

“What Is A Christian? #5: Extended Warranty”

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Scripture: Matthew 28:16-20

Prayer

Consumer Advocate Clark Howard has few kind words for extended warranties. He really hates them. Why? Because generally you pay more for the warranty than the so-called protection is worth. As we approach the holiday shopping season, Clark will again denounce these instruments of deception and ill gotten gain. He will say that there are too many loopholes in the coverage. Or the product is so dependable that you do not need to worry about premature failure anyway. (Like how many times would you have used an extended warranty on your refrigerator?)

So why, if these extended warranties are so bad, does Clark Howard continue to talk about them? Because people still spend hard-earned money to buy this generally unnecessary protection. But why do we do that? What are we afraid of? Simply put, we are afraid of things we cannot control. The risk, however slight, of a failure, a breakdown, drives us to buy peace of mind through these so-called warranties. Yes, I said *buy* peace of mind. How many times have you proudly proclaimed, “But it has a great warranty!” when the only great thing about it was the price? When things go wrong that are out of our control, we want something that can make things right for us.

We are looking for assurance in all the wrong places! We might have a sense of uneasiness as Jesus commissions his first disciples in the text for today, or as we move ahead in the implementation of our ministry growth plans. The end of Jesus’ ministry had come, and he meets with the disciples after the resurrection to give them instructions for the future. Now, you talk about the Man with the Plan?! This was it! In these 5 verses, Jesus gives the disciples and, by extension, all of us *his* plan. And frankly, it still scares us to death, so we try to find ways around it or choose simply to ignore its importance.

It scares us because we do not immediately see how we can accomplish these goals. We either do not take Jesus seriously, or we panic and become paralyzed by fear and become convinced of our inadequacy. Remember who is giving the instructions here. It is Jesus, and that makes this set of instructions different from any other we will ever receive because he alone holds the authority over heaven and earth.

The Authority – Who Jesus Is

The authority of Jesus is a recurring theme in Matthew’s account of the gospel. Jesus teaches with authority in Chapter 7, he heals with authority in Chapter 8, he forgives with authority in Chapter 9, he has authority over unclean spirits in Chapter 10. he has authority over death in Chapter 28. Now comes the sweeping climax, “All authority in heaven and earth has been given to me.” That puts us in our place, doesn’t it? In a day when everyone wants to be his own authority in almost every area of life, and we even want authority over others (for classic examples, check out the 2008 Presidential campaign), do you see that we are not going very far with the gospel if we don’t first recognize the authority of Christ? We can idolize Hollywood, revere earthly leaders, or bank on the economy, but real authority over every aspect of life is with Jesus. This is the *risen* Christ speaking – the one who has overcome the world and even death. Why would we ever consider placing our faith and trust in anything less? Why would we ever refuse or second guess a directive from one who has authority over all things in heaven

and earth? The answer becomes clearer when we realize that, like the disciples on the mountain in Galilee, we are sent with authority.

The Great Commission – What Jesus Requires of All of Us

We are *sent* by the risen Lord. Someone has pointed out the obvious, that the word Gospel begins with **go**. Scholars have had trouble translating the Greek New Testament word for 'go'. Some English translations of the New Testament have 'go', some have 'move out', and others have 'get moving.' All are good because they all capture the mood of Jesus' dynamic command to the disciples.

The property line of a congregation is not the outer perimeter of its concern. The mandate to encounter the world for Christ does not end at the edge of our comfort zones. The commission we have been given calls us to examine our lives and the life of the church in light of these words. All of our activities and programs -- our budget and our stewardship programs -- all that we do must somehow relate to these few words. *"Go and make disciples..."*

It is not that each one of us should rush out of here today with our bibles and briefcases and hit the streets, knock on doors and buttonhole the lost. It is not that we shouldn't have suppers, social gatherings, fellowship events, or great times together.

It is, however, a challenge to take a careful look at our life together.

- * We are not a club.
- * We are not a fraternal organization.
- * We are not a book club.
- * We are not a social service organization.
- * We are not a restaurant.
- * We are not a university.
- * Or even a seminary!

There may be times in our life together when we do things that resemble a school or a club or a social service organization. But Christ has issued a blueprint that defines the heart of who we are and empowers us to do it. It is a Great Commission. That can be a daunting task. Many people might *prefer* to attend a book review or attend a supper than to go about "making disciples."

But this authority is the imperative or command to *make disciples*. All the rest are adverbs. Making disciples, that's where the baptizing and the teaching come in. To baptize is not some sort of spiritual inoculation. To baptize in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is to bring into a relationship with the one true God, so the renewed person in Christ can come forward and live in that relationship. That is also what the teaching is all about. "Teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you" is not something that is accomplished in "ten easy lessons." It's not a "done deal" at confirmation. It's a life-long process of growing in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

A pastor's four-year-old son watched his father administer baptism in church one morning "in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost." That afternoon in playful imitation the boy got a bowl of water from the kitchen and three times he sprinkled some on his father as Dad sat in the living room reading the newspaper. "I baptize you," the toddler solemnly said, "in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Go" (*Insights*, 6-14-87). That toddler didn't quite have the words right, but I

wonder if we have we been baptized in the name of the “Holy Go” or are we living by the “unholy stop”?

