



what is
Jesus
doing right
now?

You know what Jesus did 2,000 years ago, and you believe strongly enough in what He did to commit yourself to following Him. But an even more important thought for you today is this: What is Jesus doing right now, this very moment, and what should I be doing today to help Him?

One thing He is doing right now is interceding for us. He is seated at the right hand of God, receiving our worship and making our needs known to the Father—and only He can do that; we can't help. He is also preparing a place for us—and we can't help with that, either. He isn't taking requests concerning our eternal accommodations. However, we can and should have an active role in His current work of establishing His kingdom on earth, which is the same as building His Church.

Many Christians live their lives as though Jesus finished His work in the first century. They seem to think that being a Christian is simply accepting the finished work of Christ, going to church every Sunday to express their worship, and waiting for His second coming. No, no, no. Jesus is working today, just as He did 2,000 years ago, to accomplish His cosmic mission. Long before the first humans made their appearance, He was busy creating the universe. Perhaps He still is. At a certain time in history God poured His energy into the earthly ministry of Jesus. And since then He has been actively working in the affairs of people to bring humanity under the Lordship of His kingdom.

Somehow people can't grasp the idea that Jesus goes to work every day, just like we do. Or conversely, and

more correctly, we go to work every day, just like Jesus does. He told His disciples, “My father is always at his work to this very day, and I, too, am working” (John 5:17). He still is.

The central task of the universe today is extending the kingdom of God into every corner of human life, one follower at a time, one conversation at a time. That’s what Jesus is concentrating on, and that’s what we should be spending the best part of our time and energy doing. You may have assumed that the most important thing you could be doing with your life is selling carpet in Centerville, raising kids in Indiana, governing the state of Louisiana, discovering a cure for cancer, or pastoring the second-largest church in a small town. Those are all worthwhile endeavors, but each one of those tasks is only significant when it is a subtask of the grand objective: building the kingdom of God.

After Jesus completed the earthly segment of establishing His kingdom, He gathered His friends around Him and laid out the strategy for the next phase. His friends weren’t very mature, spiritually, at the time of this meeting; in fact some of them still doubted. However, in spite of their immaturity Jesus delegated the next phase of the expansion of the Kingdom to them. It was to be a joint venture; in partnership with Jesus’ own Spirit, they were assigned to make disciples of the whole world, following the plan of Kingdom growth Jesus had modeled for them—one disciple at a time, one step at a time. And He gave

them a blank check—drawn on all the resources of heaven—to accomplish this next step in the Kingdom’s establishment. There was only one limitation: these resources were for making disciples only.

Just as the task of recording the revelation of God through the centuries had been delegated to individual people with the assistance of the Holy Spirit, even so Jesus delegated the spread of the gospel to His friends. Since we are His friends, we have that same assignment. And we also have the same promise: that He will be with us in every step of that enterprise.

So if we are sent by Jesus Christ to make disciples in our world, we’d better know for sure what a disciple is. And once we know that, we need to figure out how to make more of them.

Disciples are simply people who follow Jesus. At some point in their lives they have accepted His claim to be the Son of God, the one person in the universe worthy of following. In most cases disciples have had to turn away from less worthy pursuits and go a different direction. For some people, following Jesus is something they have done for as long as they can remember. For others it is a radically new idea. The important issue is not how a person got started on this pilgrimage but whether he or she is currently following Jesus. “Following Jesus” today simply means taking the same steps Jesus instructed His first-century friends to take, the steps so clearly recorded in the New Testament.

Those first-century disciples enjoyed their friendship

with Jesus. They walked along with Him, talking about things they saw on the way. He taught them practical lessons about God's kingdom, using life experiences as illustrations. That's what being a disciple means today: enjoying companionship with Jesus, learning from Him about the Kingdom, and taking whatever step we see Him taking ahead of us. It doesn't matter where we joined the journey, just that we are following.

In the process of following Jesus, an amazing transformation takes place: the follower becomes more and more like the leader. The Holy Spirit shapes and bends the character of His followers until they, too, have the mind of Christ and do the kinds of good things that their leader did. These steps are not the ultimate objective; the goal is to become like Christ.

A kingdom is the territory under the control of a king. Earthly kings mark out that territory in geographic terms: from the river on that side to the mountains on this side. But the territory God seeks to control is human hearts. His kingdom is all those hearts loyal to King Jesus. That Kingdom is penetrating more and more of our world as people surrender to His Kingship and place more and more of their lives under His authority. It is spreading throughout the world in an inevitable and unstoppable tide that cannot be suppressed and will not be thwarted. The only question for us and our friends is, "Will we ride the wave or be swept under by it?"

Jesus did not come to sell memberships in the King-

dom. Only religious hucksters do that. He merely announced that with His arrival God's kingdom had come. Those who follow Him will enjoy it and its privileges. Those who don't are going the wrong way. "Repent!" He said. "Turn around! You're going the wrong direction. I'm the truth, the way, the life. Follow Me. There's no future the other way." Jesus didn't make any effort to coerce or cajole people into the Kingdom. In fact He raised the bar high enough that only those who really are serious about following Him will find that Kingdom.

