

What's Next?

Do you ever wonder what's next in your life? What's next in your relationship with the person you are dating or your spouse? What's next in your career? What the next season of life is going to be like? Do you ever wonder if this is as good as it gets?

Unfortunately, I don't know the answers to those questions for you. But what I do know is that no matter what season of life you are in today, ***God has invited you into a good and satisfying life– Life as a citizen and participant in his kingdom come.*** Now I know this sounds like a fantasy or a heavenly vision that is out there somewhere in the future. But the truth is Jesus has invited you to live your life, your "everyday ordinary life" in the reality of his kingdom where He is fully present and in charge of heaven and earth. And He has invited you into the work of building this kingdom. The good news is that if you accept his invitation to live in this reality and participate in his work you will experience more purpose and satisfaction than you ever will building your own kingdom in this world.

I have to warn you that this message may be so familiar that you miss the connection between living in the reality of God's kingdom and experiencing satisfaction in your daily life. Don't miss the beauty of the truth in this familiar passage! Today ***I want you to think about two questions– Are you living in the reality of God's Kingdom in your daily life? Are you participating in the work of building his kingdom on the earth?***

Today we are talking about the story where Jesus commissioned his disciples in Matthew 28 and then ascended to heaven right in front of their eyes in Luke 24.

"Then the eleven disciples left for Galilee, going to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. When they saw him, they worshiped him—but some of them doubted! Jesus came and told his disciples, "I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth. Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Matthew 28:16-20 NLT

"Then Jesus led them to Bethany, and lifting his hands to heaven, he blessed them. While he was blessing them, he left them and was taken up to heaven. So they worshiped him and then returned to Jerusalem filled with great joy. And they spent all of their time in the Temple, praising God." Luke 24:50-53 NLT

The first thing I noticed is that some of his disciples still doubted whether Jesus had really been raised from the dead and if he really was God. This is an encouraging detail because it shows us how gracious Jesus was when his disciples lacked faith. Think about all that they had seen and experienced over the last three years with Jesus, and they still struggled with doubt! Jesus ignored their doubt and continued on with his plan for them. When you struggle with doubts you need to remember that Jesus has grace for you just like he did with his original disciples.

Jesus then told his disciples, "I have been given authority over heaven and earth." He was letting them know the reality of who he really was. ***Jesus was and is the king of kings and lord of lords who rules over heaven and earth.*** This means that Jesus has the final say over everything that takes place in the

spiritual realm of heaven and the physical realm on earth. There is no one more powerful than Jesus. Every spiritual being and human being is under his authority and rule in his kingdom come. The Bible says, "God elevated him to the place of highest honor and gave him the name above all other names, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue declare that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." Philippians 2:9-11 NLT

Next Jesus commissioned the disciples to the work of building his kingdom. "Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you." ***Jesus described four aspects of discipleship— becoming a disciple, being baptized as a disciple, growing as a disciple and doing the work of helping others become disciples.***

Dallas Willard defines a disciple as "a student, apprentice, practitioner of Jesus Christ, steadily learning from him how to live the life of the Kingdom of the Heavens into every corner of human existence." I love this definition because its simple, practical and inspiring. ***Being a disciple means following Jesus and practicing his way of life.***

The first aspect of discipleship is becoming a disciple of Jesus Christ. Earlier in Jesus' ministry he shows us there is a clear starting point to become his disciple. In Mark 1 Jesus announced, "The kingdom of God is at hand, repent of your sins, believe the Good News...and follow me." ***The starting point for becoming a disciple is to accept Jesus' invitation to turn from your sins and believe the Good News of his life, death and resurrection.*** When you do this everything changes. God forgives you, cleanses you, adopts you, seals and empowers you with the Holy Spirit. Have you accepted Jesus' invitation to repent and believe in him for your salvation and life?

The second aspect of discipleship is being baptized as a disciple. Baptism is designed to follow conversion. Jesus told his disciples to "make disciples and baptize them in the Name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit." I used to be soft on this point because I didn't want to pressure people who had not been baptized yet. Now I encourage every disciple of Jesus that has not been baptized to do so as soon as possible. Baptism is an essential aspect of your discipleship to Jesus. ***Baptism is a physical expression of an invisible spiritual reality.*** When you are baptized in the Name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, you are identified as one in relationship with God. When you go under the water you identify with the death of Christ, and when you come out of the water you identify with the resurrection of Christ and your new life in him. Your baptism marks the day that you died to your old life and you were given a new identity and whole new way of life in Christ. Have you been baptized in the Name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit? Don't neglect to take this important step of faith in your discipleship journey.

The third aspect of discipleship is growing as a disciple. Jesus said, "Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you." ***Jesus summed up what it means to follow him and to practice his way life with The Great Commandment (Matthew 22:37-40) and The Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20). He essentially said, Love God, Love People and Make Disciples.*** The good news is that learning to follow Jesus is a slow, life-long process that is full of grace and help from the Holy Spirit. This means you can relax and trust God to work in you as you follow Him, taking steps of faith and practicing this new way of life of loving God, loving people and making disciples. Paul said, "And now, just as you accepted Christ Jesus as your Lord, you must continue to follow him. Let your roots grow

down into him, and let your lives be built on him. Then your faith will grow strong in the truth you were taught, and you will overflow with thankfulness." Colossians 2:6-7 NLT Are you practicing the way of Jesus in your daily life? Are you seeing more fruit of the Spirit's work in your life?

The fourth aspect of discipleship is doing the work of helping others become disciples. Jesus told the original disciples, "Go and make disciples of all nations." Jesus' plan is for all of his disciples to make more disciples. The work of making disciples isn't only for pastors or church staff members, its for everyone who follows Jesus. "Go into all the world" means to go to every nation of the world, but it can also be translated "as you go", meaning as you go about your "everyday ordinary life". This is an important distinction. ***You are to carry the Name of Jesus into your daily life by living and working as his representative wherever you are.*** Paul said, "Whatever you do in word or deed, do it as a representative of Jesus Christ." Colossians 3:17 This means you can do anything from having out with friends to working in the name and way of Jesus. Are you helping others follow Jesus and practice his way of life?

The final thing Jesus said was, "And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

Questions To Consider–

Have you accepted Jesus Christ's invitation to believe the Good News of his life, death and resurrection?

Have you been Baptized in the Name of the Father, the Son & the Holy Spirit?

Are you Practicing The Way of Jesus in your Daily Life?

Are you Helping Others Practice The Way of Jesus?