Now is the time for us to go. Now is the time to go because we don’t know how long we’ll have to get the word of life in Christ out to a dying world. A little girl was lost in her own city. Along came a stranger, so she asked him for help. “Can you help me find my way home?” she asked. “Just tell me where the cemetery is. We live just this side of the cemetery.” To which the stranger mumbled, “Don’t we all” (*Insights*, ’87). Because we all live “just this side of the cemetery,” it is important for us as the followers of Jesus to go out with the word of forgiveness and life. We obviously can’t share the good news with someone who has gone “to the other side.”

This commissioning account is remarkable. Matthew does not mention any dialog with the disciples. Maybe they were so stunned they could not speak. Maybe they were afraid to challenge him because he spoke with such authority. Whatever the reason, the focus is entirely on Jesus. In our day of group dynamics, we would not advocate this approach to get your potential “ambassadors” onboard with you. But remember that Jesus said, “You did not choose me but I chose you” (John 15:16). He wants us working with him because he loves us.

Matthew also reports a division among the disciples – some believed while others doubted. So from the beginning the Church is composed of those who are “with the program” and those who “didn’t quite get it.” But from the mountain in Galilee to today and tomorrow, we still go forward with the authority of Christ.

And perhaps surprisingly, Jesus makes no comment here about preceding events – his trial, crucifixion, and even his resurrection. **All that – the past - pales in contrast to the mission Jesus is calling them to.** (*Proclamation 6*, Pentecost 1A, pp. 20f). Now, I hope you understand what Matthew is saying. He is not discounting or dismissing the crucifixion and resurrection. That’s foundational. But with that foundation well in place, the risen Christ, in all his authority, is saying, “Don’t spend your time wistfully gazing at the past – go into the world with that word of victory and life.”

What About the Extended Warranty?

In many ways God calls us to go and make disciples. It is doing what Jesus wants, what he commands: whenever you pray for a member of your family to come to know Jesus as Lord and Savior; or when you have a neighbor over for coffee and you talk about how God is helping you to be a better parent; when you invite a friend to the a study group and work with a child as an Angel Buddy; when you ask a co-worker to come to Men’s Club, or to a Circle meeting; when you bring a friend to HeartLight or VIPs or you teach a study group, or you teach English as a second language, or a hundred other ways that God calls us and gives us gifts and gives us the Holy Spirit to fulfill his great commission. You and I are part of the greatest commission ever, and Jesus is with us through it all.

One writer says these words of Jesus are “not chastisement for doubting disciples, but rather words of *empowerment for believers*” (*Insights*, 5-22-05). When you do your best to verbalize to a friend what Jesus means to you... when you pray for missions... when you work and serve as a Christian mom or dad... when you give to your church to support its mission to its community and world, you have the assurance of your risen Lord, “I am with you always, to the end of the age.” You have the empowerment of being sent into that opportunity by the very one who has all authority in heaven and on earth. Now we can disagree with Clark Howard. That is an extended warranty worth having.

Jesus charges us to bring healing, to seek justice, to touch people who are poor, to be with the sick and to visit those who are in prison. Now that is something that is worth giving yourself to for a lifetime. What a charge! What a challenge! What a mission! What an opportunity! Jesus uses that unlimited authority that has been given him for the sake of touching people's lives and calling us to do the same. Each of us is part of and should be caught up in this mission, this great commission that Jesus has left for us.

Jesus gives us a mission that is far bigger than anything we could accomplish on our own, and in part he does that so we will depend on him. We will recognize that it is in him and through him and with him that his great commission will be accomplished. Do you take Jesus at his word that he is always with us, that he will work in us and through us? It is true. The more that we depend on him and enjoy and look forward to and relish that relationship with him, the more we see him at work. Jesus is the one who has all authority. He gives us the ultimate assignment, and he promises that he will be with us to accomplish it.

One more thing: We tend to equate warranty and guarantee. If we have either, we *know* we will succeed and will have something to fall back on when things go wrong. Why then does the church – you and me – doubt that God can do what God wants to do with us and through us? My conclusion is that we do not really believe the warranty will do what it says. It says, “And surely I am with you always, even to the very end of the age.” But you know, the English is a bit anemic compared to the Greek text. It should read more like this: “***And get this... I am with you day in and day out until my purpose is fulfilled and earthly history comes to an end.***” No expiration date, no loopholes, purchased at an unimaginable price, but given to us freely if we will but believe him. As Clark Howard would say, “That’s a deal!”

Prayer