

**John's Commission**

**John 20.19-23**

**Series: Signs of Life**

**February 14, 2021**

**The Village Church at Shell Point**

**I. Famous Last Words**

- A. We never know when our last words will be uttered
  - 1. But if there are those we love and care about present when they are uttered, they will likely be remembered
    - a. And if remembered, they will be considered significant, if not important
- B. Sometimes one's last words are trivial
  - 1. As the story goes, Marie Antoinette was on her way to the guillotine and she accidentally stepped on her executioner's foot
    - a. And she exclaimed, "Pardonnez-moi, monsieur"
    - b. At least she was polite
- C. Sometimes great people will express extraordinary humility in their last words
  - 1. Isaac Newton is reported to have said, "I don't know what I may seem to the world. But as to myself I seem to have been only like a boy playing on the seashore and diverting myself now and then in finding a smoother pebble or a prettier shell than the ordinary, whilst the great ocean of truth lay all undiscovered before me."
    - a. This is from a man responsible for identifying the three laws of motion as the foundation of classical mechanics, the notion of gravity as a universal force, the generalized binomial theorem, and he wrote one of the great works on the history of science
    - b. On top of all that, he invented calculus (some of you have never forgiven him for that)
    - c. But his own impression of himself was that he was playing on the seashore
  - 2. Leonardo da Vinci was dying when he uttered these words: "I have offended God and mankind because my work did not reach the quality it should have"
    - a. This is from a man known for the Mona Lisa and the Last Supper, in addition to inventions in civil engineering, chemistry, geology, hydrodynamics, mathematics, optics, physics, pyrotechnics, and zoology
- D. Sometimes last words express deep spiritual truths
  - 1. Bessie Smith, the great blues singer, said, "I'm going, but I'm going in the name of the Lord."
  - 2. Harriet Tubman, the great abolitionist, gathered her family around her and they sang spirituals
    - a. Her last words were, "Swing low, sweet chariot."

- E. If ever we were to pay attention to anyone's last words, it would be the last words of Jesus
1. The last words of Jesus are commonly known as **The Great Commission**
    - a. They are finally expressed just before He ascended into heaven
    - b. **Acts 1:8** (NASB95) — 8 "... 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."
- F. The significance of Jesus' last words are not their humility, or even their deep spiritual truths – though there is much spiritual truth in them
1. The significance of Jesus' last words are that they have propelled the church into a missionary movement that has spanned the centuries
    - a. And covered nearly every country, and every corner of the globe
  2. A missionary movement which continues to this day
    - a. Unfinished – but arguably on the home stretch of history
    - b. With every unreached people group identified
    - c. And gospel resources focused on its completion
  3. A missionary movement which captivates us – we, the Village Church
    - a. A congregation which has captured the vision
    - b. Has responded, and is responding, to Jesus' command
    - c. As we support international workers in more than 80 countries
    - d. Giving more than \$500,000 yearly to the effort
    - e. Which is a drop in the bucket compared to the prayers we offer to fuel the passion of our co-workers in ministry all over the world
  4. The Great Commission
    - a. As a congregation devoted to building a community of forgiveness, purpose and hope in Jesus Christ
    - b. The Great Commission is our ultimate purpose
    - c. It's what gets us up in the morning
    - d. It's what energizes our passions
- G. One of the interesting things about Jesus' last words – the Great Commission – is that He repeated them
1. While they were His last words just before His ascension – the passage we just read from Acts – they were not the first time He had said them
  2. We say, "The Great Commission," but there are actually five Great Commissions
    - a. Five times Jesus commissioned the church to be His witnesses all across the globe
  3. There is the passage in **Acts** which we just read
    - a. Which outlines **the program of the Great Commission** – witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria, and to the remotest part of the earth
  4. But there are also Great Commissions at the end of each of the gospels
  5. The most famous is the one in Matthew

