

THE FINAL WORDS OF JESUS

They are some of the dying words of famous and infamous men:

- ✓ Napoleon Bonaparte, the French general and emperor, said, “I die before my time, and my body will be given back to the earth. Such is the fate of him who has been called the great Napoleon. What an abyss between my deep misery and the eternal kingdom of Christ.”
- ✓ Voltaire, the famous French infidel, is reported to have said to his doctor, “I am abandoned by God and man! I will give you half of what I am worth if you will give me six months’ life.”
- ✓ Thomas Hobbes, the brilliant skeptic who corrupted the faith of some of England’s great men, exclaimed, “If I had the whole world, I would give it to live one day. I shall be glad to find a hole to creep out of the world at. I am about to take a leap into the dark.” [Boice and Ryken, *14 Words from Jesus* (Kindle Locations 138-144).]
- ✓ And John Wilkes Booth, the assassin of President Lincoln, penned these words a few days after the incident: “I am here in despair...I have too great a soul to die like a criminal. O, may He spare me that, and let me die bravely!” About a week later he was mortally wounded by a bullet and his dying words reportedly were, “Tell mother, tell mother, I died for my country.... Useless, useless.” [Forbes, *They Went That-A-Way*, 41, 43.]

It is true, as Jesus taught, that all our words always reveal what is in our hearts (Lk. 6:45). That is particularly true of one’s dying words or final words, as those words reveal not only what is in one’s heart, but what is preeminent in one’s heart. For that reason, many have been attracted to the final words of Christ from the cross — those seven sayings revealed what His cross-work was accomplishing. But those were not His final words.

The Gospel writers record a number of additional interactions and teachings of Jesus following His resurrection. *These* are the final earthly words of Jesus; they are conversations that are meant to strengthen weak people for the task the Lord is leaving for them to do.

These followers are in various states of mind and need; what is common among them is that the basis of Christ’s ministry to them is the resurrection. As you examine the lives of those who made up the first generation church after Jesus ascension, there is a remarkable transformation of those people after the resurrection. Prior to the resurrection they are weak, confused, timid, and fearful. After the resurrection, they are increasingly and dramatically transformed into people who are strong, clear, passionate, and bold. The reason for the transformation? The truth of the resurrection. And that transformation begins with Jesus’ ministry to them with words of resurrection hope.

JESUS' FINAL WORDS REVEAL THE HOPE OF THE RESURRECTION.

- 1. A Word of COMFORT for the GRIEVING (John 20:15-17)**
- 2. A Word of PEACE for the FEARFUL (Mt. 28:10; Jn. 20:19, 21)**
- 3. A Word of EXPLANATION for the CONFUSED (Lk. 24:27)**
- 4. A Word of REVELATION for the DOUBTING (Jn. 20:27-28)**
- 5. A Word of FORGIVENESS for the SINNER (Jn. 21:15-17)**
- 6. A Word of DIRECTION for EVERYONE (Mt. 28:18-20)**

Transition: Here are six final words of resurrection hope for those who are in need.

1. A Word of COMFORT for the GRIEVING (John 20:15-17)

- Saying “good-bye” is one of the hardest things we do. We say “good-bye” to spouses when they die, to children when they move out of our homes, to colleagues when they transfer, to friends when there is a relational fracture. Sometimes we get to say the words, and sometimes the relationship is gone and then we realize, “I never had a chance to say ‘good-bye’ and all the things that person meant to me.” And of course with the change in these relationships there is a measure of loneliness.
- It appears that loneliness and grief is what is behind Mary’s tears in John 20.
 - ✓ For all the times that Jesus talked to his disciples and followers about His coming death and resurrection, none of them understood; they all seemed to be blind-sided by Friday’s events.
 - ✓ And Mary particularly feels the weight of solitude, loneliness and loss. We see that in verse 13 — **they have taken away my Lord**. She doesn’t say, “the Lord,” but “my Lord.” Her relationship with Christ was not unique to her, but she experiences His death in an intensely personal way. It’s almost as if she is oblivious to the grief of everyone else on that day.
 - ✓ And she is also somewhat irrational in her grief (v. 15) — **tell me where you have laid Him...** As if this one woman will be able to carry the weight of a man (160-180 lbs?) covered with an additional 100 lbs. of spices (19:39). This is the greatness of her grief.
- To that grief, Jesus speaks two words of comfort —
 - ✓ **Mary** (v. 16) = With this one word, Jesus is revealed to Mary. Jesus is her Master and her Friend; but He is also her Shepherd. With this One word, He reminds her of the truth of **10:3** — “He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out.” A few moments earlier He had called her “woman” (v. 13), but that didn’t awaken her. “Mary” did. This is a reminder that the Savior knows His people — He knows you and He knows your need. You may be grieving, lonely, and confused, but He is comforting, with you, and knows what you need.
 - ✓ **I ascend to My Father and your Father, and My God and your God** (v. 17) = Jesus had previously upset the Pharisees by calling God *His* Father (10:30-31). Now He says that God is also the Father of Mary and the disciples! He has called His followers brothers and friends, now He amplifies that relationship by indicating their adoption into the Heavenly family.
 - This means she (and we) have a Father who is infinite in compassion (Mt. 7:11).
 - This means we have “siblings” to come alongside us in ministry and need. She and we are not alone. When grieving and lamenting loss (even of “God”), be comforted by God’s provision.
 - And of course the means for these new relationships is through the resurrection (Gal. 3:26).

