

**Discipleship in the Gospels and Acts**



Summary of the Contents

Making Disciples

**Abstract**: This article gives an overview of the Commissions in the Gospels and a summary of the concept of disciple making in the New Testament

Discipleship Across the Gospels

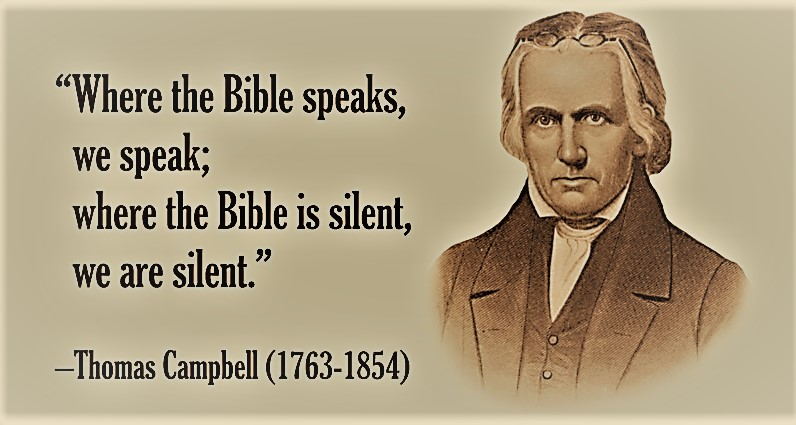
**Abstract**: Prompted by the decline and closing of churches, Dr. McCuistion promotes a renewal of disciple-making based on the concepts found in the Gospels. Focusing on the initial interactions between Jesus and His first disciples, the four Gospels are examined to determine if they provide the model for the disciple Jesus intended when He gave the commissions recorded in the Synoptics. The investigation centers on the person and nature of Jesus, giving evidence that it does matter who the master is as only Jesus is qualified to receive that honor. This quest is strengthened with what it means to ask, “If Jesus is Lord.” The evidence comes together with the examination of discipleship in the mid-section of Mark (chapters 8, 9, and 10), drawing the conclusion that the foundation of discipleship is Jesus who is also able to claim ownership as the disciple is ransomed to serve King Jesus, who paid the price.

The Speeches of Acts as a Model for Contemporary Preaching

**Abstract**: Luke’s record of the early church in Acts takes two forms – narrative and speeches. While speeches were common in histories, Luke’s thorough investigation from which he promises “to write in consecutive order so that you may know the exact truth about the things you have been taught” (Luke 1:3b-4) reveals via the speeches of Jesus’ disciples the common confession of the faith once delivered. Put into context, they take the form of gospel proclamation intended to convict and convince the listener of Jesus’ nature and intent. This article contends that the disciples’ speeches form the model for the Christocentric confession of the early church that should be used today, modeling Matthew’s Great Commission for disciple-making. The thesis will be defended exploring the methodology revealed in the evangelistic speeches, emphasizing an approach beneficial to contemporary preaching and unpacking Luke’s Christology revealed in the speeches given by Jesus’ disciples. From this, the author’s conclusion stresses that the Lukan model of making disciples must be based on a conscious decision regarding Jesus’ nature and mission rather than salvific in emphasis ­– forgiveness and going to heaven – as is common in contemporary evangelism. This conclusion is based on the rapid, sustained growth reported by Luke that is duplicatable today.

Discipleship Demands a Cross

*Discipleship 101: Getting Back to Basics* is designed to create a paradigm shift in the theology that underlies our discipling concepts. As Bible believing and practicing people, we are committed to using biblical truth as the blueprint for faith and practice. Thomas Campbell stood by this principle, and it was the driving mantra that fostered the fastest growing tradition in America in the early 1800s.



Regarding *faith*, there is no dispute about **what** we believe. However, when it comes to the practice of making disciples, many churches are following the trends that are not producing devoted followers of Jesus who are *willing to take a bullet for Him*. Rather, they are producing *sit-and-worship church members.* This is a form of what Dallas Willard calls *non-disciple Christianity* (Forward to *The King Jesus Gospel*, by Scot McKnight. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011, 15).

Examining church vision and mission statements, searching “Gospel” or “Jesus” on their *Who We Are* and *What We Do* pages did not produce a single hit. The conclusion: **They have lost the vision of the Gospel of the Kingdom of God!**

From that time Jesus began to preach and say, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matthew 4:17).

It is stories like this and a thousand others who have lost the vision of King Jesus’ kingdom mission that has been the focus of my study for the past few years. The climax of the study has been a focus on the Apostolic Gospel and the contemporary churches’ need to refocus *from* the contemporary messages that have developed into a *salvation onlyism* that is producing comfortable, non-disciples. This is the reason for the vast number of discipleship resources being promoted today that reverse the biblical model commanded by the One *having* *all authority* of baptizing disciples and then teaching them to observe Jesus’ law. Don’t confuse being a disciple with being saved. As these articles show, being a disciple is about making a conscience decision like the first disciples who “left everything and followed Him” (Luke 5:11).

It is time for a *King Jesus* paradigm shift in making disciples. Jesus taught it and the church practiced it. I have given evidence of this in the two sections of this booklet. The first gives an overview of discipleship in the Gospels while the second contends for a contemporary message modeled by the speeches in the book of Acts.

