

GROUNDING DISCIPLE-MAKING IN GOD’S CREATION ORDER:

FILLING THE EARTH WITH THE IMAGE OF GOD

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Matthew 28:18-20 has been considered the classic “Great Commission” text since William Carey ushered in the Modern Missions Movement citing it in his essay entitled, “An Enquiry into the Obligation for Christians to Use Means for the Conversion of the Heathen.”¹ That biblical text documents Jesus’ final recorded words in a summative reiteration of what His follower’s lives were to be centered upon – the task to “make disciples of all nations.” Carey’s *Enquiry* was aimed at discrediting the false notion that the Great Commission was intended solely for the first century Apostles and has not been binding upon Christians since. The authenticity of Carey’s message to his 19th century context is undeniable as he lived out Great Commission obedience by moving and planting his life among the unreached in India.

Introduction: The Great Commission is NOT a Single Text

For all the good that Carey did, he never intended to convey that the Great Commission is solely rooted in a single New Testament passage. Though many in the West now believe, at least in theory, the Great Commission is binding upon all Christ-followers, few understand that the mission to “make disciples of all nations” is actually

¹ For the full text of Carey’s *Enquiry*, see <http://www.wmcarey.edu/carey/enquiry/anenquiry.pdf>, last accessed September 15, 2015.

grounded in God's original "Creation Order."² This paper will argue that the concept of disciple making is grounded in the gospel's redeeming *and sanctifying* work to reconcile God's fallen image bearers to Himself and to make them new through empowering the reordering of their worship. In addition, the mandate to these redeemed image bearers to make disciples of all nations is the means by which God is accomplishing His original purpose of filling the earth with worshipers who are rightly related to Him and living for His glory.

What is a "Disciple"?

The term *disciple* (μαθητής) first appeared in the ancient Greek writings of Herodotus predating the New Testament era by five centuries carrying the connotation of *learner*. Michael Wilkins suggests that the term eventually garnered the idea of making a devoted commitment to following a teacher and his teachings and was referenced by both Plato and Socrates.³ So when Jesus comes along in first century Palestine, the concept of discipleship is already present and understood in the culture. Jesus flipped the concept however by becoming the teacher who sought out disciples rather than the traditional approach of having qualified candidates apply to study under the teacher. This shift is significant because Jesus was not merely inviting his disciples to study his teachings, but moreover to become relationally and spiritually attached to his very life. The ensuing

² The concept of "Creation Order" is not primarily a reference to the chronological ordering of events as they occurred in Genesis 1 and 2. Rather, the emphasis in this concept is upon the intended function and purpose that underlies God's original design. Thus, "Creation Order" assumes that God created all things to function in such a way as to bring glory to Himself and that the disordering of Creation is both the result of man's sin and the subsequent cause of any chaos that exists. Ultimately the work of Christ is reconciling all things to God (2 Cor. 5:19a) to bring about a reordering and restoration of all things to fulfill God's original purposes (Rev 21:5-6). My colleague Dr. Mark Liederbach does a phenomenal job expounding upon this concept on pages 119-132 in *The Convergent Church: Missional Worshipers in an Emerging Culture*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2009).

³ Wilkins, Michael. *Following the Master: A Biblical Theology of Discipleship*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1992), 73-75.

commitment made by those disciples that remained until the ascension was one that the risen Jesus would use to continue the invitation up to our very day.

What about before Jesus' incarnation, or before Socrates, Plato, and Herodotus? Was the concept of discipleship present then? Maybe not in the same sense, though there are many examples of apprenticeship in the Old Testament such as Elijah and Elisha or Moses and Joshua. Is it possible that something of a discipling relationship existed between God and Adam? If we take Jesus' reinterpretation of the term and apply it to the first man and his relationship with God, we do find some similarities. For example, Adam walked with God, received instruction and learned from God, was blessed by God, and even bore the image of God forth to all creation. And it is to this final distinctive we will now turn in our quest to understand how disciple-making may indeed be rooted into God's Creation Order.