2. A Word of PEACE for the FEARFUL (Mt. 28:10; Jn. 20:19, 21)

- If there is one particularly dominant emotion on the day of the resurrection, it was fear:
 - ✓ Joseph of Arimathea was afraid of being identified with Jesus (Jn. 19:38).
 - ✓ The guards were afraid of the angels (Mt. 28:3-4).
 - ✓ The women were afraid of the angels (Mt. 28:5, 8; Mk. 16:8; Lk. 24:5).
 - ✓ The women were afraid that Jesus would leave them again (Mt. 28:10)
 - ✓ And the disciples were fearful (of the Jews; cp. Mt. 10:28) in their gathering room (Jn. 20:19).
- Now the angels exhorted the women not to be afraid (Mt. 28:5), but Christ could make them not afraid — He could expel their fear. And that’s what He did for them and the disciples (Jn. 20:19, 21).
 - ✓ Jesus expelled their fear by speaking a single word: **Peace** (vv. 19, 21).
 - ✓ The word “peace” is the Hebrew word “Shalom,” and while it was and is used as a word of greeting, for Jesus, this was more than a greeting. Just three days earlier, on Thursday night, He had promised them peace (Jn. 14:27) — a peace that superseded any worldly peace. And now He is reminding them of what He is bringing.
 - ✓ And He brings that peace because of His victory. The twin foes of sin and death have been conquered. Jesus said that to them in His final private word to them Thursday night (Jn. 16:33). Now His first word to the re-gathered disciples is “I come with the peace I promised.”
 - ✓ Even more than that, “After their conduct on Good Friday the disciples might have expected rebuke or blame. Instead Jesus pronounces peace upon them.” [Laney] This is grace on top of peace! And that’s the way of God’s peace.
 - ✓ The message of Christ is forgiveness of sin, and that forgiveness yields peace in the life of the believer (Rom. 8:1). When Christ is believed and followed, He produces peace in one’s life.
- A few weeks ago we talked about the things that fearfully keep us awake at night (Ps. 63:6). The believer in Christ can (and must) rest in the truth that Christ’s death and resurrection has provided him with peace with God — the one thing he could never attain on his own. The disciples did not need to fear angels or enemies because Christ was resurrected and their salvation was sure. Similarly, we need not fear our enemies or our troubles because they cannot remove what Christ has given.

3. A Word of EXPLANATION for the CONFUSED (Lk. 24:27)

- Following the resurrection appearance of Christ, word began to spread — the women saw the angels; Peter and John saw the empty tomb and empty grave clothes, Mary talked to Jesus...
- They had to be hopeful, but they are still curious; it’s like they’ve just dumped the contents of a 5,000 piece puzzle on the table and they’re trying to make sense of it (v. 14 — **all these things**).

- They had many of the details (vv. 19-24; Cleopas' wife was likely at the cross and tomb, Jn. 19:25); they just did not yet comprehend. They are confused and *sad* (v. 17). And to their confusion, Christ provides an explanation:
 - ✓ When Jesus refers to *all that the prophets had spoken* (v. 25), He is indicating that the OT Scriptures had revealed enough to keep them from their confusion.
 - ✓ What was particularly confusing to them was that Christ died. How could the Messiah die? This was the complaint of the unbelieving Jews (Jn. 12:34) and it was the primary puzzle for the disciples as well. So Jesus reminded them that it was *necessary for the Christ [Messiah] to suffer these things...* (v. 26) — something He had told them many times before: Mt. 16:21-23; Mt. 26:54; Lk. 9:51; 22:22. And even the angels had reminded the women (Lk. 24:6-7).
 - ✓ Then Jesus culminates His explanation with a walk through the Old Testament: starting with Moses (the Pentateuch), *Jesus explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures*. So starting in Genesis, Jesus walked through the OT to demonstrate the divine purpose of God's salvation through a suffering Messiah being consistently revealed (**Jn. 5:39**).