**It’s Time to Get Serious about Biblical Discipleship!**

**Abstract:** Prompted by the decline and closing of churches, Dr. McCuistion promotes a renewal of disciple-making based on the concepts found in the Gospels. Focusing on the initial interactions between Jesus and His first disciples, the four Gospels are examined to determine if they provide the model for the disciple Jesus intended when He gave the commissions recorded in the Synoptics. The investigation centers on the person and nature of Jesus, giving evidence that it does matter who the master is as only Jesus is qualified to receive that honor. This quest is strengthened with what it means to ask, “If Jesus is Lord.” The evidence comes together with the examination of discipleship in the mid-section of Mark (chapters 8, 9, and 10), drawing the conclusion that the foundation of discipleship is Jesus who is also able to claim ownership as the disciple is ransomed to serve King Jesus, who paid the price.

**Discipleship Across the Gospels**

Christian leaders in churches and the academia should be painfully aware of the decline in church membership in the last decade.[[1]](#footnote-1) Church plants are not keeping up with church doors closing. Thus, there is no greater need today than that of dedicated leaders and devoted disciples. The latter is the focus of this article and should be at the heart of every concerned Christian and academic, based on the commission given by Lord Jesus as recorded in the Synoptic Gospels, where Matthew’s *go and make* is reinforced by Mark and Luke’s *proclamation of good news* (Mark 1:1; Luke 24:46-48)*.* The growth of the church recorded in Acts, and Paul’s summary statement of the transformation into a new creation that is appointed an Ambassador for Christ demonstrate a duplicatable potential and power available in this post-church era. Since the Day of Pentecost, there has been no greater need for true disciples.

Thus, the key, theological question raised regarding discipleship is: “Do the Gospels provide the model for the disciple Jesus intended when He gave the commissions recorded in the Synoptics?” The answer is found by a synopsis of “Discipleship Across the Gospels.” Questions that naturally emerge are: 1) Where did Jesus place the emphasis in discipleship? 2) What common concepts are shared by the four gospels? 3) What is the single motivation used by Lord Jesus as the foundation for the commissions given and how should that inform the making of disciples today?

It Matters Who the Master Is

The first question identifies the foundation of discipleship and will be developed under the heading of “It Matters Who the Master Is.” The notion of who is leading should be obvious, yet it is more often assumed and seldom discussed with the passion required to establish it as the fundamental foundation. In fact, a church-wide paradigm shift is mandated to deliver a gospel that is focused more on Jesus and less on salvation and forgiveness, producing a serving disciple rather than a *sit and worship* church member. As Darrell Bock states, “The gospel is about more than death for sin.”[[2]](#footnote-2) It is about the only one who is qualified to initiate God’s Kingdom on earth, establishing the church as the Father’s client agent until King Jesus returns.

**His Master’s Voice**

In the 1950’s, various companies making gramophone and recording devices used a painting from the late 19th century called “His Master’s Voice.” The painter had “the hilarious idea of painting Nipper (the Jack Russel in the painting) on canvas, depicting him as absolutely confounded and wondering how the sounds could be coming out of the unusual object.”[[3]](#footnote-3) Yet, the message of the advertiser was loud and clear – Nipper could not distinguish the difference between the recording and his master. This reminds one of Jesus’ statement, “My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me” (John 10:27). George Beasley correctly identifies the emphasis falling “on the Shepherd’s calling and establishing a relationship with the sheep.”[[4]](#footnote-4)

The relationship with His first followers was initiated by Jesus Himself. These who were to become his Apostles (after all, discipleship precedes giftedness and ministry) had the privilege of a face-to-face invitation from Jesus. Nolland rightly contends that the “discipleship of the Twelve, though unique and unrepeatable, embodies patterns of discipleship which are of a more general relevance.”[[5]](#footnote-5)

The invitation had a single intent – fall in behind Jesus as He was on a mission. Based on the accounts of the first call to discipleship in the Gospels, this question must be answered, “Why would they respond to this call?” They were on the front side of the empty tomb, yet the reason was obvious, and that same reason should still prompt someone to follow Jesus today. That reason – the same conclusion Thomas drew when confronted with the resurrected Jesus – “My Lord and My God” (John 20:27). This gives Jesus the authority to say, “Follow Me.”

**Follow Me**

All four gospels record Jesus’ initial encounter with Peter and Andrew. Matthew and Mark describe a simple picture of Jesus walking along the beach, asking two men to come with him (Matthew 4:18–22; Mark 1:16–20). However, Luke and John offer more dramatic accounts (Luke 5:1–11; John 1:35–51). Seen together, these four witnesses present a leave/follow model that is repeatable in the contemporary church.

The concept of following is expressed in two ways in the four accounts. Matthew and Mark use an adverb (δεῦτε) to support the main verb of making them fishers of men. This adverb is used to exhort or incite and is normally followed by an imperative or aorist subjunctive.[[6]](#footnote-6) However, Matthew and Mark use a future tense to indicate progression. Louw and Nida group this adverb under “spacial extensions,” marking movement in a specified direction,[[7]](#footnote-7) which, in this case, is the future work of fishing for men, that is, making disciples. The summary statement of *follow* appears in all four Gospels using the aorist, active, indicative – punctiliar aorist – indicating the moment a conscious decision was made (Matthew 4:22; Mark 1:18; Luke 5:11; John 1:37). In each case, there was a linguistic emphasis on leaving and following.

