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West Valley Church
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The View From Here¹ *Part Two*

The drive up this particular mountain is a twisting, turning road that at times winds through beautiful forested countryside and other times along moonscape-looking cliffs, whose edge is so close it will put your heart in



your throat. Each turn can take you around a corner into another breathtaking or harrowing vista. The road up the mountain is only open between Memorial Day and Labor Day, as long as the weather cooperates. "The Mount Evans Scenic Byway, just 60 miles west of Denver, Colorado, is the highest paved



road in North America. A day trip to the top is a journey that snakes and climbs through nearly 9,000 feet of elevation gain, from the high plains of Denver through five climate zones to the 14,264-foot summit of Mount Evans."²



¹ Primary sources:

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² <https://www.denver.org/things-to-do/day-trips-around-colorado/mount-evans/>

When you finally reach the parking lot, you can walk just a few feet up to the summit and the view from the top is simply incredible. This is one of the grandest panoramas in Colorado and much of the state is visible, from the Never Summer Range in the north to the Sangre de Cristo Mountains in the south³ – a view of over 300 miles.



That's the great thing about summits – when you get to one high point, you can see even more stunning views from there. West Valley Church is at an amazing place in her 60-plus year history, and let me tell you, the view from here is even more amazing.

Today we are in the second of a three-part series entitled, “The View From Here,” exploring vistas in your life and in our church. We’ve taken some windy and scary roads at times to get here, but we made it! And where *you* are in your spiritual life is a place that God has brought you to – a place where *you* will get a fresh and new view of the way forward in *your* life, like a climber who has been hiking until he finally crests the mountain and is able to see the amazing expanse of what lies ahead. I’m praying that God will open to you new vistas in your life of where you can go from where you are. The same thing is true for our church; God has brought this church through the years to this place and time. And with all the amazing things that God is accomplishing right now, we have an incredible view of where to go from here. We want to you to be able to see *The View From Here* for West Valley Church. We are in an amazing place as a church, and we have amazing places to go that are right in front of us.

In this series we want to see what it means to be a missional church – that means a church on mission. We want to help you see the view of the new and exciting ways we are fulfilling our mission, as well as how you and I can live missionally as Christians in this world. As we proceed, keep in mind that every command Jesus gave in the Bible applies to both the church *and* the individual believer; and therefore both you as a Christian and we as a church have an ability to respond – a response-ability – to Jesus’ Kingdom commands.

There are three progressive great commands that Jesus gives in the book of Matthew, and today we’ll start with another look at one of the four “sending commands” that we looked at last week:

1. The Great *Commission*

The great commission comes to us from Matthew 28. Matthew recorded Jesus’ words to his disciples and, of course, to all who would be his followers, after Jesus had already risen from the dead and just before he ascended into heaven. So these

³ ibid

were important last words from Jesus to us. Would you stand with me in honor of Jesus' words? Here is the scene and here are Jesus' words:

“Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. Then Jesus came to them and said, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.’” (Matthew 28:17-20, niv)

You can have a seat.

The Bible is honest about how these disciples were feeling; some of them worshiped Jesus, some of them were afraid to worship him, as if they didn't know for sure if they should actually believe it, others of them were filled with joy and some of them weren't yet convinced. But they were all followers of Jesus who were struggling to understand what was going on.

So Jesus told them that he has all authority in heaven and on earth. They already knew he had authority on *earth* – he had proved that in his teaching (Matthew 5-7, esp. 7:29), and through his healing (Matthew 8-9, esp. 8:8-9; 9:8). So it wasn't a surprise for them that Jesus would say he had authority on earth; they *knew* that. In fact, that's why, up until Jesus died, the disciples thought Jesus was going to set up a throne on earth and be an earthly king. But the truth they didn't know until after the resurrection was that Jesus had authority in *heaven*, too. *Now* there could be no question that Jesus was God: he has authority in heaven *and* earth.