- This is still the part of the story of Jesus that leaves most unbelievers befuddled. The story of Jesus is the story of God's provision for man — this is the story in both the OT and the NT.
 - ✓ Man is a sinner who sins and is thus God's enemy deserving God's wrath and judgment.
 - ✓ God is compassionate and gracious and withholds His judgment against all men for a time.
 - ✓ God sends His Son, the perfect and infinite God-Man, to earth to die in place of men. Though Christ never sinned, God treated Him as if He had committed all the sins of all who would believe in Him.
 - ✓ Those who believe that they deserve God's judgment but that Christ died in their place are given salvation — freedom from God's penalty and freedom from sin's power. Christ has their sin imputed to Him and they have Christ's righteousness imputed to them.
 - ✓ Those who believe in Christ have the hope that they will one day see God (which no man can naturally do and live) and be with God eternally in His presence (1 Jn. 3:1 ff).
 - ✓ And as Jesus said to the men on the road to Emmaus — it *had* to be this way according to OT.

- This is the word of explanation Jesus offers; it was sufficient for the disciples, and it is sufficient today. If you are confused about Jesus and the resurrection, know that it is all about saving you and me from God's eternal and infinite wrath. It's a story of God's infinite grace and love to provide for His own.

4. A Word of REVELATION for the DOUBTING (Jn. 20:26-28)

- The resurrection may be the most doubted historical account in the history of man. Only hours after the resurrection, stories are already being contrived to conceal its truthfulness (Mt. 28:11-15). And the secularists were not the only ones who doubted; even the disciples questioned it.
 - ✓ When the women reported to the disciples the empty tomb and the interaction with the angels, they didn't believe, thinking the women were speaking *nonsense* (Lk. 24:11)
 - ✓ When Mary herself looked into the empty tomb (presumably the angels had already left), she assumed someone had stolen Jesus' body (Jn. 20:11-13).
 - ✓ When Cleopas' own wife told him that she had seen the empty tomb, he still went to Emmaus.
 - ✓ When Peter and John saw the empty grave clothes, they believed but they did not understand (Jn. 20:9).
 - ✓ And of course there is Thomas (Jn. 20:24ff). Poor Thomas who is singled out as *the epitome of doubt* (so much so that he is most often referred to as "Doubting Thomas," as if "doubt" was his first name). But Thomas was just one of many who doubted that day.

- So what does Jesus say for those who doubt (Jn. 20:26-28)?
 - ✓ For eight days Thomas has been meditating on the reports — "could it be true?" He had been adamant about his doubt (v. 25) — Notice his response (v. 25): "not only do I not believe you, but I don't believe that He could be resurrected!" But he has to think about that for eight days.
 - ✓ Jesus arrives again with the word *Peace* — not condemnation or judgment, but the offer of peace.
 - ✓ And immediately Jesus singles out Thomas (revealed His omniscience) — ***Reach here...do not be unbelieving but believing.***
 - Jesus was offering an affirmation of the resurrection. It is reasonable to believe the resurrection — it is not something to be believed by blind faith. It is substantiated. And it was to Thomas.
 - But notice also that one doesn't need to touch Jesus' hands and side to believe (in fact, Thomas doesn't appear to have touched the wounds). So Jesus says, ***blessed are they...*** (v. 28). To believe without seeing does not mean to believe without reason. Our faith is a reasonable faith (1 Cor. 15:3-8ff).

- To those who doubted — Thomas, the disciples, and others, Jesus revealed Himself as resurrected. He is out of the grave. He really is alive. It is reasonable to believe in Him. We can be confident.