Leaving

Leaving was not without cost. Mark, in his typical, simple manner, states they left nets (1:18). Matthew adds value by stating the loss of the family business (4:22). Finally, Luke declares that they left *everything* (5:11)*!* In these and John’s report, the aorist active participle was used to express the leaving and hearing that prompted leaving, which John’s context required (John 1:37). A. T. Robertson supports the idea that it was the aorist active participle that “made the participle so powerful in Greek.”[[8]](#footnote-8) The participle in this form reveals the idea of an expressed nature. Leaving was the indication of a paradigm shift regarding their life’s calling.[[9]](#footnote-9) Bill Hull confirms the need for this conscious decision as being “at the heart of the transformational process.”[[10]](#footnote-10)

Jesus had come to do the will of the Father (Hebrews 10:7). His mission of serving the Father by initiating his kingdom through preaching and teaching would need faithful servants to continue this task after he returns to take His rightful place at the Father’s side. Now that the kingdom has come, it is required of the disciple to drop everything, “because entering the kingdom is more important than even life itself (Mark 8:36).”[[11]](#footnote-11)

Following

Nolland rightly contends that “The abruptness of the call is matched by the immediacy of the following. Following Jesus involved the abandonment right then and there of their lifestyle and material possessions: the call of Jesus is totally disruptive.”[[12]](#footnote-12) The disruption was not the end of the story. Rather, the drama unfolds with a leave/follow scenario that establishes Jesus’ first followers.

The “come after”/follow portrayals graphically illustrates a “follow the leader” commitment.[[13]](#footnote-13) Early in Mark, Peter comes after Jesus. However, the scene changes when Jesus is ready for Jerusalem and suffering, the hour for which He came (John 12:27). Here, Peter moves in front of Jesus, taking the lead by rebuking Him (Mark 8:32). Jesus’ response was to put Peter back in place, “Get behind Me.” The reason was clear. “You are not setting your mind on God’s interests, but man’s” (Mark 8:33). The shift in perspective was the result of a shift in purpose. A similar modification in contemporary outreach has moved *making disciples* away from making the conscious decision to serving King Jesus to the saved and forgiven comfort of *sit and worship* Christianity. The former is God’s interest while the latter belongs to humanity. The same, stern response from Jesus is needed today to create the desired paradigm shift – “Get behind me.” This knee jerk reaction by Jesus gives evidence of His authority, asking Peter, “If I am Lord, then who are you?”

**If Jesus is Lord**

The question of Lordship asks the average *sit and worship* church member what Jesus should mean to them. To facilitate a master/slave response, consider Francis Chan’s insight that prompts some important “**if**” questions, “…we don’t get to write our own job description. **If** Jesus is Lord, then He sets the agenda. **If** Jesus Christ is Lord, then your life belongs to Him.”[[14]](#footnote-14) Thus, the solid rock on which discipleship stands is in the *who*, not the what you may learn or know.

Jesus **is** the *why* of discipleship*,* but it is more complex than just saying He is Lord. We know that saying this is not enough (Matthew 7:21). Rather, discipleship is a decision, a commitment that determines the reason for being a disciple in the first place. Like Jesus who emptied Himself to take the form of a bondservant and become obedient by dying on a cross (Philippians 2:7-8), the decision must be made to empty one’s self and take the form of a bondservant to King Jesus, who is the prototype disciple for whom emptying and humbling were the driving forces in taking up His cross. No less is expected of the Christian today.

The Gospel accounts being considered offer three insights into creating this driving force in someone who has yet to commit to Lord Jesus. As should be evident, this perspective puts disciple-making at the point of sharing the Gospel not after the salvific experience as practiced in the contemporary church. Albert Einstein once said, *“doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results is the definition of insanity* (quoted author’s emphasis)*.”[[15]](#footnote-15)* Thus, Einstein would call the contemporary church insane for continually repeating a process that results in churches closing their doors.

This shift in practice must turn back to the New Testament, especially as revealed in the Gospels and Acts. The epicenter of discipleship is Jesus, not the believer. Believer orientation evangelism focuses on forgiveness and salvation. New Testament evangelism focused on the person and nature of Jesus. After all, it does matter *who* was on the cross.

If I am Lifted Up

In John Stott’s emphasis on the uniqueness of Jesus’ claims, he states:

He spoke like a megalomaniac, but he was the most balanced and modest of human beings. His teaching was fundamentally self-centered – I, I, I; me, me, me – but he was absolutely unselfcentered and gave himself away in the self-sacrificial service of others. He made himself the central figure on the Judgment Day and then got on his hands and knees and washed his Apostles feet.[[16]](#footnote-16)

Now, sitting at the right of the Father, Jesus’ call to become a disciple has been extended through His Ambassadors when He is lifted up. Only then will people be drawn to Jesus (John 12:32).

Looking again into the call of the first disciples, two common traits are evident in the making of disciples. These are the testimony of others as well as Jesus Himself and the miracle Jesus performed. To begin, consideration will be given to the testimony of John the Baptist and Andrew, Peter’s brother. Both are from John’s account.

Testimony

Supporting the prologue of the nature of Jesus, John puts high Christological statements on the lips of others (1:29, 34, 36, 41, 45, 49). Thus, “the confessions provide a credible motive why these men would make the dramatic decision to leave everything behind to follow Jesus.”[[17]](#footnote-17) The response to the “Behold, the Lamb of God” statement would be understood in the light of John as only the forerunner of the anticipated Messiah. From his response, it seems that Andrew understood that the Baptist intended to send them to the someone else.[[18]](#footnote-18)

Andrew’s response indicated some type of messianic expectations, which is not the case today. People aren’t looking for someone to rescue them. The American identity of self-worth stands against the need for any type of messianic figure intent on changing their status quo. Science offers answers that are comfortable as they eliminate the need for a God, judge, or supreme entity. No God mandates self-rule, commonly known as relativism. As Lincoln confesses, “the messianic conviction can be taken for granted.”[[19]](#footnote-19)