- a. **Matthew 28:18–20** (NASB95) — 18 And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. 19 “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”
- b. The Matthew Great Commission emphasizes **the authority Jesus gives** to the enterprise
- 6. But there are others
  - a. Mark emphasizes **the final judgment**
  - b. **Mark 16:16** (NASB95) — 16 “He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved; but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned.”
  - c. The stakes are high for the completion of the Great Commission
  - d. Finishing the task has great significance for the souls of humankind
  - e. Luke emphasizes the **fulfillment of prophecy**
  - f. **Luke 24:46–47** (NASB95) — 46 and He said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Christ would suffer and rise again from the dead the third day, 47 and that repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem.”
  - g. The Great Commission has always been God’s great redemptive plan, and the prophets foreshadowed its completion
- 7. So with Matthew, it is the authority of the Great Commission
  - a. With Mark it is the consequentiality of the Great Commission
  - b. With Luke it is the prophetic fulfillment of God’s redemptive purpose
  - c. And with Acts, recorded by Luke, it is with the missional program
- H. But what about John?
  - 1. Does John even have a Great commission?
    - a. Well, of course he does – otherwise there would be no sermon today!
  - 2. And examining John’s Great Commission will be excellent preparation for the beginning of Global Impact Week
    - a. The highlight of our church program for the year
    - b. As we remind ourselves, and even celebrate, what God is doing, all across our planet

## II. **Text**

- A. **John 20:19–23** (NASB95) — 19 So when it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and when the doors were shut where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in their midst and said to them, “Peace be with you.” 20 And when He had said this, He showed them both His hands and His side. The disciples then rejoiced when they saw the Lord. 21 So Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you; as the Father has sent Me, I also send you.” 22 And when He had said this, He breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy

Spirit. 23 “If you forgive the sins of any, their sins have been forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they have been retained.”

B. Outline

1. Prerequisite of peace
2. Historical reality of Jesus
3. The sending of the church
4. The spiritual resources needed
5. The authority of the church’s proclamation

III. **The Prerequisite of Peace**

A. **John 20:19** (NASB95) — 19 ... Jesus came and stood in their midst and said to them, “Peace be with you.”

1. He repeats that phrase two verses later just as He is about to deliver the Commission itself, the imperative to send them
2. **John 20:21** (NASB95) — 21 So Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you; as the Father has sent Me, I also send you.”

B. Peace with God is a prerequisite to participating in the Great Commission

1. And peace is what Jesus promises through faith in Him and repentance
2. **John 14:27** (NASB95) — 27 “Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Do not let your heart be troubled, nor let it be fearful.”

C. We cannot, as a church, proclaim the gospel boldly and with abandon unless we have the assurance that we have peace with God

1. We are by nature, enemies of God
  - a. Transgressors, as we are, of His law
2. But through the finished work of Christ on the cross, and through faith in His work, we are transferred from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of His beloved Son
  - a. We are no longer enemies, but friends
  - b. Willing and faithful servants of our benevolent King

D. John Stott: We learn then that the Church’s very first need, before it can begin to engage in evangelism, is an experience and an assurance of Christ’s peace – peace of conscience through his death that banishes sin, peace of mind through his resurrection that banishes doubt... Once we are glad that we have seen the Lord, and once we have clearly recognized him as our crucified and risen Savior, then nothing and no one will be able to silence us.

E. Do you have peace with God?

1. Peace with God can only come by faith in Jesus Christ
  - a. Faith in His life, death and resurrection
2. Peace can only come with what the Bible calls justification
  - a. Justification – legal term, in which we are declared “not guilty” in the Divine courtroom
  - b. And we can only be declared “not guilty” because Christ has been declared “guilty” on our behalf, taking upon Himself our punishment, our condemnation that we so justly deserve

- c. But having faith and trust in Jesus' death on the cross for us, we can be acquitted, declared "not guilty"
    - 3. **Romans 5:1** (NASB95) — 1 Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ...
    - 4. You can only have peace with God by trusting in the finished work of Christ on the cross
      - a. His death for your eternal life
    - 5. Do you have peace with God?
  - F. But there is not only **peace with God** – settled by faith in the death of Christ
    - 1. There is the **peace of God** – the inward assurance that we belong to God as His children
    - 2. **Romans 8:16** (NASB95) — 16 The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God...
    - 3. **Philippians 4:7** (NASB95) — 7 And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.
    - 4. Do you have that inward assurance?
      - a. We can have that inward assurance by being filled with the Spirit
      - b. Motivated, activated, controlled by the Spirit of God
    - 5. **Romans 8:6** (NASB95) — 6 For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace...
  - G. Peace with God, and the peace of God
    - 1. Prerequisites to finishing the task of the Great Commission
- IV. **The Historical Reality of Jesus**
  - A. The second thing John records – and it is critical to our fulfillment of the Great Commission – is the historical reality of Jesus
    - 1. Of not only His existence
      - a. But of His life, death and resurrection
  - B. That Jesus lived in space, time and history – as Francis Schaeffer so eloquently put it – and that He died on a wooden cross, at a particular time and place,
    - 1. Was buried in a tomb in a particular location
    - 2. And was raised from the dead
    - 3. And appeared to the disciples – and to more than 500 followers as Paul tells the Corinthians
      - a. Is a critical feature of biblical Christianity
  - C. Christianity, in the final analysis, is not a religion
    - 1. Not a myth
      - a. Not a set of fables or fabrications
    - 2. Not an ideology or compendium of ideas
  - D. Christianity is about a person – Jesus of Nazareth – whom we affirm in the Apostles' Creed
    - 1. I believe... in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord,
    - 2. Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
    - 3. Born of the virgin Mary,
    - 4. Suffered under Pontius Pilate,
    - 5. Was crucified, dead, and buried.