5. A Word of FORGIVENESS for the SINNER (Jn. 21:15-17)

- The disciples are virtually all criticized for their responses at the cross (except John); later all appear to be afraid and hiding. But Peter in particular is singled out for his actions: “how could he deny?”
- How could he? I know. He was terrified and alone and operating out of the flesh (***I will never...***). He was just like us. He could deny Jesus because he is like me (and I am like him) — he still had indwelling sin that had not been eradicated. And it showed up at the worst possible moment.
- So I guess all was lost. Peter certainly thought so. Immediately after the deed, Luke says ***he went out and wept bitterly*** (22:62). And John doesn’t say that Peter is quitting, but in John 21:3 he reports that Peter says, ***I am going fishing***. It appears to be more than just one fishing trip — it appears that he is going back to his former profession:
 - ✓ Peter also had a family to support and undoubtedly his sin led him to question his usability in serving the Savior, even though the Savior had expressly told the women to tell Peter to meet Him in Galilee (Mk. 16:7), and has apparently already met privately with Peter (Lk. 24:34).
 - ✓ “The fishing expedition plainly reveals the uncertainty of the disciples, an uncertainty which contrasts sharply with their assured sense of purpose from the day of Pentecost on.” [Morris]
- They can’t catch anything until Jesus shows up and then He makes breakfast and has words for Peter.
 - ✓ Three times Peter denied knowing Jesus.
 - ✓ Three times Jesus asks Peter if he loves Jesus (more than the others? do you *love* me? *do you* love Me?) [Don’t make too much out of the change in words for “love;” John uses variation in words when he is talking about one topic — he also uses different words for “tend” and “sheep.”]
 - ✓ Three times Jesus says, ***tend my sheep/lambs***. Jesus is the great Shepherd, but He uses under-shepherds to care for His people, and He tells Peter to get about the business of shepherding.
 - ✓ These are three words of restoration and commission. They are hopeful, because they reveal that God uses sinners. Paul would later call himself the chief of sinners (1 Tim. 1:15). Yet that is just the very kind of person that God uses to build up His church (2 Tim. 2:20-21).
 - ✓ That doesn’t mean you can stay in your sin and be useful for Christ; but it does mean that sin is not fatal or final. For the one who confesses his sin there is always forgiveness and there is always opportunity to serve Christ.
 - ✓ Whatever your sin (and you have sinned and you may well have sinned even this morning), know that if you confess your sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive you of all your sins and to cleanse you from all unrighteousness (1 Jn. 1:9).
 - ✓ Jesus’ resurrection means there is always hope for being cleansed by forgiveness and equipped for staying out of sin and staying in service of Christ.

6. A Word of DIRECTION for EVERYONE (Mt. 28:18-20)

- Here are the very last words of Jesus on earth (they are also recorded in Lk. 24:47-49; Acts 1:7-8).
- Even after 50 days and many appearances to hundreds of people, some of the disciples still *were doubtful* (v. 17) and questioning. And now Jesus is leaving. What will He say?
 - ✓ Remember His power (v. 18). How authoritative is Jesus? Authoritative enough to destroy sin and death (1 Cor. 15:54-56). He has demonstrated His authority over every realm — in Heaven and on earth, in the natural and supernatural, and over Satan, sin, death, and man. And that authority is eternal in nature. So what the disciples would do and what we do is not on the basis of personal strength. Anything that is accomplished is accomplished solely because of the authority of Christ to accomplish His will. And He will accomplish all His purposes.
 - ✓ Remember His purpose (v. 19-20a). Because Christ has all authority, we should all do His will. And His will is that wherever we are (while we are *going*) we are to *make disciples* — people who follow Christ by obeying *all that I commanded*. What does Christ want? Followers who are obedient to Him. And that’s what we work to do. We aren’t working to feed people. And we aren’t working to have people pray prayers. We are exhorting and teaching so that people will love Christ enough to obey Him. That’s a big task, so Jesus also says...
 - ✓ Remember His presence (v. 20b). *I am with you always, even to the end of the age*. Into eternity, Christ is with the Twelve and all other believers as well. He is always with His people doing and accomplishing His will.
- This is a good place to finish on Resurrection morning. “He is risen.” “He is risen indeed.” “So what?” some might declare. He is risen, so let us declare that truth to those who do not know and lead them to become obedient followers of Christ.

CONCLUSION: There are many remarkable aspects to the resurrection account. Aside from the wonder of Christ’s resurrection itself, one of the most remarkable is what happened to Jesus’ followers. Consider Peter. You remember his denial. But then read the account of his arrest for his affiliation with Jesus (Acts 4:8-12, 18-20). What happened? He had been with Jesus (v. 13). And the life and words of Jesus changed him. And the resurrection life of Jesus changes you and me too. The resurrection is not merely a good story; it is an account of hope —

- ✓ A Word of Comfort for the Grieving
- ✓ A Word of Peace for the Fearful
- ✓ A Word of Explanation for the Confused
- ✓ A Word of Revelation for the Doubting
- ✓ A Word of Forgiveness for the Sinner
- ✓ A Word of Direction for Everyone