (Mt. 28:19). World mission is God's will.

[See **The Mission of God** by Chris Wright.]

God is Almighty. He is all-powerful and He is the Sovereign Lord of all! He is Sovereign in the church and He is Sovereign in the nations. He wills world mission! Who can thwart Him? Can Satan and the

principalities and powers? No – because they were disarmed on the Cross (Col. 2:15). There is no one in heaven, hell or on the earth who can thwart God's purpose to complete world mission.

In the 11th, 12th and 13th centuries the Crusaders had a great motto – a great battle cry: **"God wills it"**. Very sadly He didn't. It was a very great tragedy that the medieval church in western Europe had departed so far from New Testament Christianity that they had no idea of the will of God or how to accomplish it. But still they captured one of the great motives of world mission. God wills world mission and if this is so who can ultimately thwart His will?

So we have seen four reasons why the promise is sure.

2. The price is sacrifice and suffering

"As the Father has sent Me, even so I am sending you." (Jn. 20:21)

The price of missions is the Cross. The price of missions is suffering. If we refuse to pay the price of self-sacrifice we are refusing **to do God's will** and to **bring glory to God's name**.

What we must sacrifice is our self-life on earth. Where does self-sacrifice begin?

- Self-sacrifice in prayer
- Self-sacrifice in going
- Self-sacrifice in giving

People, money and methods are all vital in carrying out world mission, but there is something else more basic and indispensible. **It is a spirit of self-sacrifice motivated by love for God**.

➢ **The place of sacrifice**

- Self-sacrifice in prayer

Missions are not primarily a matter of men or money or methods. They are a mighty outworking of God through workers called out pre-eminently by prayer. Prayer releases the greatest power on earth. God answers prayer, but sometimes He waits to see how earnest are our prayers in claiming His power to meet our needs.

Tozer said, **"Revivals are born after midnight"**! Are we praying earnestly, continually and sacrificially? How much has prayer for those we support in missions cost us in time, in strength and in self-denial? If our prayer has cost us little, then it has probably availed little. God is seeking intercessors, impassioned hearts through whom He can demonstrate His saving power to lost men and women.

- Self-sacrifice in going

There is a 19th century missionary hymn where we hopefully sing:

"Waft, waft ye winds His story And you, ye waters roll.
Till like a sea of glory It spreads from pole to pole."

"Winds" and "water" won't fulfil the Great Commission. So often our desire to advance world mission gets no further than wishful thinking. Redeeming love is only carried forward by men and women willing to go and tell of it. Mission needs people to go.

- Self-sacrifice in giving

It is going to cost us our gifts to missions to complete the task given to the church. How much have we given? Are you trying to serve God and satisfy your conscience with your spare cash or are you meeting the New Testament standard: ***"Freely you have received, freely give"?*** (Mt. 10:8)

The heart of missions is sacrifice – sacrifice inspired by a pure, personal and passionate love for the Lord Jesus Christ. As a result, we have His love for a lost world shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy

Spirit. The heart of missions is the heart of believers as they pray, go and give sacrificially. This may also mean sacrificing time.

- **The place of suffering**

There are no closed countries or unreachable peoples, but some places demand a higher price. It is relatively easy to get into some places but often very hard to get out. Most of the least reached peoples in the world live in places that are hard to get to.

We live in an increasingly volatile world and it is going to get worse! Rev. 12:12 says that Satan will get angrier as he knows his time is getting shorter.

But there is a principle:

Opposition to the Gospel often increases receptivity to the Gospel.

Some of the fastest growing churches in the world are those who have endured persecution and are now experiencing persecution:

- China now has perhaps as many as 100 million believers.
- Iran has at least 350,000 believers from a Muslim background.
- Algeria has around 750,000 BMBs.

Why does hardship and suffering accelerate church growth? We measure the worth of a hidden treasure by what we will gladly sell to retain the treasure. If we don't sell what we have, then we are saying that what we have is more valuable to us than the treasure we have found.

"The Kingdom of Heaven is like a treasure hidden in a field which a man found and covered up. Then in his joy, he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field." (Mt. 13:44)

The extent of his sacrifice and the depth of his joy demonstrate the value he puts on the treasure in the field.

The credibility or believability of our lives and message increases dramatically when people see how much we are prepared to give joyfully and sacrificially in order to tell them the Good News about the free salvation God has provided for them.

