



World Christian Discipleship

Thriving under the Supremacy of God's Son

by David Bryant

I've heard it said among believers: "God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life." I suppose it would be much more appropriate to say it this way: "God loves His Son and has a wonderful plan for Him, to bring all the nations to His feet as Lord of all, and He loves you and me enough to give us a place in it." Let's investigate that promise more closely.

Caught up in the Grand Narrative

In C.S. Lewis' *The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe*, four children playing hide and seek in a English country manor take shelter in an old wardrobe on the third floor, only to discover it holds more than just mothballed coats. It is magical. The back of the wardrobe empties out into another dimension altogether – a land called Narnia. Immediately the four are thrown into the midst of a story already well underway, involving a conflict between the White Witch (who has made Narnia always winter but never Christmas) and a grand lion named Aslan (the Christ-figure in Lewis' drama). Not only are they included in the story of Narnia, but they become key players as they follow Aslan, in delivering the inhabitants of Narnia from the witch's spell and transforming the kingdom into all it was meant to be. Once they enter the wardrobe, their destiny becomes sealed with the destiny of Aslan!

The same has happened to everyone who has been "transferred from the dominion of darkness into the Kingdom of God's dear Son" (Colossians 1). We've been summoned to be part of a narrative far greater than we could have imagined – a larger purpose, a longer story, a higher calling, marching toward a grander horizon. We've stepped into something rooted in an ancient history, moving toward a nearly incomprehensible culmination, contending with a more formidable enemy, and fulfilling the most incredible task humankind could ever assume, one that invites all the earth into eternal transformations. Our story is about a Lion who reigns supreme, portrayed as a Lamb at the center of the throne of the universe (Revelation 5).

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In 1948 Dwight Eisenhower penned another story, his memoirs on World War II titled *Crusade in Europe*. As commander-in-chief of the Allied Forces, he faced many pressures to give up his primary goal to use the beaches of Normandy for an all-out invasion of the Nazi empire at the earliest practical moment. Two sentences on page 48 sum up his account: "History has proved that nothing is more difficult in war than to adhere to a single strategic plan. Unforeseen and glittering promise on the one hand, and unexpected difficulties or risks upon the other, present constant temptations to desert the chosen line of action in favor of another."

In the same way, *our* story is focused on victory. Our Supreme Commander will never waver, despite all the opposition. He will not desert His redemptive invasion of the nations. He will not turn back from fulfilling the promises of the Father, or fail to recapture uncontested what is rightfully His. His "one strategic plan" is for every knee to bow, by either redemption or judgment, in the confession of His Kingship over all, to the glory of our Almighty Father (Isaiah 45 and Philippians 2).

Like waves ascending up a beach in the momentum of an incoming tide, despite periods of ebbs and flow, the missionary purpose cannot be stopped. Its Champion remains undaunted, concerned for all peoples, Lord of all, for all time to come. God is writing no other story. At this very moment our lofty Leader is about the business of bringing *unconditional surrender* among all the nations through the spread of the Gospel. In our generation this planet-wide mission is one of the most vivid expressions of the all-embracing scope of Christ's ascension.

From Heaven's throne Christ has never ceased directing a 2000-year-old global missionary advance among the nations. True to His universal presence, He meets us where He sends us. There is no place His ambassadors go

where He has not gone *ahead* of them. With full authority He sets the stage for our arrival before we get there. He works through us when we arrive. He sustains the impact of His reign long after we move on.

The Father has given His Son keys to countless doors, in cities and communities, among cultures and ethnicities, where Christ is not yet known. Those gates are just waiting to be flung open to Him. There are peoples poised by sovereign grace, even now, to be reached with His salvation. There is no place on the planet Christ cannot and will not lead His missionary Church in its victory parade (Matthew 28). He intends to *fill* the nations with the hope of the Gospel (Acts 1 with Colossians 1). Sovereignly rearranging the affairs of mankind as needed, to bring everything to pass, the Father has set His heart on countless sinners yet to be drawn to His promises in Christ Jesus (See 2 Corinthians 2, 3, 4).