6. On the third day he rose again from the dead...
- E. So it is no accident that John records
  1. **John 20:20** (NASB95) — 20 And when He had said this, He showed them both His hands and His side. The disciples then rejoiced when they saw the Lord.
  2. Jesus was not an idea or an apparition
    - a. He was no ghost
    - b. He had a physical existence
    - c. And lived, died and rose in time, space history
- F. We only complete the Great Commission as we have complete confidence in the historical reality of Jesus Christ
  1. His life, death and resurrection
  2. The apostles did
  3. The early disciples did
  4. They changed the Roman world over just a few short centuries because of their certainty of the person of Jesus Christ in history
    - a. And we are changing the planet through the Great Commission
    - b. Because we are so convinced as well
    - c. That truth, that certainty, drives us forward
    - d. Drives us to finish the unfinished task
- G. Do you have that certainty?
  1. Do you doubt – as Thomas did just a few short verses later?
  2. I urge you to consider the evidence
    - a. As so many others have done through history
    - b. Men like Lee Strobel and Josh McDowell
    - c. And many others
  3. Maybe you're a skeptic
    - a. Fine – are you an honest skeptic?
    - b. Then consider the evidence
    - c. Evidence of the historical accuracy of the OT and NT
    - d. Evidence of the events of the 1<sup>st</sup> Century
    - e. Evidence of the transformation of people and societies because of the truth of Jesus Christ
  4. The disciple's had that certainty
    - a. It launched the Great Commission
    - b. And it propels us forward as well
- V. **The Sending of the Church**
  - A. Then there is the actual commission
    1. In John it is quite memorable
    2. **John 20:21** (NASB95) — 21 "... as the Father has sent Me, I also send you."
  - B. Jesus sends the apostles, the disciples
    1. Sends them
      - a. And has sent others following in their footsteps throughout history
      - b. And continues to send even today

2. Sends people we know and love
  - a. Like Lisa Munson
  - b. Like Janice Quinlan
  - c. Like Tim and Marilyn Westergren
  - d. Like Eric and Krisy whom we'll meet during GIW
  - e. Like Tim and Shelly Crouch, originally sent to Russia, who now have the pleasure of sending hundreds more all over the world
- C. But the key aspect of this version of the Great Commission as "as the Father has sent Me, I also send you"
  1. "As the Father sent Me"
- D. How has the Father sent the Son?
  1. First, He sent the son **into the world**
    - a. **John 17:18** (NASB95) — 18 "As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world."
  2. The Father sent the Son into the world – in the incarnation
    - a. He didn't have to do that
    - b. But He sent the Son to identify with the world
    - c. To live in the world
    - d. To save the world
  3. We too are called to be sent into the world
    - a. We are to be with the world
    - b. We are to identify with the world
    - c. We are to serve the world
  4. We are not to act according to the principles of the world
    - a. We are to be in the world, but not of the world
  5. This may be one of the most difficult aspects of fulfilling the Great Commission
    - a. We don't want to get our hands dirty
    - b. We don't want to mess with the world's troubles
    - c. We don't want to put ourselves in harm's way
    - d. And so the church often retreats to its sacred enclaves, away from the rough and tumble of our dysfunctional society
  6. But that's not what Jesus did
    - a. He lived with the "sinners" of His day
    - b. He taught the morally compromised
    - c. He loved even the greedy tax collectors
  7. And we are called to do the same
- E. John Stott: I personally believe that our failure to obey the implications of this command is the greatest weakness of evangelical Christians... We do not identify. We believe so strongly... in proclamation, that we tend to proclaim our message from a distance. We sometimes appear like people who shout advice to drowning men from the safety of the seashore... We are afraid of getting wet, and indeed of greater perils than this. But Jesus Christ did not broadcast salvation from the sky. He visited us in great humility.
- F. Not only did the Father send the Son into the world