Imago Dei

Genesis 1 and 2 provides the backdrop for God's relationship with humanity and with the rest of creation. It is here that we find creation as God intended. The aforementioned concept of Creation Order is not merely a reference to the chronological ordering of events as documented in these first few chapters of the Bible. Rather, the concept is intended to convey how things within God's creation relate to Him as Creator and to the rest of His creation in a regulative or dispositional sense. Chronology is merely one way to bring about order.

At the culmination of God's creative order we find Him making man *imago Dei* (תְּצַלְמֵנוּ in Hebrew), or in His own image (1:26a). John H. Walton lends insight to this term noting, "Throughout the ancient Near East, an image was believed to contain the essence of that which it represented. That essence equipped the image to carry out its

function.”⁴ And the function that humanity was intended to carry out is explicitly stated in 1:26b-28. The full text in the English Standard Version reads:

Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them *have dominion over* the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.” So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. And God blessed them. And God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and *fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over* the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth. (emphasis mine)

John Sailhamer notes that the author of the Pentateuch subtly contrasts the creation of the man and the woman with his previous creative work.⁵ Instead of “Let there be ...” as earlier creative acts noted, the text reads, “Let us make” In addition, earlier creatures were made “according to their own kind” but the man and woman are made “after our (Triune God) likeness” emphasizing that we are more like God than like other creatures. Yet another distinction is that only the man and woman are given dominion, or vice-regency, over all creation. All of this uniqueness is embedded in the *imago Dei*. Again, Walton adds that among ancient Near-eastern peoples, “(I)n an image, it was not physical likeness that was important, but a more abstract idealized representation of identity relating to the office/role and the value connected to the image.”⁶ So our identity as God’s image bearers carries functional purpose related to the task He has made us for, namely bring Him glory through being fruitful, multiplying, and thereby having dominion over the rest of creation.

⁴ Walton, John H. *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary: Genesis*, Vol. 1. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009), 20.

⁵ Sailhamer, John H. *The Pentateuch as Narrative: A Biblical-Theological Commentary*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1992), 94-96.

⁶ Walton, 21.

While the idea of a “cultural mandate” that is often tied to these verses has been skewed taking on a negative destructive connotation, nothing could be further from the truth.⁷ The inherent harmony that existed and is conveyed repeatedly in Genesis 1 was not threatened by man’s dominion, but rather accentuated. Following each day of creation God looked at His work and declared it to be “good.” What standard was God using in His assessment of creation? “Good” does not exist abstractly apart from God. Rather, God’s pronouncement that His work was “good” conveys that creation was rightly related to Himself and thus existing as a display of His glory. And after creating man and woman in His image to have dominion and compound His ordered purposes, God declares all that He has made to be “very good.” Why?

God’s image bearers, like a clean, unbroken mirror, were rightly related to God and thus reflect God’s goodness and glory by ruling over all that He had made. The relational “likeness” between God and humanity and the harmony in that relationship served to build up, not abuse and destroy the rest of created order. Keep in mind that at this time, there was no sacred/secular dichotomy. Every task was sacred. All of life was an unbroken act of worship and obedience giving glory to the One whose image the man and woman bore. And as long as God’s image bearers were rightly related to God, everything that God made would function harmoniously fulfilling His creative purposes. So what went wrong?

⁷ For a better understanding of the positive tone of this term, see Crouch, Andy. *Culture Making: Recovering our Creative Calling*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008). Crouch notes, “Culture is, first of all, the name for our relentless, restless human effort to take the world as it’s given to us and make something else” (p. 23). Thus, culture can be either good or bad contingent upon the heart behind the vice-regent.

Imago Dei Fractured

The very identity of the man and the woman was inseparably grounded in their relationship with God. Bearing the image of God, they were made to be worshipers. Worship was not something they did as some dichotomized activity. It is who they were; and that identity permeated the motive and method behind everything they did. As long as their relationship with God was intact their lives, and therefore their worship, were rightly ordered.

