

The Christian's Commission in 2022

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—Galatians 6:9,10

WHEN THE RESURRECTED

Jesus appeared to his disciples the last time before his ascension, he outlined for them what their work as his disciples was to be. He said, “Ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Spirit is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of

the earth.” (Acts 1:8) Years later, when the Apostle John received that marvelous vision of the future, he saw those who had been fully dedicated to “the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, ... and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years.”—Rev. 20:4

The commission given by Jesus to his disciples nearly two-thousand years ago, and which John saw in vision as having been followed by all those who would ultimately reign with Christ in his kingdom, is still in operation today. As we enter the year 2022, there are many activities, causes, and potential distractions which might draw us as Christians toward other fields of endeavor. However, our commission has not changed from that which our Lord gave his disciples, for indeed, we are also his disciples, and are to be followers of his example in thought, word and action.

The work of bearing witness to the Truth of God's Word is done under the power and through the authority of the Holy Spirit. Jesus himself received this power and authority at the time of his baptism when the Holy Spirit came upon him. Later, in a synagogue in Nazareth, Jesus quoted from Isaiah 61:1-3 to show that his authority and work had been known and foretold by his Heavenly Father. (Luke 4:16-21) Verse 1 of Isaiah's prophecy reads: "The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me; because the LORD hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound."

Throughout the three and one-half years of his ministry Jesus was faithful in carrying out this commission of the Holy Spirit. Luke 8:1 states concerning Jesus that "he went throughout every city and village, preaching and shewing the glad tidings of the kingdom of God: and the twelve were with him." Jesus not only preached the gospel by word of mouth, but also illustrated the blessings which

would reach the people through the agencies of his kingdom by the many miracles he performed.

Jesus sent his apostles out to do a work similar to his own. After that he sent out seventy others. These all, under the leadership of Jesus, and following his example, went from place to place throughout the land of Israel to bear witness to the "gospel of the kingdom." (Matt. 10:5-8; 24:14; Luke 10:1-9) The apostles and the other seventy were empowered to perform miracles in order to substantiate the message they proclaimed.

NOT A SOCIAL GOSPEL

While in the course of their ministry these first witnesses bestowed many temporal blessings of healing upon those to whom they proclaimed the kingdom gospel, this was merely a by-product of their campaign. The miracles were designed simply to make more effective their witness to the fact that the kingdom of heaven was at hand. It is important to keep this in mind, for today throughout the professed Christian world the preaching of the gospel of the kingdom has almost ceased, and a social gospel is proclaimed instead, which seeks to rid mankind from various social evils solely by human effort, coupled with good works on behalf of the poor and needy.

We should appreciate and commend those who seek to do good to their fellow men along material lines. Probably at no time has there been greater need for assistance throughout the world. However, as followers of the Master our obligations as Christians are set forth in his commands, and in his example. Those who are acquainted with God's

plan for man's salvation have the advantage of knowing that in due time abundant provisions will be made for all the poor and needy of the world, as well as for the sick and dying about which we could do very little now in any case.

Jesus said to those he called from their fishing business, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men." (Matt. 4:19) He did not say to them that in following him their primary work would be to feed and clothe the needy. When he sent them out into the ministry, he said, "As ye go, preach, saying, The kingdom of heaven is at hand. Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out devils: freely ye have received, freely give. Provide neither gold, nor silver, nor brass in your purses, Nor scrip for your journey, neither two coats, neither shoes, nor yet staves: for the workman is worthy of his meat."—Matt. 10:7-10

From these detailed instructions it is clear that the apostles were sent out to preach, and in conjunction with their preaching, to heal the sick and perform other miracles. They were not provided with means to assist the poor. Indeed, they often had to depend upon the generosity of those whom they served for their own material needs. Later, when opposition toward Jesus and his coworkers had grown to the point that the religious rulers were ready to crucify him, he instructed his apostles that they should now take whatever material means they had with them, because perhaps from then on they could not expect much help from their fellow Israelites.—Matt. 10:21-36

Jesus conducted his ministry along lines similar to the manner he outlined for his representatives.

His miracles were more outstanding, for on several occasions he awakened the dead from the sleep of death. After Pentecost Peter also did this. (Acts 9:36-42) Another of Jesus' outstanding miracles was the feeding of the multitude. (Mark 6:34-44) There is no evidence to show that these five thousand people were particularly poor. It was simply that they had been listening to Jesus' preaching in a "desert place," far removed from their homes, that he considered it an act of courtesy and hospitality to provide something for them to eat. His disciples advised that they be sent into the villages to buy their own food, indicating that they had the necessary funds to do this had Jesus permitted it.