If a disciple is simply a follower of Jesus, how complicated can making disciples be? To make a disciple is simply to help our friends follow Jesus, one intimate discussion at a time. Making disciples is having helpful conversations with our friends, helping them take the next step in following Jesus.

Sometimes it is our privilege to help one of our friends take the first step in the journey with Christ: the step of initial faith. This can be a moment of high drama or a long process of growing acceptance of Jesus as King of Eternity. The logistics of this step are not as important as the fact of it. Just because you came to faith in Christ in a certain manner doesn't mean that all your friends will have the same experience, or that any of them will.

Martha and I were sitting in church recently, getting ready to receive the elements of Communion, the Lord's Supper. Our worship leader said, "This is a family meal. It's only for family members. If you haven't joined God's

family, you shouldn't participate. However, if you are on the outside looking in and want to be included in God's family, there are people at the back of the room who will help you take the next step. Then you can join us in the family celebration."

A young couple in the row ahead of us were having a serious whisper about something, and I sensed that the husband was ready to take his first step of faith. Sure enough, he got up from his seat and made his way to the back. As he passed the sound booth, one of our tech guys asked him, "What do you need?" Scott, the young husband, said, "Jesus." The technician pointed him to Ralph, one of the mature Christians waiting in the back, who helped him take the first steps in a life of walking with Jesus. Scott's wife had also come to join him, as I had, and we gathered around him as he prayed. Now Scott and Ralph get together on a fairly regular basis, and Scott is making great progress as a follower of Jesus.

Sometimes we help our friends take the last step. My Aunt, Peg Henderson, was one of Jesus' sweetest followers. Her whole life was spent in gracious service to her family, friends, church, neighbors, and colleagues at work. Last year we moved to Florida, just a few miles from Aunt Peg and nearer than any of her own kids or grandkids. So we had lots of enjoyable visits with her, although some of them involved trips to the hospital for her deteriorating health. In May she went into the hospital for the last time.

It was clear to us and to her that she was taking her last step with Jesus in this life.

Martha and I had the bittersweet joy of helping Aunt Peg take her last step. All her kids and grandkids gathered around her bedside for several days, and finally it was time for her to tell them all good-bye. She gave each one a blessing, and when she got too tired to stay awake she said, "I'm going to sleep, and when I wake up I'll be in heaven." And so she did, and we were gratified that we had helped a grand Christian lady take her last step and take it well.

Making a disciple is teaching your friend to learn from the Holy Spirit. You're not the teacher; you're just a friend. Jesus promised that when He was no longer physically present with His disciples He would send the Holy Spirit to teach, guide, comfort, and correct them and help them stay on track. Our role in that process is to help our friends stay tuned in to the Spirit and to walk, step by step, in a divinely led pilgrimage. We do that by talking: discussing, holding accountable, sometimes confronting, encouraging, asking good questions, and so on. Human interaction is how the kingdom of God spreads. Friends talk to friends, steps are taken in following Jesus, and His Kingship oozes into more and more of human life. The Holy Spirit, through human agents, is conquering new territory all the time, building allegiance and loyalty to Jesus in the hearts of His people and helping them do things His way.

Together, friends do God's work in the world. When

Jesus said, “Go into all the world and make disciples” (see Matt. 28:19; Mark 16:15), He meant the corner of the world you live in. Establish God’s kingdom right there. You and your friends are colleagues in a conspiracy of kindness to do good things in Jesus’ name. In your circle of influence you are channels of God’s grace and power to bring truth and justice, love and compassion, peace and harmony, one conversation at a time. As the old poem goes, “Little drops of water, / Little grains of sand, / Make the mighty ocean and the beauteous land. / Little deeds of kindness, / Little words of love, / Make our earth an Eden / Like the heaven above” (Mrs. J. A. Carney).

Obviously, we can’t extend the kingdom of God in our own strength. It would be the height of arrogance to even think we could. But in partnership with God’s Spirit, all He asked us to do is entirely possible. I know there are people who try to do good on their own, in their own strength, but it’s a futile effort.

One of my favorite stories is about a vacuum cleaner salesman making calls in the mountains of eastern Kentucky. He drove up into the head of a hollow and knocked on the door of a mountain cabin. When the lady of the house answered the door, he pushed his way inside without even giving her a chance to say “howdy” and dumped a large bag of dirt on her linoleum floor. “Madam,” he announced, “if my Ace Vacuum Cleaner can’t suck all this dirt up in one minute, I’ll give you \$20.00!” To this

the woman replied, “Good luck, Sonny. We ain’t got no ‘lectric!”

That’s what we say to those noble do-gooders who are trying to save the world in their own strength: “Good luck, Sonny! You’ve got the right idea but no power.” Those of us who are following Jesus are on a mission to make our world a better place by making disciples and doing God’s work, and He has given us the authority and resources to transform our own little corner of the world.

As the writer of the Book of Hebrews reminded us, “Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear. For our God is a consuming fire” (12:28-29, NKJV).

For Reflection and Discussion

1. What is Jesus doing right now?
2. How is His kingdom spreading throughout the world?
3. What is a disciple? And what does it mean to “make disciples”?
4. In the process of making disciples, who is supposed to be the teacher?