1. He sent Him into the world with a purpose – **to save sinners**
    - a. **1 Timothy 1:15** (NASB95) — 15 It is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am foremost of all.
  2. We, the church, are called to serve the world
    - a. We, like Lisa Munson’s work with refugees, seek to meet basic needs – health care, hygiene, community development, education
    - b. That’s what CAMA Services does
    - c. But not without the communication of the gospel
    - d. Not without the message being proclaimed
    - e. That God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself
  3. And that an eternity awaits – either of salvation in the presence of the loving God
    - a. Or of judgment at the hands of a jealous God
- G. But as we go into the world
1. With the purpose of proclaiming salvation to sinners
    - a. We must go with humility
  2. **1 Timothy 1:15** (NASB95) — 15 It is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, **among whom I am foremost of all.**
  3. That’s Paul – the greatest evangelist
  4. We’re not going because we’re superior to those sinners
    - a. We are those sinners!
  5. We are like beggars telling other beggars where to find bread
- H. That’s how we are sent
1. That’s why we are sent
    - a. And that’s how we should go
- I. Finally, we are sent as the Father has sent the Son in order **to glorify God**
1. **John 17:4** (NASB95) — 4 “I glorified You on the earth, having accomplished the work which You have given Me to do.”
  2. **John 17:10** (NASB95) — 10 “... and all things that are Mine are Yours, and Yours are Mine; and I have been glorified in them.”
  3. The ultimate goal of our being sent is the glorify God
- J. So that is our Commission
1. To go into the world as Jesus was sent into the world
  2. To go so that sinners might be saved through the testimony of other redeemed sinners
  3. And that in the process God would be glorifies
- VI. **The Spiritual Resources Needed**
- A. **John 20:22** (NASB95) — 22 And when He had said this, He breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit.”
  - B. Receive the Holy Spirit
    1. Did they receive the Holy Spirit then and there?
      - a. What, then, about Pentecost – when the Holy Spirit was poured out upon masses of believers?



- C. There is no conflict between the two
    - 1. The Spirit of God has been engaged with selected believers from the very beginning
    - 2. Remember when Peter made his great confession of Jesus: “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God”
      - a. Jesus said that wasn’t revealed to him by flesh and blood, but God revealed it to him
      - b. How did God do that?
      - c. By the Spirit of God, of course!
    - 3. Pentecost, recorded in Acts 2, was about the fulfillment of the prophecy in Joel that the Spirit would be poured out, not on just a select group of people, but on all kinds of people
      - a. Old, young, male, female, Jew, Gentile
  - D. The point is, we can’t be sent without the Holy Spirit going with us
    - 1. Teaching us
    - 2. Empowering us
    - 3. Inspiring us
    - 4. Sustaining us
    - 5. Growing us
    - 6. Assuring us
  - E. Matthew’s version emphasizes the authority that Jesus gives us in the Great Commission
    - 1. John’s commission emphasizes the power that Jesus gives us in completing the Great Commission
    - 2. The task is unfinished
      - a. But it will be finished
      - b. Because Jesus has given us of His Holy Spirit
    - 3. We have all the spiritual resources needed to do the job
- VII. **The Authority of the Church’s Proclamation**
- A. **John 20:23** (NASB95) — 23 “If you forgive the sins of any, their sins have been forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they have been retained.”
  - B. Finally, Jesus provides the authority the church needs in its proclamation
    - 1. Like any ambassador, to engage with the leaders of another nation the ambassador needs the authority of the king or president
      - a. Then he can make his case with confidence
      - b. Because he carries the authority of the one who sends
  - C. In this case, in the gospel, the church proclaims that forgiveness of sins is given through faith in Jesus Christ
    - 1. And when one believes in Jesus, we have the authority to assure them that because of Jesus, they are forgiven
  - D. It’s not that the church has authority to forgive sins
    - 1. Only God can forgive sins
      - a. The NT is very clear on that
    - 2. But the church is given the authority to declare that the sins of all those who believe in Jesus have been forgiven

- a. That's what the text says
  - E. And that's an integral part of the Great Commission
- VIII. John's Commission
  - A. Prerequisite of peace
  - B. Historical reality of Jesus
  - C. Sending of the church
  - D. Spiritual resources needed
  - E. Authority of the church's proclamation

## Benediction

Hebrews 13:20–21 (NASB95) — 20 Now the God of peace, who brought up from the dead the great Shepherd of the sheep through the blood of the eternal covenant, even Jesus our Lord, 21 equip you in every good thing to do His will, working in us that which is pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen.