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“The harvest truly is great, but the laborers are few: pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he would send forth laborers into his harvest” (Luke 10:2)

May 2020

No. 413

IDENTIFYING JESUS' COMMANDMENTS

About eight years ago, my 82-year-old (at that time) father shamed me into memorizing the scripture. He was trying to maintain his health and was making two one-mile walks a day down on the farm. On the weekend I'd visit and walk with him, and he would quote scripture to me, mainly from Peter. I had been studying the Bible all my life, but never simply tried to memorize whole chapters and letters. As I listened to Dad, it made me consider my own efforts as coming up short of seeking first the kingdom of God.

So I began to memorize, following Dad's lead in Peter. I will

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admit that I am a very slow memorizer. I don't memorize to string words together. I memorize to string thoughts together, sometimes taking weeks on a passage and months on a chapter. This has opened my eyes to truths in the scriptures, sometimes hidden "between the lines," that I have heard and overlooked for years.

A life changing, eye opening moment occurred while working on 2 Peter 3:2 as Peter wrote that we may "*be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandments of us the apostles of the Lord and Savior...*"

As I broke the verse down for my mind to memorize, I realized that I had never thought about the commandments of the apostles. Where are they, and what are they? I know about the Ten Commandments and the laws in Exodus, Leviticus, and Deuteronomy; but where are the New Testament commandments? As I began to search, I realized they are everywhere in the New Testament. They may not be framed as a "Thou shalt..." or a "Thou shalt not...", but almost every chapter has at least one command of the apostles in it.

So a search for the New Testament commandments began about five years ago. I thought it only fitting to begin at the beginning of the New Testament and try to identify Jesus' commandments first. I'm presenting this to you not so much to show you the commandments I have found, but to open your eyes to a deeper way of looking into the scripture to see the layers of meaning that have been there all along. Many of you have already realized this, I'm sure.

As we begin to identify Jesus' commandments, it will help to identify certain types of commands to make them easier to see. It seemed to me that His commandments fell into five categories, in general:

1. Some were situation specific

2. Some were situation specific, but let us see what can be done
3. Some were simply stated as facts
4. Some are universal
5. Some were neglectfully simple

As we proceed with this study, I think you will see the purpose and usefulness of these categories. So let's examine each one.

Some were situation specific. Let me ask you a loaded question. Do all the commandments of Jesus apply to us today? Think carefully before you commit. Consider these specific situations and commandments:

- Jesus to the Samaritan woman at the well: "*Give me to drink.*" (John 4:7)
- Jesus to the nobleman at Cana: "*Go your way; your son lives.*" (John 4:50)
- Jesus to the impotent man: "*Rise, take up your bed, and walk.*" (John 5:8)

While it is clear that Jesus gave a command for something specific to be done, it should also be clear that these were specific commands for specific situations, and the command itself does not apply to us now.

Some were situation specific, but let us see what can be done. While many situation specific commands do not apply to us, there are some that let us see a principle that does apply to us even though the specific situation does not. Consider these two tremendous examples:

- Jesus to the impotent man, after He had spoken away his sins: "*Behold, you are made whole: sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto you.*" (John 5:14)
- Jesus to the woman taken in adultery, after Jesus had spoken away her sins: "*go, and sin no more.*" (John 8:11)

- Even though those two specific situations don't apply to us in that we are not to seek verbal forgiveness from Jesus, it is unmistakable what Jesus' expectations are. That is to sin no more! If Jesus didn't think we could do it, I don't think He would have said it to them. This commandment is not written in a table of stone or engraved across the front of our communion tables, but the power and directness of these three words is enough to save souls and marriages, if we are attentive!

Some were simply stated as facts. This has proven to be the biggest category of Jesus' commandments. I have found many life-changing commandments simply stated as a fact and often embedded in another story. Why would Jesus "hide" commandments in facts instead of outright declarations? Consider these two points:

1) To a smart man, a fact has the weight of a commandment. For a smart man will take the facts, think through the consequences of what he is about to do, and make the right decision about whether to do it or not. Isn't that all a commandment is supposed to do?

2) A command stated only as a fact is not as likely to stir up the rebellious nature of man. For example, if after church service one Sunday morning the preacher walks to the back of the church and stands there defiantly barring the doors and telling everyone that they can't go out, what would people think and do? Even if we didn't know why, our rebellious nature might want us to force our way out. But on the other hand, if the preacher stood at the back doors and calmly said,

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“I just looked out on the porch and there are three rattlesnakes out there, acting mad and striking at each other. You can go out there if you want to. It’s up to you.” Now what would our reaction be? We probably couldn’t get to the other exit doors fast enough. Instead of rebelling at authority, we were glad to obey authority because we realized it was in our own best interest.

Jesus knew this about our human nature. He left us many more facts in the gospels than outright commandments. We just have to train our eyes to see them. Consider these:

- Jesus to Nicodemus: “*Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God*” (John 3:3). A smart man will do anything to see the kingdom of God.
- Jesus to the Jews: “*Whoso eats my flesh, and drinks my blood, has eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day*” (John 6:54). A smart man will do anything to be raised up instead of being sent to damnation.
- Jesus to the Pharisees: “*I am the light of the world: he that follows me shall not walk in darkness...*” (John 8:12). A smart man will always choose the light over spiritual darkness.

Some are universal. Sometimes Jesus spoke of rules that were not specific to the Old or New Testament, but are universal. They were rules and principles that God wanted his children to observe regardless of the dispensation. Consider these:

- Jesus to his disciples: “*Say not you, There are yet four months, and then comes harvest? Behold, I say unto you, Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields: for they are white already unto harvest*” (John 4:35). God wanted his people harvested in Old and New Testament times.
- Jesus to the hungry people: “*Labor not for the meat which perishes, but for that meat which endures unto everlast-*

ing life...” (John 6:27). The intent of properly directed labor is universal.

- Jesus to the people... *“He that loves his life shall lose it, and he that hates his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal”* (John 12:25). Nothing is specifically stated for us to do, but a timeless principle to follow God’s will.

Some are neglectfully simple. Sometimes Jesus spoke in a parable and sometimes He spoke in a long discourse. Sometimes He interpreted the parable, and sometimes he left the interpretation to the reader. But usually, somewhere, there was a “one-liner” that clinched the thought of the principle involved. If we are hasty to get to the “punch line” or to get to the next chapter, we can skim right over a golden nugget. Consider these:

- Jesus to the multitude: *“Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven”* (Mat. 5:16). Are you ready to be judged by this one? We can’t be shy or insecure or we could break this commandment.
- Jesus said: *“Come unto me, all you that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and you shall find rest unto your souls”* (Mat. 11:28,29). This is the ultimate anxiety killer!
- Jesus to the Pharisees: *“He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her”* (John 8:7). The prerequisite of self-examination/incrimination is just as binding on us today, if we notice it.

In conclusion, this study of Jesus’ life in the gospels has revealed many subtle, hidden commandments; but the biggest benefit has been training my eye to see them. And this is my desire and prayer for you, that you would be able to see through the layers of circumstances and find the golden nug-

gets that our Savior left us. Try looking deeply through a passage for days at a time and see how long it is before the power of the scriptures makes a change in your life. Try it...I believe you'll like it (and so will the ones you live with!).

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SEARCH THE SCRIPTURES

1. Who was the father of Abraham?
2. Which judge unknowingly vowed his daughter to the Lord as a burnt offering?
3. Why wasn't David allowed to build God's house?
4. What did the Holy Spirit look like when the disciples received it?
5. Who was the goddess of the Ephesians?

ANSWERS NEXT MONTH...

And remember last month's questions?

1. What relation to Abram was Lot?
HIS NEPHEW (Gen. 14:12)
2. What object did Elisha cause to float?
AXE HEAD (2 Kings 6:5-6)
3. Which region was specially noted for its balm?
GILEAD (Jer. 46:11)
4. Who did Pilate send Jesus to after he had interrogated him?
HEROD (Luke 23:7)
5. By what name was the disciple Tabitha also known?
DORCAS (Acts 9:36)

NOTICE: The Camp Meeting in New Mexico scheduled for May 25-29, 2020 has been cancelled.

THERE IS A SEASON

To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven:

A time to be born, and a time to die;

a time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted;

A time to kill, and a time to heal;

a time to break down, and a time to build up;

A time to weep, and a time to laugh;

a time to mourn, and a time to dance;

A time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together;

a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing;

A time to get, and a time to lose;

a time to keep, and a time to cast away;

A time to rend, and a time to sew;

a time to keep silence, and a time to speak;

A time to love, and a time to hate;

a time of war, and a time of peace. (Eccl. 3:1-8)

To every thing there is a season. What an incredible thought that shows that there is a balance to all that God does. We know that there is a lot of uncertainty with life. How great it is to know that no matter what storms may come, there is sunshine coming. There is balance. The times that we are in should work to make our faith and our hope stronger. We know that God controls all, but do you show that in how you live? That doesn't mean that we go out and do things that could bring harm to us. We are still given choices to make and a brain to use in making them. We show that we know that God controls all by walking and talking with faith and not fear. Faith that no matter what happens, we have hope in life beyond this one. We are in a new season but know that there is a purpose to it and that God is in control.

A. D.