The Biblical narrative documents in Genesis 3 exactly what went wrong in Adam and Eve's relationship with God and how the subsequent brokenness spread through the entirety of the creation they were made to steward. In Genesis 3:1 the reader is introduced to a Serpent who is "more crafty" than the other animals God had made. Scholars note that the word "crafty" carries the connotation of *wisdom* that has been twisted.⁸ This is crucial because the Serpent had been a part of God's good creation, but at some point had taken the wisdom he had been imbued with and twisted it inward on himself by questioning the good character of God.⁹

Being cast down from the heavens, this angelic being brings his twisted wisdom into the realm of the vice-regency of the man and woman and tempts them to question God's good word and thereby His good character. God had issued a single prohibitive command to His image bearers in 2:17 forbidding them to eat from the Tree of

⁸ D.A. Carson, *The God Who is There: Finding Your Place in God's Story*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2010), 30-31.

⁹ It is beyond the scope of this paper to explain the varying theories related to the concept of Theodicy - the problem of evil and its origin. For our purposes here we will limit our study to examining the point at which evil affected humanity and subsequently the earth they were made to rule over.

Knowledge of Good and Evil¹⁰, but that in the context of radical generosity offering them unlimited opportunities for obedience in the form of every other plant (2:16). As the woman, *and* the man who “was there with her” (3:6), weighed the crafty proposal that was before them, they too questioned God’s good word and His good character and thus, their relationship to the God whose image they bore was shattered – but *NOT erased*.

The image of God that constituted the essence of the man and woman was fractured in that encounter, though not altogether erased. Being made as worshipers, they could not cease to worship – but they could change the focus of their worship, which is exactly what they did. Paul speaks of this in Romans 1:21-25 culminating with a summary of terrible exchange: “they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator.” Note that Paul emphasizes that they did not cease being worshipers but shifted the object of their worship from the Creator God to the creation that they were made to have dominion over. The irony is that the man and the woman, and we their progeny, choose to submit ourselves in worship to those things that we were created to rule over!

The brokenness of sin manifests itself in the form of misdirected worship. Awestruck worshipers became brazen idolaters and ceased to accurately image forth God’s goodness in the world. So the brokenness that began in mankind naturally extends to the entirety of the realm which we were made to steward (see Genesis 3:14-19).

Expanding on this thought, Noel Due states,

¹⁰ Carson suggests that infinite God is able to know of the possibilities of evil without being a cause or participant by virtue of His omniscience. However, as finite creatures humans are incapable of knowing apart from experience and participation. This does NOT mean that the man and woman were set up by God destined to fall into sin. God’s instruction, or discipling if you will of Adam, was intended to warn him that there are things that were beyond his knowledge that needed to stay that way. See *The God Who is There*, page 32.

The curse that follows the entrance of sin into the Garden, in its several different elements, reveals dislocation at every level. The rest found in God's nearer presence; the communion of intimate fellowship with him and with one another; the harmony of the created order; and both the joy of procreation and the ability to rejoice in other elements of the mandate are all affected. The mandate the primal couple had been given now becomes the arena for the curse. The key functions of multiplying and filling, keeping and tilling, ruling and subduing are all accompanied by pain, suffering, hard labour (sic), and ultimately physical death and decay.¹¹

As the offspring of fractured image bearers, all of humanity is cursed with a bent toward misdirecting our worship away from God and toward creation and ultimately ourselves (Romans 5:12). So the next time someone asks, "If God is so good, then why ... ?", the only answer is, "It is my fault. And if you'd be honest about your own brokenness you would admit that it is your fault too." We are not just victims of circumstance. We are sinners by nature and by choice. And we cannot fix ourselves.

Imago Dei Redeemed

While the taste of the forbidden fruit was still on their lips, Adam and Eve were already beginning to be cognizant of the unraveling of Creation Order for they had been "naked and were not ashamed" (Genesis 2:25), but now seven verses later are trying to cover their nakedness because of shame. Genesis 3:7 portrays the couple "sewing fig leaves together" and making themselves loincloths. This was no crafting project, but rather an misguided and unsuccessful attempt to undo what they now knew to be sinful misdirected worship. Yet their efforts were futile for fig leaves once removed from the tree wither and die. In order to cover their nakedness they would have to return and repeat this process again and again. This is why I believe that this sewing project is the first instance of man-made vain religion. Interestingly there is another passage of

¹¹ Noel Due. *Created for Worship: From Genesis to Revelation to You*, (Scotland: Mentor Imprint, 2005), 48.

Scripture that speaks about fig leaves that may lend some insight. In Matthew 21 Jesus sees a fig tree that is green and leafy from a distance, but upon his approach he finds no figs so he curses it (Matthew 21:19). Why did Jesus curse the fig tree? Because it gave the appearance of fruitfulness but had no fruit. Man-made religion displays guilt of the same infraction. For all of our acts of religious devotion, we cannot produce the righteousness that God demands of us and we cannot reconcile ourselves to Him. They, and we too, simply cannot fix our own brokenness. But God can – and He did!

You do not have to go much further in Genesis 3 to see that God would willingly made costly provision to redeem His image bearers. Rather than condemn and destroy, our merciful God pursued the man and woman in their brokenness. The question, “Where are you?” is not intended to convey that God was not privy to their ensuing rebellion. God’s word is intended to bring clarity to the now spiritually blind and disoriented couple. They had just rejected God’s word and now He would graciously speak again. His words would issue forth judgment and mercy, consequence and hope. Because the image bearers had been given authority over all creation, the curse for their sin would permeate as far. Michael D. Williams expounds, “The creature meant to be God’s image bearers, his covenant mediator within creation, has declared war against God. Alienation takes the place of covenant intimacy. Hostility, rather than obedient servanthood, now characterizes man’s relationship to God.”¹²

Yet in the midst of this pervasive and devastating string of consequences, God makes a promise that theologians commonly call the *proto-evangelion*, or the “first good news.” Genesis 3:15 reads, “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.”

¹² Michael D. Williams. *Far As the Curse Is Found: The Covenant Story of Redemption*, (Philipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2005), 67.

In these condemning words to the Serpent, God would offer hope of a future Rescuer that would in John's interpretation, "destroy the works of the devil" (1 John 3:8b). In the Septuagint, "the Seed of the woman" (τοῦ σπέρματός) is singular and conveys that one man would accomplish this task of fixing the brokenness of creation by crushing the Serpent and his offspring.¹³ Perhaps this is one reason why the Bible portrays a preoccupation with genealogies – because God's people were to look for the identity of this promised Rescuer.¹⁴

Consider how Matthew begins his Gospel: "The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham." (Matthew 1:1) Matthew is declaring to those who have been waiting, "Here he is! Here is that Rescuer that was promised long ago!" Luke's Gospel concludes by affirming that the Rescuer had to suffer in order to set things right (Luke 24:26). It would take "the image of the invisible God", the very Son of God by whom all things were created, to bring about the reconciliation of all things to Himself through the shedding of His own blood (Colossians 1:15-24).

Noel Due states, "Where the first Adam failed and brought the tyranny of false worship to the race, the obedient worship of the second Adam would lead a new

¹³ "It has also been argued that, on the basis of the Septuagint translation of Genesis 3.15, Jews were already reading the 'seed' of Eve as referring to a singular person who would 'crush' the serpent: This evidence has to do with the pronoun one uses with the word *seed*. In Hebrew, *zera'* is masculine, so one would use the masculine pronoun 'he' (*hū'*) whether one wanted to speak of one descendant or all of them. But in Greek the word for 'seed' (*sperma*) is neuter, so if one wants to use the word to refer all the descendants, one follows it with the neuter personal pronoun 'it' (*auto*). In contrast, if one wants to use the word 'seed' to refer to a single descendant, one uses a masculine or feminine pronoun: 'he' (*autos*) or 'she' (*autē*). In this passage, the Septuagint uses the masculine pronoun *autos*, indicating that 'seed' refers to a single male descendant of Eve." Quoted from <http://hermeneutics.stackexchange.com/questions/9315/what-is-the-historical-basis-for-viewing-genesis-315-as-the-protogospel>, last accessed September 20, 2015. See also Donald Fairbairn, *Life in the Trinity: An Introduction to Theology with the Help of the Church Fathers* (2009), p.122, footnote 10.

