

# VISION FORWARD



## THE GREAT COMMISSION

<sup>18</sup> And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. <sup>19</sup>

"Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, <sup>20</sup> teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." (Matthew 28:18-20)

Christ Himself will usher in His Kingdom in its fullness at the end of the age. However, in the meantime, He is expecting His representatives to be both light and salt in all spheres of authority. One community at a time.

Paul used his citizenship as a Roman to promote the gospel wherever he went. He also said in the book of Romans that the government, wherever it exists, was God's servant and appointed to restrain evil and keep the peace. Even in ancient Israel, apart from the religious aspects of the law, there were many civil laws designed to restrain evil and maintain order. All authority does come from God and is to be used for His purposes.

Jesus Himself told Pilate that his office was appointed by God, that he would have no authority at all if it were not given to him from above. But then He also stated that

those who turned Him over were committing the greater sin. *Authority, even where God given, can be used sinfully.*

### **So who speaks for God today? And whose principles and morals are leaders to rule and judge by?**

Vacuums of thought are always filled by someone's voice, someone's message, someone's ideas. Should it not be the representatives of the Kingdom of God per Christ's commission? I think this is in part what Jesus was saying concerning the discipling of nations, teaching them to observe His ways.

In Acts 4 the disciples were being reprimanded for speaking in the Name of Jesus. The Jewish religious leaders of the day threaten them and warned them to be silent concerning Jesus. But to the disciples this was much more than just a "religious" matter.

What Scripture did the disciples quote and what was their understanding of this specific event of the day? We read their response in Acts 4.23-26 where they reference Psalm 2: "The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers were gathered together, against the Lord and against his Anointed"

Acts 4 then goes on to list specifically those who stood against Christ's authority: Herod, Pilate, the Gentiles, and

the people of Israel. These authorities, both secular and religious, were failing to recognize Jesus' ultimate Authority.

**Key point# 1: Christ has given Kingdom authority to His representatives. These representatives have been commissioned to declare God's purposes for mankind.**

#### THE KINGDOM OF GOD AND DELEGATED AUTHORITY

Now the Church is not the Kingdom of God. God's Kingdom is eternal and transcends time, it includes the church and the individuals who make it up. It includes other ministries and organizations that are called to walk in submission to Kingdom authority.

Likewise, the church is not a political entity, it is not a theocracy. God's earthly authority has been shared between the Church, the State, and the family. *This shared approach creates a natural tension, which is often exacerbated by fallen mankind.* Mankind has a propensity to "take things by force".

The Church does represent heaven's values, and is a witness to the world as to God's desires for mankind. The Church has also been given authority to bind and loose heaven's will here on earth. This Spiritual authority will ultimately manifest itself in the natural. Likewise, individuals and groups who meet in Jesus' name, who declare and pray according to His will, can also influence life as we know it.

By contrast, the State, which is not divine, has legitimate authority for serving God's will. The State is to restrain evil and promote order. The State has not been given authority over the church, nor is the Church in authority over the State. There is a designed tension between these two spheres of authority and both are accountable to God.

In summary, the Church is to proclaim the Kingdom of God, the gospel, and remind all of Christ's authority.

The family is likewise called to propagate the gospel through families. The family, by design, is to be a cornerstone or humanizing influence on communities and society. The Church, which aids the family in this call, together are to represent a *counterculture* to a fallen world.

**Key point# 2: If the Kingdom representatives will not lead, making disciples of all nations, one community at a time, the State will.**

Ultimately, true peace and order are the result or fruit of biblical justice. True justice can only be realized when the claims of heaven are given room. Biblical justice, unlike

social justice, involves the moral laws/claims written on the heart of man from eternity. And there is no violence or compulsion involved in perusing godly justice. In God's eyes, process and outcomes are equally weighted.

When Pilate heard that Jesus' kingdom was not of this world, he failed to understand it was a Kingdom over and above this world. He failed to see the spiritual aspects of spiritual authority, in that Christ's rule in the hearts and minds of individuals, revealed by His Spirit, was a superior rule. It is a rule based on truth. So Jesus noted to Pilate that only those who love the truth would hear His voice.

Pilate and the Jewish authorities of Christ's day ignored the Prince of Peace and His gospel of freedom and life. Today it is much the same with "might making right," and external power often being used to force compliance. So problems will persist until a true spiritual awakening occurs, for the problems of our day are spiritual in nature.

The State, through political thought, desires to *change the culture, to change the person.* This historically has and does lead to tyranny. Could it happen in our day, in our land?