Andrew stood outside the norm and not only readily accepted but acknowledged Jesus by the proclamation to his brother, Peter, “We have found the Messiah”. So strong was this conviction in Andrew that when John mentions him, he is always giving testimony of Jesus (6:8; 12:22).[[20]](#footnote-20) John includes another example of this type of testimony with the woman of Samaria who insists that her neighbors “Come, see a man who told me all the things that I *have* done” (4:29). John uses the same adverb here indicating that the woman was coming after Jesus. Come was controlled by the verb “see,” an aorist, active imperative. Insight into her life, the prophetic language: “a time is coming,” and the assertion that “salvation is from the Jews” seems to confirm her conviction of Jesus’ messianic nature.[[21]](#footnote-21) However, contemporary evangelism does not focus on the person and nature of Jesus. Rather, using a believer oriented approach of having a home in heaven, being a sinner, or Jesus lifting burdens, the offering is an answer to life’s problems. Jesus *is* the answer, but they have the wrong question. The question is not “What must *I do* to be saved?” Rather, the question should be “Who is this Jesus and *what should that mean to me.*”

Words and Works

In addition to the testimony of others, Jesus Himself offers evidence as to why they should leave and follow. Luke records two activities of Jesus that confirm Andrew’s messianic message. Robert Stein contends that Luke’s intent is to demonstrate Jesus nature.[[22]](#footnote-22) The first is His authority in teaching and the second, His power over creation.

Jesus uses Peter’s boat as his pulpit to speak to the crowds. While Luke does not give the details of the lesson, it is feasible that something Jesus said convinced Peter to go against his judgment as an experienced fisherman and his human weakness, being tired from working all night. Peter ultimately complies to Jesus’ request, calling Him *Master,* a term used in the New Testament only by Luke (5:5; 8:24, 45; 9:33, 49; 17:13), principally in miracle stories and typically by someone addressing Jesus.[[23]](#footnote-23) Stein confirms this by noting that the *someone* was a disciple.[[24]](#footnote-24) Luke adds further confirmation to Peter’s assessment of Jesus by his response to the miracle where Jesus shows control over nature. Seeing this miracle, Luke changes the title to “‘Lord’ (5:8), acknowledging his own human frailty and sinfulness.”[[25]](#footnote-25)

Moving from this first account into the Gospels, the disciple is soon confronted by the reality of Jesus’ intentions and ultimate hour for which he came (John 12:27). That hour involved a cross – a challenge to every disciple, forming the focus of discipleship.

**The Focus of Discipleship**

Every believer must be a cross-carrying disciple who is a blood-bound bondservant to King Jesus. This is discipleship *DNA,* taken from the prototype disciple, Jesus, and best realized in Jesus’ statements in Mark 8, 9, and 10 that require a *cross-bearing* attitude and commitment.

His Imminent Passion

“He began to teach …” (Mark 8:31) is Mark’s time marker, designating that Jesus’ intentions were set, and His course determined. He was going to Jerusalem to die! Brooks ties the *new* teaching to the reason the disciples *didn’t have a clue* about Jesus’ identity. He contends that they were not “ready to proclaim Jesus as the Christ. He had to die first.”[[26]](#footnote-26) Mark 8:31 gives the first of three predictions, each using different wording, but all including the core elements of the passion – death and resurrection. Having set this backdrop, Mark reveals exchanges between Jesus and the disciples, giving insight into being a cross-bearing disciple.

Set their Mind on God’s Interests (Mark 8:31-38)

This passage has the exchanged reference previously where Jesus commanded Peter to get back in line. Like Jesus, disciples have to be focused on the will of God that mandates the death of Jesus and cross-carrying disciples. In this, Mark insists that a *disciple must deny himself before he can put his mind on God’s interests*. This proposal is in the language of obligation (*must*) with the expectation that the disciple will respond positively to the intended purpose.

Cross-bearing is not just an inconvenience, it is a sacrifice. Cross-bearing is the passion to give Jesus everything He needs to advance the kingdom. “Such ‘self-denial’ is on a different level altogether from giving up chocolates for Lent. ‘It is not the denial of something to the self, but the denial of the self itself.’”[[27]](#footnote-27)

Be Last and Servant of All (Mark 9:30-37)

The next exchange built on Jesus’ announcement of His self-sacrifice deals with the attitude of the disciple.[[28]](#footnote-28) Jesus’ disciples must learn that “in the kingdom ordinary human values are reversed.”[[29]](#footnote-29) Edwards suggest that cross-bearing requires taking the journey with Jesus on “the road of humiliation to Jerusalem.”[[30]](#footnote-30) Before anyone can pick up a cross, they must put their own interests away and walk the path of self-denial that was at the heart of the first conversation about Jesus’ death and resurrection (8:34). Following Jesus to get to heaven is focused on self-interest, not doing the will of the Father. Whereas, cross-bearing sets the mind on God's interest.

Discipleship is about *being* a follower of Jesus. By *being,* it is meant that the disciple is devoted to incorporating the very nature and Spirit of Jesus into their lives. Jesus is clear that humility produces a *servant mentality* that is not thinking less of yourself but thinking about yourself less.

Be Able to Drink the Cup that Jesus Drank (Mark 10:32-45)

Jesus’ final trial uses His own motivation to serve as the standard for His disciples. His willingness to offer Himself challenges His followers to be willing to “drink the cup Jesus drank” (10:38). By this, Jesus is asking them to pick up crosses, take bullets, or whatever phrase that speaks to total commitment. As with the second prediction when Jesus added the betrayal (handing over), He adds some very descriptive forms of torture and humiliation – mocking, spitting upon, and scourging, asking if they are willing to suffer the same.