¹⁴ Stephen G. Dempster notes that, "A key purpose of genealogies in some contexts is to show a divine purpose that moves history to a specific goal." He goes on to say that, "the rest of the story (after Genesis 3) recounts the restoration of the relationship (between God and humanity) through the twin themes of geography (dominion) and genealogy (dynasty)." Thus, the hope represented in the Bible's genealogies is directly tied to the fulfillment of the promise that they would exercise dominion over all creation. *Dominion and Dynasty: A Theology of the Hebrew Bible*, (Downer's Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003, 47-49).

humanity to the liberating glory of the worship for which it was created.”¹⁵ The second Adam would replace the ever-wilting insufficient fig leaves of our vain self-help religion with His all-sufficient atoning sacrifice. In so doing He would redeem all that was lost in the fall enabling those who come by faith to be immediately reconciled to God and progressively made new through the process of sanctification – which also comes by faith in His gospel. Is it not interesting that it was by the rebellious rejection of God’s word that misdirected worship entered the world and it is by humble submission to God’s word by faith that reconciliation and rightly ordered worship is once again made possible?

Graeme Goldsworthy summarizes,

Original sin involved the suppression of the truth of God in nature and conscience, and also the rebellion against every supernatural word from God. Ever since the original sin of Adam and Eve, all of mankind has been involved in sin and is characterized by sin. The saving acts of God involve a new supernatural revelation from God given progressively throughout the whole history of redemption ... As Adam refused every supernatural word of God through which human existence and the world could be truly understood, so the children of Adam are born rebels who suppress the truth of God within them, and reject the supernatural world from without. Only God’s grace in the saving work of Christ can restore the proper relationship between God and man, and thus cause us to accept the truth.¹⁶

It is to this reordering of worship by faith in the gospel of Jesus Christ that we now turn.

Imago Dei Restored

Having been redeemed by faith in God’s gospel promise, believers are at once reconciled to an inviolable relationship with their Creator based upon trust in His goodness established through the person and work of Jesus Christ. This reconciliation of relationship is the necessary first step in the on-going application of the gospel in the life

¹⁵ Due, 2005, 20.

¹⁶ Graeme Goldsworthy. *According to Plan: The Unfolding Revelation of God in the Bible*, (Downer’s Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1991), 59-60.

of a believer. Paul seems to have Creation Order in mind as he dictated Romans 5:19 to his amanuensis, “For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many *will be made* (κατασταθήσονται is also translated as “will be appointed”) righteous.” In Romans 4:5 Paul refers to believers as being “*counted* righteous” (λογίζεται is also translated as “reckoned”) because of their faith in Christ. Both of these terms speak of a restoration by God’s own work of something that was lost in the fall – the former in future tense and the latter in past tense. Being counted righteous takes place in our once and for all justification and being made righteous takes place through progressive sanctification.¹⁷

This restoration goes beyond a return to Adam and Eve’s Edenic state as is seen by Paul’s statement in 1 Corinthians 15:49, “Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven.” G.K. Beale underscores this stating, “people, formerly conformed to the world’s image (Romans 1:18-32), begin to be transformed into God’s image (Romans 8:28-30; 12:2; 2 Cor 3:18, 4:4) ... This process of transformation into the divine image will be completed at the end of history, when Christians will be resurrected and fully reflect God’s image in Christ (1 Cor 15:45-54; Phil 3:20-21).¹⁸ Thus, in our being reconciled to God through faith we are set on a course of conformity to the image of Christ (see also 1 John 3:2).

Making Disciples to Fulfill Jesus’ Last Command

Returning to the text cited by Carey earlier, the central imperative in the classic Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20) is *μαθητεύσατε*, usually translated as “make

¹⁷ For a fuller explanation of sanctification see William D. Barrick, “Sanctification: The Work of the Holy Spirit and Scripture,” *The Master’s Seminary Journal*, 21/2 (2010): 179-191.

¹⁸ G.K. Beale. *We Become What We Worship: A Biblical Theology of Worship*, (Downer’s Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 282.

disciples.” It has been noted that the other verbs found in that text, πορευθέντες (having gone), βαπτίζοντες (baptizing), and διδάσκοντες αὐτοὺς τηρεῖν (teaching them to observe) are all participles outlining how one is to make disciples of all nations.¹⁹

However as Leon Morris asserts, “From this fact some have drawn the conclusion that Jesus did not command his followers to go; all they were to do was make disciples of such people as they happened to encounter. But where a participle is linked in this way with an imperative, it shares in the imperatival force.”²⁰

The reason this is crucial is that the earth is filled with idolatrous worshippers²¹ who bear the fractured image of the first man and woman. Fundamentally disciples are made by intentionally going *to all nations* (πάντα ἔθνη here carries the connotation of race or ethnic groups outside of Judaism), proclaiming the gospel and baptizing those who repent and believe, and then teaching them to obey Jesus through the enabling power of the indwelling Holy Spirit. Jesus’ emphasis stands in stark contrast to how most churches approach disciple making as a class or curriculum in which believers participate. Christians have inadvertently substituted “discipleship” (a noun) for “disciple making” (a verb). This seemingly subtle change has produced a passive, rather than active approach to fulfilling Christ’s last command. If Jesus’ last words were not enough to convince us of His purposes of gathering worshipers for Himself from among all nations, perhaps if we saw these final words as a restatement of God’s first words to

¹⁹ D.A. Carson notes, “While it remains true to say that the main imperatival force rests with ‘make disciples,’ not with ‘go,’ in a context that demands that this ministry extend to ‘all nations,’ it is difficult to believe that ‘go’ has no imperatival force.” In *Matthew*, vol. 9, in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary Revised Edition*, ed. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 666.

²⁰ Leon Morris. *The Gospel According to Matthew*. Vol. 1, *Pillar New Testament Commentary*, 746. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992.

²¹ Michael D. Williams notes, “An idol is anything in creation that man turns to in worship rather than God. Idolatry is not merely one sin among many, but the epitome of all sin, the disobedience that denies God his rightful place over his creation and our lives.” *Far As the Curse Is Found: The Covenant Story of Redemption*, 66.

the man and woman in Genesis 1:28 we would understand the pervasiveness of His intentions.

Making Disciples to Fulfill God's First Command

Returning to the first chapter of Genesis, it is important to note the content of God's first recorded words to the man and woman together. Genesis 1:28 was referenced earlier with emphasis placed upon the image bearer's role in stewarding creation through exercising dominion. However, such dominion would not be possible for the two alone to accomplish. This is why the text contains the imperative, "*Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth* (פְּרֹו וּרְבֹו וּמְלֵאֹו) and subdue it, and have dominion ..." In other words, the means by which dominion would be exercised would be through the intentional multiplication and dispersion of image bearers throughout the earth. God's plan for humanity has always been that we spread His image throughout all creation and exercise our vice regency as worshippers that are rightly related to Him. By now it should be apparent that Jesus' last command to "make disciples" is beautifully similar to this first command recorded in Scripture. The intent behind both is that God's image bearers multiply and fill the earth with rightly ordered worship, which in effect accentuates the wholeness²² that God established in Creation Order. Such wholeness is impossible when humanity's worship is misdirected away from God and toward any created thing, including ourselves.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Jesus command to make disciples explains how God's original purposes will ultimately be fulfilled in a broken world. When we are reconciled to God

²² שְׁלוֹמַם transliterated *shalom* communicates all things working rightly together.

through faith in Christ, our worship begins to be reordered through the Spirit empowered process of sanctification – which comes by *learning obedience* to God’s word (Matthew 28:20). And as we are conformed to the image of Christ, we too are to be fruitful and multiply – not merely through physical procreation, but rather through spiritual multiplication. Disciple making is grounded in Creation Order and is ultimately how God’s original purposes will be fulfilled. Or in the words of John Piper, “Missions exists because worship doesn’t.

Worship is ultimate, not missions, because God is ultimate, not man. When this age is over, and countless missions of the redeemed fall on their faces before the throne of God, missions will be no more. It is a temporary necessity. But worship abides forever.”²³ God’s purposes will be fulfilled as John portrays in the new song being sung in Revelation 5:9-10,

Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation, and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth.

The blood bought image bearers from all nations fill the earth with their worship for Christ and exercise dominion to bring about flourishing as God intended in the beginning. The only thing that stands between this moment and that one is the command to make disciples and the promise that God will honor our efforts and grant success.

²³ John Piper. *Let the Nations Be Glad: The Supremacy of God in Missions*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1993), 11.