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With full determination this mission-sending God has narrowed His sights on *our* generation. He sees more than two billion people still completely unevangelized. He knows there are multitudes who have no knowledge of who His Son is — who have no one like them, near them, to even begin to tell them. But He refuses to leave earth's peoples in this hopeless condition. What is the *goal* of God's story? — To achieve the most comprehensive glory for His Son, among the greatest host of humans, to the fullest extent possible, in a way that magnifies forever the triumphs of His salvation and the supremacy of His Messiah.

To avoid any spirit of trivial "triumphalism", however, let's be clear on one thing: Christ's missionary story not only initiates *harvest fields*, it also instigates *battlefields* — just as the children experience in Narnia at the climax of Aslan's return. Any war is costly, sometimes bloody. Skirmishes are lost and won. Not every moment in the service of Jesus' Kingdom offers visible, unalloyed advances in His mission. There are Forces of Darkness opposed to God's promises, ready to fight them, and us, to the death. This, too, is part of the narrative of Christ's global cause in which we each play our part

Still, we can boast in the undiminished hope our narrative proclaims. Though not physically present, Christ is right now actively subduing many of His enemies, dethroning Principalities and Powers in many places. Increasingly He is putting limits on their opposition to His dominion among the nations. Though the time of their full destruction awaits the Consummation, God's Son is rapidly rendering them ineffective and unproductive. He is breaking their *stranglehold* on earth's peoples. He is tearing down their *strongholds* against the Gospel. He is upholding His cause to bring saving hope to sinners everywhere (compare Revelation 12:1-12 with Hebrews 12:25-29). The increased martyrdom of Christians over the past century alone, in unprecedented numbers, only serves to reinforce how decisively and effectively Christ's redemptive mission is penetrating enemy territory.

World Christians: Out of the box and into the drama

Unfortunately though every Christian is called into the thick of Christ's global cause, many are *not* actively involved as God intended. Some are asleep; some are on retreat, while others are determined to make their lives count, particularly for the sake of some of the multitudes that await the opportunity to hear of Christ for the first time. Some are heading into the sunrise of Christ's forcefully advancing Kingdom while others huddle in the shadows of unbelief. Some run the race before them setting no limits on how, where, or among whom God will use them, while others remain trapped in myths about who Christ really is, where He's headed and what He is doing among the nations — myths that rob them of incentive to care about the unreached. Others are determined to make Christ's global cause the unifying focus — the context — for all they are and do. They are willing to be broken and remolded to fit in His worldwide mission wherever they can make the most strategic impact. In turn, they're growing to know Christ so much better as they live for His fame and reign.

Some Christians flourish in outwardly-focused discipleship while others seem satisfied to just sit in what I call "boxes of pea-sized Christianity". Sincerity and doctrinal convictions may be similar for both. But it's unmistakable when Christians live for the consummation of God's redeeming purposes among all peoples. What shall we call this distinct group of Christians? For the moment, let's call them *World Christians*.

A World Christian isn't superior to other Christians. But by God's grace, he or she has made a discovery so

important that life can never be the same again. A World Christian has discovered the call of Christ to believe, think, plan, and act in accordance with a “plan for the fulfillment of the times, to sum up everything in Christ, things in heaven and on earth” (Ephesians 1:9-10). By faith, World Christians have chosen to invest all they are and have in that larger purpose.

Some World Christians become missionaries who physically cross major human barriers to distant lands or cultures to bring the gospel to those who can hear no other way. *But every Christian is meant to be a World Christian*, even if you physically “stay” in familiar places to provide the sacrificial love, prayers, training, money, and quality of congregational life that backs the work of those who “go.”

World Christians are day-to-day disciples for whom Christ’s global cause has become the integrating, overriding priority for all that He is for them. World Christians are heaven’s expatriates, camping where the Kingdom is best served. They are members of God’s global dispersion down through history and out through the nations, reaching the unreached and blessing the families of earth.

The term “World Christian” may have been coined recently, but living as a World Christian is certainly nothing new. For example, many years ago a World Christian named John R. Mott — leader of the Student Volunteer Movement that began in 1886 and within thirty years had sent out 20,000 new missionaries while mobilizing nearly 100,000 lay people to send them — defined World Christians when he observed:

An enterprise which aims at the evangelization of the whole world in a generation, and contemplates the ultimate establishment of the Kingdom of Christ, requires that its leaders be Christian statesmen with far-seeing views, with comprehensive plans, with power of initiative, and with victorious faith.

Recently, mega-church pastor Rick Warren found another way to describe what it means to live as a World Christian with the helpful phrase “the purpose-driven life”. The idea of being impelled and focused on God’s global concerns has encouraged many. But in the long run, to flourish in a purpose-driven life, we need to know first what it means to live a *Person-driven* life. For all of our activities and general support for Kingdom work, many may not be, in fact, the *Person-driven* people we thought we were.

For you see, World Christians are drawn to a passion for a Person — the supreme, sovereign and all-sufficient Son of God, for whom the purpose for our churches and our lives exists to begin with. World Christians long to be a part of a movement toward the glorious climax of history *in Him*. They sense that we’re on a mission that even now tastes of the powers of the Age to Come because Jesus Christ is in our midst. They have tied their true destiny directly to the Hour when heaven and earth will be “summed up” in God’s all-consuming Son (Ephesians 1 and Colossians 1). To help them become Person-driven, they also seek to boldly share such a vision with fellow believers every chance they get.

World Christians follow Jesus daily with the exciting conviction that what He will be Lord of ultimately He is Lord of even now; that every believer is being led by Him in triumphal procession today toward the Grand Finale when He will fully triumph at The End. For them, the Christian life is so much more than a matter of contending for doctrinal purity (as important as that is). It has become for them the thrill of a passion for Christ that’s marked by “abounding hope in the power of the Holy Spirit” (Romans 15:13). Having encountered the Son of the Father who stands among them as the assurance of all the glorious things to come (Colossians 1:27), they continue to dwell under the upraised hands of this Risen One — the One whose blessing has become their commission, which they joyfully serve before His ever watchful, majestic gaze (Luke 24:50-53).

God loves His Son and has a wonderful plan for Him . . . and he loves you enough to give you a place in it. World Christians trust this fully and obey.

World Christians: Serving a Monarch not a Mascot

In so many of our churches, I fear, Jesus is regularly deployed as our *mascot*. Once a week on Sunday, for example, we “trot Him out” to cheer us up, to give us new vigor and vision, to reassure us that we are “somebodies”. We invite Him to reinforce for us the great things we want to do for God. We look to Him to

reinvigorate our celebration of victories we think we're destined to win. He lifts our spirits. He resuscitates our souls. He rebuilds our confidence. He gives us reasons to cheer. He confirms for us over and over that all must be well. We're so proud of Him! We're so happy to be identified with His name. Enthusiasm for Him energizes us — for awhile.

But then, for the rest of the week He is pretty much relegated to the sidelines. For all practical purposes, we are the ones who call the shots. We implement the plays, scramble for first downs, and improvise in a pinch. Even if we do it in His name, we do it with little reliance on His person. There's scant evidence that we think of ourselves as somehow utterly incapable of doing anything of eternal consequence apart from Him. Promises of fuller displays of His dominion leave our daily discipleship un-phased. We evidence little desperation for increased manifestations of His majesty among ourselves, let alone among earth's unreached peoples.

As contradictory as it may seem, many of us have redefined Jesus into someone we can both admire and ignore at the same time! To be our mascot, we've re-designed Him to be reasonably convenient — someone praiseworthy, to be sure, but overall kept in reserve, useful, “on call” as required. We've come to Him as far as we *need* Him, and no further.

Without promoting an overriding passion for Christ as our *Monarch* — as our *everything* — why would we ever openly celebrate Him as anything other than our mascot? The truth is, Jesus' claims to the Monarchy means He encompasses in Himself the coach, quarterback, playbook, team, uniforms, cheerleaders, goal post and final championship — the “whole nine yards” (as we say) — wrapped up in one person alone. Are most evangelicals ever aware that they are incorporated into such a story, defined by such exalted dimensions? Do our daily lives express such grand themes? Does contemporary Christian discipleship promote an exclusive love for Him — an enthusiasm not unlike what rises from thousands at a Super Bowl — a zeal for His glory evident in our daily routines in the marketplace as much as in our churchly schedules on the weekends? Do we thrive, or do we just survive?

On that red-letter day recorded in Matthew 16, Peter began to awaken to how supreme His Lord was; that He was, in Himself, the focus of everything the Father deserves, desires, designs and declares. There we read that Peter proclaimed (even though it is certain the disciple did not grasp the full reality behind his words): “You are the Christ, the son of the living God”.

In essence, to first-century Jewish ears this confession meant: “As the Son who is the Christ, wherever You dwell all of God's promises are gathered to You, guaranteed by You and summed up in You. As the Son who is the Christ, you are ordained and anointed as supreme — absolute and universal in every way. You are supreme in the appeal You make to sinners. You are supreme in the scope of Your activities on our behalf; supreme in the depth of Your transforming power for all the Redeemed; supreme in the eternal relevancy of Your reign extended throughout the entire universe. And You are supreme in the magnificently indescribable future into which You are taking all who are Yours.”

Yet, we must also remember how quickly Peter reversed course that very same day, treating Jesus in a mascot sort of way. We read further in Matthew 16 that he attempted to divert Jesus from the Cross as he sought to co-opt Jesus as their personal helper and deliverer, as Peter failed to recognize the grander global narrative God was writing with His Son — one in which Peter (and the others) would eventually lose their lives for His sake and the gospel.

Many years later the Lord Jesus capsulated His role as Monarch when he witnessed to John: “I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End” (Revelation 22). Not only is He at the beginning, but He Himself is the Beginning. Not only will He be waiting for us at the end, He is the End. All history streams from Him and is directed toward Him, to be completed by Him. The eternal past has no other eternal future but Christ alone. There is only one in the entire universe of whom God has ever said without qualification: “With you I am well pleased” (Luke 3). Thus Christ and He alone can insist on being the center and the circumference for everything — the One to whom all supremacy belongs, whose supremacy encompasses all.

Christ supreme is the theme of the story of the Ages! . . . and God loves you enough to give you a place in it.

Psalm 110: A biblical template for any World Christian

Psalm 110 is the most frequently quoted or referenced Old Testament passage by New Testament writers. Why is that? Why, out of all the ancient promises, did the first disciples turn to this hymn time and time again? The answer is obvious. This one text spoke more clearly than most about who they understood their ascended Jesus to be at work in His Church. Here's real "thriving under the supremacy of God's Son"! It reads (with an NIV footnote):

“The Lord says to my Lord:
‘Sit at my right hand
until I make your enemies
a footstool for your feet.’
The Lord will extend your mighty scepter from Zion;
you will rule in the midst of your enemies.
Your troops will be willing
on your day of battle.
Arrayed in holy majesty,
from the womb of the dawn,
your young men will come to you like the dew.
The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind:
‘You are a priest forever,
in the order of Melchizedek’
He will crush kings on the day of his wrath.
He will judge the nations”

Psalm 110 pinpoints the single greatest reality unfolding around us today. Its drama interprets both the front page of our newspapers as well as the frontlines of our mission. It reinforces that peoples and events everywhere are being woven into Christ's reign, whether they know it or not. No matter how far from the center of divine activity we may seem to be, Christ engages every human domain. He engages kingdoms of finance and commerce, entertainment and education, industry and labor, the arts and sciences, rulers and governments. There is not a square inch of any sphere of existence for which it cannot be said: "Christ rules over you!" All ambitions will soon be cut or culminated in Him.