It is now necessary to bring this to a close. Mark’s conclusion is the most appropriate at this juncture. “For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many” (10:45).

**Conclusion**

Being convinced of the person and nature of Jesus is the foundation of discipleship. Nowhere is this more evident than in the picture of ownership the Gospels paint with the image of ransom. This picture conjures up the notion of a slave being sold on the open market. “Who gives me five, no, make it six for this fine specimen of a slave. He is strong, works hard and can be left alone to finish a job. You’ll get your money’s worth with this one. Who will give me five?” Jesus steps forward, lifts both hands to His side, crying, “I will pay the price.” Jesus sacrifices all He is for this slave, bringing him into His kingdom.

Now, what to do with this ransomed person. Does Jesus free him to go his way? May it never be! Jesus does free him from the bondage of the taskmaster who had enslaved this person. However, His intent is to make them His servant, designed (gifted) for kingdom work. **This is a disciple**! It is a slave freed from the tyranny of the fear of death (Hebrews 2:15), transferred into the kingdom of the Beloved Son (Colossians 1:15), bought with a price and is now a *living sacrifice* fully devoted to his Lord. **This is a disciple**! Now, teach the slave how to please his master.

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**The Speeches of Acts as a Model for Contemporary Preaching**

**Abstract**: Luke’s record of the early church in Acts takes two forms – narrative and speeches. While speeches were common in histories, Luke’s thorough investigation from which he promises “to write in consecutive order so that you may know the exact truth about the things you have been taught” (Luke 1:3b-4) reveals via the speeches of Jesus’ disciples the common confession of the faith once delivered. Put into context, they take the form of gospel proclamation intended to convict and convince the listener of Jesus’ nature and intent. This article contends that the disciples’ speeches form the model for the Christocentric confession of the early church that should be used today, modeling Matthew’s Great Commission for disciple-making. The thesis will be defended exploring the methodology revealed in the evangelistic speeches, emphasizing an approach beneficial to contemporary preaching and unpacking Luke’s Christology revealed in the speeches given by Jesus’ disciples. From this, the author’s conclusion stresses that the Lukan model of making disciples must be based on a conscious decision regarding Jesus’ nature and mission rather than salvific in emphasis ­– forgiveness and going to heaven – as is common in contemporary evangelism. This conclusion is based on the rapid, sustained growth reported by Luke that is duplicatable today.

**The Speeches of Acts as a Model for Contemporary Preaching**

The Gospels present the historical Jesus in action. He is preaching, teaching, healing, and performing other miracles to demonstrate His authority and right to initiate the Kingdom of God as the worthy Lamb exalted to the right hand of the Father. While the verbs employed by the Gospels depict Jesus as a man of action, Luke moves Him from the historical setting, making Him the subject of the primary speeches spoken by His disciples. Changing from verbs to nouns, Luke focuses the attention on Jesus, promoting the preeminence that Paul declared to be the intent of the Father (Colossians 1:18). With one-third of Acts presented in speeches, “Luke has used the technique of placing Christological conversations in the mouths of key figures at important times throughout the story.”[[31]](#footnote-31) These conversations promoted explosive growth in the early church, and that growth is duplicatable today.

Thus, the key theological question raised by Luke’s record is: “How does Luke understand disciple-making in light of the Christology revealed in the speeches of Acts?” The answer is found in the evidence from the speeches delivered by followers of Jesus, forming the model for the Christocentric confession of the early church that should be the contemporary model of preaching, forming the basis and practice of Great Commission disciple-making. The focus of this work will be on speeches given to non-believers, demonstrating their approach and content. Thus, the first task is to expose the methodology used to present the Christological Kerygma.

**Methodology Revealed in the Evangelistic Speeches**

The task of finding a representative statement that epitomizes the commission intensity of Acts would seem daunting even if one chooses from an oft-repeated verse – “you shall be My witnesses …” in 1:8, “No other name …” of 4:12, or the ever-popular, Restoration plea, “Repent and be baptized …” in 2:38. However, as David Peterson remarks, “Luke presents a final summary of the first main section of his book that began with a description of life in the Jerusalem church in 2:42–47,”[[32]](#footnote-32) summarizing growth by “added to the church” (2:47) to “more added to the Lord” showing constant expansion in Jerusalem (5:14). Rick Flanders observes that “The math begins with addition.” Then we read that “the number of the disciples was multiplied (6:1, 7).”[[33]](#footnote-33) Acts 5:42 provides the transitional key prompting change from addition to multiplication by introducing two terms still employed in contemporary disciple-making – teaching and preaching. How Luke uses these terms reveals part of his methodology. Before unpacking them, it is necessary to identify the issue in the current method of disciple-making.

The Issue at Hand

Following Craig Blomberg’s understanding of disciple-making in Matthew’s commission, there is a contemporary view of discipleship described as a “perennially incomplete, life-long task.”[[34]](#footnote-34) Disciples are always forming and never reaching. This attitude describes the typical Adult Sunday School class from which no one graduates, suggesting that there may be an unachievable level of knowledge to be a *true* disciple of Jesus.

