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Is the Power of the Gospel Fading?

Matthew 28:19: (NASB) *Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.*

Hasn't it been long enough? It is 2,000 years since Jesus walked the earth with the promise of change, the promise of righteousness and the promise of his kingdom. So, where is he? Where is the change - the good - he promised? All we can see now is a world that slowly walks away from Christianity and walks towards self - self-satisfaction, self-gratification and self-worship. Has the power of the message of Jesus quietly faded into the sunset? Is the gospel lost and gone forever?



 **Survey, Americans Losing Their Religion, CBS News (2015)**

- *A new study on the changing U.S. religious landscape shows we are losing our religion. approximately 56 million in recent years. Christianity is still the dominant faith by The number of Americans who don't affiliate with a particular religion has grown to far in the U.S. Seven in 10 Americans identify with the tradition, but it is down by almost eight percent. By contrast, atheists and agnostics have nearly doubled, making the unaffiliated have the most growth, a 6.7 percent increase. The survey of 35,000 people was conducted in English and Spanish from June 4th to September 30th of last year.*

To begin, let us establish the context of our theme verse, for it was nearly the last thing Jesus said to his followers before being taken up into heaven. It is therefore important! We will compare the King James Version (KJV) with the New American Standard Bible (NASB).

Accuracy matters! Matthew 28:18-20: (KJV) ¹⁸And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, all power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. ¹⁹Go ye therefore, and **teach <3100>** all **nations <1484>**, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit: ²⁰Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen.

Matthew 28:18-20: (NASB) ¹⁸And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, all authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth. ¹⁹Go therefore and **make disciples <3100>** of all the **nations <1484>**, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and the Son and the Holy Spirit, ²⁰teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.

Make Disciples: Strongs #3100 matheteuo (math-ayt-yoo'-o); intransitively, to become a pupil; transitively (an adverb with a specific focus), to disciple, i.e. enroll as scholar

Nations: Strongs #1484 ethnos (eth'-nos); a race (as of the same habit), i.e. a tribe; specially, a foreign (non-Jewish) one (usually by implication, pagan)
KJV - Gentile, heathen, nation, people.

Just before the ascension, Jesus said: Luke 24:46-47

Observations - Jesus instructs four things:

1. Preach/proclaim repentance and remission of sins everywhere.
2. Make disciples out of all nations, but start at home in Jerusalem.
3. Baptize in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This would symbolize the disciples' source of life, of redemption and of enlightenment.
4. Teach Jesus' words to these new followers.

The obvious mission here is to preach the gospel to the world - the not-so-obvious mission is that this preaching, while bringing disciples, will not convert the world. We do not believe Jesus was instructing his disciples to convert the whole world.

Why would we say that worldwide conversion is NOT the plan? How is this a good thing?

Jesus clearly explains via a parable (and explanation) that *conversion is selective and NOT universal.*

The Parable of the Sower: Mark 4:3-8: (NASB) ³Listen to this! Behold, the sower went out to sow; ⁴as he was sowing, *some seed fell beside the road, and the birds came and ate it up.* ⁵*Other seed fell on the rocky ground where it did not have much soil; and immediately it*



sprang up because it had no depth of soil ⁶*And after the sun had risen, it was scorched; and because it had no root, it withered away.* ⁷*Other seed fell among the thorns, and the thorns came up and choked it, and it yielded no crop.* ⁸*Other seeds fell into the good soil, and as they grew up and increased, they yielded a crop and produced thirty, sixty, and a hundredfold.*

Jesus tells us *the seed* represents the gospel and describes four types of ground it falls upon:

- Beside the road: Birds eat it so the seed never takes root.
- Rocky ground: Since there is no deep soil, the seed springs up and withers in the hot sun. It takes root but dies.
- Thorny ground: The seed is choked; even though it does not produce a crop, it does not necessarily die.
- Good ground: The seed thrives and produces an increase of 30, 60 and 100-fold!

The gospel *looks like it is supposed to meet with massive failure!* Mark 4:9-12: Jesus specifically spoke in such a way the people would not understand.

