

Worship: The Ultimate Priority

By Jeff Noblit

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Anchored in Truth Ministries

1915 Avalon Ave.
Muscle Shoals, AL 35661

Website: www.anchoredintruth.org
Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/anchoredintruth

All right, I want you to take your Bibles this morning and let's go to the book of Psalms. Psalm 96, a text that just bleeds with the glorious truths of world missions and God's glory being spread to the very ends of the earth. Psalm 96, and I don't know how Jimmy Swaggart ever did it this way with a microphone in his hand; I need a third arm this morning to function appropriately up here. The Psalmist writes and he's writing about the vision of what it's going to be like when the Lord returns. Verse 1, Psalm 96,

1 Sing to the LORD a new song; Sing to the LORD, all the earth. 2 Sing to the LORD, bless His name; Proclaim good tidings of His salvation from day to day. 3 Tell of His glory among the nations, His wonderful deeds among all the peoples. 4 For great is the LORD and greatly to be praised; He is to be feared above all gods. 5 For all the gods of the peoples are idols, But the LORD made the heavens. 6 Splendor and majesty are before Him, Strength and beauty are in His sanctuary. 7 Ascribe to the LORD, O families of the peoples, Ascribe to the LORD glory and strength. 8 Ascribe to the LORD the glory of His name; Bring an offering and come into His courts. 9 Worship the LORD in holy attire; Tremble before Him, all the earth. 10 Say among the nations, "The LORD reigns; Indeed, the world is firmly established, it will not be moved; He will judge the peoples with equity." 11 Let the heavens be glad, and let the earth rejoice; Let the sea roar, and all it contains; 12 Let the field exult, and all that is in it. Then all the trees of the forest will sing for joy 13 Before the LORD, for He is coming, For He is coming to judge the earth. He will judge the world in righteousness And the peoples in His faithfulness.

We call this "Worship: The Ultimate Priority." You'll recognize maybe the outline and all but I've reworked the body significantly, hopefully with more wisdom as I have grown through the years. But this, again, is a Psalm of a vision of the Lord's coming to establish his universal kingdom on the earth, and throughout this Psalm we see universal worship. Do not we see it over and over? "All of the earth. All of the peoples. Among the nations. O families of the people. All of the earth. All of the nations." Over and over we see that God has ordained that he will be worshiped from every people, tongue, tribe and nation to the very ends of the earth, by everyone. So in that day when that is accomplished, listen now, things will finally be set aright on planet earth. Things are not right now.

Things are out of joint now. In that day, things will be set aright and all must be continuing on God's perfect timetable until that ultimate end is met. And by the way, every true child of God has this abiding and continual passion, "Our God must be worshiped by all the earth." Now, it may ebb and flow but a true born-again child of God has an ever abiding seed of desiring God's glory among all the peoples of the earth.

The model prayer that the Lord gave us is a world missions, universal worship prayer. "Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. May your name be revered and known and worshiped and praised because of the awesomeness of who you are. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." Well, what's going on in heaven? Every speck, every square inch to the far corners of heaven fully, completely, joyously worships God. So he says, from the very outset, the foundation stone of your heart and your prayer life is that, "I would be known and worshiped by all." That's God's passion and as we mature in Christ, that becomes our increasing passion.

Now, today the world does not know him and the world does not worship him as they will in the fullness of time. God's time clock is ticking and it's counting down until that day when all of the earth is filled with his glory and every single inhabitant of the earth will know him truly, love him deeply, and worship him fully. The Almighty and sovereign God is orchestrating every event of history to come to this desired end. Revelation 5:9-10. We look at this verse often but we need to look at it often. "And they sang a new song, saying, 'Worthy are You to take the book and to break its seals; for You were slain, and purchased,'" past tense verb. So here we have sovereign grace again, even election. You've already purchased "for God with Your blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation. You will have made them to be a kingdom and priests to our God; and they will reign upon the earth.'" So from the heavenly perspective, John saw as if it's a finished task already, Jesus has completed the task and has shed his blood and redeemed for himself a people out of every people, tongue, tribe and nation. It's already done.