This miracle, even as all the others performed by Jesus and his chosen representatives, was designed to impress the message of the kingdom they were preaching. Later, Jesus admonished his hearers, "Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you: for him hath God the Father sealed." (John 6:27) When the people asked Jesus for a sign he referred them to the manna which God provided for the Israelites in the wilderness, and reminded them that all those Israelites died. Then he explained that he was the "true bread" which, when accepted through faith, would give everlasting life.—vss. 30-35, 47-51

TO FEED THE POOR

On one occasion a young man came to Jesus and asked him what he could do to acquire eternal life. He was a Jew, and Jesus reminded him of the Law, which promised life to anyone who could and would

keep it. When the man told him that he had kept the commandments, Jesus said to him that he should sell all that he had and give the proceeds to the poor, then take up his cross and follow him. (Matt. 19:16-21; Mark 10:17-21) Jesus did not ask this young man to give his wealth to him so that he might feed the poor. What he did ask was that the man divest himself of his riches, dispensing them to the poor, and then become his follower. The simple act of giving his wealth to feed the poor would not have been following Christ, but a necessary step in becoming a follower. The point is that the purpose of Jesus' ministry was not one of feeding the poor with material food.

By no means do we condemn the professed Christian world for devoting much effort towards social and uplift work among the poor and needy. We are merely emphasizing that this was not the focus of the work Jesus conducted, nor are his followers commissioned to concentrate their efforts along such lines. Jesus was commissioned by the Holy Spirit to proclaim the glad tidings; and, as his followers, our great commission also is to preach the gospel of the kingdom.

AFTER PENTECOST

After Pentecost, by the authority of Jesus, and through the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit, the apostles and other disciples continued the ministry of the Truth, the glorious gospel of the kingdom. The apostles were able to perform miracles, as Jesus did, although this aspect of their ministry does not seem to be as prominent as it was in the case of Jesus. When the apostles died, miracles ceased altogether.

The simple proclamation of the gospel message was then depended upon to give the witness.

In the beginning, this effort was limited almost entirely to what could be accomplished by individual oral presentations of the message to varying sizes of audiences. Copies of the Scriptures themselves were very scarce and costly. During the Dark Ages, possession of the Holy Scriptures was prohibited by the church-state system in power at that time, and translation of the Bible into a commonly used language was a crime punishable by death. Finally, following the advent of the printing press in the 15th century, the Lord's witnesses had this additional means of dispensing the message. Coming down to our day, we rejoice in the availability of radio, television, the Internet, and many other forms of electronic media as further means of transmitting the gospel. At no time, though, has there been any change in the commission.

From time to time there have been some of the Lord's people who reached the conclusion that all the efforts to proclaim the gospel of the kingdom are wasted because, they reason, there are such meager results. Nowhere in the Bible, however, are we instructed to give up proclaiming the gospel on the grounds that there are little to no results. God's will in this matter is not determined by the results of our efforts. Quite to the contrary, we are instructed to continue laying down our lives in this service whether the people to whom we witness hear, or whether they forbear to hear.

Solomon wrote: "He that observeth the wind shall not sow; and he that regardeth the clouds shall not reap. As thou knowest not what is the way of

the spirit, nor how the bones do grow in the womb of her that is with child: even so thou knowest not the works of God who maketh all. In the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not thine hand: for thou knowest not whether shall prosper, either this or that, or whether they both shall be alike good.”—Eccles. 11:4-6

SEED SOWING

In Jesus’ parable of the sower he taught us what to expect from our efforts to proclaim the Word of God to the people. (Matt. 13:18-23) According to the parable, as the seeds of Truth are sown, some fall upon what is illustrated by the “way side,” some fall on “stony places,” and still other grains of wheat fall among “thorns.” Only a small portion, it seems, falls upon the “good ground” of sincere and honest hearts. It is this class, we believe, that eventually prove worthy of joint-heirship with Jesus in his kingdom.

Jesus said, “Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.” (Luke 12:32) It is indeed only a little flock who, during the present age, fully and completely respond to the message of the gospel. It must have seemed many times to the Lord’s people that they were obtaining very small results from their self-sacrificing efforts.

