

“Famous Last Words”

Matthew 28:16-20

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Missions Sunday

The final words of people are intriguing, aren't they? Recently, I was scanning some and found them very interesting. Let me share some with you.

“I inhabit a weak, frail, decayed tenement that is battered by winds and broken by storms. From all that I can learn, the landlord does not intend to repair it.” John Quincy Adams, sixth President of the United States

“Take a step forward, lads. It will be easier that way.” Irish patriot, Erskine Childers' last words before being executed by a firing squad.

“Too late for fruit and too soon for flowers.” Walter De La Mare, British poet, when asked on his deathbed whether he would like fruit or flowers.

“Why are you weeping? Did you imagine that I was immortal?” Louis XIV, French King, as he noticed on his deathbed that his attendants were crying.

“Nonsense, they could not hit an elephant at this distance.” John Sedgwick, U.S. General in response to a suggestion that he should not show himself over a barrier during the Battle of the Wilderness.

“Clip the red wire first.” Anonymous

Mathew recorded some of Jesus' final words at the end of his Gospel. We refer to these dramatic and forceful words as the Great Commission *“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, Son and Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”* I would like to examine these memorable words in light of our “missions” emphasis today.

It appears to me that Jesus did three things in his farewell address. He made a bold claim, issued an ambitious challenge and left a reassuring promise. Let me explain.

First of all, Jesus made a bold claim. “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.” That's bold!

In civics' classes, instructors talk about how dangerous it is to have power in the hands of a few, much less one person. Power is less likely to be misused when it is distributed. This is why organizations have checks and balances. Is it really a good idea for one man, even Jesus, to have so much authority? Yes, because he made power a healthy word.

In 1991, I conducted the funeral for my friend, Senator John Sherman Cooper. He had an illustrious career in government work, serving for twenty years as a United States Senator. He was also an Ambassador to East Germany and India, a delegate to the United Nations and an advisor to several presidents. At his funeral, I said, “He made power a healthy word.” He had a lot of power, but he used it wisely. He left the world a better place because of his influence.

I feel even more strongly about Jesus. He, too, made power a healthy word. He was such a good steward of his time, talents and resources that after his crucifixion and resurrection, his heavenly Father entrusted all authority to him. He knew that Jesus would use it wisely.

So, what does Jesus want to do with the power he has been given? He wants to change the world by reversing the destructive process of sin. He wants to turn chaos into order, evil into good, fear into courage, sorrow into joy, confusion into peace and death into life. He wants to make the world a place where righteousness, justice and mercy prevail, which is what God dreamed when He created it.

How does he intend to do that? **This is where the challenge comes in.** He wants to use you and me to make the world a better place. He wants to partner with us to bring about radical and permanent change.

What does he want us to do? He wants us to take what we have learned from him about God and life and share it with others. He wants us to teach people what he said about arranging priorities, relating to others, handling challenges, problems and temptations. He wants us to encourage them to trust him and make a commitment to follow him, symbolized by the beautiful and meaningful act of baptism.

He wants us to do this as we go along our way by developing and nurturing relationships so we can impact others' lives and help them when needs arise. At other times, he wants us to lay aside our responsibilities and go out of our way in his name to help people.

How gratified I am to see the members of this church doing both. It thrills me when someone gives his or her life to Christ and joins our church because of the influence and encouragement of someone already here. It pleases me when I see many men, women and young people setting aside their own schedules to travel to parts of our country and even foreign lands to help people enjoy a better way of life. This balanced mission strategy fulfills the demands of the Great Commission.

Let us remember as we go across the street or across the globe, we do so with this promise. We do not go alone. Always and everywhere he will be with us leading the way, enabling us to follow and empowering us for the tasks. That certainly is good news when you consider the power and authority he has!