

The Command: We have one job to do until Jesus returns

Jesus was about to give the apostles a command. From the beginning of Jesus' ministry—his baptism to this point—the apostles had seen with their eyes the evidence beyond any reasonable doubt that Jesus was the Promised One. They had heard with their ears the word of God confirmed. They had lived with Jesus. They had been admonished, rebuked, loved, served and taught. The Scriptures were explained fully to them, and their thinking about God had been corrected. They knew God as he had revealed himself through Scripture, creation and the person of Jesus. Their faith was being established.

All future things Jesus told them about himself had occurred in exactly the manner and timing in which Jesus foretold them. The Scriptures also confirmed these things. In recent days, Jesus had spoken a new future thing to them. He would be leaving. The Helper would come. Jesus would return at some undisclosed time and judge the living and dead. Now the burning question in their hearts was, "What do we do now?"

This question was a natural one. The apostles left everything to follow Jesus. They quit their jobs, they lived together in close community, traveling wherever Jesus traveled and wherever he instructed them to travel. Their worldview had changed. Their character had changed. Their priorities were now different. Their lives had launched in a new direction. They moved in knowledge from men who were waiting on God's fulfilled promise to men who watched God fulfill his promise to send the Messiah before their eyes. But what now?

What would it look like to no longer have Jesus telling them every move to make? How would the days fill themselves without Jesus being there to gather them for a lesson, to law with them along the road or to explain the parable the just spoke to the

crowd? What would be the conclusion of these things? How would their knowledge of the Christ and their eye witness accounts of his resurrection matter moving forward?

Jesus answered this question for them by giving them a command—THE COMMAND. To summarize Jesus' response to the apostle's greatest question at this time, Jesus did what God has done from the beginning—he gave them promises to believe, instructions to obey and boundaries to trust. All of this Jesus accomplished in a command. In all that Jesus is about to say to them, he would communicate: What are you to do while you wait for me to return? Make disciples of all nations. Make disciples of this generation who will make disciples of the next generation. You have on job to do until I return. Make disciples.

Every generation afterward has lived under the responsibility of this command. Every congregation of believers must be reminded that there will be a day when Jesus returns to receive an account of their stewardship and obedience to the command. The testimony of our lips—that we believe Jesus is Lord—will be measured against the resulting action of faith. What does believing Jesus cause us to do? What work does it produce in our lives? It is a work that has been established for us since before the foundation of the world. We have one job to do until Jesus returns. Our work is to make disciples of all nations. One day our responsibility to obey this command from Jesus will fully converge in a day of accountability to the One who was promised—to the One who has been given all authority under Heaven and in the earth.

Let's examine Jesus's instructions, promises and prohibitions and remind ourselves of our accountability to the Lord when he returns. Let's evaluate our obedience to the command. Like the faithful who have gone before us, let's be wise in our day. We have one job to do until Jesus returns. Let's do it.

At least five times, Jesus commanded the apostles concerning their responsibility to make disciples until he returned. We will pause to examine each of these occur-

rences in the texts of Scripture. While each of these texts do not exclusively use the words “make disciples,” and while these five texts do not exhaust all of what Jesus taught about the disciple-making task, we may adequately and sufficiently piece together an understanding of this command in such a way that we may begin our journey to obedience in this matter. My hope is that by unpacking what Jesus says in these passages, our current worldview and thinking about evangelism and disciple-making will be confronted with the biblical worldview and transformed. This will enable us to see our accountability to obey THE COMMAND as God sees it.

Luke 24:44-49. Repentance and forgiveness of sins will be proclaimed in the name of Jesus to all the nations.

44 He told them, “These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you—that everything written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms must be fulfilled.” 45 Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures. 46 He also said to them, “This is what is written: The Messiah would suffer and rise from the dead the third day, 47 and repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in his name to all the nations, beginning at Jerusalem. 48 You are witnesses of these things. 49 And look, I am sending you what my Father promised. As for you, stay in the city until you are empowered, as from on high (CSB, Luke 24:44-49).”

24:44-47. Jesus makes it clear that he is reminding them of things he has already told the apostles. He has spent three years with them, teaching and explaining that everything written about him must be fulfilled. Jesus mentions the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms. This is nearly if not all of the Old Testament which is preserved for us to read and understand today.

The only Scriptures Jesus had—the Scriptures he was leaving with the apostles—was the Old Testament. It may seem odd to the American believer that everything necessary to understand God’s promise of redemption and his terms for salvation was

and is contained in the Old Testament, we must begin thinking of the Scriptures in the same way Jesus thought of them. According to Jesus, the apostles could not accomplish the disciple-making task without an understanding of the Old Testament.

Disappointingly, our culture seems to attempt disciple-making with no regard for what was written in the Law, the Prophets and the Psalms. When Paul says that all things that were written before were written for our instruction (Romans 15:4), this is the very idea he was communicating. In our day, the church has produced generations who neither know the Old Testament or understand its application to our lives. We live under the common teaching that everything in the Bible points to Jesus, but this teaching falls short of the full significance of what Jesus is teaching his apostles in this text. Jesus says that a scribe (one who knows the Old Testament) who understand the kingdom of God holds the most preeminent value among teachers of the word (Matthew 13:52). We will discuss this concept further, but for now I want to highlight the fact that the apostles could not possibly obey the COMMAND without first fully understanding the Old Testament.

Jesus “opened their minds to understand the Scriptures in 24:45. This could have been a supernatural experience for them of instant knowledge, but probably not. Acts 1:3 indicates that Jesus taught the apostles for forty days about the kingdom. This was not a short period of mystical revelation, but a long period of discipleship. Forty days of intense conversations, lecture and illustration. Jesus explained the Old Testament to them—and remember, he had already explained it to them! Jesus was not leaving the earth until the apostles understood everything that had already been written.

Based on this principle, we can completely trust the New Testament commentary on the Old Testament. When Stephen explains the reason Moses killed the Egyptian, we can trust that he completely and fully understood all that had been previously written about the incident. When the writer of Hebrews explains what was going on in

Abraham's mind as he led Isaac to the altar of atonement, we can trust his commentary. The testimony of the apostles is that Jesus made sure they understood these narratives. The New Testament writers were not speculating on their own. They were not solely reliant on new revelation from the Holy Spirit. Jesus explained the Old Testament to the apostles and they were commanded to pass this explanation on to their generation and future generations.

24:46-48. Jesus was not only concerned with them understanding what had been written. He wanted them to view what had been written in the context of what they had seen with their own eyes. The apostles would remain for all eternity—along with at least five hundred (1 Corinthians 15:6)—the only people who saw the promise of redemption fulfilled with their own eyes. Jesus wanted them to feel and comprehend the full impact of their role in the kingdom.

Jesus reminded them that the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms foretold that "the Messiah would suffer and rise from the dead the third day and repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in his name to all the nations, beginning at Jerusalem." This is an amazing verse. It speaks to the extensiveness of Jesus' teaching during the forty days he walked the earth after the resurrection. We can directly correlate specific passages that verify Jesus' statement (Consider Genesis 3:15; 3:21; 12:3, Deuteronomy 18:15, Leviticus 17:10-12, Psalm 2:6-9; 16:10; 22:1-18; Hosea 2:23; 6:2, Joel 2:32). However, the breadth of understanding the promise of redemption, the resurrection of the Messiah and the proclamation of the name of God to the nations can only be pieced together from someone with a comprehensive understanding of all of the Scriptures and a willingness to deeply unpack the truths of the narratives.

To illustrate this think about the feasts, God prescribed in the Law of Moses. Three times a year, the people of God were to present themselves together before him to

observe seven feasts. The first three feasts (The Passover, The Festival of Unleavened Bread and The Feast of Weeks) proved to be a timeline marking the fulfilled redemption promise. Jesus was the Passover Lamb. He died on the Passover. He resurrected on the day of the sheaf waiving which was during the Festival of Unleavened Bread on the day of First Fruits. The Holy Spirit was poured out on the Feast of Weeks, fifty days from the waiving of the sheaf.

For the apostles to fully understand everything that had been written in the context of what they were witnessing in their day, Jesus spent forty days reviewing all that he had taught them. Jesus cemented the biblical worldview in their thinking so that they would pass on the unadulterated, undistorted, non-politicized, supra cultural meta-narrative of Scripture to their generation and future generations. It was important to Jesus to remind them that the command he was about to give them was not a new idea.

24:49. The outpouring of the Holy Spirit—the sending of the Helper—was something the Father promised 1000 years before the day of Pentecost in Acts 2. Solomon was the first to prophesy about the baptism of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:5; Proverbs 1:23). Isaiah (Isaiah 59:21), Ezekiel (Ezekiel 36:24-27), Zechariah (Zechariah 12:10) and Joel (Joel 2:28-32) all reaffirmed this promise from the God. When God speaks future things, there is always a passage of time before God fulfills his promise. God always requires faith from those who would call on his name and wait for his faithfulness.