History is not moving in a vacuum. At His footstool, Psalm 110 tells us, we can watch history pursuing one increasing purpose: to bring about the fullest possible expression of Christ's supremacy, to the farthest bounds of earth, to the greatest extent ever envisioned by the Father. Nothing will ever turn this battle back at the gates.

Our hope in God stands strong because Jesus' reign already stands strong. Installed as Messiah, His promised work of universal restoration is underway. His lordship is becoming increasingly visible among all peoples, as God works through His people. Because of Him the whole earth boasts wondrous potential for experiencing and expressing God's glory. The Son's victory procession is on the move across the planet, recruiting people from many tribes and tongues.

Therefore, wherever they live and whatever they face, World Christians can expect to walk daily in ever-increasing demonstrations of Jesus' supremacy, by the power of His Spirit in us. No wonder Psalm 110 predicts: "Your troops will be willing on your day of battle." In view of what He is up to, our enthusiasm for serving Him should be unbounded.

Taking our cue from Psalm 110, World Christians rise to serve Him every day, willing and ready "from the womb of the dawn" to volunteer freely to be with Him wherever He is engaged. We serve the risen, living, presiding Lord seated at the right hand on high. Ultimately, we aren't trying to obey a "missionary vision". We obey Christ Himself. We refuse to give our allegiance to programs or projects or personalities that may be related to Christ's global cause, but which often are at best Christ-like, and at worse nearly Christ-less, in their focus and impact. World Christians are determined to be *Christ-ward* – to give the preeminence to the supreme Son of God. We're not merely copying Christ, or simply trying to do what He would do. Rather we're determined to join in with

what Jesus actually *is* doing, pressing His Kingdom forward in this hour as our ascended and crowned as King.

As Ephesians 4 reminds us, He ascended on high to fill (present tense) the universe — to fill it at this very moment with His presence, His sovereignty and His activity. For a World Christian the joy of living — of *thriving* — is experienced by how we join Him in the superior story being written right now.

Questions to ask yourself:

- Do I see the big picture of Christ's global cause from God's point of view?
- Do I see the Church's potential in our generation for closing the gap between God's world-wide purpose and its fulfillment?
- Do I see the great scope of the earth's unreached peoples, especially the billions who have no knowledge of Christ, and no one like them, near them, to tell them?
- Do I believe that I, along with other Christians, can have a strategic impact on Christ's global cause right now?
- Am I willing to come under the supremacy of Christ, to unite my whole relationship with Him around His global cause
- Am I willing to design specific ways to begin getting involved right now?
- Am I willing to team-up with other World Christians so we might serve His cause *together*?
- Am I willing to take time to keep exploring the cause? Will I expand my world vision by studying the cause daily?
- Am I willing to transfer my vision to other Christians? Will I seek to mobilize additional World Christians to serve Christ and His global cause?
- In solidarity with the promises of God, am I interceding for those who cannot (yet) intercede for themselves?
- Even more strategically, am I willing to seek God daily for a spiritual awakening to Christ throughout the Church, which alone can empower a fresh, vital missionary movement among the nations?
- Am I *really* ready to grow as a World Christian? Am I committed to become a *Person*-driven disciple? Am I intent on thriving under the supremacy of God's Son?

Ultimately, maturing as a World Christian flows from the gracious work of Christ Himself! Always, our eyes must be fixed on Him, not simply depending on methods or processes. It is Christ who opens us up to catch His vision for the nations. He alone anchors us to that vision and then empowers us to effectively obey it. Like the hymn writer, all World Christians appeal to Christ: "Be Thou my Vision, Oh Lord of my Heart." With the North African church leader Augustine, every World Christian moves out boldly among the nations convinced that: "They who have Christ have everything. They who have everything but do not have Christ, have nothing. And they who have everything plus Christ have no more than they who have Christ alone."

Or as Paul says in Colossians 3:11 – "Christ is all!" That's why for World Christians the whole missionary story begins and ends *in Him*.

God loves His Son and has a wonderful plan for Him: To bring all the nations to His feet as Lord of all. And He loves you and me enough to give us a place in it. Therefore, it's time to arise and thrive!