So our hardship and suffering, joyfully accepted for the growth of the Kingdom, show the world the depth of God's grace and mercy towards us more clearly than all our church meetings and testimonies. So what is the price of world mission? It is our willingness to suffer. God has to motivate us out of our "comfort zones".

Our self-sacrifice and our willingness to suffer joyfully is not only **the price** of world mission. Sacrifice and suffering is also **the principle method of advance** in world mission. Please notice Paul's understanding of mission: ***"I do my share to fill up*** (or make complete) ***that which is lacking in Christ's suffering"***. (Col. 1:24)

What does Paul mean? What is lacking in Christ's suffering? The only other place in the New Testament this phrase 'to fill up' (or 'to make complete') is used is in Phil. 2:30. It speaks about Epaphroditus who, ***"almost died for the work of Christ, risking his life 'to fill up'*** (or 'make complete') ***the help you could not give me"***.

The Philippian believers had sent a gift to Paul while he was in prison in Rome. The gift of money represented their love for him. Epaphroditus carried that gift to Paul in his Roman prison and thus 'completed the gift'. The Philippian believers were poor, but they had sacrificially collected the money together as a love offering. What was missing in their gift was the presentation of the gift in person. So Epaphroditus – in his person and with great personal sacrifice (he almost died) – 'made up' what was lacking in the gift of the Philippians – **the presentation of the love gift in person**!

I want you to get a hold of this, for in the 20th century we lost something in our evangelical theology. We looked at the **incarnation** and said that it was truly wonderful. This led to discussions and attempts to model this. We called it **incarnational evangelism**.
We saw that a major theme in the teaching of the Lord Jesus was **the Kingdom** and we have tried to model our preaching and teaching on the Kingdom. **We have tried to germinate Kingdom Communities**. The Lord Jesus **healed** and we have tried to follow His model in this as well. It is clear Jesus moved in the natural and the supernatural worlds interchangeably, so we are trying to do the same. **However**, when we get to the Cross, we are deeply thankful and say it is very wonderful that Jesus died for us, but we are not going to follow Him there – through suffering and death! We see the **life** of the Lord Jesus as our model, but we see the death of the Lord Jesus as unique. But the greatest thing Jesus did was to suffer and die – greater than His amazing teaching and miraculous power.

This was well understood by the early Church (1st – 3rd centuries). It was recovered at the Reformation and at the Great Evangelical Awakenings of the 18th and 19th centuries. But we lost it in the second part of the 20th century.

For example: Francis of Assisi died aged 51 very disappointed that he hadn't been martyred! In his younger days he went to Egypt (1251 AD during the 4th Crusade) and spent two years trying to stop the Crusade and preaching the Gospel to the Muslims. He eventually had an opportunity to speak to the Caliph in Cairo. Then he was expelled. This wasn't just cavalier over-the-top nonsense – a form of masochism! Historic, Biblical Christianity has always seen that it is a great privilege to suffer for Christ because it 'makes up that which is lacking in the sufferings of Christ'.

Now there is nothing lacking in the death of the Lord Jesus as to the matter of providing forgiveness for our sin – our guilt and our shame. His sacrifice is unique and we can **add nothing** to improve the merit and atoning value of the blood of the Lord Jesus shed to purchase our salvation. We can **add nothing** to the death of the Lord Jesus in the matter of eternal justice.

But Paul's understanding of mission was that there was something lacking in the sufferings of Christ. There **is** something lacking if we are to see a people for God out of every tribe and tongue and nation on the face of this earth. It is for this that we are called to suffer to take up our cross and follow the Lord Jesus.

So Paul's understanding of mission was this: **God's great love gift, His offer of salvation, is to be presented to all people everywhere. It was an immensely costly gift – both to the Father and to the Lord Jesus. This gift must be presented in person. How can the receivers understand the cost of a free gift? The presentation is most effective when the receivers can see how much it cost in terms of time and in our suffering. A costly offering of our lives helps them understand the value of God's gift. This is the only way it is really believable.**

The Story of an Indian evangelist

He was young, poor and not very highly educated. He had been to Bible school for a year. He spent his life going from village to village in north India preaching. One day tired, hungry and alone, he went to a remote Hindu village. It took him much of the day to walk there. When he arrived he began to preach to the villagers. They were angry and beat him with lathis (large sticks). Stones were thrown at him and he was driven out of the village. Outside the village some little distance, he found a big tree and under it he fainted with exhaustion and despair. He woke up a couple of hours later, at dusk, and was very frightened. The whole village had gathered around the tree quietly waiting for the evangelist to wake up. This is what had happened. After he was driven out of the village, the village elders sent some strong men to follow him to make sure he didn't come back. When these men found him collapsed under the tree, they approached to look at him. They saw the wounds that the villagers had made, but they also saw his feet. His feet were blistered and bleeding and very painful. They realised the evangelist had paid a high price to come to their village. They reported this to the elders who decided he must be a holy man and so the whole village should listen carefully to what he had to say

to them. They apologised to the evangelist for what they had done and they invited him to stay with them and teach them. He stayed some time in the village and reported that many believed in the Lord Jesus.

This is what Paul means – the presentation of the love-gift (the Gospel) in person through suffering and sacrifice. This demonstrates the value of the gift to us. The price is sacrifice. Suffering is always the mark of the Kingdom's advance. Don't always pray that persecution would stop. Pray that the believers will endure it **with joy** as they present the love-gift.

Paul and the early apostles expected to suffer and sacrifice. They welcomed it. So in our calling to get involved in world mission, in the battle, in our weariness – our emotional and sometimes physical injuries – we realise afresh that our warfare is not against people but against Satan and his evil spiritual principalities and powers in high places that are trying to destroy the lives of billions of people. Why do they want to destroy us? It is because we are made in the image of God and for His glory. The battle is fiercest when we seek to destroy the spiritual bondages that hold millions of unreached peoples isolated from the Gospel.

We battle Satan in order to release these people and allow them the freedom to choose to follow the Lord Jesus. Our weapons in this battle are: worship, praise, intercession, humble service **and sacrifice and suffering**.

In 1999 in Sudan, it was estimated there were 500 martyrs each day throughout the year who died for their faith in the Lord Jesus. They were paying the price. The price for advance is being paid in Indonesia, in India, in Nigeria and in many other places. Where the price is being paid there is usually rapid church growth.

If we are going to see all the unreached peoples of the world reached with the Gospel, then we must pay the price. But so often we have different priorities in our western churches. Potential recruits ask questions like:

- Will my family and I be safe?
- Will I get sick?
- Will I get a pension if I go?

Our Western Christian priorities appear to be good health, a good job, a good school for the kids, a nice house and a good pension. Woven into the very fabric of our lives is a desire to move towards comfort, security, ease, and safety and away from trouble, danger, and stress.
But God is calling us to do the exact opposite!

Dietrich Bonhoeffer said: **"The cross is not the terrible end to an otherwise God-fearing and happy life, but it meets us at the beginning of our communion with Christ. When Christ calls a man, He bids him come and die."** This is a paraphrase of Mk. 8:34: ***"If any man would come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me."*** Implicit in being a follower of the Lord Jesus is a willingness to suffer and die.

This is a total reverse of what our western culture suggests! Our culture is absorbed with comfort and ease. Our consumer society permeates our Christian culture. Our idol is comfort, success and security! Failure to obtain these is the one unforgivable sin. We like to be safe, secure, comfortable and **nice**. We do nice things for each other. We are a bit boring, but we are very safe. Occasionally our consciences are stirred and we go out in evangelism to help in an open-air meeting, but we scurry back to safety very quickly.

Golgotha wasn't a nice comfortable suburb of Jerusalem for comfortable, middle-class people. There is a sad domestication of the Cross in our lives. We speak of having a 'cross to bear' meaning a persistent cough or a cranky mother-in-law! As a result, we miss the radical thrust of the call of the Lord Jesus on our lives. In many places in the world to follow the Lord Jesus is to choose the possibility

of death and, in some cases, the probability of death. But for all of us, to choose to follow Jesus is to choose to wage a sustained lifelong conflict with evil.

So the crying need of the hour for God's people everywhere is to be mobilised on a wartime footing. God is looking for those who are willing:

- To suffer for the sake of the Gospel
- To take risks for His Kingdom's sake
- To watch and pray and believe God's promises

God has assured us of the triumph of world mission. He will get the victory over all His enemies in such a way that great glory goes to Him and so that His redeemed people from all nations will enjoy Him. So as we read in Heb. 13:13: ***"Let us go with Him outside the gate, bearing the disgrace He bore."***

What is the price of getting the job done? It is simply our suffering and sacrifice – bearing our cross – living a crucified life.