Jesus wasn't bragging about his authority; Jesus told them he had all authority because he wanted them and us to understand that this command, this commissioning, was coming from the highest authority of all – heaven *and* earth, so Jesus expected them to actually *DO* it. The purpose of his authority, and therefore his ability to authorize you, *disciple of Jesus* – is that you will make disciples of all nations – starting with the one you live in.

We usually focus on the imperative of that word, “go” in “Go into all the world and make disciples.” But that isn't really the original intent. It is more accurately translated, “*When you go, make disciples.*” In other words, the commission of Christians and the church is not simply *to go*; *going is a given*. In Jesus' mind it is *assumed* we will go. *The mission of the church is to make disciples of all peoples.* Hopefully you remember that last week we talked about what the word “nations” or “peoples” meant.

When you become a Christian, you too are a disciple of Jesus; you are being discipled by Jesus through the Holy Spirit and through the church – through the spiritual growth opportunities that the church provides. But understand something really important: when you are discipled through the church, it's not through the *programs* of the church, even though we have classes and small groups. You are discipled through the *people* of the church; through *one another* as Christ lives in

you. Small groups are simply the best format so that *you* can disciple each other. It is expected that you *are*, and that you *make*, disciples.

If you are a Christian, you are...

Disciplined to Disciple

There is no distinction between the two for Jesus. If you are a Christian, you are a disciple of his AND you will disciple others. In Matthew's gospel, the way of following Jesus is always a life of discipleship. These final words of Jesus are framed in terms of the Christ-formed life – a life of discipleship: being a disciple in order to disciple others.

So what does that mean? Remember last week that we said evangelism is more of a *process* than it is an event? Well, discipleship is a part of the evangelism process. It starts with the intentional relationships you have with people who don't know Jesus. When you love and accept them, develop friendship with them, serve them as you are able, invite them to church with you, then you are discipling them. And when they get to the point that they repent of their sin and turn to Jesus either by you or someone else, you can then disciple them in their relationship with Jesus.

This is the same thing that we as a church are doing. We are discipling our neighborhood as we grow in our intentional relationship with them, building the friendship, serving them as we can, and inviting them to church with us, and they are responding.

And now from this viewpoint we are stepping toward another vista – to do what we've already become good at doing, but now to also do it out in the community of Mountainview Elementary. As we build our relationship with that community, as we love them and serve them as we are able, we are discipling them, that they might join our strategic small group that meets out there and then accept Christ. Every Christian and every church is disciplined and commissioned to make disciples.

Secondly, let's see...

2. The Great Commandment

So we've been commissioned by Jesus himself to make disciples; disciplined to make disciples. We've also been given the Great Command. This is found in Matthew 22. Would you stand with me again as we honor God's Word to us. Here's what that passage says:

“Hearing that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, the Pharisees got together. One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question: ‘Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?’ Jesus replied: ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’” This is the first and greatest commandment. And

the second is like it: “Love your neighbor as yourself.” All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.” (Matthew 22:34-40, niv)

You can be seated again...it’s good to honor God’s Word and get our blood flowing!

The Religious leaders had divided the 613 precepts of the Old Testament Law into what they called the “heavy” laws and the “lighter” prohibitions. In other words, of the 613 precepts in the Law, 248 were “must always do” laws and 365 were “mostly always do” precepts. So they had these classifications of law, and they would debate about which laws were in which categories. They were essentially asking Jesus which one of the laws he thought was the heaviest of the heavies; which law they should they always do. So Jesus’ answer (hear this) took the subject out of the realm of law and debate, and put into the context of covenantal relationship with God and others. Do you understand that? The Jewish leaders were debating about *rules*; Jesus definitively said it’s about *relationships*.

Jesus quoted the second line of what was called the *Shema* – beginning with Deuteronomy 6:5 –

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.” (Deuteronomy 6:5, niv)

This was the basic and essential creed of Judaism; every Jewish service still begins with reciting this verse. To this day, this is the very first Bible verse that practicing Jewish families teach their children to memorize beginning at age three.

Now there is a very important word to understand here: the word that is used for love in “Love the Lord,” is *agape*. Are you familiar with that word? It means unconditional, total love, no strings attached, wanting nothing in return. Jesus says we are to agape/love God – with all our heart, soul, mind, and the other gospels add “strength.” Scholars have debated and deciphered what each of those four words mean. Here’s my two cents: Who cares? The point is *not* the individual meanings; the point is in their totality. Jesus is saying, “Love God with absolutely everything you are and everything you have. Go ‘all in’ with your love for God.” The only appropriate response to God’s love for you is to love him in return, completely, with everything you have.

Then, without pausing, Jesus continued. He said:

“The second command is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’” (Leviticus 19:18)

Here, Jesus is quoting Leviticus 19:18 –

“Never get revenge. Never hold a grudge against any of your people. Instead, love your neighbor as you love yourself. I am the LORD.” (Leviticus 19:18, gwt)

Jesus is saying it is just as important to love people as it is to love God. The second command is like the first. In fact, remember what word Jesus used for “love” in the first quote about loving God? Agape; unconditional love. Guess what word Jesus

uses here to describe how we are to love people? Agape. Unconditional love. With the same kind of love that we offer God, we are to love people.

Jesus said that this is the intent of the entire Old Testament; the Law and the Prophets. All that the Old Testament tells you about how to live is centered around relationships: loving God and loving people.

You know, living a holy life, being completely sanctified – being holy, being Christlike – as Christians is something that we believe in and believe is possible for every Christian. But it's not being made holy so we can keep all the rules; it is about love; it's about relationships: loving God completely and loving people completely. You see, we are...

Loved to Love

We are loved by God, and it is God's love – poured into our hearts because of the work of Jesus Christ on the cross and the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives – it is the love of God that enables us to love others: for me to love *you*, and for you to love me, and for you and I to love other people; agape-love, by the Spirit of God. Loving not just our friends, but also our non-friends: people that are not nice, that are bullies, that are mean and nasty to us. But not just our enemies; also people that think and are different than us. There are no categories or qualifiers – we love people of other religions, other colors, other cultures, other sexual identities. We are to agape-love God and agape-love all people. Period. That's *exactly* why God gives us his Holy Spirit, because we can't do it without his divine love infusing us, transforming us, flowing out of us. If, as Christians, you and I are not seeing that in our attitudes and actions toward others, then we have some praying to do because we either don't have the Holy Spirit or we are not depending upon him. We are disciplined to disciple, we are loved to love. And that love will show itself in some specific ways. That's what we are doing for our neighborhood when we show hospitality to them, when we invite them into our church, when we meet their needs. Not to brag, but we are doing a pretty good job of that, church! We have gotten pretty good at loving our neighbors – and so now we are reaching beyond our immediate neighborhood to love the neighborhood around Mountainview Elementary. We have a small group of people in our church who meet in a home out near that school, and they are getting involved in helping the activities of that school and serving the teachers and children.

So third let's look at...

3. The Great Compassion

We've been disciplined by Jesus and loved by God. We are to make disciples and love people. Those things are done as we show love and compassion to people – *especially* people who are poor and people who are on the margins of society.

Jesus makes this especially clear in the Great Compassion, in Matthew 25. I want to read this passage to us, and to keep you awake I want to ask you to stand one last time in honor of God's Word. Jesus starts off by saying:

“When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.”
(Matthew 25:31-33, niv)

Now remember that we are to make disciples and love people until quitting time – when we die or Jesus comes back, right? And Jesus promised to be with us until when? Until the end of time – quitting time. So now, Jesus is saying, “When quitting time comes, this is how I’m going to judge how well you’ve disciplined and loved.”

“Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.’” (Matthew 25:34-36, niv)

Keep standing please.

Now those who are on Jesus' right are a little confused. They remember doing those things for *people*, but not Jesus – he is the King of Kings. They never saw Jesus as a stranger, or naked, or sick in the hospital, or in prison!

“Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?’ The King will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.’” (Matthew 25:37-40, niv)

There it is. Jesus is saying, anytime you do this for someone else, you are exactly doing it for me.

Okay great job – you can have a seat now. Now the goats are next, and Jesus says to them, “every time you did NOT do this for others, you did NOT do it for me. You left me alone and lonely and never welcomed me in. You left me naked and cold, sick and in prison.”

And they are saying, “Lord, if we knew it was you, we would’ve done something!” But it’s too late; it’s past quitting time. None of us gets a do-over.

How many of you have seen those commercials for the ASPCA with the sad, shivering puppies sitting on concrete or in the mud, or in cages, with big huge eyes just looking at you? And Sara McLaughlin singing, “I will remember you...” Okay, if you can't



get sad for those poor dogs you're not human. Have you noticed they don't have cats in those commercials? Yeah, no one will give money for a sick mangy cat. But dogs, come on!

How in the world can we have more compassion for a *dog* than a *human* who is created in the image of God? ANY human – Christian or not. Jesus didn't say "as much as you do it to a dog, you've done it to me." (I'm not saying be cruel to animals – God expects us to care for all his creation; even cats...I guess) Jesus is saying *people!* No qualifiers.

He saved you. He disciplines you. He loves you. He's blessed you. Now he expects you to be a blessing to people. You are...

Blessed to Bless

In the Old Testament, God says this (I'm going to paraphrase it) "Those outside the church must be treated like church members. Love them as yourself, for you were once outside the family of God. I am the LORD your God." (Leviticus 19:34). God has blessed you, and he expects you to share it with others. Hospitality is a very, very big deal. The Bible says:

"Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it." (Hebrews 13:2, niv)

Jesus said you ARE showing hospitality to him.

God wants to make the West Valley neighborhood a great place. He wants it to prosper. He wants it to be a safe, healthy place for people. And the church is supposed to make that happen. Proverbs in the Bible says this:

"Through the blessing of the upright a city is exalted." (Proverbs 11:11, niv)

God wants to exalt this city, and the way he does that is through the upright – which means those who are Christians – being a blessing to the people in it. What does this mean? This is *not* saying, "Oh, I'm so wonderful that when I walk in the room, my blessing just wafts all over you. Just by my being here, you are blessed." No, we bless by the way we feed, clothe, tend, heal, and visit people who are hungry, naked, cold, sick, and in prison.

We bless our neighbors, friends, and family members. We bless West Valley. We bless Mountainview. We bless so they can be exalted. Take the blessings you have been given and bless others with them.

You ask, how much of my blessing do I have to share? What does *agape* mean to you? Whatever that means, that is how much.

Are you understanding this? This is the mission of the church. That's why our mission is to introduce people to Jesus Christ, to equip people with a faith that works, and to live as people with purpose. That's why we love Wide Hollow and the children and their families. God has brought us to a great place and we can see

where we need to go from here. We have enough love and enough resources that we are going beyond here to Mountainview.

God, right now speak to us. Not just in a "yeah I'll think about it" kind of way. Convict us. Change us."

As you are in prayer, can I ask you to take inventory? Who are you discipling? I mean, think of some names. Specific people. Who are you discipling to know Jesus? I'm not talking about already Christian people in church.

How about this: who are you loving? Specifically? Can you honestly say that there is someone who is so mean and nasty to you, and you are loving them? Think of names. I bet you can think of someone – now you need to start loving them.

Who are you blessing? Name names. If you can't, then pray about that. They're not going to come to you, you know.

As you pray, let me speak to you, long-time Nazarenes. What we are talking about today, *THIS* is what holiness is. This is what sanctification is. This is why the Holy Spirit fills you and this is the proof. Sanctification is discipling, loving, blessing. *Forgive us for being disciplined, loved, and blessed and letting it stop with us. It was never, ever, intended for that. Holy Spirit, fill us now. Make it our consuming passion and action to disciple people to Jesus, to love people unconditionally, and to bless people sacrificially.*