Further, it is a reasonable assumption that most in church leadership, as well as academia, might agree with this assessment. The multitude of books on the subject strongly suggest you must teach someone to be a disciple. Greg Ogden contends that discipleship is spiritual formation based on the basic practices, core biblical/theological truth, character, and engagement of church and world.[[35]](#footnote-35) The contention is that a disciple must know basic church doctrine, especially that of the group (denomination) to which they belong. Thus, discipling classes emphasize teaching basic doctrines and right living to make disciples.[[36]](#footnote-36)

This approach is based on the *save and disciple* method that is the outgrowth of the Great Awakening and the advent of the *being saved* theology revealed in “a liturgical rite which, when performed, grants one assurance that one is a genuine believer. By reciting the ‘sinners’ prayer,’ parents and friends assure you that you are an actual Christian now.”[[37]](#footnote-37) Or, as Mont Smith contends that Restorationists “sell remission of sins for a dip in the water.”[[38]](#footnote-38) This type of evangelism has created and duplicated the *sit and worship* believer who seldom becomes involved in ministry and, less seldom, makes a disciple. This is not the pattern in Acts that multiplied believers. Rather, “they kept right on teaching and preaching Jesus *as* the Christ” (5:42; literally “Jesus the Christ”) that supports making disciples as the point of conversion, not *discipling* after conversion as practiced today. This is supported by the approach illustrated in 5:42 under the terms teaching and preaching, to which this essay now turns.

Teaching

Luke’s use of the term teach(*didaskō*) in 5:42, and elsewhere in Acts, reveals instruction in a setting that can be either formal or informal.[[39]](#footnote-39) Seldom does the modern-day evangelist employ the idea of teaching non-believers, yet this was the practice of the early church. The primary subject was the person and nature of Jesus, not the sinful nature of the listener or remission of sins.

Twelve of the sixteen times Paul uses the term, the object of teaching is Jesus and the Gospel (4:2, 18; 5:21, 25, 28, 42; 11:26; 15:35; 18:11, 25; 20:20-21; 28:31). Ten of the twelve are evangelistic in nature (4:2, 18; 5:28, 42; 11:26; 15:35; 18:11, 25; 20:20-21; 28:31). Only two imply that the teaching was done in a church setting (homes or temple with believers; 5:21, 25). To reinforce the usage of *teaching* as evangelistic, consider the setting and the content.

**The Setting**

Teaching takes place in two settings – public, in the temple or some common place of public assembly (2:46, 5:20, 5:25, 5:42) and in homes (2:46, 5:42, 20:20). A similar expression occurs in 20:20 where Luke contrasts the public (*dēmosios*) with house to house. In 2:46, the same settings are given, but Luke states that the houses are for fellowship. Considering the use of “and” (καὶ) in 2:42 connecting the teachings to fellowship, it is feasible that they shared the apostles’ doctrine as part of the fellowship. Two of these passages were evangelistic with the stated content of “the whole message of this life” (5:20) and “repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ” (20:20). While the impression of many today is that preaching is done in a church setting and teaching is something done *after* someone is saved, these passages do not support this. Rather, teaching happens before someone is a disciple to convince them of who Jesus is and why He should be followed. Focusing on the death of Christ, as the modern evangelist does, does not make disciples. Rather, it produces *sit and worship* church members.

**Luke’s Idea of Discipleship**

For Luke, as well as in the Gospels, being a disciple is a completed state or condition of being “in Christ.” In this relationship, the disciple is ready to be baptized and taught (the order in Matthew’s commission). Parenthetically, this does not change the purpose of baptism as the disciple now needs to be made clean (remission of sins) and empowered for service (gift of the Holy Spirit). This observation is obvious in the twenty-eight times Luke uses the term disciple as someone capable of being numbered (6:1, 7), form a congregation (6:2), be part of a group, (13:52, 18:27, 20:1) or named individually (16:1). As a verb, teaching (μαθητεύω) is used only once in 14:21 about which Hans Weder correctly states, “This verb characterizes the central quality of existence as a disciple.”[[40]](#footnote-40) This statement supports the idea that discipleship is not a process. Rather, it is a state in which one enters. While Paul does not use the term disciple, his comparable concept is to be “in” Christ. This graphic demonstrates this principle as given in Matthew’s Commission.

Baptize the disciple

Disciple: Someone Convicted of who Jesus is

**The Containers**

Luke places his theology in *containers* that are general concepts summarizing the specifics of his Christological emphasis focused on the person of Jesus and His ministry. Luke used four containers to reflect his theology:

1. The name of Jesus controlled by ἐπὶ τῷ ὀνόματι where the preposition ἐπὶ signifies the content (4:18; 5:28)[[41]](#footnote-41)
2. The person of Jesus controlled by περὶ τοῦ Ἰησοῦ where the preposition περὶ signifies content as well (18:25; 28:31)[[42]](#footnote-42)
3. The word of the Lord (τὸν λόγον τοῦ κυρίου) as the direct object of teaching and preaching (εὐαγγελιζόμενοι) (15:35) and the word of God (τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ) (18:11)
4. “in Jesus” as a catch-all container used to convey the idea of the resurrection of the dead (4:2), literally, “in Jesus the resurrection” for emphasis[[43]](#footnote-43) (Cf. 26:23)

The conclusion drawn is that Luke’s understanding of teaching is the common confession (ὁμολογέω) of who Jesus is and why that should matter. The very same message should be *taught* today, producing believers who want to learn the church teachings and, finding their giftedness, serving the family of God effectively.