So God has purchased, if you will, a world of people through the shed blood of his Son who will one day be the only people on the earth and all will worship him. It's as if right now there are all these ones that Jesus has redeemed through his blood and they are scattered among all the peoples, tongues, tribes and nations of the world. It's like they're on lay away just waiting for the Gospel to get there and for them to come to faith in Jesus Christ. So contrary to the Arminian's argument that the teachings of the doctrines of grace and sovereign grace might inhibit evangelism, oh, my friend, it fuels evangelism because we're going behind what God has already finished; we're just reaping the fruit of what he's already established in our work of missions. And by the way, absolute historical fact: all the leaders practically, all the leaders of the modern missionary movement, Adoniram Judson, William Carey, to a great degree Hudson Taylor, Lottie Moon, were staunch, reformed theologians. They believed in the sovereignty of God in salvation and that was part of what kept them strong in their work knowing, "God has some believers here somewhere. I've just got to keep preaching and commanding all men everywhere to believe until they come to faith in Jesus Christ."

Now, today missiologists tell us there are over 4,000 distinct and unique people groups in the world. Over one billion peoples live in the world today, now listen, they have their own culture, they speak their own language, and everyone else to them is a foreigner. But among these one billion peoples, 4,000 distinct people groups. They have no opportunity to hear the Gospel. If everyone in their culture were to tell everyone else in their culture what they know about God, no one would talk about the God of the Bible and his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, because no one knows him. The Gospel is just not there. There is not a person in their culture who knows Christ. There is not a missionary there. There is not a preacher there. There is not a church there. There is not a radio broadcast there. There is not a television program there. There is no literature there. There is no Bible in their language. It's not there. Over one billion people, 4,000 distinct people groups.

So these people, as of today, have no opportunity to love him, to know him, and to worship him which is his goal for all peoples, yet he has purchased some of them with his own blood to be worshipers, and so we know it's absolutely going to happen. The Bible says in Proverbs 11:18, "He who sows righteousness gets a true reward." When Jesus came and died for his children, for his church, when he purchased them by his precious blood, that was the most righteous act ever performed. He has righteously earned for himself a people. He has saved them by his own sweat, his own suffering, his own sacrifice, his own shed blood, and he will see the reward of his suffering. His commission to Grace Life Church of the Shoals is to be a part of getting the message to all peoples that he might be worshiped by all peoples. In Romans 1:14, the apostle said, "I am under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish." I have a burden and obligation to get this Gospel to all these different people groups.

You remember the story of the Moravian missions movement; the Moravians were a Baptist people and quite reformed in their theology, and they said that during a great move of God among the Moravian believers, that up to 50% of their church members went to the mission field. Can you imagine such a thing? Fifty percent among all of their churches during this great movement. And they said when they would, of course, they didn't have airplanes in those days, when they would load up on the ships and head out to countries all over the world where they didn't know the Gospel, they would take their belongings in a casket because they were going there to die. They were going there to give their lives that other peoples might be saved and might become worshipers of God. And they said it was common as the ship left the port that they would wave to each other with their handkerchiefs and cry with tears rolling down their faces, "May the Lamb receive the reward of his suffering." That was their goal. "May Jesus get his prize. May Jesus be glorified. May Jesus be known and loved and worshiped by all of these peoples who do not yet know him. That's why we're going. May the Lamb receive the reward of his suffering."

Well, that's my introduction. Point 1: worship is ultimate because of his intrinsic worth. Worship is ultimate. Worship is the ultimate part. Look, folks, saving men from hell is not the ultimate priority. That is a priority, that is a genuine motivation, that should be a genuine burden, but that is secondary to our God being worshiped and being glorified. Like it or not, it's time for some of you to get a God-centered view of things and not a

man-centered view. When everything is settled, the eternal state is set in never to be changed again, there will be men with God in heaven worshiping him and bringing him glory, and there will be people in hell suffering just penalty for their sins, bringing God's justice glory because they are worthy of that punishment. But one thing is for certain, God is going to be glorified, whether by the praises of those saved by grace or the sufferings of those suffering for their own sin and refusal to return to God and believe on his Son.

