

The Parting Words of Jesus

A study of the great commission

Intro: Our theme for the first Sunday of each month is "Reaching the lost." And that great work was a high priority for Jesus and His apostles. Luke tells us that after Jesus' resurrection, He appeared to his apostles and instructed them concerning their mission on earth. Knowing that He would return to be with the Father in heaven, He gave them specific instructions about what He wanted them to do on earth.

Those instructions are especially important because they were the Lord's parting words to His disciples before ascending to heaven. His commission to them is sometimes called "the great commission" and reveals in very clear terms Jesus' plan for the salvation of all people. Every person needs to hear what Jesus had to say so that they can know how to be saved and enter the eternal kingdom of God when Jesus returns.

LET'S READ THE FOUR ACCOUNTS OF THE GREAT COMMISSION

And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." (Mt. 28:18-20)

And He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved; but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned. (Mk. 16:15-16)

Now He said to them, "These are My words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled." Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, and He said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and rise again from the dead the third day; and that repentance for forgiveness of sins should 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; but you are to stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high." (Lk. 24:44-49)

*And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and *said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, their sins have been forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they have been retained." (Jn. 20:22-23)*

LET'S NOTICE WHAT WE LEARN ABOUT SALVATION FROM THESE ACCOUNTS:

Jesus Christ has all authority in heaven and earth.

He received that authority from the Father to rule over His kingdom and to be the head His body, the church.

Only He has the right to say how sins are forgiven. That is not the prerogative of any man.

Jesus has authorized His apostles to announce the terms of forgiveness to the world.

Through the symbolic gesture of breathing upon them, Jesus promised the apostles that they would receive the Holy Spirit to empower them to carry out their mission in Jesus' name.

They would be Jesus' witnesses to testify concerning Him. Through the guidance of the Spirit, they would forgive and retain sins as Christ Himself had determined, not as they determined.

Consequently, when the apostles forgave sins, Christ also forgave them. When they retained them, Christ had also retained them.

The way to forgiveness of sins is through preaching/teaching the gospel.

In the great commission in Matthew, Jesus commands, "Go teach" or more accurately, "Make disciples." Of course, the very word disciple implies that those the apostles taught would be students of Jesus.

In Mark's account, salvation is mediated to man through preaching, a word that means simply to herald forth good news to others.

Jesus statements take the mystery out of how people come to God.

They would hear the gospel and respond to it.

The salvation offered through the gospel is for all people.

Jesus urged the apostles to make disciples "of all the nations." This makes clear that God's new covenant people would not just be Jews, but Gentiles from all over the ancient world. There would none excluded from this salvation. It would be proclaimed to "all the nations beginning from Jerusalem" and spreading all over the world.

In John's account, the forgiveness of sins is offered to "whoever" the apostles forgave. That means that there is no divine determinism that unconditionally predestines some to salvation and others to condemnation.

The message that saves is the message of Christ's death, burial, and resurrection, and coronation.

The apostles were told to preach that He was the fulfillment of the prophecies of the OT. (Lk. 24:44-46). Those prophecies pointed to His death, burial, and resurrection from the dead. The apostles would "be witnesses" (Lk. 24:48) of these things because they had been with Jesus and had seen Him after His resurrection from the dead.

They were to tell people why He died, i.e. for our sins (1 Cor. 15:1-4); and that "remission of sins" could be received "in His name".

Through that message, people could be "saved" (Mk. 16:16); their sins could be "remitted."

The response to the gospel that saves is to believe the gospel, to repent of sin, and to be baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

He that believeth... (Mk. 16:16)

Those who believe would repent of their sins (Lk. 24:47)

Those who believed and were baptized would be saved (Mk. 16:16).

Disciples would be made by "baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit".

Those that disbelieved would remain in the condemnation of their sins.

Those who obey the gospel need to be taught to observe all things that the apostles were authorized to teach!

Such preaching would make "disciples".

We are saved from sins of the past at baptism; but we must continue to be faithful and observe all that the Lord has taught.

Only then can we be assured of Christ's saving presence with us.

Conclusion: Jesus' parting words tell us what we need to know to be saved from our sins and have the hope of eternal life with Him.

He wanted you to hear this message. He died for you and wants you to be saved. You have heard. Will you believe, repent, and be baptized in his name today?