Jesus reaffirms God's promise that the gospel will spread throughout the whole earth, but it is interesting that he tells them to wait for God to fulfill the promise of the outpouring of the Spirit. The apostles fully understand the Scriptures. They have witnessed the fulfillment of the redemption promise. It would seem from a human perspective that they are prepared to go tell what they know and testify to the truths they have seen. However, God has waited until this moment in history to pour out the Holy

Spirit in a special way on all who believe. The power on believers through the dwelling of the Holy Spirit is necessary for the disciple-making job they are commanded to accomplish.

In Luke 24:44-49, we learn that an understanding of the Old Testament is a critical component of disciple-making. We also learn that the presence and power of the Holy Spirit is necessary. As we continue to unpack each Great Commission text, we will put these pieces of information together to help us launch a correct biblical worldview of the one job Jesus commanded us to accomplish until he returns.

Acts 1:3-8. You will receive power to be witnesses throughout the whole earth.

3 After he had suffered, he also presented himself alive to them by many convincing proofs, appearing to them over a period of forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God. 4 While he was with them, he commanded them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait for the Father's promise. "Which," he said, "you have heard me speak about; 5 for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit in a few days." 6 So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, are you restoring the kingdom to Israel at this time?" 7 He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. 8 But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come on you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth (CSB, Acts 1:3-8)."

1:3. After Jesus had suffered, he appeared to the apostles in such a way that his resurrection was unmistakable. For forty days he taught them about the kingdom of God.

1:4-5. Jesus points out that although John baptized with water, they would be baptized by the Holy Spirit in a few days. A little less than ten days from this conversation, the Holy Spirit would descend on them. The word baptize simply means to sub-

merge. All of the apostles had either seen Jesus' baptism by John or heard about it shortly afterwards (Acts 1:21-22, John 1:40-51). The visual of the Holy Spirit descending on Jesus like a dove would have provided a context for them to understand what Jesus meant when he used the word "baptized."

1:6-7. After forty days of teaching on the Kingdom of God, the apostles attempted to construct a present day application to the future things of which Jesus had reminded them. After all, God promised David that the Promised One would come through his seed and sit on the throne forever (2 Samuel 7:12-16). They understood that the promise to restore the kingdom of Israel remained unfulfilled. They wanted to know what all of this meant for them in a present day sense. What would life look like now? What would change and what would be their purpose?

1:7-8. The timing of Jesus' return and the fulfillment of future promises concerning the Kingdom was not a matter in which they should concern themselves. However, their one concern should be the resulting work of the outpouring of the Spirit. They would be witness of the fulfilled promise of redemption. They would bare witness to the resurrection and the gospel to the ends of the earth. This was their present day purpose. This was the one job with which they were to live accordingly. This is what following Jesus would mean after Jesus ascended into Heaven.

In Acts 1:3-8, we learn that the result of the baptism of the Holy Spirit is a power to successfully bare witness to the testimony of Jesus Christ. Believers will wait on the kingdom to be restored. While they wait on God to fulfill this promise—while they wait for the return of Christ—they are to receive power from the Holy Spirit and spend their lives as witnesses to the ends of the earth.

Mark 16:14-18. Preach the gospel to all creation.

14 Later he appeared to the Eleven themselves as they were reclining at the table. He rebuked their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they did not believe those

who saw him after he had risen. 15 Then he said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. 16 Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned. 17 And these signs will accompany those who believe: In my name they will drive out demons; they will speak in new tongues; 18 they will pick up snakes, as if they should drink anything deadly, it will not harm them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will get well (CSB, Mark 16:14-18)."

16:14. Jesus rebuked the apostles, because they did not believe the testimony of those who had already witnessed his resurrection. Their unbelief and hardness of heart is astounding to Jesus. After all they had seen. After all he had taught them. The things which had been written before and the Jesus' personal foretelling of these things (Matthew 16:21, 17:9, 27:63; Luke 24:7; John 2:19) were provided to them before as an act of grace so that they would not struggle or waiver during the fulfillment of these things. From the beginning God has exerted grace on man by speaking future things so that man could understand the day he lives in and glorify the One True God who knows the future. God gives instructions, promises and prohibitions so that man may respond to him by faith and be declared righteous.

16:15. Jesus commands them—in light of the truthfulness of the resurrection—to "go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. God's faithfulness to accomplish all that he said he would do (Isaiah 46:9-11) requires that believers obey his command to declare these things to every person on the earth. There is no place on the earth where this good news should not be declared and taught. There is no culture judged to be undeserving of this message. There is no people considered unworthy to have their thinking about God corrected.