God will be worshiped and glorified. It's because of his intrinsic worth. As you look at Psalm 96, I don't even have a particular verse because the entire Psalm just bleeds with, "God is worthy." It's because of who he is. It's his intrinsic worth. You see, God's purposes throughout history and throughout specifically revelatory, that means biblical history, is about his own worship. Let's go back a little bit and follow it chronologically. Abraham was called to go out from his land to a new land and Genesis 12 tells us when he arrived at the new land, he built an altar and worshiped. It was about worship. Moses is told in Exodus 3 to leave Egypt and take the people to worship. In Exodus 7:16, God tells Moses to command to Pharaoh, "Let my people go that they might go and serve," same root word, same concept as, "worship me." God said, "I want worshipers. I'm looking for worshipers." In Exodus 34:11-12, God commands Israel to tear down the altars and the idols of the land that they are going to inherit so that only God, the God of the Scripture, is worshiped in the new land. God is jealous for worship. Do you not realize as we sit here today and people are worshiping politicians, they're worshiping philosophies, they're worshiping themselves, they're glorying in their own lusts, they're excited about a silly ballgame and God is in heaven jealous for his own worship. He's going to fix all this one day.

Later, Solomon builds the temple. 1 Kings 8 records that, "all the people of the earth may know that the Lord is God and there is no one else." That's about worship. Jesus is born and the Magi come from the east and they say, "Why have you come?" They say, "We've come to worship." As Jesus ascends right before he ascends back into heaven, he gives a final commission to his followers, "Go into all the world and make disciples." That means followers, servers. That's worshipers. By the way, the idea of worship and service are always intertwined. They're one thing. We're so busy at just singing together, that's a wonderful thing we do, worship is from your heart, loving, knowing, honoring, treasuring who he is and what he has called us to be and do. Paul stated in Romans 1:5 that his ministry was to bring about the obedience of faith among the nations for his name's sake." That is, that people might know who he really is and love him for who he really is among all the peoples of the world. That's all about universal worship and it's all because of his intrinsic worth. By his very nature, it demands all things love him and worship him.

You know, when you look at all the biblical text and you think about all that God has said about his own worship, some might ask, "Does God have a problem here? What's all of this focus on himself? I mean, is God having an identity crisis? Is God an egomaniac? Does God have a public relations problem?" No, not at all, it's just that he and he alone is intrinsically worthy of all glory and honor and praise and if you truly know him through

the merits of his Son, you cannot help but worship him. So that's where we come back to the Gospel and the preaching of the Gospel being the primary thing we're involved in in missions. We might do other things, but that is the main thing we're going to always do is send preachers to preach the Gospel because through the Gospel, God saves men through the power of his Son, and through the power of his Son, men know God truly and then can finally truly worship him because worship is the goal. You see, in one very real sense, the Gospel is not the goal and evangelism is not the goal; they're the goal leading to the main goal that men might become worshipers of the one true God.

We've said so much about this in the past but I want to say it again because some of the newer folks and even us older folks need to remind ourselves that we at Grace Life Church reject all the modern church growth emphasis about building a church's ministry on people's perceived needs. It's an enormous amount of work and effort and money. People need. Now they're telling us all these new generations, you know, they're so visual. They have all the social media. We've got to do all these fantastic things to capture their attention that they might know the one true God. But we're not focused on anyone's needs. What we want to be focused on is on one person's desire and that's God's desire to be worshiped. You say, "I'm not sure you're making true worshipers that really love God and want to worship him if we have to pacify them and entertain them and coddle their flesh to get them to try to like God." Are you with me? Because if you become a disciple of Jesus Christ, you might suffer next week, and if I've taught you a Gospel that says, "We're going to bless you, entertain you, pick you up, rub you the right way, make you feel great about yourself, thrill you with the best amusements in town and, by the way, receive Jesus at the end of the service," and you go out into the world and tell somebody you're a follower of Jesus and they start putting the pressure on you, you capitulate because you've been told a lie. You've been told this is all about fun, entertainment, and having a great time. You didn't become a worshiper, you've been entertained on Sunday. You've been converted to a worship service of entertainment, not to the God of Scripture.

