

“Last Words” – Pr Jim Sprengle – Ascension Day – May 18, 2023

- I. **Acts 1:7-8** – Jesus said, “It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by His own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be My witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.
- II. **Famous last words**...
 - a. Sometimes the last words of a person are full of meaning that we take to heart...
 - b. Sometimes the last words are finishing an argument or relationship by “getting in the last word”.
 - c. Sometimes last words are ironic or humorous...I found several famous people’s last words:
 - i. P. T. Barnum, the circus entrepreneur who died in 1891, said, “How were the receipts today at Madison Square Garden?”
 - ii. Lady Nancy Astor, who died in 1964, woke briefly during her last illness and found all her family around her... and said, “Am I dying, or is this my birthday?”
 - iii. Domonic Willard was sentenced to death by firing squad for his crimes during the Prohibition era, and was asked if he had a last request, to which he said, “Why yes, a bulletproof vest.”
 - iv. Mother Theresa, who died in 1997, said these words before she died, “Jesus, I love you. Jesus, I love you.” ¹
 - v. And Martin Luther, the father of the Reformation, is said to have spoken these last words before he passed away on February 18, 1546, “We are beggars. This is true.”
 - d. I commonly use that as an idiom to remind people that we can’t count on anything...or that our words will be proven wrong.
 - i. Like, “If I leave the office now, I will have plenty of time to get there...*famous last words*.”
 - ii. Or, “I haven’t been sick for a really long time! *Famous last words*.”
 - iii. Or maybe like the parable of the man who stored up his goods in his barns, “I’m saving up so that when I retire I can travel the world... *famous last words*.”
- III. **Jesus’ last words on earth still echo through the Christian Church.**
 - a. Jesus was not dying when He spoke His last words, and He was also not being ironic or sarcastic... but He was responding to a question about the future.
 - i. His answer was, “Don’t worry about the things that are in God the Father’s hands to deal with, but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be My witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”

- ii. With that, Jesus ascended into heaven... leaving the disciples to consider what that meant for them.
- b. He was departing to take His rightful place at the right hand of the Father in heaven.
 - i. Today is the remembrance of an even bigger event than the recent coronation of King Charles... today we remember the coronation of our Savior Jesus Christ.
 - ii. At the end of Matthew, Jesus told His disciples that, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me.” (Matthew 28:18)
 - 1. The authority to be the Ruler, the King of kings... as we read today, that Jesus was placed, “far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come.” (Ephesians 1:21)
 - iii. Yes, Jesus is now in heaven – both God and human – watching out for the best interests of His people... us.
- c. It's sometimes hard to figure out why the Ascension is important – for most Christians, the birth of Jesus, His death on the cross, and His resurrection from the dead are good enough for them... why make a big deal out of this event?
 - i. One reason is that not only is Jesus God, but He is a human being in heaven as our intercessor (or go between) – we have a real person watching out for us – a real person who understands us and has experienced our lives...
 - ii. Another reason to celebrate ascension is the release of the Holy Spirit – as Jesus would not remain in a single place at a point in time, but open the door for the Holy Spirit to pour out over all people – so, the temple of God which had only one point of access was then opened to all people wherever they might be.
 - iii. The Ascension also matters for us because throughout the whole Bible we hear that the Savior will be seated at the right hand of God until His enemies become His footstool (Psalm 110:1).
 - 1. This means that Jesus won the victory over death and our fate is wrapped up with Him – or that we will also have a place in heaven one day too –
 - 2. In fact, Jesus says that He is going ahead of us to prepare a place for us – John 14:2.
- d. So the ascension is important to us in many ways as Christians, but also the last words of Jesus as He departed.

IV. **You will be My witnesses.**

- a. Jesus spoke to the disciples, explaining who and what they would become... filled with the Holy Spirit and witnesses to the Truth as they experienced Him.

- b. Be the witnesses of the truth – in all your circles of influence, whether locally, regionally or even worldwide – you will be My witnesses.
- c. Now, are those “famous last words” like the idiom?
 - i. I mean in the sense that – yeah right Jesus, like *that’s* ever going to happen!!
 - ii. As terrible as that sounds, sadly, for some Christians that may be true – they have no intention of witnessing – in words or deeds.
 - 1. Perhaps that is the case in your life as you do your best to keep your faith in Jesus private and personal.
 - iii. In other cases, we let everyone know we are Christians, and then our witness to Jesus is tainted by our lack of love for others... by our condemnation of those who don’t live up to our standards... and by our lifestyle that doesn’t reflect Christ at all.
- d. However, “you will be My witnesses” are famous last words that carry an immense significance and blessing in our lives.
 - i. These words for all who believe in Jesus Christ mean that we are a part of something big – something that includes God’s power filling us for our life of faith.
 - ii. Jesus chooses us to be His witnesses and to tell about the truth of His love through our vocations or stations in life.
 - iii. God loved us in such a way that He turned over His own Son to torture and death on a cross – a payment that opened the door for our forgiveness – which He applies to us through faith.
 - iv. That gift of grace and forgiveness is also a gift we can give by the power of the Holy Spirit.
- e. Our living and ascended Savior gives us everything we need to witness His love and truth in the world around us.
 - i. We have the Church and all its members held together by the King of kings.
 - ii. We have our Baptism in Christ to anchor us to the living God as His very own child.
 - iii. We have the Lord’s Supper to strengthen us in the midst of the trials and persecution that will always take place as we suffer for Jesus.
 - iv. We have the Word – our mighty sword of truth that cuts through false beliefs and brings people home to Jesus.
- f. Yes, these are famous last words – “You will be My witnesses” – they are words that remind us of who we are in Christ... Saved by grace through faith and filled with the power of the Holy Spirit! Amen

¹ Source: www.wikiquote.org