

Sunday 7th June, 2020
“Famous Last Words”
Matthew 28:16-20

Here is a random selection of 10 final, or last words before death:

"I'm going to go and see Jesus."

Whitney Houston, (American musician, 11 February 2012)

"I can't breathe. I can't breathe. I can't breathe. I can't breathe x10

Eric Garner, (American former horticulturist, 17 July 2014), after being put in a chokehold by an arresting NYPD officer

"I love you, too."

George H. W. Bush, (President of the United States, 30 November 2018), speaking to his son George

"Heaven has turned against me. No wise ruler arises, and no one in the Empire wishes to make me his teacher. The hour of my death has come."

Confucius, (Chinese philosopher 479 BC)

"We are beggars, this is true."

Martin Luther, (German theologian, 18 February 1546)

"Oh God!"

Mahatma Gandhi, (Indian revolutionary and pacifist, 30 January 1948),

"I'm finished. I don't even trust myself."

Joseph Stalin, (Soviet statesman, 5 March 1953)

"I'm bored with it all."

Winston Churchill, (Prime Minister of the UK, 24 January 1965)

"I know this beach like the back of my hand."

Harold Holt, (Prime Minister of Australia, 17 December 1967)

"I've always loved my wife, my children, and my grandchildren, and I've always loved my country. I want to go. God, take me!"

Dwight D. Eisenhower, (President of the United States, 28 March 1969)

Last week we considered how at how coming of the Holy Spirit equipped and empowered the church to allow ordinary people to do extraordinary things for the Glory of God and the growth of His Kingdom.

Today, we consider the last words of Jesus to His disciples that is commonly known as “The Great Commission”. We all know that Jesus’ last words were just before his death while on the cross, before breathing his last, he cried, **"It is finished."** Meaning, the debt of sin is paid in full, God’s plan of redemption for mankind is complete. It was a cry of triumph! But the “Famous last Words” to his disciples, is to go to all nations and share this Good News.

In Revelation 7:9, God reveals the grand finale of human history. When humanity’s struggle finally ends, God will fill His eternal Kingdom with *“a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb”*.

Bible reading: Matthew 28: 16-20

I am very proud of the support of our Global Partnerships, we appreciate the support of the cleaning team, and our monthly special offering. Elizabeth keeps us up to date with stories from the fields and coordinates our monthly missions Mart. For a small community our giving is amazing! We give generously to:

- Global Mission Partners: (GMP): Vietnam / Zimbabwe and Vanuatu
- OMF: Thailand, through our support of David & Tina Cannon
- Compassion: Child support of Genesis Garcia from Honduras.
- Bible Society
- Prison Fellowship

The great commission is stated for us in 5 places in the New Testament:

Matthew 28:16-20, / Mark 16:14-18, / Luke 24:44-49, / John 20:19-23, and Acts 1:4-8. We probably most familiar with our Matthew passage. Countless sermons have been preached on it.

Pentecost

The passages in Luke, John, and Acts, are unique in that they show the connection between Pentecost and the giving of the great commission.

Luke 24:46-49, and He said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Christ would suffer and rise again from the dead the third day, and that repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. And behold, I am sending forth the promise of My Father upon you . . ."

John 20:21-22, So Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you; as the Father has sent Me, I also send you." And when He had said this, He breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit."

Acts 1:8, "but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth."

What took place at Pentecost, that is the giving of the Holy Spirit, was necessary for the disciples to be successful in carrying out the great commission spoken of in the above passages. In fact, we see the Holy Spirit working immediately within a local body of believers to this end.

Acts 13:1-4: Now there were at Antioch, in the church that was there, prophets and teachers: Barnabas, and Simeon who was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. While they were ministering to the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." Then, when they had fasted and prayed and laid their hands on them, they sent them away. So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia and from there they sailed to Cyprus.

Not only were Barnabas and Saul sent by the Holy Spirit, but they themselves were filled with the Holy Spirit.

