

What We Believe about Evangelism and Missions
Matthew 28:18-20

Famous last words have always been fascinating to me. Some people say words of great profundity and some people don't know what they are saying. **Luciano Pavarotti** – one of the greatest opera singers ever in the world – said *"I believe that a life lived for music is an existence spent wonderfully, and this is what I have dedicated my life to."* Now, those are beautiful last words and there are worse things to live for than music but this life is not about music.

On the other end of the profound spectrum is **Stan Laurel**, one half of Laurel and Hardy, the comedians of a generation ago, who said *"I'd rather be skiing"* when he realized he was about to die. I guess so. Just before **Sir Winston Churchill** slipped into a coma, his last words were, *"I'm bored with it all."* Do you remember **Todd Beamer**? He was one of the passengers on Flight 93 on 9/11. Do you remember his last recorded words? *"Let' roll!"* After being injected with the horrible drugs that would kill him, **John Belushi** said to the person who injected him, *"Just don't leave me alone."* **Spike Milligan** said, *"I told you I was ill."*

But my favorite one is the **Union General John Sedgwick**, who was facing Confederate sniper fire, and told his men, *"Don't worry, boys. They can't hit an elephant at this dist..."* Famous last words. What do you want yours to be? Something profound? Something funny or ironic? How about life-changing words for those who hear them?

The Gospels – Matthew, Mark, Luke and John – tell the story of Jesus and His birth, life, death, burial and resurrection. He rose again after being dead for three days and ascended back to Heaven where He lives today and forever but the book of Matthew tells us His last words while He was here on earth.

You know the passage. Go ahead and turn to the last chapter of Matthew. Matthew 28 and let's read again these famous last words. Let's see what our orders are in **Matthew 28:18-20**. Yes, you recognize that passage. It is **the Great Commission**. We have studied it several times before and I don't guarantee that we won't study it again several more times this year. We might ought to at least discuss it every week. It is that important and it is that neglected. If a soldier in the army was given a direct order by his commanding officer but failed to carry out that order, what do you think would happen? Would he get promoted? Would the CO tell him how proud he was of him and give him shiny medals?

Maybe today that is why you are struggling in what you are going through. Maybe you have a personal relationship with God through His Son Jesus and yet God has not blessed you like He could. One reason for that might be because you have received your orders but you have failed to carry them out. Let's look at those orders right now in **Matthew 28:18-20**.

Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

I have a friend named **Bud Elkins** who was in the US Army Air Corps which became the US Air Force in World War II. Bud was the navigator on a B-17 Flying Fortress which was the main big bomber of the day. He had some incredible stories of flying mission after mission into enemy territory and dropping bombs on military and strategic targets.

Bud told me that one time they were given the order to fly from somewhere in North Africa up to Germany and drop some bombs on a certain ball-bearing plant, if I remember right. That would have been an acceptable and understandable order except for one thing. The B-17 had a flight range of something like 2000 miles and the target was about 1500 miles away – one way. That wouldn't leave them with enough fuel to make the return trip.

Bud said everybody on the crew knew what their range was and what the mission was and do you know what they did? They didn't talk about it. They just suited up. They got on the plane. They taxied to the end of the runway and just as

they were about to take off on what surely would have been a suicide mission, they got word from headquarters that the weather was too bad over the target and the mission was aborted. He said the exact same thing happened to them twice. That's the "Greatest Generation" for you, right there. Twice they were not just prepared but expecting to give their lives for the greater good of their nation because an order was given.

In the Great Commission, we, like the first disciples are given an order. Jesus first gives His credentials as Commander, as if anybody needed them. He said that all authority has been given to Him in Heaven and on earth. He is the sovereign leader; the one in control of everything going on in Heaven and on earth. Scripture tells us over and over again not to be afraid. Why? Because God is sovereign and has given control of everything going on in the universe to His Son, Jesus.

So, based on the authority of the one who is in control, our command is to go and make disciples. Well, what is a disciple? First, notice that Jesus doesn't tell us to go and make church members. He doesn't even say to go and make Christians. He sure doesn't say to go and make people better; you know, help them to not cuss so much and quit watching R rated movies and follow a bunch of rules and collect a bunch of money so you can buy a \$54 million-dollar jet to help you do it better.

He said that we are to go and make disciples and a disciple, as we have talked about before, is simply one who has learned something from Jesus and then tells somebody else what they have learned. When someone has authority, there is no arguing with that. And if Jesus has authority over all things then it shouldn't matter what He tells us to do, where He tells us to go, or what He tells us to say. We can be obedient without any fear of the consequences. It's what the first church depended on. It's what gave Paul the power to stand up and preach. It's what gave Stephen the strength to forgive his attackers. It's how Peter slept in prison the night before he was supposed to be tried and probably killed. If Jesus is in control, what do we have to worry about?

And the authority of Jesus is what this church depends on just like the first church. I love the fact that it was this church's idea to take the church to the Lake Road RV Park down the road when we found out that most of them couldn't come to us for any number of reasons. We have done it for several years now and we never know who is going to show up or what is going to happen or how we are going to be treated but I saw faith in this church; faith in the authority of Jesus Christ that allowed you to do what you were supposed to do, go where you were supposed to go and say what you were supposed to say!

And whether you thought about it or not, you were doing your part at that time to fulfill the Great Commission of Jesus in this Gospel. When Jesus says to "*Go and make disciples...*" it literally means, "*as you go, make disciples*". As you go, go intentionally. As you go to the grocery store, as you go to the gas station, as you go to Dos Chiles after church today, be intentional about telling others what you know.

Tell others about what Jesus has done in your life. You don't have to be an evangelist or a missionary to tell that. Telling that makes you an evangelist and a missionary. When Jesus gave this order to His disciples, it was the end of His bodily, earthly ministry. But it was the beginning of ours. We don't do it to work our way to Heaven. We do it because the One who died and was raised again tells us to.

We do it because we want other people to have what we have and to not live in anger and shame and guilt and disobedience and wickedness. We do it so our children and grandchildren won't have to grow up with the same anger and pain and all the issues we see on the news today.

I'm reminded again of what I heard a famous atheist say. The great magician, **Penn Jillette**, once said that somebody tried to witness to him about Jesus. He said he knew it was all bunk, but he appreciated the guy trying. He said if that is what you truly believe; if that is your honest belief about how somebody can have eternal life in Heaven then how bad do you have to hate somebody NOT to tell them? That is from an avowed atheist.

So, what is it that is keeping you from giving your 2–3-minute testimony to your neighbor, your friend or your loved one? You don't have to know everything. You just have to know that it says in **John 14:6** that *“Jesus said, I am the Way, the Truth and the Life and no man gets to the Father but through Me.”*

But look at how Jesus ends this command. The One who lived a perfect life, died a sacrificial death and then became the victor over death tells us that wherever we go, whatever we do, whatever we say, He is with us. The One who is in authority; the One who defeated Satan and conquered death; the One who deserved to cry out, *“Tetelestai! It is finished”* **is with us.**

Do you know Him today? Do you have a relationship with Him? I'm not asking if you are a church member or who your family is or what you have done, good or bad. None of that matters. I'm asking if you have believed that Jesus is God and that He can take away all the guilt and shame of your sin just by asking Him into your life to be Lord of your life. Do that right now as the music plays.

Now...tell me your testimony and then tell me how to be saved. If you are reading this, I'd love to hear from you.