By contrast the Kingdom of God and the call of the church is to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ in both word and action, for the gospel alone has the power to *change the heart and, in turn, can reform society by reforming man from within.* Kingdom ambassadors, proclaiming and carrying out the kingdom ideals, become the salt and light that can facilitate lasting change.

**Key point# 3: There are no political solutions to spiritual problems. Mankind's chief problem is his heart, and only biblical truths can bring a real peace. Can bring Shalom.**

#### THE GREAT COMMISSION AND REVIVALS – THE SAME DIFFERENCE?

**So how are God's representatives to make disciples of nations? What does it look like?** To help us answer these questions, or capture a proper perspectives here, please consider the following quote from French theologian Jacques Ellul:

*"The Christian who is involved in the material history of this world is involved in it as representing another order, another master (than the "prince of this world"), another claim, (than that of the natural heart of man)... Thus he must plunge into the social and political problems in order to have an influence on the world, not in the hope of making it a paradise, but simply in order to make it tolerable – not in order to diminish the opposition between the world and the Kingdom of God, but simply in order to modify the opposition between the disorder of*

*this world and the order of preservation that God wills for it – not in order to “bring in” the Kingdom of God, but in order that the gospel may be proclaimed, that all men may really hear the good news of salvation through the death and resurrection of Christ.”*

Three such men who were exemplary examples and ambassadors of Christ Kingdom’s are William Wilberforce, Charles Finney, and Martin Luther King Jr. All three promoted a biblical justice that was based upon or required a conversion of the soul.

Wilberforce, a converted politician, was led to reform a nation and abolish slavery and the slave trade in the British Empire. Before his death on July 29<sup>th</sup> 1833, as he slipped into a coma three days after his Abolition Bill passed, he whispered, “Thank God that I should have lived to witness a day in which England was willing to give 20 million sterling for the abolition of slavery”.

Finney, a converted lawyer and evangelist, challenged both the church and culture of his day. His meetings led to revivals and cultural reforms. For example, in 1830 over 100,000 people were born again in Rochester, NY. Finney’s revival message and ministry changed significantly after 1834 upon the Holy Spirit’s conviction to target injustices in the culture. Because of this he became president of the first college in America that accepted both women and minorities.

Martin Luther King Jr. was a 4<sup>th</sup> generation preacher and had a high respect for the law. He was not an anarchist and didn’t believe in violence. He understood, however, that the laws of the land needed to be just and morally consistent with the laws of heaven. The irony here is the laws of segregation that were corrected by our Supreme Court were not being followed in America.

Martin Luther King Jr. was frustrated by the moderates of his day who were more concerned for order or peace over against the pursuit of real justice. He said, “We will have to repent in this generation not merely for the hateful words and actions of the bad people, but for the appalling silence of the good people.”

**Key Point #4: God will raise up those who will promote His justice. Those called of God will challenge the status quo which will affect both the secular and religious realm. The same question remains for us today, as was in Jesus day, will we recognize His choices? (See Jesus’ words in Matt 11.11-19, especially 18 & 19)**

#### GOD LOVES HIS CHURCH AND THE WORLD

I find it interesting to note that two secular scientist, J.D. Unwin and Pitirim Sorokin, who independently studied the rise and fall of 80 civilizations, found the following to be

true: *Recovery was rare for morally lost civilizations, but possible.* This is what their research revealed.

Recovered societies required a small segment of the people who remembered the process by which society had grown strong and prospered. And to rebuild this remnant had to stay faithful to these ideas and steward them, teaching them to the next generation. Secondly, they had to avoid the temptation to join the party, participating in the decadence of the day.

And, finally, because they might be viewed as cultural outcasts, the remnant will need to endure ridicule, persecution, and even violence from the broader society that rejects the “old ways”. Eventually, though, the revelers will look to this smaller segment for answers as the broader beliefs crash the culture.

So, what part may we be called to play? We need to embrace the challenges with faith and be involved in prayer, service, and other constructive means. We need to see God as He truly is, as the Scriptures portray Him (Psalm 2; Acts 4), as *the final authority on all things to Whom all authority is and will be accountable.*

Ignoring the challenges of the day will only breed fear, sow doubt, and undermine our faith in subtle ways. This we cannot afford to do.

So, who is speaking for God today? And what might a new move of God look like? Throughout the Scriptures and history itself, God is always intervening for His purposes and Glory. And often mankind is slow to realize that God is moving, because His truth often brings tensions and fallen men prefer darkness and convenience.

Revivals and reformations are often couched in the backdrop of periods of great darkness or outright chaos. Initially, they can make things messy, but spiritual warfare is just that, a war. The ministry of Christ, Paul, and the many called by God throughout history was very messy at times.

**Key Point #5: A real revival will align people with the truths of heaven. And heavenly truths will affect the church, the culture, and the politics of the day. And, if the godly take the lead, people will put their hopes in God and not look to other voices of the day for their deliverance.**

#### FINAL CONCLUSION

The Great Commission does not allow the Church to be silent nor the individual disciple to be inactive. God’s love for mankind compels Him to come to all of us with grace and truth. Can we as God’s people do any less?

## LET'S BE HONEST (by Pastor Jonathan)

Let's be honest: *Do we treat the place we live in as the place we are going to die in?*

In general, for many of us as children, we rarely imagined there was any place but home. Our family, our friends, our neighborhood, our school, our church, our city. Everything and everyone we needed and wanted was in one place. But adults seem often to imagine leaving home. For many reasons, an undercurrent of discontent makes it hard for us to settle down. Life must be better somewhere else.

As Americans, the pull is to create for ourselves a better life. There is always and only "moving up". But as disciples of Jesus, is that the best way to think about the direction of our lives? Always up?

For the first few years of living in Oswego, this was precisely what I tried to do. I had my own dreams, plans, and ideas of what God was calling me to do. In retrospect, what I imagined God calling me to do lined up exactly with what I wanted Him to do. So I often felt "drawn" or "led" away because my life as it was was not what I imagined it would, could, or should be. I had to find a way up and out. As a result, my life was one of mild discontent – discontent with God, life, ministry, work, etc.

It wasn't until my wife and I purchased our home that I finally ceased to "kick against the goads" (Acts 26:14). In fact, the decision to buy our home is the hardest decision I have ever made. I saw clear that it meant putting down roots and being willing to never leave this place. I fought hard to resist that. But we only hurt ourselves when we resist God. The moment I gave in, my heart found rest and I began to come alive. Today I imagine Oswego, New York to be the place I will die in. And I am content with joy.

As disciples of Jesus, the direction of our life and ministry may not be to climb out and up. It may be to fall to the ground and die. "Unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains alone." (John 12:24) As disciples of Jesus, we must be willing to receive the place we live in as the ground He intends to plant us in. This means being willing not only to live here, but to die here. This freedom allows us to live without reservation. To hold nothing back. To forsake all other options. To lay down our life.

There may still be reasons for which we will leave the place we live in: family, a work transfer, sickness. But wherever we are, the fruit Jesus wants to produce in us and through us is only possible as we lay down deep roots. As we surrender our lives to Jesus in a specific place among a unique people. As we sow our lives within the boundaries of our dwelling which God has determined for us (Acts 17:26).

Let's be honest: *Do we treat the place we live in as the place we are going to die in?*

## A BOOK THAT'S CHALLENGED ME (by Pastor Jonathan)

***"Digital Minimalism: Choosing a Focused Life in a Noisy World" by Cal Newport***

~ "Minimalism is the art of knowing how much is just enough. Digital minimalism applies this idea to our personal technology. It's the key to living a focused life in an increasingly noisy world."

I've been a big fan of Cal Newport for some time now and have read all his books. This one, however, "hit the target" as I continually seek and oftentimes struggle to be a disciple and to make disciples in an increasingly technological society — a society in which our relationship with technology seems more and more intertwined and yet leaves us feeling more and more exhausted, discontent and, tellingly, disconnected from the things that really matter to us. A "theology of technology" is something I aspire to learn, model, and teach.

In particular, there were three key thoughts/questions in this book that captivated and convicted me:

1) **Do the digital devices/activities I've selected support the things I strongly value? Do I even know what my deepest held values are (as a disciple, husband, father, pastor)?** Identifying our deepest values and then asking *what* technology, and *how* we use that technology, supports those values is critical to living wisely today.

2) **What's the single biggest factor shaping our lives today? Our screens.** There's no way around it: the devices we use (and the content we consume through them) are designed to be used in particular ways and for long periods of time.

3) **Solitude is about what's happening in your mind, not the environment around you. Accordingly, solitude is only truly possible when your mind is free from input from other minds.** So, time in solitude with God (myself, others) requires that I be free from the digital input that comes from others through my digital devices. This doesn't mean I have to be somewhere completely free of people or noise, but that I learn to move past constantly reacting to other information.