However, the results are not our responsibility. We are to plant the seeds of Truth and water them, but it is the Lord who causes it to grow. (I Cor. 3:6,7, *Rotherham Emphasized Bible*) Many times newly interested ones are reached by the message. Only one here and one there may fully make it their

own at the present time. For the vast majority, the germination of the “seed” of Truth which has been planted by our efforts will take place in the glorious Messianic kingdom. Indeed, it is for this future time that Jesus’ taught his disciples to pray.—Matt. 6:10

SERVING THE BROTHERHOOD

Bearing witness to the Truth does not end with a public proclamation of the message, important though this is as the bulwark of the Christian’s commission along this line. Our love for the Lord should reach out especially to our brethren in Christ. Jesus commanded us that we should love one another as he loved us. (John 13:34) The Apostle John wrote that we should lay down our lives for the brethren. (I John 3:16) The great need of all our brethren is spiritual help and encouragement, and we should be on the alert at all times to render this needed assistance.

We cannot turn our backs upon the needs of our brethren in Christ, including those of a temporal nature. When there was a famine in the Jerusalem area, and the brethren there were in desperate need, Paul raised funds from among the brethren of many ecclesias to help supply their needs. We believe that the Lord’s people in every part of the age have similarly been awake to their privileges along this line. What a joy it is to render what assistance we can to all such! It is one of the Lord’s ways of giving us an opportunity of demonstrating our love for him.

In this connection we think of the opportunities which presented themselves some seventy-five years ago at the close of World War II. Many of our

brethren in Christ in European countries were in dire need of food and clothing, and it was surely a heart-cheering experience to observe the extent to which brethren in many parts of the world came to their assistance. This is the privilege which, as the Lord's consecrated people, we all have of helping to take care of our own. If our love does not include this type of service for our brethren, it is of a shallow nature indeed.

UNSELFISHNESS

The motive in all that Christians do as followers of the Master should be love. There should be no desire to please self, nor to be honored of men in any work or service rendered. The course of selfishness is described by the Apostle Paul as sowing to the flesh, and the course of selfless love as sowing to the Spirit.

Our opening text is the climax to Paul's lesson on these points. We quote: "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting. And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not. As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith."—Gal. 6:7-10

God is preparing true Christians to be instruments of blessing to all the families of the Earth. He wants the footstep followers of Christ to keep their hearts sympathetic toward all mankind, and to rejoice in the prospect of soon having the privilege

of assisting in their blessing. Indeed, how great are the needs of the poor groaning creation! They are sick, and dying. They are filled with fear and perplexity. They are without direction from their leaders and statesmen, and they wonder how much longer such conditions can continue without catastrophic consequences.

God knows all about these conditions and could remedy them very quickly if it were his will to do so. However, he has a due time in his plan for this work. He is now preparing a special called-out class for this great project. The Heavenly Father wants those who hope to be a part of that group in the heavenly phase of his coming kingdom to develop love, sympathy and understanding toward the masses of mankind, even as he loved the whole world in giving his Son to be their Redeemer and Savior.—John 3:16,17

One of the greatest blights upon the suffering world is a lack of understanding of the true and loving God. For the most part the people are without true faith in God, and therefore struggle mightily to have any real hope for the future. Fully consecrated Christians, through the enlightening influence of God's Holy Spirit, know his divine arrangements for man's ultimate blessing, and are in a position to speak a word of comfort to those who are in need. Thus in a small way we can bind up the brokenhearted with the good tidings of the kingdom. How better could we "do good unto all men," than to share with them the glorious "gospel of the kingdom?"

As Paul declares, in our work of sowing to the Spirit, we are to do good "especially unto them who

are of the household of faith.” These, our brethren in Christ, are to be our special care, both along spiritual as well as material lines, when needed. The apostle says further that we should not be “weary in well doing.” There would not be much danger of becoming weary if we could see outstanding results from our efforts. It is because we frequently do not see tangible results that we might become weary. When this happens, we may even question whether or not we are doing the proper thing.

Paul reminds us that we shall “reap, if we faint not.” Here he is not speaking primarily of present visible results from our efforts, but rather to “reap life everlasting” in the kingdom. (Gal. 6:8) The Lord does not want us to depend upon present results for courage and strength to continue in the narrow way of sacrifice and service, although we are all greatly encouraged when he permits us to see some small results from our labors. He wants us to “walk by faith,” and to rejoice in the hope set before us of reaping “glory and honour and immortality” beyond the veil, and of sharing with Jesus in causing the knowledge of the Lord to fill the earth “as the waters cover the sea.”—II Cor. 5:7; Rom. 2:7; Isa. 11:9; Hab. 2:14

What a glorious prospect is set before us! May it give us strength as we enter the year 2022 to continue faithful to our commission to bear the glad tidings to all as we have and can make opportunities. Let us ever keep before our minds that those who will live and reign with Christ are those whose lives are fully dedicated to “the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God.”—Rev. 20:4 ■