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The Jesus Way to Win the World

Robert E. Coleman

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The Great Commission

Jesus calls us to be his disciples. The word means 'learner,' as in the sense of an apprentice. By placing the emphasis here, our Lord emphasizes not only development in the disciple's character, but also involvement in his mission to the world—an expectation finally articulated in the Great Commission (Mt. 28:19, 20; Mark 16:15; Luke 24:47,48; Acts 1:8; John 17:18; 20:21).

What may be overlooked, however, in setting forth the universal extent of his mission is that Jesus specifies the end result of all the activity—going out, preaching, baptizing, teaching, witnessing in the power of the Holy Spirit—is to 'make disciples', not converts.¹

1 The Matthean version (28:19-20) especially brings this out, where the only verb in the passage translates 'make disciples.' 'Go', 'baptize', and 'teach' are all participles, which means that they derive their force from

Herein is the key to his plan to win the world.² For disciples do not stop with conversion; they keep following Jesus, ever growing in his likeness, while learning the lifestyle of the Great Commission, and someday, through the process of multiplication, the gospel will reach the ends of the earth.

Taking the Form of a Servant

It behoves us, then to look closely at how Jesus made disciples. Of course, some of his practices two thousand years ago probably would not be the

the leading verb, though the word 'go' does stand in a coordinate relationship to the dominant verb.

2 The basic idea of this paper comes through in a number of my books, all published by Fleming H. Revell/Baker Book House, including *The Master Plan of Evangelism* (1963, 1964, 1993); *The Master Plan of Discipleship* (1987); *The Mind of the Master* (1977, 1989, 2000); *The Great Commission Lifestyle* (1992); and by Crossway, *The Master's Way of Personal Evangelism* (1997).

Robert Coleman, Ph.D.(Iowa), is Distinguished Professor of Discipleship and Evangelism at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, near Boston, USA. He served formerly at Billy Graham Center Institute of Evangelism at Wheaton College and was Director of the School of World Mission and Evangelism, Trinity Evangelical Divinity, Deerfield, Illinois. A founding member of the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelism, and a past president of the Academy for Evangelism in Theological Education, he is a well known speaker and author of many books, including *The Master Plan of Evangelism* (1993 rev.); *The Master Plan of Discipleship* (1987) and *The Master's Way of Personal Evangelism* (1997). This paper was presented at the Evangelical Theological Society meeting, November 21-23, 2003 held at Atlanta, Georgia.

same today. Methods are variable, conditioned by the time and situation. But principles underlying his ministry are unchanging, and offer guidelines for his disciples in every generation.

The place to begin is with the incarnation, when Jesus 'humbled himself', and for the sake of the world, took 'the very nature of a servant', a mission that inevitably led to Calvary (Philp. 2:6-8). 'The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many' (Mark 10:45). What this self-renunciation means has implications we will never cease to learn, but as we can understand, the principle of servanthood is inherent in taking up the cross and following Christ.

In this chosen way of life, Jesus went about doing good and demonstrating in works of compassion how much people mattered to God. Little wonder that multitudes were drawn to him. Sometimes the crowds numbered into the thousands (John 3:26; 6:15; 11:47, 48; 12:19; cf. Mark 12:12; Mt. 21:26; Luke 20:19).

There is a lesson in this for us. If our ministry does not attract people, could it be that they do not see in our life genuine concern where they hurt? Let us not imagine that our witness has greater vitality when only a handful of people seem impressed.

Yet Jesus realized the superficiality of popular recognition. As long as he satisfied the people's temporal interests, they were with him. But when the true meaning of his kingdom became apparent, the multitudes soon changed their allegiance: The 'hosannas' changed to 'crucify him' (Mt. 21:9; 27:22).

This was the heartbreak of his min-

istry. The lovable people were easily excited by the works of Jesus, but just as quickly thwarted in their aspirations by their spiritually blind leaders. Like sheep without a shepherd, they had no one who could lead them in the way of truth.

Jesus was doing all he could to help them, but in the incarnation he accepted the limitation of a physical body. Unless men and women were raised up to multiply his ministry, the potential world harvest could not be realized. He told his disciples to get under the burden, and pray for 'the Lord of the Harvest' to send workers to meet this compelling need—workers with a shepherd's heart who could lead the sheep (Mt. 9:36-38).

His Unfolding Strategy

Our Lord's own ministry seems to unfold around this need. Before attempting to trace that pattern, however, let us recognize that any human activity that does not flow out of communion with God is an exercise in futility. With this principle in mind, I believe we can discern in the Gospels how such prayer is answered.

1. Look for Servant Workers

While ministering to people Jesus looked for some disciples in whom he could invest his life most productively. In time he selected twelve especially to be with him. Peter, James and John had an even closer relationship. It was not that he loved the multitudes any less; it was for the sake of the world that he concentrated on persons who would learn to lead them. Doubtless, those early disciples were not the most

astute students, perhaps not the most religious, but with the exception of the traitor, their hearts were big, and they were willing to lay other things aside to follow Jesus.

We, too, would do well to give attention to a few such learners, beginning at home, then reaching out to spiritually alert neighbours and friends. They are the answer to our prayers. If we get absorbed trying to please the aimless crowd, we can spend our energy perpetuating the problem rather than its solution. Better to give a year or so to a few disciples who learn to conquer for Christ than to spend a lifetime just keeping the old program going. Other persons also will have an impact, of course. Discipling involves the whole church, though our influence may make the difference with a few.

2. Stay With Them as Much as Possible

Jesus' disciples learned by being with him. For the better part of three years they were together. They walked the streets together; they ate together; they attended the temple and synagogue together. Even when he ministered to others, whether preaching in the marketplace or talking with a lonely beggar along the road, the disciples were usually at hand to observe and listen.