Preaching

Teaching is connected to preaching in 5:42 where the first occurrence of εὐαγγελίζω – to preach good news – appears, having Jesus as the object of the message. The term provides a technical, Christological-soteriological meaning with the containers of Jesus (8:35; 17:18), Christ Jesus (5:42), and Lord Jesus (11:20).[[44]](#footnote-44) Donald Hagner confirms that the universal authority of Jesus is the basis of the universal mission of the church.[[45]](#footnote-45)

Commenting on 5:42, John Polhill visualizes the practices of preaching and teaching in an A-B-B-A chiasm,[[46]](#footnote-46) which closely follows the pattern of the Great Commission:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Acts 5:42 | Matthew 28:19-20 |
| A – The Temple – Preaching | The World |
| B – Homes  B – Teaching | Teaching them to observe all that Jesus commanded (Matthew 28:20) |
| A – Preach the Gospel | Making Disciples |

As before, the setting gives a picture of the mission field of the early church.

**The Setting**

Leon Morris gives *“Go”* an imperatival force in Matthew’s commission where “Jesus was commanding his followers to go as well as to make disciples, though the emphasis falls on the making of disciples.”[[47]](#footnote-47) From the references below, it is obvious that the first disciples took Jesus seriously:

5:42 in the temple and from house to house

8:4 Those scattered from Jerusalem

8:25 Many villages of the Samaritans.

8:35 In a chariot, to the south on the road that descends from Jerusalem to Gaza (Philip and the eunuch)

8:40 Passing through Azotus, until he came to Caesarea

11:20, 15:35 Antioch

14:6-7 Cities of Lycaonia, Lystra and Derbe, and the surrounding region

16:10 Macedonia

17:18 Athens

These passages are indications of the satisfaction of Luke’s commission in 1:8, with disciples advancing across cultural thresholds. These missionaries that William Larkin states, “must also be theologians,” discover the “true power of the gospel.”[[48]](#footnote-48)

**The Containers**

The verb εὐαγγελίζω is used fifteen times in Acts and is associated with different topics (containers):

1. The word (non-specific) (5:41–42; 8:4)
2. Jesus/Lord Jesus (5:12, 25, 35, 40; 10:36–38; 11:20)
3. Word of God (13:32–33; 14:5–7, 15–17, 21–22; 15:35)
4. Jesus and the resurrection (16:10; 17:18).[[49]](#footnote-49)

Please note how the content of preaching and teaching parallel each other: number two is similar to numbers one and two above, numbers three and four are the same. A further example is found in 14:21, connecting preaching the Gospel(εὐαγγελισάμενοί) to making disciples (μαθητεύσαντες), using the conjunction *καὶ* that marks the “sequence of closely related events.”[[50]](#footnote-50) Thus, for Luke, a disciple is someone who has made a conscious decision in response to the gospel message that God was in *Christ*, reconciling the world to Himself (2 Corinthians 5:19), all according to the Scriptures. The response was to a proclaimed message about Jesus, a common theme in Acts.

**Conception of Proclamation**

Gerhard Friedrich lists twenty-eight different Greek verbs translated by the English *preach*, confessing not only a “poverty of vocabulary, but of the loss of something which was a living reality in primitive Christianity.”[[51]](#footnote-51) Like the two on the road to Emmaus, the early Christians “spoke” the message burnt into their hearts. “We cannot stop speaking about what we have seen and heard” (4:20) declare Peter and John. What they had seen and heard gave them the message – their Christological Kerygma.

**Evangelistic Speeches**

Simon Kistemaker counts twenty-six speeches made by apostles, Christian leaders and non-Christian Jews and Gentiles,[[52]](#footnote-52) all with a definable structure as the message was the Lord’s and not their own. Hans Conzelmann states that they had “persistent elements in the structure,” including among other elements, a Christological kerygma with scriptural proof.[[53]](#footnote-53) Martin Dibelius came to the same conclusion, identifying the kerygma as “Jesus’ life, passion, and resurrection,” typically emphasizing Apostolic witness,[[54]](#footnote-54) which is the same structure Paul uses in 1 Corinthians 15.

The Christological Kerygma

The aim of this research is to present evidence that the speeches in Acts form the model for the Christocentric confession of the early church that should be the contemporary model of preaching. Having examined the methodology of the evangelistic speeches, the topic now turns to the specifics of Luke’s Christology. This must start with Jesus, the heart of the message.

**Jesus, the Heart of the Message**

While this may sound like a given, it raises the question regarding the contemporary, evangelistic message that is focused on the death of Christ and forgiveness. Darrell Bock makes the point well, “If the gospel were only about death for sin … Romans 6, alive to God.”[[55]](#footnote-55) The intent of this is to show that discipleship is about the power of the resurrection. Marion Soards emphasis validates Bock’s sentiment by noting that the speeches are about “God’s will and work in terms of Christology.”[[56]](#footnote-56) It was the Christological kerygma that motivated the rapid expansion, not the pleas for forgiveness and going to heaven that marks the contemporary approach. It is by duplicating the Christological message as closely as possible that the contemporary church will have multiplying results, **producing serving disciples**. Thus, the Christological Kerygma was based on two basic elements – the death and resurrection of Jesus and why He was the only one qualified for this ministry. To validate this, a cursory review of the evangelistic speeches confirms the emphasis on the resurrection. Additionally, it will demonstrate that the focus on the crucifixion was not related to the “sins of the world.” Rather, it was generally tied directly to the sin of the rejection of the Messiah.