So our goal is to make true worshipers and to be centered on that as our priority. Now, Acts 6 is a great illustration of the balance here. In Acts 6, the early church is going great. God is saving lots of folks and a serious problem arises, some of the precious widows who are not able to care for themselves are being neglected in the daily serving of food. That's a serious problem. The apostles do something that most Baptists wouldn't understand. They said, "Okay, we pastors are going to go study and preach. Now, appoint some Spirit-filled men who will oversee and make sure these ladies are taken care of because it's not right for us to neglect prayer and preaching the word even to take care of widows who need food." Now, get the balance here. It's very important those ladies were taken care of but not so important that the men of God were detracted from the primary thing of preaching the Gospel which is the means God uses to create worshipers. Are you with me? You see, God being worshiped is more important than you eating. I can prove that. I've known many people who got diseases, cancers and other things, who could no longer eat but they became great worshipers. God became precious and dear. He became the joy of their life. Not that he wasn't before but in increasing ways. They could no longer eat but they became greater worshipers. Those people to a person, by the way, testify that was the happiest days of their lives. Physically, humanly, they had nothing but

spiritually they had everything. So we are about making worshipers of God the ultimate priority that we would be and that we would help others become worshipers. Because of his intrinsic worthiness, he must be worshiped.

Secondly, II. Worship must be according to his name. Worship must be according to his name. Look at verse 8, if you will. The Psalmist just throws out here in verse 8, "Ascribe to the LORD the glory of His name." Now, the word "name" here does not mean Jesus. Jesus was a personal name, it was common in the day just like Tom or Harry is common today. "Name" here means "the truth that God has revealed about himself in the word." God says, "They've got to know who I really am." Listen, folks, God is not impressed nor desires you to worship him according to how you feel. "Well, I feel God's like this. Well, I feel God would be like that. Well, I feel like God wouldn't do this. Well, I feel like God wouldn't do that." It doesn't matter to God. God says, "I have revealed through my word who I am, now learn who I am and worship me according to that. That's what I desire." So they had to be brought to a knowledge of who truly God is so they can begin to worship him properly according to his name. That's why sound, rich, doctrinal, biblical preaching is essential so that you might know who you are worshiping.

You can't worship God according to how we feel. You know, what would it be like if you raised your children to honor you according to how they feel? "I hope you feel it today, son." What I'd say is, "I'll tell you what you're gonna feel. You're gonna honor me." Now look, that's not all you do but that's one of the things you do as a good parent, and then as your child grows, the joyous day comes when they learn the wisdom of honoring you, when they learn that it honors God to honor you, and when they begin to joy in honoring you. Well, you see, that's where God wants us to be spiritually as children. Not just that we, and let me pick a little bit on my brothers and sisters in charismatic circles, and I love these folks, a lot of them love Jesus, but I'm telling you, they've got this thing radically upside down a lot of the time. They build everything around how it stirs us, how it blesses us, how it picks us up, how it makes us feel, well, God's not interested in that. He wants to know, "Who am I? Do you know me? Have you studied hard to learn who I am? I gave you a whole big thick book that reveals who I am. Learn who I am." That's why, folks, we don't shy away from those rich challenging doctrines like predestination and election and choosing and calling because they reveal to us the rich and dynamic glories of the wisdom of God and we walk out marveling over, "What a God this is." And we worship better. You see, the older you get, the better worshiper you become because you learn more.

Now, balance again: God is blessed, I know, by folks who are just coming to know him and don't know much yet and do the best they can, but God forbid you've been saved 20 years and you're still worshiping like an infant. It's according to his name, according to who he has revealed himself to be. In one sense, you must know the book well to be able to worship well, thus the primacy of Bible preaching. No one is to offer speculative guesses in their worship to God. Brother Tom and I have a continual dialogue about, "Are the songs telling the truth about what the book says about God?" By the way, I've dealt with music guys who are always grieved by that, are offended by that. Brother Tom loves it. He loves it. He says, "It's about truth and it's about doctrine, it's not about me having a

silly song that people have fun with. It's about God being worshiped when we sing," and when we preach.