The policy of Jesus at this point would teach us that whatever the method of training we adopt, at its heart, must be a relationship with those God entrusts to us. The more natural the fellowship the better. Making disciples is like raising children. It will take time. There will be inconveniences. But out of such family-like

association, children can grow to maturity.

3. Show Them How to Live the Gospel

In this ongoing fellowship, the disciples of Jesus were always learning. Every aspect of his life was opened to them—prayer, use of Scripture, public worship, stewardship, caring for the needs of the sick and the poor, ever seeking their ultimate welfare in the gospel. What is also obvious is that without realizing it, the disciples were being discipled.

He sets before us an example. It is well enough to tell people about the Great Commission, but it is far better to show them how to do it. This puts us on the spot to be sure. Clearly, we must be prepared to have students follow us even as we seek to follow the Lord.

4. Involve Them in Ministry

Jesus gave his workers-in-training something to do. First assignments were small, common tasks, like providing hospitality. But as they developed in their confidence and skill, he began to use them to confirm others in the faith. Later he sent them out into new areas two by two to produce what they had watched him do. All the while, he was projecting his vision of the kingdom, culminating in his post-resurrection commands to win the world.

So, too, disciples today must find ways to utilize their abilities and gifts while sharing the gospel. Everybody can do something. Unless opportunities are given for practical outreach, we can stagnate in self-centredness and inertia.

5. Keep Them Growing and Going

To see how the disciples were coming along, Jesus would check on them, asking them questions, responding to their queries, building in them a sense of accountability. It was 'on-the-job training' all the way. Their encounters with life situations enabled him to deal with issues when they came up, giving his teaching the ring of authenticity. Though their progress was painfully slow, especially in comprehending the cross, Jesus patience kept moving them on toward the goal of world evangelization for the glory of God.

No less determination is necessary among those we are discipling. Offensive habits and carnal attitudes must be dealt with. The beautiful thing about it is that in discipling others we find ourselves being disciplined. The Great Commission is more than God's plan to reach the nations; it is his way to encourage the sanctification of his Church.

6. Expect Them to Reproduce

The day came when Jesus turned his work over to his followers and commissioned them to go to the world and replicate what he had done with them. The believers around him were but the vanguard of a movement that would continually expand until finally the whole world heard the gospel.

It is not difficult to see why Jesus prayed so earnestly for those men that the Father had given to him (John 17:1-26). For in a real sense, everything he had done on earth now rested upon their faithfulness. Would they 'go and make disciples of all nations'? Here finally all of us must evaluate how our

life is being multiplied. Will those persons providentially entrusted to us catch the vision of the Great Commission, and will they in turn impart it to faithful servants who will teach others also? The time will come all too soon when our ministry will be in their hands.

7. Trust Them to the Holy Spirit

As observed in his command to pray, workers for the harvest do not come forth by human ingenuity. Jesus made it abundantly clear that his life and work was possible only through the Holy Spirit. As Jesus had glorified the Father on earth, now the Spirit would lift up Christ. He would take the same place with the disciples in the unseen realm of life that Jesus had filled in his visible experience with them. The Spirit was a real compensation for the loss which they were to sustain—'Another Counsellor' just like Jesus—who would fill them with his presence. (John 14:16).

We can understand why Jesus told his disciples to tarry until this promise became a reality in them (Luke 24:49). How else could they do his work? His passion for glorifying God by accomplishing his mission had to become a burning compulsion within them. The supernatural work to which they were called demanded supernatural help—an enduement of power from on high. They needed to come by faith into a refining experience of the Spirit's infilling, and live in that obedience day by day. So it is with all that God will use. Only as the Spirit exalts Christ in and through us will our lives make disciples for his glory.

A Pattern to Follow

The way Jesus disciplined illustrates the way that in principle every believer can do it. Too easily we have relegated his work to various clergy vocations and to highly organized programs of evangelism. Not that these ministries are unnecessary, for without them the church cannot function as she does. But unless the Great Commission directs the daily life of the entire body, the church cannot function as she should.

Here the priesthood of all believers comes alive. Disciplining is not a special calling or gift of the Spirit; it is a lifestyle—the way that Jesus lived while he was among us, and now the way he commands disciples to follow.

Let us then begin where God has

planted us and taking up the Cross become a true servant. As people respond to love, we can give particular attention to those few who seem hungry to learn more—persons who are not afraid to go all out for Jesus. We can afford to invest largely in these learners—spending time with them showing them the disciplines that govern our life, helping them express their gifts of ministry, monitoring their growth, and above all, never ceasing to pray for them. We can trust the Holy Spirit to bring forth the harvest as they go and make disciples. Our joy is in knowing that in generations unborn, our prayers and labour for them will still be bearing fruit, in an ever-widening circle to the ends of the earth and to the end of time.

The Third Schism: Christianity and the Legacy of Modernism (Deep Church Series)

Andrew Walker

It has long been recognised that the Christian Church has been divided by two great schisms between Orthodox and Catholic and between Catholic and Protestant. Andrew Walker argues Christians today face a 'third schism' between those who maintain allegiance to historic orthodoxy, with its credal basis in the Trinity, the divinity of Christ, and a high view of Scriptures and those who do not. The book provides a ground-breaking study of the roots of the third schism and a prophetic call to the Church.

Andrew Walker is Canon Professor of Theology, Culture and Education at King's College, London. He is also author of *On Revival*.

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Paternoster, PO Box 300, Carlisle, Cumbria CA3 0QS, UK