

The Great Debate: Evangelism or Discipleship?

Just as we don't argue which side of a coin is more valuable, so it is absurd to argue about the relative importance of evangelism versus discipleship. The Great Commission has been understood only when both are fully embraced. This is the example Jesus clearly laid out, and He calls us to extend His ministry.

He preached to the unsaved: "From that time Jesus began to preach and to say, '*Repent*, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand'" (Matt. 4:17, emphasis added); "The Son of Man has come *to seek and to save* that which was lost" (Luke 19:10, emphasis added).

And He developed believers: "*Follow me*, and I will make you fishers of men" (Matt. 4:19, emphasis added). "Everyone, after he has been *fully trained*, will be like his teacher" (Luke 6:40, NASB, emphasis added).

Jesus both evangelized and made disciples. That is enough to settle any debate and get on with the work. But we must also get to the root of the debate and change the wrong thinking that caused it.

Let's look beneath the surface of Jesus' ministry. We have seen that for Jesus, evangelism and discipleship were two sides of the same coin, but this leads us to an important question: What was Jesus' "coin"?

It was God's kingdom. Every stream of Jesus' ministry flowed from one inner spring: God's invading dominion. The gospel Jesus preached to the lost was the "gospel of the kingdom" (Matt. 4:23). The followers He trained were "disciples of the kingdom" (Matt. 13:52).

Jesus' whole vision was to establish and advance God's kingdom in people's lives. "Your kingdom come ... on earth as it is in heaven," He prayed (Matt. 6:10).

Wherever God rules, there is salvation and increasing peace (Is. 9:7). God's kingdom is not merely a ticket to heaven. *It is the expansion of divine life.*

It begins as a tiny seed but grows into a huge tree (Matt. 13:31-32). After it initially delivers a person from sin, it gradually permeates him with the character of its king.

That kingdom was Jesus' whole mission! Thus for the lost, God's kingdom meant evangelism; for followers, it was discipleship; for the sick, healing; for the demonized, deliverance; and for the dead, resurrection. Jesus' ministry was the full expression of God's kingdom.

So we must replace our narrow ministry visions with Jesus' vision! Evangelism and discipleship are two sides of same coin: God's kingdom.

It is this "lost coin" for which we must light a lamp, sweep our house and search until we find it again (Luke 15:8-9). Let's end the debate by doing exactly what Jesus taught us: seek *first* God's kingdom.

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