You know, to be converted you even have to know something of God. You have to be taught the knowledge of the truth about who he is. For example, you can't begin to grasp your sin and your need for salvation if you don't begin to grasp something of his holiness. You're only sinful because he's intrinsically and transcendently holy. So you've got to know some of the truth about that. You probably couldn't enunciate it, you probably couldn't verbalize it, but the Spirit of God through the revealing of the word of God begins to enable you to see something about this glorious, transcendent, holy God and it begins to impress upon you about the woeful wanting and offensiveness of you before him, and then you see your need of a Savior. Then you need to know what the Bible says about the Savior, how Jesus is the substitutionary sacrifice for your sin, how he died in your place. The Bible says God looked upon Jesus on the cross as if he sinned all your sins and had the nature of a sinner like you have in your heart and he took the wrath for you in your place and declares you justified, that is standing before God in his very righteousness, if you trust him as Lord and Savior. You have to have some knowledge. Now, I do believe there are people who are saved on very, very little knowledge but it's a shame that they don't get to glory and joy and worship the God they have come to know because they are under poor teaching all the time. So even to be converted, you have to have something of the knowledge of his name, that is, know what he truly is and what the book really says.

You know, you're going to run into folks and it's always a mixed bag and it's a mixture of things and you'll say, "Well, at our church, we do this and at our church we do that," and we don't want to be cosmic killjoys and just be critical, but folks, just because stuff is happening and stuff is hot doesn't mean God is being worshiped at all. You see, worship is about knowing what the word says about him. With our minds, we continually learn the truth from the word about him. Then our hearts follow that knowledge; our hearts begin to treasure and joy in what we've learned in our minds from the word about him. Then our lips begin to say and speak and sing things. What we learned in our hearts and what we begin to treasure in our hearts, what we have learned in our minds and what we treasure in our hearts about him. Then in our lives, we begin to want to live like he wants us to live because in our minds we learn what he expects of us; in our hearts we begin to treasure it; in our lives we want to live it better until the day we die. And that, by the way, is worship. That's all worship. Then we come in here on Sunday because we're running a little bit low, we're getting a little bit spiritually weak, we need to be primed back up. We need to begin thinking about some of the silly stuff we put so much energy and passion in and say, "Oh God, that may not be wrong but I may have made it too important. Oh God, let me get the priority back. It's you. It's who you really are, who you have revealed yourself in the word. That's who I want to know and that's who I want to worship."

Do you know what? I'll elaborate on this probably a little bit more but you aren't capable, you are not capable, listen to me, listen to me, you are not capable of knowing him and loving him apart from divine intervention in your heart. You are not that smart. You're not that virtuous. You are not capable unless God, the Holy Spirit, takes the word of God

and changes your heart, and then you begin that glorious pilgrimage of learning of him, of loving him more and wanting to worship him and serve him better.

III. God's ordained means to bring himself the worship he deserves. God says, "I want worship. I want worship from all people. I want true worshipers to the end of the earth." Okay, God, what do you want us to do? How do you want us to do this? Now, this is very, very important and, once again, very, very brief, that's why we have a True Church Conference. That's why we have hundreds of pastors, no exaggeration, to one extent or another, thousands of church leaders, who have looked to us for guidance in these areas. Not that we're the last answer but we are an answer God might be using. The message I'm preaching to you tonight that I'm finishing tonight, has had tens of thousands of downloads on the internet. Tens of thousands because men are hungry for, "What saith the Scriptures? What's the truth about these things?" By the way, that's sad because there is nothing unique and special about my preaching, my message, or you, it's just that everybody's become so radically subnormal, if a few folks try to act normal, they seem abnormal. That's all it is. We're just barely normal, if that. It's like the guys at the cancer ward comparing themselves to the guy at the funeral home. The guy at the funeral home is dead so he feels pretty good, "Well, at least I'm not dead." Yeah, but you're a long way from normal. And that's the way churches are today and Christians are today, we're so radically subnormal, if just a few churches try to be normal they think it's weird.

God's ordained means, very simple stuff here. Let's think about it again, 1. He uses true churches. He uses true churches. Why all of our emphasis on being a biblical healthy church? Why all of our emphasis on being a true church? It's because God has ordained that he will get his missions work done primarily through churches and primarily through healthy churches. As a matter of fact, I've said this at pastors conferences and to pastors all over the place, the best thing a whole lot of churches could do is stop doing missions because they have so much weakness and error in their doctrine and practice, they're exporting that error and hurting the cause of Christ. If you've been around the world as much as I have, Brother Steve has, you see this everywhere. You go all over the world and you find these churches mimicking the false, shallow, even sometimes non-Gospel that they see in American churches and a big part of Anchored in Truth missions is to go over there and say, "Please don't follow Americans' examples. Please follow the word of God." The best thing some churches could do is to stop doing missions until they get a genuine enough grasp of truth and a genuine enough involvement in true biblical methodologies in the church so that they have something worth reproducing when they go around the world. Is that hard to understand? I mean, I understand today is a big football day. Your team may need a new coach so they're going to go out and find a guy who has never done anything but flounder around and fail. As far as what football is, the guy doesn't even know a soccer ball from a football. No, you're not going to hire a coach like that, you want somebody who's got something of a record that he can come and reproduce here at our team. Well, that's the way it ought to be in God's work in God's church.

