

The Master Plan of Evangelism

Robert E. Coleman

Summary by Bill Glad

The Master and His Plan: *The problem in evangelistic methods.*

In our efforts to fulfill the great commission of Christ, we need to constantly evaluate the objectives and relevance of our work. Is it worth doing? And does it get the job done? Just because we are busy doesn't mean it is to a purpose. We need to focus our attention on a well-thought-through strategy of movement day by day in terms of long range goals - everything we do must have a purpose. This is an attempt to see the controlling principles governing the movements of the Master in hope that our own labors might be conformed to a similar pattern. Since form follows function, this is a study to understand principles underlying Jesus' ministry - principles that determined his methods. In order to do this we have to look at the New Testament, and the Gospels in particular.

Christ is the perfect example. His objective was clear: He intended to save out of the world a people for himself and to build a church of the Spirit which would never perish. No one was excluded from his gracious purpose. His love was universal - he died for all sins and all people; to him there was no distinction between home and foreign missions. To Jesus it was all world evangelization. He planned to win! His life was ordered by his objective. Everything he did and said was a part of the whole pattern. Never did he lose sight of his goal - to redeem the world for God. We need to carefully consider his strategies, for he conceived a plan that would not fail.

Selection: *People were his method.*

It all started with Jesus calling a few men to follow him. His concern was not with programs, but with men whom the multitudes would follow. The initial objective of Jesus' plan was to enlist people who could bear witness to his life and carry on his work after he returned to the Father. These first converts had little immediate effect on the religious life of the day, but their lives, in time, would have an impact throughout eternity.

None of the men Jesus chose seemed to be key people. They weren't prominent in the synagogues, educated, or wealthy. They were "unlearned and ignorant" (Acts 4:13), but Jesus saw in them the potential to be leaders in the Kingdom. They weren't the men you would expect to win the world for Jesus, but they were teachable. They had a yearning for God and the realities of His life. Jesus can use anyone who wants to be used.

The wisdom of Jesus' method is that he concentrated on a few. One cannot transform a world except as individuals in the world are transformed, and individuals cannot be changed except as they are molded in the hands of the Master. Hence, as the company of followers around Jesus increased, it became necessary to narrow the select company to a more manageable number - Jesus chose twelve apostles. He didn't exclude others from following him, but it is undeniable that his attention was focused more and more on the few and not on the many. Even within the twelve there was a select apostolic group of Peter, James, and John. All other things being equal, the more concentrated the size of the group being taught, the greater the opportunity for effective instruction. Jesus staked his whole ministry on the apostles; the fringe could fall away, but the close disciples could not miss his purposes or all was lost!

Jesus, on the other hand, did not neglect the crowds. He did much to identify with them, to care for them, and instruct them - so much so that in many cases they were aroused and even moved to make him king. But Jesus didn't give in to popular conceptions; he rather stayed with his strategy at the risk of public scorn. Few seemed to understand his message.

His strategy, again, was not to impress the crowd, but to usher in a kingdom. This meant that he needed men who could lead the multitudes. Jesus was a realist. He based his evangelism on a plan that would meet the need; by focusing on a few men he developed the base on which the masses could later depend. This stands in contrast to our modern day emphasis on the number of converts, rather than building the foundation on which a continuing evangelistic ministry can be set.

Association: *He stayed with them.*

Having called his men, Jesus made it a practice to be with them. This was the essence of his training program - just letting his disciples follow him. This was an incredibly simple method and stood in stark contrast to the formal procedures of the scribes. By the virtue of their fellowship with Jesus the disciples were permitted "to know the mysteries of the Kingdom of God" (Luke 8:10). Knowledge was gained by association before it was understood by explanation. The call to the disciples was "follow me and to others "come and see". Even in the choosing of the twelve we can see that they were set apart "that they might be with Him" (Mark 3:14). He had more time with the apostles than with everyone else in the world put together, and it could only have been deliberate. Taking this approach means that Jesus had little time to call his own.

Jesus still ministered to the masses, but all the time ministered to his disciples by having them with him. He had to devote himself primarily to the task of developing some people who in turn could give this kind of personal attention to others. Again, the modern day church has failed miserably to care for the individuals in the body with the attention they need. Building men and women is not easy. But we need to be incorporating into our ministry personal care and close relationships for all new members to the body.

Consecration: *He required obedience.*

Jesus expected the people he was with to obey him. They were not required to be smart, but they had to be loyal. They were called his "disciples" meaning that they were "learners" or "pupils". For the moment all they were asked to do was to follow Jesus. Following might have seemed easy at first, but it soon became apparent that it meant the surrender of one's whole life to the Master in absolute submission to his sovereignty. There could be no compromise. Would-be disciples were made to count the cost, and many who followed turned away.

The disciples' obedience did not correlate directly with their understanding of Jesus' teachings. In fact, they were far from understanding Jesus as he talked about the cross and servanthood. But their capacity to receive revelation would grow provided they continued to practice what truth they did understand. Thus obedience to Christ was the very means by which those in his company learned more truth.

Supreme obedience was interpreted to be the expression of love. If the disciples were to love Jesus, it would be shown in their obedience to his words. Absolute obedience to the will of the Father, of course, was the controlling principle of the Master's own life. The cross was but the crowning climax of Jesus' commitment to do the will of God.

From the viewpoint of strategy, obedience was the only way that Jesus could mold the disciples' lives by his word. There could be no development of character or purpose in the disciples without it, and no one can ever be a leader until first he has learned to follow a leader. Without obedience to Christ the disciples would surely have been lost in their battle for human lives. Why are so many professed Christians today stunted in their growth and ineffectual in their witness? Is it not because of their indifference to the commands of God? Obedience has been replaced by a sort of respectable "do-as-you-please" philosophy of expediency.

Impartation: *He gave himself.*

Why were Jesus' demands upon discipline accepted without argument? The disciples understood that they were not just keeping a law, but were responding to One that loved them and who was willing to give himself for them. His was a life of giving - giving away what the Father had given him. Love is like that. It is always giving itself away. He lost no opportunities to impress upon his followers the deep compulsion of his own soul aflame with the love of God for a lost world. Everything he did and said was motivated by his consuming passion.

The constant renewing of his consecration to God through loving service to others constituted Jesus' sanctification. He continually gave his life "for their sakes". His sanctification then was not to benefit himself, but it was for his disciples, that they might "be sanctified in truth". That is to say, in giving himself to God, Jesus gave himself to those about him so that through his life they might come to know a similar commitment to the mission for which he had come into the world. His whole evangelistic plan hinged on this dedication, and in turn, the faithfulness with which his disciples gave themselves in love to the people about them. They were to give as freely as they had received. Such a demonstration of love through the disciples was to be the way that the world would know that the Gospel was true.

Jesus made it clear that his life was mediated only through the Holy Spirit. Likewise, it was the Spirit that sustained and nourished the transformed life of a disciple as he continued to grow in knowledge and grace. By the same token it was only the Spirit of God that enabled one to carry on the redemptive mission of evangelism. Evangelism was the Spirit's work; all the disciples were asked to do was to let the Spirit have complete charge of their lives. The fact that these men were of the common lot of mankind was no hindrance at all. It only serves to remind us of the mighty power of the Spirit of God accomplishing his purpose in people fully yielded to his control. After all, the power is in the Spirit of Christ. It is not who we are, but who he is that makes the difference. We must have his life in us by the Spirit if we are to do his work and practice his teaching.

Demonstration: *He showed them how to live.*

Jesus saw to it that his disciples learned his way of living with God and man. He recognized that it was not enough just to get people into his spiritual communion. His disciples needed to know how his experience was to be maintained and shared if it was to be perpetuated in evangelism. That is why the effort of Jesus to get across to his followers the secrets of his spiritual influence needs to be considered as a deliberate course of his master strategy.

As an example, it was no accident that Jesus often let his disciples see him conversing with the Father in prayer. They would see the place it had in his life without fully understanding what it was all about. Note that Jesus didn't force the lesson upon them, but rather he just kept on praying until at last the disciples got so hungry that they asked him to teach them what he was doing. At that point he would give them a lesson, and thereafter he emphasized the life of prayer again and again when talking with his disciples, continually enlarging upon its meaning and application as they were able to comprehend deeper realities of his Spirit. One thing is certain. Unless they grasped the meaning of prayer, and learned how to practice it with consistency, not much would ever come of their lives.

Another aspect of Jesus' life which was vividly portrayed to the disciples was the importance and use of the Holy Scriptures. This was evident both in maintaining his own personal devotion and in winning others to the Way. He never ceased to use Scripture in his conversation with them; he expounded the Scriptures before them repeatedly, and he made it abundantly clear that the Word written in the Scriptures and the Word spoken by him were not in contradiction. Furthermore, it was made clear to them that if they were to continue in his fellowship by the Spirit after he was gone from them in the flesh, they would have to abide in his Word.

Through this manner of personal demonstration, every aspect of Jesus' personal discipline of life was bequeathed to his disciples, but what perhaps was most important in view of his ultimate purpose was that all the while he was teaching them how to win souls. Practically everything that Jesus said and did had

some relevance to their work of evangelism, either by explaining some spiritual truth or revealing to them how they should deal with people. Jesus was so much the master in his teaching that he did not let his method obscure his lesson. He let his truth call attention to itself, and not the presentation. All the disciples had to teach others was a Teacher who practiced with them what he expected them to learn. He did not ask anyone to do or be anything which first he had not demonstrated in his own life, thereby not only proving its workability, but also its relevance to his mission in life. It is well enough to tell people what we mean, but it is infinitely better to show them how to do it.

Delegation: *He assigned them work.*

Jesus was always building up in his ministry to the time when his disciples would have to take over his work and go out into the world with the redeeming Gospel. He was never premature in his insistence upon action; he was patient. His method was to get the disciples into a vital experience with God, and to show them how he worked, before telling them they had to do it. They were given tasks such as manual burdens of getting food and arranging accommodations, as well as being sent on a preaching mission.

In their first evangelistic mission, the disciples were told to "preach the Kingdom of God and heal the sick". But Jesus did not leave it at this; he was also specific in his instructions of where to stay, what to take, and what to say. It was as though Jesus was telling his disciples to go where they would find the most susceptible audience, and within that, the disciples were told to concentrate their time upon the most promising individuals in each town who would thereby be able to follow up their work after they had gone. We too need to be giving ourselves to responsive hearers, while at the same time expecting hardship and division because of the message we bring.

Evangelism is not an optional accessory to our life. It is the heartbeat of all that we are called to be and do. But it is not enough to make this an ideal. It must be given tangible expression by those who are following the Savior. The best way to be sure that this is done is to give practical work assignments and expect them to be carried out. This gets people started, and where they already have seen their work demonstrated in the life of the teacher, there is no reason why the assignment cannot be completed.

Supervision: *He kept check on them.*

Jesus made it a point to get with his disciples following their tours of service to hear their reports and to share with them the blessedness of his ministry in doing the same thing. In this sense, one might say that his teaching rotated between instruction and assignment. What time he was with them, he was helping them to understand the reason for some previous action or getting them ready for some new experience. What is seen here so vividly in these checkup sessions following the disciples' visitation merely brings into bold relief a strategy of

Jesus throughout his ministry. As he reviewed some experience which the disciples had he would bring out some practical application of it to their lives.

Many illustrations could be cited to show how Jesus checked up on the actions and reactions of his disciples as they faced various difficult situations. The important thing about all this supervisory work of Jesus was that he kept the disciples going on toward the goal he had set for them. Disciples must be brought to maturity. There can be no substitute for total victory, and our field is the world. We have not been called to hold the fort, but to storm the heights.

Reproduction: *He expected them to reproduce.*

Jesus intended for the disciples to produce his likeness in and through the Church being gathered out of the world. Thus his ministry in the Spirit would be duplicated many-fold by his ministry in the lives of his disciples. Through them and others like them, it would continue to expand in an ever-enlarging circumference until the multitudes might know in some similar way the opportunity which they had known with the Master. By this strategy the conquest of the world was only a matter of time and their faithfulness

to his plan. It did not matter how small the group was to start with, so long as they reproduced and taught their disciples to reproduce. A barren Christian is a contradiction. A tree is known by its fruit. Jesus called people to evaluate the product of their lives. This was the revelation of what they were.

The great commission of Christ to the Church summed it up in the command to "make disciples of every creature" (Matt 28:19). The disciples were to build people like themselves who were so constrained by the commission of Christ that they not only followed, but led others to follow his way. Leadership was the emphasis. The only hope for the world is for people to go to them with the Gospel of Salvation, and having won them to the Savior, not to leave them, but to work with them faithfully, patiently, painstakingly, until they become fruitful Christians savoring the world about them with the Redeemer's love. The test of any work of evangelism thus is not what is seen at the moment, or in the Conference Report, but in the effectiveness with which the work continues in the next generation.

The costly principles of leadership development and reproduction seem to have been submerged beneath the easier strategy of mass recruitment. When will we realize that evangelism is not done by something, but by someone? It is an expression of God's love, and God is a Person. His nature, being personal, is only expressed through personality, first revealed fully in Christ, and now expressed through his Spirit in the lives of those yielded to Him.

Conclusion: *The Master and your plan.*

What is the plan of your life? Everyone has to live by some plan. The plan is the organizing principle around which the aim of life is carried out. We may not be conscious of a plan in every action, or even know that we have a plan, but nonetheless our actions invariably unfold some kind of a pattern at the center of things. To regard Jesus' plans as true means that they must be relevant. Every one of us then should be seeking some way to incorporate the wisdom of Jesus' strategy into our own preferred method of evangelism.

The multitudes cannot know the Gospel unless they have a living witness. Merely giving them an explanation will not suffice. People must be our priority. We should not expect a great number to begin with, nor should we desire it. Better to give a year or so to one or two people who learn what it means to conquer for Christ than to spend a lifetime with a congregation just keeping the program going. The only realistic way to effect this is by being together. It is going to take time and consistency in meeting together to pray and study God's word, and then to be moving out in obedience. It is not enough just to involve persons in some kind of group association, they must be given some way to express the things that they have learned; you need to expect something from them. All of this is going to require a lot of supervision, both in the personal development of these people, and in their work with others. The main thing is to keep them growing in peace and in knowledge. Help them carry their burdens, and let them carry on with the work of making disciples. The crucial thing, of course, is their own spiritual experience. Nothing less than the infilling of the Spirit of Christ will be sufficient to meet the challenge. The price of victory is costly, and disappointment sure to come, but we are not primarily living for the present. Our satisfaction is in knowing that in generations to come our witness for Christ will still be bearing fruit through them in an ever-widening cycle of reproduction to the ends of the earth and unto the end of time.