

“Famous Last Words”

There is a book titled *Last Words of Notable People: Final Words of More Than 3500 Noteworthy People Throughout History*. The last words people utter can be interesting, in some cases humorous, and may reveal much about a person's life, and what's important.

Here are some examples of the last words people have spoken. The renowned painter, Leonardo da Vinci, said right before he died, “I have offended God and mankind because my work did not reach the quality it should have.” (Apparently the Mona Lisa painting was not good enough)! Winston Churchill's last words are rather interesting. He said: “I'm so bored with it all.”

Actress, Joan Crawford, when her housekeeper began to pray for her, swore at her housekeeper and said, “Don't you dare ask God to help me.” Some claim the last words of comedian Groucho Marx were, “This is no way to live.” Others, however, report that his last words, spoken to his wife were, “Die my dear? Why that's the last thing I'll do.” George Harrison, of Beatles fame said: “Love one another.”

I come from a Methodist background. Methodism goes back to a man named John Wesley. John Wesley struggled for many years searching for an inner assurance of salvation. The last words of his dying father Samuel were spoken to John, and burned into John Wesley's heart. Samuel said, “The inward witness, son, the inward witness. That is the proof, the strongest proof of Christianity.”

What were Jesus' last words? Wouldn't you imagine the last words Jesus spoke would be well chosen, and very important? According to Matthew's gospel, Jesus' last words, before He ascended back to the Father, were: “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 and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age” (Matthew 28:18-20). Those words have become famous. They've been called “The Great Commission”. Go, make disciples! Jesus told His followers, His disciples, to go and make *other* disciples.

Note first, Jesus wants everyone to be a disciple of His. What is a disciple? The word means “student”, “learner”. But not a student in the sense of sitting in a classroom, studying a textbook. It's more like an apprenticeship, on-the-job training. Jesus' disciples followed Jesus around. They had conversations with Him. They listened to Him teach and preach. They observed Him healing people. Gradually they began to do what He did.

“Disciples” of Jesus *today* “hang out with Jesus.” They have conversations with Him (prayer). They soak up His teaching and preaching (found in the Bible). More and more they begin to see life as He sees it – think what He thinks, do what He did.

Now a lot of people consider themselves “Christians”. If asked, “Are you Christian?” they say “Yes”. They believe in God. they kind of believe in Jesus. They try to be good, decent people. Oh, they may not go to church. They may not pray much. And most days they may not even

think much about God. But in their mind they are “Christians”. Nominal Christians. “Christian” would be their “religious preference”.

But a disciple is more than that. Jesus wants us to be devoted followers, not just have a vague and generalized belief in Him.

Jesus said, “Go and make disciples.” I sincerely hope that you have taken the step of becoming a **disciple** of Jesus. If not, you can do that! You can say to the Lord Jesus something like this: “Lord, I want to stop living just for myself. I want to be more than just a Christian in name only. I want to follow You, learn from You, live as You lived. Make me one of Your disciples.”

Jesus wants everyone to be a disciple of His.

But Jesus’ spoke these last words to those who *already were* disciples: “Go and *make disciples* of all nations” (Matthew 28:19). Once you are a disciple, then try to lead others into a relationship with Jesus where they become disciples too! Notice: this is not a just *suggestion* that Jesus offers, this is a *command*!

Right here, we run into a problem: In our society, many think for you to evangelize, share your faith, try to get others to follow Jesus, is a bad thing! It invades people’s privacy (“religion is a private matter”). It means that you are judging people, that you think you’re better than them. Well if the first Christians believed that, Christianity would have died soon after it started! They took Jesus’ words seriously. They boldly proclaimed the message of Jesus to the known world, even if it meant being ridiculed, suffering, or in some instances being killed.

Look, I get it! Sometimes the way Jesus’ followers come at you is a real turnoff! Some well meaning Christians do come across as being better than you. They don’t respect you as a person – what *you* think, what your situation is, and what you may be going through. I’ve had people try to get me saved even after I told them I was a pastor! To be honest, the evil part of me wanted to tell them to shut up, and worry about their own lives!

Don’t let a few obnoxious, insensitive Christians cause you to discount the importance of Jesus’ last words: We are to “go and make disciples of all nations.”

Why did Jesus say that? Why is that so important? ***Because Jesus Christ is the Source of life: abundant life, eternal life!*** Jesus said, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life” (John 14:6). When we give our life over to Christ and become a follower, we have a new relationship with God, our sins are forgiven, we get a new perspective on life. He gives us power and joy and peace and a love that we just can’t have without Him!

Why would we not want other people to experience that too? Suppose researchers at a medical center come up with a cure for the coronavirus. These doctors and researchers are ecstatic. “We have the answer! This is great for our team! This is going to keep us and our families safe.” They even decide to have a weekly gathering at center where they can celebrate their good

fortune. “We’ll take time to be thankful that we’re safe. We’ll even develop a creed that outlines how we came up with the cure. But we won’t share this outside our group – we don’t want to intrude in peoples’ personal lives.” Why would they not want to share this cure with friends, neighbors, the whole world!

Christ is the cure for the sin and evil problem! No, being a follower of Jesus doesn’t make us perfect! It never will. But it changes us! As Andy Stanley likes to say, following Jesus makes life better and makes us better at life!

Jesus last words: “Go and make disciples of all nations” (Matthew 28:19). Not only are these words for us as an individual, but ***these words are a command, marching orders, for the church!*** Congregations can forget that their main purpose is to make disciples of Jesus, “baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.”

It’s easy for churches to forget this, to get sidetracked on things that may be good, but have little to do with reaching beyond our walls and making new disciples! Some churches have more enthusiasm for their strawberry festivals and Christmas bazaars than for winning people to Christ. They put more time and energy into programs and activities for those already in the church than in ways to reach beyond their walls to share the message of Jesus with those not yet disciples!

Jesus’ last words are for every follower of Jesus: we are to go, make disciples! No, He doesn’t want you to become an idiot about it, to insult and disrespect people by attacking them with a Bible in your hand! But genuinely care about people. Take time to build relationships with them. And when an opportunity comes up, to humbly share what you believe about Jesus, and He’s making a difference in your life.

I thank God for people who shared their faith in Christ with me. Several pastors who took an interest in me as a youth, and saw a potential in me that I didn’t see. Sunday School teachers who taught me (and put up with my bratty behavior). A neighbor who was a Lutheran, and not ashamed to be known as Christian. I only hope I can be like that for someone else who needs the Lord.