God continually rebuked Israel and called Israel to repentance because in the Old Testament era, Israel was to be God's light and God's truth to create other worshipers, and

they would fail. When they became sinful, God didn't say, "Well, you're not doing too good but at least get my message out." No, he didn't say that. He said, "No, I want to purify you then my message will be pure." So getting Israel true was essential to Old Testament evangelism. Though it's different from New Testament, they were to be God's witness in the world. The Gospel comes, the apostles are preaching on the day of Pentecost, people are being saved by the thousands and thousands, Grace Life Church of Jerusalem is started in Israel, and things are going good, and then on Sunday morning, Ananias and Sapphira come and with impure hearts and impure motives, and God kills them in the worship service. What was God saying? God was about to birth the greatest missions and evangelism explosion ever known in the history of mankind and what God was saying is, "I've got to get the church purer before I send it out into the world." Are you with me? God uses true churches. God uses healthy churches. Never perfect, by the way, but at least a genuine and humble faithfulness to strive toward being true in doctrine and true in practice. Paul's ministry, Paul is the great evangelist of the New Testament. He goes into all of these lands preaching and starting churches, yet if you'll study the epistles, he spends a lot more time correcting false doctrine and correcting false practice in established churches than he actually does preaching the Gospel in new places. I wonder why that is? Because he knows if these churches will get right, missions will happen. God does his work through true churches.

Secondly, he honors genuine prayer. He honors genuine prayer. God in his sovereignty has ordained that a means of him spreading the Gospel and preparing for himself worshipers all over the world is his people praying. In Luke 10:2, "And He was saying to them, 'The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore beseech the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest.'" Now, it's very, very important and I hope this is the focus of your prayer for missions, "Oh God, bless our efforts in missions that you might get more worshipers. Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name," is what Jesus said to pray. "Make the glory and the worship of my name the primary motivations of your prayer life." Paul requested in Colossians 4:3, "praying at the same time for us as well, that God will open up to us a door for the word, so that we may speak forth the mystery of Christ, for which I have also been imprisoned." So Paul is saying, "Pray for us as we go spread the Gospel, that he'll open a door for this word to be effective."

Genuine prayer. One of the things we do is we'll have a prayer table out there in front of the missions event. It's going to be there again this year, in front of the missions map, and you can get prayer cards just as a reminder of which missionaries you want to be praying over this next year. And it prompts us and stirs us to pray more, that they indeed would be blessed with God with open doors to create worshipers all over the world. You know, I don't know what it's going to be like in heaven. We can only speculate and our speculation is very, very weak because it's infinitely beyond our comprehension, but is it not amazing that through our efforts a sovereign God is preparing and creating for himself worshipers from peoples, tongues, and tribes, and nations all over the world? Right now as I preach to you, Eric Carpenter is in Nepal. Nepal is a little land locked country south of China, north of India, and he's teaching in a seminary and planting a church and creating worshipers of Jesus Christ in Nepal, and we send him a check every

month to support him to plant that church. It's just an amazing thing to think about. It's not about Nepal, it's not about even their sins being forgiven as wonderful as that is, it's about new worshipers of God which is what he craves and desires primarily and chiefly.