Jesus is not suggesting that the apostles spend the rest of their lives making sure that everyone in their generation understands how Jesus fulfills the redemptive prom-

ise of God. Jesus is commanding that the apostles get this job done. Jesus is commanding that every person of every generation must hear the good news of his resurrection. If the apostles were unsure of what it meant to follow Jesus after he leaves the earth, their uncertainty is removed by this command.

16:16-17. Not only does Jesus command the apostles to declare his fulfillment of God's redemptive promise to the whole earth, but he also tells them the result of their future work. Some will believe their message of hope and some will reject it. There will be a day of accountability. All who have believed and entered into covenant with Jesus (baptized in his name) will be saved. All who do not believe will be condemned.

16:18. Jesus makes a promise to the apostles. Signs and wonders will accompany the spread of the gospel. Believers will not declare the glory of God in the absence of God's demonstration of his power. Mark 16:20, reports that Jesus did indeed keep this promise to them. Everywhere the apostles preached the gospel, the "Lord worked with them and confirmed the word by the accompanying signs." The book of Acts testifies how Jesus kept this promise through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and how those who believed the apostle's message about Jesus also obeyed this command. Not only did the apostles obey Jesus' command, but they taught others who believed to obey Jesus' command also.

In Mark 16:14-18, we learn that Jesus' command requires that the gospel is declared to the whole earth. We learn that all people will be judged according to their response to the story of redemption. Finally, we learn that Jesus will work with all who preach the gospel to confirm the word with accompanying signs.

John 20:21-23. You are stewards of the gospel

21 Jesus said to them again, "Peace to you. As the Father has sent me, I also send you." 22 After saying this, he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. 23 If

you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained (CSB, John 20:21-23)."

20:21. The sending nature of THE COMMAND cannot be ignored. Jesus declares that as the Father sent him into the world, he is also sending the apostles into the world. The apostles were to define their identity after Jesus' ascension as "sent ones." In fact, this is the meaning of the word *apostle*. As Jesus obeyed the Father in everything for which he was sent, the apostles also were to obey Jesus in everything for which they are sent. Our model for obedience to the command to go into all the world is Jesus' obedience to God's command to go. As Jesus was sent, the apostles were sent. As people believed the gospel and submitted to Christ as Lord, they also were sent.

20:22-23. This is a strange occurrence, but a true event. As Jesus sends the apostles, he breaths on them and commands them to receive the Holy Spirit. Indwelt by the Holy Spirit, the apostles would not be mediators of the new covenant, but they would be stewards of it. They were commanded to go into all the world to preach the gospel everywhere. The stewardship of the covenant Jesus imparts to them is not unlike the stewardship of the covenant God imparted to Abraham.

God told Abraham that he would bless those who blessed Abraham and curse those who treated him with contempt (Genesis 12:3). Ultimately, every family on the earth would be blessed through Abraham. After this promise, Abraham and his descendants understood their stewardship of blessing and cursing. God declared his blessing on those who blessed Abraham. Therefore Abraham declared that blessing on those to whom it applied. He also declared curses on those to whom God's promise applied. The principle was not that Abraham possessed the liberty to bless and curse people. Rather, Abraham stewarded God's declaration of blessing and cursing.

In this text, Jesus is not empowering the apostles to forgive sins and impute judgement. Jesus is giving the apostles stewardship of what he has declared. The apostles would declare what Jesus has spoken. Forgiveness of sins and coming judgement must be declared to the nations so that they understand God's terms of salvation. The nature of stewardship is that the one who is a steward must act accordingly to the boundaries of his stewardship. As we saw in Mark 16:14-18, Jesus foretold a day of accountability for all people according to their response to the gospel. The apostles are being sent to steward this message.

In John 20:21-23, we learn that THE COMMAND is by nature a sending act. In the same way the Father sent Jesus into the world, the apostles and all who will believe their message will be sent. The Holy Spirit indwells believers and will enable them to declare God's terms for salvation according to his boundaries placed on their stewardship. They will declare to the nations forgiveness of sins and coming judgement with the discernment to instruct individuals with respect to their position before God.

Matthew 28:16-20. Go make disciples of all nations

16 The eleven disciples traveled to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had directed them. 17 When they saw him, they worshiped, but some doubted. 18 Jesus came near and said to them, "All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth. 19 Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age (CSB, Matthew 28:16-20)."

28:16-17. The apostles worshiped Jesus when they saw him, but some doubted. What did they doubt? Even now some reacted to Jesus no differently than Moses reacted to God on Mt. Sinai when God appeared to him from the burning bush (Exodus 4:13). To view this text in the worst sense would lead us to conclude that Jesus' pa-

tience with the apostles extends beyond our comprehension. If the apostles doubt Jesus is Lord—if at this time they are doubting his resurrection—we are unable to reasonably understand any justification for their doubt. However, it seems unlikely that the apostles doubt Jesus' lordship at this point in light of the forty days he has spent teaching them after his resurrection.