**The Message**

An overview of nine speeches (2:14-36; 3:12-26; 4:8-12; 5:29-32; 7:2-53; 10:34-43; 13:16-41; 17:22-31; 26:2-23) shows that all accounts reference the resurrection, but the crucifixion is not mentioned in three (7:2-53; 17:22-31; 26:2-23). It would seem natural for Stephen to include it before the Sanhedrin (7:2-53), but he only inferred a resurrection by stating that he sees Jesus at the right hand of God. However, there would be no need to include the method of death in Paul’s discourse in Athens. Rather, he made the resurrection the climax of his message. Additionally, the way Paul presented the message before Agrippa put the emphasis on resurrection because of the appearance of Jesus on the road to Damascus. The manner of death was incidental. Finally, the resurrection received multiple references in some accounts.

How then, does the contemporary evangelist justify beginning with the nature of humanity as sinner and work so diligently toward forgiveness? Bock asks, “Is the gospel about being somewhere for a long time?” His reply, “The gospel is about more than death for sin.”[[57]](#footnote-57)

**Death and Sin**

By way of explanation, the relation of the cross to sin is found more often in the writings after Acts. Luke relates sin to the message in five of the nine passages (2:14-36; 3:12-26; 5:29-32; 10:34-43; 13:16-41). In the conversion of Saul, Ananias connects washing away sins to baptism (22:16). In context of the speeches, the sins would be the rejection and crucifixion of Jesus (2:36; 3:17-18; 5:30). Only in 10:43 and 13:38 is sin generic relating to judgment. By count, sin and forgiveness are mentioned only six times and repentance only four, while the resurrection is included twelve times in eight of the accounts and implied in the ninth.

**Conclusion**

It is fitting to bring this journey through Acts to a conclusion. The growth of the church over the first few years was phenomenal. Today, facing a post-church era “celebrated as New Age Apostasy that flourishes in what is known as the Emerging Church,”[[58]](#footnote-58) the contemporary disciple must revisit the message of the evangelistic speeches and make a major paradigm shift to move the salvific emphasis off the believer and forgiveness of sins and onto Christ Jesus and the resurrection. Such a shift to a Christocentric message requires the application of the Acts pattern for completing the Matthean commission. To do this, the following shifts are mandatory:

1. Focus on the person *on* the cross, not the cross. “We preach Christ, the crucified one” places the emphasis on Jesus as Paul uses the perfect tense of the participle crucified (*estaurōmenon*), indicating that he remains the crucified one (1 Corinthians 1:23).[[59]](#footnote-59)
2. The emphasis of the message should be on the resurrection and the resulting new creation of which the disciple learns when he is taught all that Jesus commanded.
3. From the sinfulness of the person to the universal authority of Lord Jesus.

This shift will make disciples – disciples committed to Jesus’ lordship, desiring to know and serve.

In closing, consider the judgment of the Sanhedrin regarding Peter and John, “They observed their confidence and understood that they were uneducated and untrained men, they were amazed, and *began* to recognize them as having been with Jesus” (4:13). Can this be said of the disciples being made today? If not, why? Could it be that the focus on Jesus is missing? So, as the Lord told Paul, “Do not be afraid any longer, but go on speaking and do not be silent; for I am with you” (Ac 18:9–10a).

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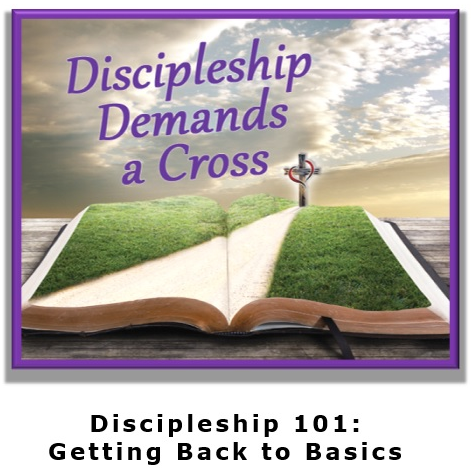
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***Discipleship Demands a Cross*** is dedicated to Jesus as the foundation needed to build devoted disciples who will do the needed kingdom work that will change the world, as believers respond to *what should this mean to me?* This is what happened according to the book of Acts. Let’s make it happen again.



The title – *Discipleship Demands a Cross* – offers some insight into the anticipated response to the “W*hat should this mean to me?”* question. To facilitate a positive response, this work will examine the *why* or motivation for discipleship rather than the what is seen in the others I’ve read or reviewed. Francis Chan offers an insight into this concept, prompted by some important “**if**” questions, “…we don’t get to write our own job description. **If** Jesus is Lord, then He sets the agenda. **If** Jesus Christ is Lord, then your life belongs to Him” (*Crazy Love* 216-217). Thus, the solid rock on which discipleship stands is in the *who*, not the what you may learn or know.

Jesus **is** also the *why,* but it is more complex than just saying He is Lord. We know that saying this is not enough (Matthew 7:21). Rather, discipleship is a decision, a commitment that we determine to make the reason for being a disciple in the first place. Like Jesus, who “emptied Himself, taking the form of a bondservant” (Philippians 2:7a), we too must empty ourselves and take the form of a bondservant *to* King Jesus. For Jesus, the prototype disciple, emptying and humbling defined His nature that motivated Him to take up His cross. Ours can be no less.

**About the Author**: Dr. McCuistion is the Director of ***Teaching4Jesus Ministries*** with a vision of being a resource for making cross-bearing disciples of King Jesus. This is accomplished by the mission that focuses daily on challenging, inspiring, and equipping Christians to impact the growth of the body of Christ in love according to each disciple’s ability. This begins by focusing on Jesus, His word and church.

A person wearing glasses

Description automatically generated with low confidence

Cover and artwork by Christine Mantush

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