3. The Power of God is Sufficient to enable us to complete the task

Out of my own experience I would like to suggest **ten steps** for us all to follow in order to experience the fullness of the Holy Spirit – the Spirit of Power:

- Make a definite consecration of yourself to God daily
  "Take my life and let it be consecrated Lord to Thee." Express your love verbally to Him. Pledge allegiance to His Lordship daily or more frequently. Muslims pray 5 times daily!
- Tell God you are willing to be made willing concerning His will for you today. You will never be happy until you let the Lord tell you what to do. Allow Him to reign over your nature and all you do.
- Have faith that the Lord Jesus will do His part in your day **perfectly**!
- Examine yourself daily to release yourself from any sense of condemnation, shame, fear or guilt. Confess sin as soon as you are aware of it. If you allow sin to remain unconfessed in your heart it will eat away all your peace and rest.
- Hand over to Jesus every possible temptation and all your worries and cares. When an annoyance, however small, threatens to spoil your peace, hand it over to the Lord Jesus saying, "Lord, I am oppressed by this. Please take care of this situation for me."
- Ask the Holy Spirit to fill you every day and more in an emergency. Expect the Holy Spirit to work in you, through you, with you and for you. Then the Holy Spirit will freely use you. Be conscious of the "fellowship of the Holy Spirit". Seek to enjoy this fellowship. Talk to Him and tell Him things. Make time in the day to get alone with God. 'Have a cup of tea' with the Lord Jesus. Tell Him everything.
- Don't dread anything. Especially don't be afraid because you fear God will ask you to do something you can't do. He will never do that. If the Lord lays something on your heart, He will do so irresistibly. As you pray about it the impression will continue to grow. You will know what to say or do and as you know, the way will suddenly open up. You will probably have done or said what He prompted almost unconsciously.
- Battle to make the Sermon on the Mount the criteria by which you evaluate your life. Work hard to implement it in your life. Don't let others or lack of success be the criteria.
- Put on the armour of God piece by piece.
- Speak out God's promises concerning fear, purity in thought, a humble heart, truthful words, a gentle spirit and reliance on God.

Follow these steps and the fire of the Holy Spirit will be evident through your life.

4. The prize is satisfying

We were made to give glory to God, our highest joy, our greatest contentment, our deepest pleasure comes when we know that God is being glorified by what we are doing!

There is such joy in even small breakthroughs. There is great joy seeing church planting movements begin in what were once closed countries with no church. There is an amazing satisfaction in joining in worship, with hundreds and hundreds of BMBs.

At the end of life there is a restful thankfulness that you have made a real difference. There is satisfaction that you have done what you were created to do.

There is the question of how we can be willing to keep on paying the price when the cost is so very high. Perhaps you are willing to go, but you are conscious of no inner strength. You know you don't have what it takes – the love of comfort and security is too strong. **The only way** is to **keep on believing** God's promises. Heb. 10:32-34 gives us an example of this:

"But recall the former days when, after you were enlightened, you endured a hard struggle with sufferings – sometimes being publicly exposed to reproach and affliction and sometimes being partners with those so treated. For you had compassion on those in prison and you joyfully accepted the plundering of your property since you knew that you yourselves had a better possession and an abiding one."

How did they cope with suffering? They remembered the promises of God and we will cope remembering those same promises.

"The steadfast love of the Lord is better than life." (Ps. 63:3). So you can confidently say, ***"The Lord is my light and my salvation. Whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life, of whom shall I be afraid? Though an army besiege me, my heart will not fear. Though war break out against me, even then will I be confident."*** (Ps. 27:1-3)

Read often Rom. 8:31-39: ***"I will never leave you or forsake you."***

Don't let Satan rob you of your joy. Remember Neh. 8:10***, "The joy of the Lord is your strength!"***

God has given us a great number of indescribably wonderful promises. See Lk. 21:16, ***"Some of you they will put to death, yet not a hair of your head will perish."*** When you die in this life you don't perish. Death is a door into a glorious future for to die is gain.

So being involved in world mission is the greatest lifestyle in the world!