They were probably hesitant in the same way that Moses was hesitant. Were they really ready for this? Was this something they were worthy of? It is possible you have also doubted. I am not suggesting that is common that believers doubt that Jesus is who he says he is. I am suggesting that you may have doubted that you are who Jesus says you are.

28:18. THE COMMAND flows from the proclamation that all authority in every place that exists is possessed by Jesus Christ. I don't want you to miss the significance of Jesus' authority and its notation before he issues THE COMMAND. Throughout Scripture God displays his authority, but reviewing a few observations from the beginning of the Bible will help us think through the kind of authority Jesus is acknowledging in this text.

In the Creation Story we see the full scope of this authority. When God created, he commanded things which did not exist to exist—and those things obeyed him. He commanded things that did exist to form into systems and order—they obeyed him in this also. In Genesis 1-2, we learn that God's word defines authority. The ability to speak a command to nonexistent matter and get results is a reality that the human mind has a hard time processing.

Imagine that whatever you speak happens. Imagine that every word that you speak is true. It is a frightening thought. I could never live with that kind of authority, because I have a tendency to say things I regret. This illustrates Jesus' authority. Not only does his word possess the power to result in obedience, but he also acts in per-

fect wisdom so that his power is never abusive or unjust. When Jesus says that all authority in every place is his, he wants the apostles to understand that his word is the manifestation of both complete power and wisdom.

Until Jesus returns we have one job to do—we are commanded to do it

God speaks no idle words. He cannot. His character of wisdom dictates that all that he says must be perfect. His authority results from his wisdom to speak only that which is according to his will. His power is shown through the authority of his word to effect obedience. It is time for the church to remember that the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords has issued a COMMAND. It must be obeyed. It cannot be ignored, because it is not an idle word.

If a commander of an army was proven to be perfect in wisdom and power, his authority would be the result of all members of the army submitting to his desire with obedience. An army who refuses to recognize the command of a perfect commander would be an army that chooses death. The recklessness of such a scenario is unthinkable. This sort of behavior would reveal the foolishness of the disobedient soldier. The soldier would surely be punished on the day of accountability. If we would not expect an army to respond to a commander who is perfect in wisdom and power with apathy and disobedience, how much more should we expect followers of Christ to obey his COMMAND.

From these five texts, we are able to construct a sufficient understanding of what it means to follow Christ while we wait on his return. I don't want you to miss the core truths of these passages. The following list is certainly not exhaustive, but it will help you evaluate your current understanding of what it means to be a disciple-maker. As you read through each core truth, allow the biblical worldview to shape your thinking from this point forward. We really only have one job to do until Jesus returns. We can

succeed in many other tasks, but if we fail at the one COMMAND Jesus gave us before he left this earth, we cannot assume that we are pleasing the King.

Core Truths of THE COMMAND

1. God is perfect in wisdom and power. Jesus' authority to give his disciples the command to "make disciples of all nations" flows from his wisdom to never speak an idle word and his power to do all that he says he will do.
2. We cannot obey the command to make disciples without understanding how God reveals himself in the Old Testament. Jesus went to great lengths to make sure the apostles understood the Old Testament before he gave them stewardship of the gospel. We cannot pass on only parts of the Bible and expect to steward the gospel well. The entire Bible is the gospel. We have a limited amount of time on this earth to understand what God has made known about himself in his word, become expert communicators of it and share it with the world.
3. The power of the Holy Spirit is necessary for the disciple-making task. Jesus promised that signs and wonders would accompany the spreading of the gospel. Our job is not simply the imparting of information. Obedience to make disciples of all nations requires a partnership with the Holy Spirit. The apostles understood the Scriptures and saw the fulfillment of God's redemptive promise with their own eyes, but Jesus still told them to wait for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. They couldn't make disciples without the Holy Spirit. Neither can we.
4. The Gospel must be declared throughout the whole earth. There is no place and no person who should not receive the message of repentance and forgiveness of sins and coming judgement. God cares deeply about

the people of the earth—even the people who live in the most remote areas. He cares about the rich and the poor, the intelligent and the simple, the strong and the weak. God demonstrated his love for them by sending his Son, and his Son sent the church. Every believer shares the responsibility to obey Christ, obeying his command to make disciples of all nations.

5. The disciple-making process begins with the proclamation of the gospel and ends when a new believer is ready to obey THE COMMAND. Evangelism and discipleship are two functions of the same ministry. Neither are an end to themselves. The church cannot separate the two.