The Work of the Holy Spirit in the Individual

The Holy Spirit permanently and immediately upon justification indwells those who have professed faith in Jesus as their Saviour. All believers have the Holy Spirit living and working in them to sanctify them, and help them fight sin (John 14:16, Ephesians 1:13, and 2 Corinthians 1:22).

The Believers' Responsibility

However, we are still told to be filled with the Holy Spirit. We see Paul tell this to the Christians in Ephesus in Ephesians 5:18. As well, believers can grieve and quench the Holy Spirit who indwells them as we see in Ephesians 4:30 and 1 Thessalonians 5:19. This occurs when we fail to fight sin and fail to grow in holiness, and this will impact our ability to live for Christ and be obedient to His commands. It will impact our ability to be open and obedient to what the Holy Spirit is doing in our lives.

The Work of the Holy Spirit in the Church

In addition to individually grieving and quenching the Holy Spirit, on a corporate level we can suppress the work of the Holy Spirit. This will directly impact our ability as a local church to be obedient to the great commission.

So then how do we as a local church not quench or grieve the Holy Spirit? How can we be filled with the Holy Spirit so we can be as effective as possible at carrying out the great commission? What do we do to prepare ourselves to be open to the working of the Holy Spirit within our church?

First, we must be a local church that is a shining light of the gospel that can be seen by the unbelieving world (Philippians 2:12-18). When the world looks at us, they should recognize there is something different and better about the way we live life together. As part of this, we must constantly forsake the ways of the world and live for Christ (1 John 2:15-17).

Second, we must be a local church whose members are in regular, intimate, disciple making fellowship with one another. This means, with few exceptions, being part of Sunday worship service every week. This also means being part of a life group because it is within these smaller gathered groups where we can most effectively love and sacrifice for one another as John commands his readers to do in 1 John 3:16-19. Without regularly gathering together we will fail to grow corporately in holiness both inwardly and outwardly (Hebrews 10:23-25).

Third, we must be a church that has faith in the current and eschatological promises of Christ. He has promised to be with us until the ends of the age as we obey His commission (Matthew 28:20). He has promised to be our sympathetic high priest as we live in a sinful world and sinful bodies (Hebrews 4:14-16). He has promised to return and make all things new and free us from the pain and suffering of this world so that we can live with Him forever in unending and unimaginable joy (Revelation 21:1-7). These promises should motivate us to good works and give us strength to endure for His glory (Romans 8: 18-25, 2 Timothy 2:10-13 and Titus 1:1-3, Hebrews 12:1-2).

Fourth, we must be a church that is faithful in prayer. *“Then he said to his disciples, “The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.”* Matthew 9:37-38

If we are to be a local church that is obediently carrying out the great commission through the power of the Holy Spirit whom we are relying on for our success, then we, as a congregation, must be marked by these characteristics so that we can be filled with the Holy Spirit and be open to what He will call us to do.

While the implications of the Great Commission seem clear, the Barna Research Group discovered just last year that 64% of church attending people either don't understand, or have forgotten the meaning of this all-important command.

So, more than ever, we need to recover the meaning of Jesus' mission and find our part in it. I now want to take a brief look at three of the components of the commands found in Matthew 28:19-20 and Luke 24:46-47:

- a) Preach the Gospel to all nations and peoples
- b) Baptize new believers, and
- c) Disciple those who receive Christ.

a) Preach the Gospel to all nations and peoples:

God is preparing a glorious inheritance for His Son Jesus—an uncountable multitude of perfectly-forgiven, wholly-devoted worshippers from every nation, tribe, and tongue. We must not merely *wait* for this happen. God asks for us to *work with Him* to bring it to pass (2 Corinthians 6:1). Jesus commands: *“Go to all nations preach repentance for the forgiveness of sins”*. Luke 24:47.

Many today are afraid of preaching the gospel. We're glad to quietly live it...but boldly proclaim it? "Not me." According to Barna, "Almost half of [practicing Christian] Millennials (47%) agree at least somewhat that it is wrong to share one's personal beliefs with someone of a different faith in hopes that they will one day share the same faith."

But Jesus did not stutter when he gave the Great Commission. As Hudson Taylor said, *"the Great Commission is not an option to be considered; it is a command to be obeyed."* If we would be Jesus' disciples, we must go and preach the only message of salvation: *"that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures"* 1 Corinthians 15:3-4 But we're not merely called to preach to the same nations over and over again. No, God's love is expansive and universal—He loves the whole world (John 3:16). Therefore, Jesus calls us to reach *every person and people group* with the message of salvation.

Tragically, the modern church has terribly failed in this call. To this day, 41.6% of the world's population—have little or no exposure to the gospel. 97% of these live in a region called the 10/40 Window.

What will happen to this generation of people if Christians like you and I don't awaken to our heavenly responsibility? How will our generation be saved? As Paul asked in Romans 10:14, *"How then will they call on Him in whom they have not believed? How will they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how will they hear without a preacher?"* It's clear—we need to wake up to God's call to pray, give, send, and if possible, go to preach the gospel.

b) Baptize new believers:

The second command of the Great Commission is to baptize those who receive the gospel. In Matthew 28:19, Jesus says, *"go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit"*

The New Testament teaches that baptism is an important part of becoming a Christian. On the Day of Pentecost, Peter told the masses how to receive salvation: *"Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit"* Acts 2:38.

When Ananias led Paul to Christ, he exhorted him clearly: *"Get up and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on His name"* Acts 22:16.

In Romans 6, Paul pinpoints the moment we begin new life in Christ: *"We were...buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life"* Romans 6:4. It seems that the modern church has seriously overlooked the importance of baptism in our mission.

Now, I'll be clear. I'm not saying you have to be baptised to be saved. Water cannot save you; only the blood of Jesus. Baptism, in a sense is the biblical "sinner's prayer." For this reason, whenever we win someone to the Lord, we should seek to baptize them as soon as possible. Only we should make sure that the new believer enters the water in true repentance and faith, trusting God to cleanse their conscience and renew their inner man. 1 Peter 3:21. Anyone can baptize—the Apostle Paul was baptized by an everyday believer.

c) Disciple those who receive Christ:

The third command of the Great Commission is to *disciple those who receive Christ*. In Matthew 28:19-20, Jesus commanded—*"Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations . . . teaching them to observe all that I commanded you"*.

In the late 1800s, Evangelist William Booth warned, *"The chief danger that confronts the coming century will be religion without the Holy Ghost, Christianity without Christ,*

forgiveness without repentance, salvation without regeneration, politics without God, heaven without hell.”

If we would be faithful to Jesus’ Great Commission, we must not only win converts but disciples—true Christians who have died upfront, choosing to spend their lives learning how to follow Jesus Christ.

Perhaps we have forgotten this call more than any of the others. Today, if you mention Jesus’ commands, many cry, “Legalist!” If you focus too much on the Sermon on the Mount, others cry, “You’re giving us law, not grace!” But if we would obey the Great Commission of our Lord, we must teach our disciples “to observe all that [Jesus] has commanded” (Matthew 28:20). Yes, we must ground our hearers in the love and grace of God, but we must also show them how to properly respond to God’s grace: *“I appeal to you . . . brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship”* (Romans 12:1 ESV).

Many shy from personal discipleship because of its difficulty. It takes time, patience, and wisdom. Even more, it requires consecration. To teach another obedience to Christ, you must first obey Christ.

Therefore, perhaps the Great Commission has a fourth, hidden command: Give your all to Jesus. Follow Him day in and day out. Let His hope and light restore you. Let His Word transform you. Soon, you may find it hard to keep His glorious message hidden away. You’ll want to tell the nations. And by God’s grace, the nations will listen to His voice through you.

I encourage you to take some time to reflect on the scriptures in this message. I would also love to hear your thoughts. May we together in a new way make our Lord’s “Famous Last Words” our first priority. Blessings, as we together and through our partnerships; SHARE GOD’S HOPE!

Prayer.