Thirdly, his means, he has shown us in the word, he uses our financial support, the apostle actually organized, the Apostle Paul that is, organized a systematic method of training, motivating, overseeing, and holding accountable the established churches to take up offerings to help the needs in Jerusalem. And also there was consistent and clear testimony, an example among the existing churches in the New Testament, of raising funds to continue supporting the preaching of the Gospel to other places. And from the book of Corinthians, we didn't preach on it this year unless Brother Steve decides to next Sunday, we came up with what we call a faith commitment offering. Have you got that car to put on the screen, guys? A faith commitment offering and instead of what a traditional Baptist Church does and it's fine the way they do it, I'm not saying that's wrong, but they'll take up around Christmas an offering for, is Christmas a home missions? Am I right, Brother Steve? You southern Baptist boy. Christmas home missions, international missions, that's how long we've been away from it. At Christmas they take up an offering for international missions, at Easter, they take up an offering for North American missions. And we just found out that we don't need to delegate missions to a couple of times a year, it needs to be something we do all year long.

So based on Paul's example to the Corinthian church, I don't have time to go into it, he went and prepared them to give a missions offering before he took it up. Well, that's what we do during World Impact Conference, we call it the True Church Conference. We're preparing ourselves to give, though we're not giving toward missions yet. So in that envelope, two weeks from today, we'll take up these envelopes and on the front you will indicate the amount and the frequency you want to give to our world missions efforts to train these pastors, to support these church planters, to send out these missionaries all over the world. On the first line, you'll indicate the amount you intend to give. On the second line, you'll indicate the frequency you want to give that amount. Then we'll take all these cards in and we'll make our missions budget out of what you have committed. Now, nobody will ask you for this but God. This is between you and God. It is a faith commitment between you and God and God has just unbelievably blessed our missions as we turn to this, what I believe, clear biblical pattern in the New Testament. It's not an absolute, but it is a good biblical pattern for missions giving. So, again, on that top line, you'll put the amount I want to give. Second line, how often I'm going to give that amount. Then put your name on there or if you know your envelope number, put it on there and we'll make sure you get giving credit for that.

Now, it is an envelope and we did that because since we started this conference and I commend our staff, they've really worked the cost of the conference down, but it's typically tens of thousands of dollars to do this conference and not charge very much for it. So we just ask you to prayerfully give an offering, a one time offering in the envelope for the conference expense. But the front of it indicates what you're going to start doing and, Brother Steve, I forget when we ask people to consider starting, is it next month? Just the next month they start with their new amount? April. Alright, in April is when we

kind of move toward the new budget year. So, anyway, that's the way we do it here at Grace Life. God has blessed it for many, many, many years, and I believe I'm correct, I know it's way above \$7 million you've given to mission since we began doing this and approaching \$8 million. Above and beyond all of our other giving and, again, that's not anything to get real excited about because we probably could do better but I thank God for it.

So you seek God and pray because, listen, this is one of the means God has ordained so that he might get worshipers to the ends of the earth. He has ordained those means: genuine prayer; financial giving; we must strive to be a true church; and then lastly, he uses the sending of preachers. Now, you say sending of laborers, but I got more narrow because everything about God's work of creating worshipers centers on preaching the Gospel and building churches. Preaching the Gospel and building. Now, there are other folks who can labor to go and associate and help that effort, but that is the primary effort, sending preachers and planting churches.

One final verse here and I'll have a closing thought and we'll be done, Romans 10:1. Paul is talking about lost Israel and he says, "Brethren, my heart's desire and my prayer to God for them is for their salvation." So Paul's burdened about his lost brethren of Israel. Then he says, "What is God's means?" Verse 14 of Romans 10, "How then will they call on Him in whom they have not believed? How will they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how will they hear without a preacher?" How are they going to hear unless someone goes and preaches? Now, Paul could have said a thousand different things. By the way, a theater and acting and drama was very big in the Roman culture, in the Greek culture of the day. He could have said, "We're going to do creative stuff to keep their interest." No, he said preaching. God's primary means is preaching. Not just any preaching, but God called, but thoroughly biblical, Spirit-empowered preaching of the word of God.

And how will they preach? Verse 15 of Romans 10, "How will they preach unless they are sent?" Now, that's a key for us. Somebody's got to send them. As the apostle went out and other associates went out with Paul, he'd keep visiting back to the other churches and they would keep giving him funds and he would go out and preach some more, and he'd come back and get some more money, and go out and preach some more. And the church at Philippi really got it and he commended them and said, "You were the first ones to get this idea of giving and receiving. You were given the Gospel and blessed by it, now you're giving back to me, enabling me to go and give it to others." So these are God's primary means of enabling him to create for himself worshipers to the ends of the earth. He didn't have to do it this way but this is the way he has ordained to do it.

So the entire True Church Conference is dedicated to this end: God might get more worshipers. You see, the Lord is one of transcendent holiness and majesty. Listen to me, God is, you need to meditate on holiness sometimes because a lot of you don't tremble enough before who God is. He is of transcendent holiness and majesty, so much so that it requires the entire earth, even the entire universe, to worship him to do him justice. It's a crime if all the universe does not worship him because of who he is. One day he's going

to return, he's going to reign on earth, and he's going to receive worship from the entire earth and all earth's inhabitants, but yet today God is on mission. He's on mission now to press toward the ultimate goal of that universal worship and we are called as God's local New Testament church to be on mission with God to get those worshipers.

And I'm going to tell you, I'm in my 35th year here. This will hold you. The glory of God in creating worshipers to the end of the earth will keep you going 35 years. Creating nice events and fun stuff and the best children's events and all of that other stuff, that's not all wrong, we do good stuff there, but that's secondary at best. That will not hold you. I don't want to go out into my community and say, "We have the most whizbang exciting student stuff you've ever seen." That doesn't matter. Are your students knowing, loving, treasuring, and worshipping God even if it's hard? That's what God wants, worshipers. By the way, we've got a lot of kids like that. A lot of them. And parents, you ought to be sold out and dedicated to your children getting everything they can out of Grace Life Church. Granddaddy's, be sold out that your grandchildren are going to get what God has in a healthy local church because you are not able to do it apart from partnership with God's church. God has ordained the church as his means to that.

Missions is what God is about. He's about that ultimate goal of bringing worshipers for himself from all peoples and we must be on mission with God. To make worshipers of him, we must worship according to his name. That means they've got to know the truth of the Gospel so that's the only way they can know the true God and worship him truly, because only those the Son saves and only those the Son clothes in his own righteousness are enabled to know him and to worship him probably. That's why we strive toward a True Church Conference. That's why we strive to be a true church. That's why we motivate and challenge each other in prayer. That's why we commit to the faith commitment offering. That's why we strive to send out and support church pastors and preachers around the world.

Maybe as much as anything else, as we head toward this True Church Conference, we need to be enthralled again with the Gospel because, you know, it's important that you understand everything I've preached, but at the end of the day, if you and you and you and you and you and you and you and you and you and you, if the Gospel hasn't grabbed you, nothing else is going to help you. This is going to be just dead stuff. You say, "Oh well, he's kind of passionate about it. Well, I get that. I'll chuck a nickel in," figuratively speaking.

There was a, you know how you hear stuff and it grabs you and you never get over it, this is one of those stories I heard that grabbed me and I never got over it. There was a missionary in Asia and he was preaching and teaching to a packed crowd of Asians who were unreached. They had never heard of the Bible. They had never heard of the Gospel. They had never heard of Christ. And this missionary was doing a good job. He began to tell them about this intrinsically transcendent holy God and how he was so high and perfect and beyond us and he was righteous and that how our very lives from our nature and our deeds had offended him, and we fail him, and we deserve judgment from this just and holy God. And he hammered that point of their sin and their need to them, then he

explained, "But this God has loved beyond what you can comprehend. This God sent his own Son from heaven to hang on the cross, suffer, bleed, and die to take the judgment you deserve." And he was just elaborating on those rich doctrines. It got late at night and the missionary was worn out and he said, "Look, we'll meet together in the morning. We'll study this some more tomorrow. You're all tired. You need to go home and you need to go to bed," and they wouldn't move. If you know the Oriental and Asian culture, they're very respectable. Sit very still and very, I mean, they weren't going to say anything. They wouldn't move. They wouldn't go. He said, "No, it's fine. It's okay. You can go home and we'll talk about this tomorrow." And one of them very bravely raised his hand and said, "Sir, you've just told us about an infinitely holy and just God that ought to crush us for our sin and yet he would send his Son to die for us and you want us to go home and go to bed and sleep?" In other words, "We can't go to sleep. You've told us something that's just radically overwhelmed us." Perhaps for us it's a little too common of a story. It needs to enthrall us afresh because if you're grateful that this God has saved you, then you'll want to desire to please him and help him make worshipers to the ends of the earth.

Let's bow in prayer.