The source of Jesus' words: (We will come back to this shortly...) Isaiah 6:8-10

Jesus is saying that he does NOT want to convert the masses! But why would he say that? Mark 4:13-14

Jesus explains why the gospel does not take hold with most: Lack of understanding - Beside the road: Matthew 13:19: If now was the only time for salvation, then why does a simple lack of understanding of the word give Satan the ability to take it away? Is simple ignorance a just cause to NOT give someone salvation? Even more, the very opportunity is gone because Satan takes it! Not Fair! Emotional acceptance but no heart acceptance - Rocky Ground Heart acceptance but no discipline to follow through - Thorny Ground Intellectual, emotional and heart acceptance - Good Ground

Jesus said he spoke in parables because he did not want the majority of people to understand what he was saying. He stripped away the opportunity for the masses to understand. If we think the gospel's purpose (according to Jesus before his ascension) was to *make disciples of all nations* - to bring all people in the world to the gospel NOW because now is the only time of salvation, the Parable of the Sower completely contradicts this. The Parable shows the call as being selective and not universal, but we know as the inspired word of God, the Bible must harmonize with itself.

So, Jesus himself tells us not many are ripe for following. If this is true, do these next texts contradict? Romans 5:18-19: (NASB) ¹⁸*So then as through one transgression there resulted condemnation to all men, even so through one act of righteousness there resulted justification of life to all men. (If everyone is under condemnation, everyone gets justification, right?)* ¹⁹*For as through the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the one the many will be made righteous.* (Okay, so all are stuck in sin and all are made righteous, right? Doesn't that contradict the other three types of "ground" in the parable?)

Matthew's version of the parable expands Jesus' teaching to build a kind of "us vs. them" scenario: Matthew 13:10-14:

Remember when we discussed Isaiah 6 as the source of Jesus' words? Let's now look at the context: Isaiah 6:8-10: (KJV) *Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then said I, here am I; send me.*

The literal fulfillment of this was Isaiah answering God, but Jesus quoted this prophecy to let us know it was about him.

Jesus "volunteers" for the job and is given instructions: ⁹*And he said, go, and tell this people, hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not.* ¹⁰*Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and be healed.*

God's instructions to Jesus (prophetically stated by Isaiah and repeated by Jesus) clearly stated Jesus' purpose was to leave his listeners in an unconverted and sinful state!



Why would God have commanded Jesus to do that if he came to save the whole world? Some of our Christian friends explain this dilemma as follows: These "sinners" are those who already rejected Jesus, and therefore it was impossible for them to comprehend his teaching. In other words, "They wouldn't have gotten it anyway." We do not believe it makes sense that so many millions would not have any opportunity for salvation since this would contradict the character of God. God is love, built upon justice, wisdom and power. So, how does all of that work together?

This brings a whole new question into play - if it is true that the call to salvation is so selective, what about this? 1 Timothy 2:3-6: (NRSV) ³*This is right and is acceptable in the sight of God our Savior,* ⁴*who desires everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge <1922>, of the truth.* ⁵*For there is one God; there is also one mediator between God and humankind, Christ Jesus, himself human,* ⁶*who gave himself a ransom for all - this was attested at the right time.*

God WANTS all men to know His truth! But isn't that contrary to the direction He gave Jesus?

Knowledge: Strongs #1922, full discernment

Knowledge is more than just a passing memory about something.

Luke 19:8-10: What was lost? Paradise! Genesis 3:22-24: (NASB) What was lost was humankind forever living in a sinless environment, the opportunity for eternal life and high level of fellowship with God. Jesus came to save that which was lost, but not to convert the whole world. How do those two ideas come together? **What is the true power of the gospel?**

2 Corinthians 5:17-20: There is hope because there is a *ministry of reconciliation* for the world.

Observations about the gospel power unfolding:

- To be *in Christ* is to be a New Creation, a unique and different spiritual class.
- This New Creation is given a specific ministry - one of reconciliation. How does that happen? More soon!
- Those of the New Creation are ambassadors - representatives of God's will through Christ.

Peter further explains this clear and unmistakable example of Christianity: 1 Peter 2:9,12: (ASV) ⁹*But ye are an elect race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, that ye may show forth the excellencies of Him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.*

In other words, you are supposed to show the excellencies of God because God blessed you through Christ. But who do you show these to and how is it received?

¹²*having your behavior seemly among the Gentiles; that, wherein they speak against you as evildoers, they may by your good works, which they (those who were left in the dark) behold, glorify God in the day of visitation (in the future).*

The message is for the rest of the world - but not applied now. The world's opportunity is not lost, but it is not now. God's instruction for Jesus to leave the masses in the dark is a TEMPORARY condition - the Apostle Peter tells us they will glorify God later! The true power of the gospel is to draw out followers of Jesus now, who will serve, teach and bless the rest of the world later. Is this provable with additional Scriptures?

John 5:28-29: **Jesus saves the world in two stages; the true Christians first and the rest of the world second:** 1 John 2:2: (NASB) *and he himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world.* **The instructions of God allow for the passing of a lot of time and the developing of sin to its fullest potential. All evil will be destroyed:** 2 Peter 3:7-9: It is all part of a big plan that takes time, implements justice, provides mercy and develops those who will be needed to teach the rest of the world about who God REALLY is. Hebrews 2:9

Here is an incredibly detailed proof of the gospel's message and power happening in two stages: Romans 5:12-14: Adam was entirely responsible for inherited human sin. Death reigned even before the Law was given, therefore the penalty was clearly upon all humanity. The consequences of sin happened even before the Law identified what would be considered sinful. Romans 5:15-17: (NASB) ¹⁵*But the free gift is not like the transgression. For if by the*



transgression of the one the **many** died, ("the many" MUST mean all humanity according to Paul's context in verse 14) much more did the grace of God and the gift by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, abound to the **many**. (This MUST mean the same "many.") ¹⁶The gift is not like that which came through the one who sinned; for on the one hand the judgment arose from one transgression resulting in condemnation, but on the other hand the free gift arose from many transgressions resulting in justification. ¹⁷For if by the transgression of the one, death reigned through the one, (Whom did death reign over? Everyone!) much more those who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ. (Aha! There IS a qualifier here applying to the called-out ones! Those who follow Jesus during their lifetimes. This shows them reigning (exercising an authority they are given). There is a logical, sequential order in which God allows for sin to come into play, labels sin through the Law, allows it to continue to its full extent and gives the gift of justification to give everyone who had the experience of sin.

Romans 5:18-21: (NASB) ¹⁸So then as through one transgression there resulted condemnation to **all** men, even so through one act of righteousness there resulted justification of life to **all** men. (ALL humanity MUST be included) ¹⁹For as through the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the One the many will be made righteous. (Again - this is about ALL humanity, as it is a continuation of thought.) ²⁰The Law came in so that the transgression would increase; but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, ²¹so that, as sin reigned in death, even so grace would reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. (Grace replaces sin based on justice on a wholesale scale!)

For those called - their whole future depends upon their present and the world waits for them! Romans 12:1-2: Those following after Christ now have a special set of responsibilities.

We see God's attributes of LOVE, WISDOM, JUSTICE and POWER are all in harmony with this plan. We see when God told Jesus not to convert all of the people, it was for a specific purpose - to call out the faithful followers first so they can be crystallized in character in this time. When the resurrection comes, they will be part of *the ministry of reconciliation* Peter spoke about.

How do we MAXIMIZE the power of the gospel? Realize it is personal - the gospel's power now in this age is focused on individuals (NOT denominations) who are truly following Christ: Romans 8:14-25 Realize the personal focus of the gospel's power now is for the purpose of blessing, teaching, guiding and directing the rest of the world later in the next age: Again we see how God's plan works. He allows sin and death so sin can be revealed for the ugly, disastrous division it causes between man and God. Our job is to be teachers and guides later. Life and hope will be embraced and mankind, once given a true choice, will choose righteousness. **Realize that our role here and now can easily be overlooked or ridiculed, because to those around us this is so farfetched.** The hope we have is not tangible; it is a hope of life with Christ in heaven. We do not know what that looks or feels like. All we know is it is promised so we look forward to it. It is higher than earthly hopes. We develop our life of sacrifice now and the world waits for us to finish our development of this life of sacrifice. God loves the human creation. We are His children. A good parent allows a child to go through difficult times so they can be better and stronger.

Here is a great summary of the power of the gospel in our personal Christian lives: Romans 8:31-32,35-39: We have the greatest power in the universe working with us and through us. If you are a called-out one following in the footsteps of Jesus, this is personal. You have been given the power and influence of God to work in your life. Your mission is not just about YOU. You are to come into harmony with God. We are to be Christ-like. We should be learning and reacting differently to the experiences of life. If faithful, we will have a part in blessing the entire world of mankind! Romans 8:28: The gospel is growing because God's plan is coming closer and closer to its fruition. This age will end. It looks dark now, but there is a "happily ever after!"

**So, is the power of the gospel fading?
For Jonathan and Rick and Christian Questions...
Think about it...!**