

OUR MASTER'S MISSION—TO US!

How important are someone's last wishes? I guess it would depend on how close you are to the person—and whether or not there were any ramifications for failing to carry them out. Imagine being welcomed to heaven by one of your parents with the words: "My dying wish was for you to do such-and-such and you didn't do it!" Yikes; probably not a happy home-coming!

Not surprisingly, you can google "people's last wishes" and find wishes that are absurd—and those that will make you cry. In the way of *absurd*, Fredric Baur invented both Pringles and the Pringles can. His last wish? Be "buried" in a Pringles can! (He obviously had to be cremated first). Ed Headrick—inventor of the modern Frisbee—had a similar idea: he wanted his ashes in a Frisbee! Since a Frisbee is not an ideal container for ashes, his heirs honored his wish by having his ashes *pressed into* a Frisbee when it was being molded!

In the "ones-that-will-make-you-cry" category, there are people who wanted to see their pet one more time; people who were transported to the graveside of a loved one in their hospital bed; a dying Dad walking his 11-year-old daughter "down the aisle" to give her a lasting memory, and an entire neighborhood celebrating Christmas in October so their dying neighbor could have one last Christmas!

Did Jesus give His followers any last wishes? Yes—and, no! They weren't dying wishes because He gave them after He conquered death and came back to life! And they weren't *wishes*—they were commands—and are often referred to as the church's "marching orders." This mission from Christ—also known as the Great Commission—is seen in all four gospels, as well as in the book of Acts.

Let's turn to John 20:19-23 and examine John's version of the Great Commission. Often times when we are about to hear a message regarding sharing our faith, our minds—and our will—go on the defensive. We entertain thoughts like: "That's not really my gift..." or "I let my life do my witnessing" or "I don't really know how and don't want to goof it up." Christ gave us a mission, though, didn't He? We see it here in verse 21: "...as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you." Are you obeying that command? Is it important to you? It certainly is to God! Let's ask God to help us put down our defenses and lay aside our excuses and simply strive to obey what He wants us to do.

1. The Mission—we are sent by Christ (end of vs 21) "even so send I you"

A. The Sender is Christ

--We are not sent by a mission board or military commander—we are sent by Christ

--We are not sent by a pastor or the President—we are sent by Christ

--We are not even sent by the church—we are sent by Christ!

--Who is our sender? Our sender is Christ!

But who is Christ? Where do you start—and where would you end? Think with me of another appearance of Jesus on the first day He arose. Cleopas and an unnamed person were walking to Emmaus. They obviously didn't recognize Jesus because when He asked them why they were so sad, they proceeded to tell them all the things that happened concerning Jesus of Nazareth.

Luke 24:27 "And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, He expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning Himself." "Beginning at Moses" refers to Genesis;" "all the prophets" refers to much of the rest of the OT. What a wonderful Bible lesson that must have been!

I don't believe I'm exaggerating to suggest that I could spend the rest of this sermon—and the rest of this day—going through the Bible and showing you who Christ is. I'm not going to do that, though. Instead, let's notice a few things right here in this passage that teach us of Christ.

i. Peace-giver (v 19, 21)

Notice verse 19. The disciples were in a locked room—the Greek word translated “shut” carries the idea that the doors were locked. Why were the doors locked? “...for fear of the Jews...” They feared for their lives because they were known followers of Jesus and really thought that they might suffer the same fate He did. Jesus knew of their fear and draws near to comfort and encourage them.

Does Jesus know our situation? Does He know our fears and our worries? He certainly does and because He is alive, He can draw near to our hearts and give us that same peace. He had told them in the upper room: **John 16:33** “These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.” The world won’t give you peace—but Jesus will

ii. Proof-giver (v 20)

Verse 20 “And when He had so said, He shewed unto them His hands and His side.” For 3-1/2 years the disciples daily saw His love in action where it culminated on the cross—Him dying for them, “the just for the unjust, that He might bring them to God” Peter writes in I Peter 3:18. He proved His love: ‘these holes are for your sins—not mine!’ and “Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:13).

They were confident of His love; He wanted to ensure they were convinced of His **resurrection**. How did He do that? By appearing to them multiple times. He appears to them here; He appears to them eight days later when Thomas is with (verse 26) and He appears to them a third time at the sea of Tiberias (John 21:1 and 14). That’s not all, though. We often forget about what it says in Acts 1. Notice verse 3 “To whom He also shewed Himself alive after His passion—His suffering—by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God:”

Again, imagine the teaching that went on during that time. Jesus wanted them to be convinced beyond a shadow of doubt of both His love and His resurrection and proved both on multiple occasions.

iii. Promise-keeper (v 22)

Verse 22 “And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and saith unto them, ‘Receive ye the Holy Ghost:’” As to what Jesus meant when He said “Receive ye the Holy Ghost,” I will talk about more this afternoon. The main point I want us to see right now is that Jesus promised He would send the Holy Spirit. The following verses are from Jesus’ conversation with them in the upper room before He was crucified.

John 14:16 “And I will pray the Father, and He shall give you another Comforter, that He may abide with you for ever;” “Another Comforter” is a Comforter like unto Himself.

John 16:7-8 “Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send Him unto you. And when He is come, He will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment:”

John 16:13 “Howbeit when He, the Spirit of truth, is come, He will guide you into all truth”

Who is the sender? The sender is Christ—the peace-giver and proof-giver and promise-keeper. Next let’s consider...

B. The Sent is Us!

Notice again the last part of verse 21 “even so send I you.” Some here will say—or at least think—‘but Pastor, Jesus is speaking here directly to the disciples and not necessarily us.’ It does seem that way—here. But **Matthew 28:18-20** clears it up: “And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. ¹⁹ **Go ye therefore, and teach all nations**, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: ²⁰ **Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you:** and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen.”

Question for you: When does Jesus want the Great Commission to cease from being shared? Has He given us an end date? He hasn't, has He? Jesus taught His disciples to go and teach all nations—make disciples—then teach them—the new disciples—to do the things that they had been commanded by Jesus. In other words, Jesus' disciples were to make new disciples, then teach the new disciples to make more new disciples!

We've failed miserably, haven't we? The problem in America is not politicians—it's the pastors in the pulpit and the people in the pew! Christ is the sender—have we obeyed His command to go?

We saw first the mission; now let's look at

2. The Manner—as the Father sent the Son (end of vs 21) “...as my Father hath sent me...”

Maybe I'm being a little too “picky” here, but I think it's important to realize the “angle”—if I can use that word—that Jesus is taking here. He is not saying ‘look at it from **my** perspective as the One who *came*—the sent One; instead, look at it from the perspective of the One doing the sending. In the same manner the Father sent Me is the way I am sending you.’ In what manner did the Father send the Son?

A. Just as God sent the Son with a purpose, Christ sends us

John 3:17 “For God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through Him might be saved.”

Galatians 4:4 “But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth His Son...”

I John 4:9 “In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him.”

There was a purpose in God sending His Son—to **bring salvation** from the penalty of sins to mankind. But what is the purpose of Christ sending **us**? It is obviously different because we can't save anyone, can we?

Christ sends us to share the good news that Jesus is the way to heaven—the only way—and that through Him we can know our sins are forgiven! It is the good news of **Romans 10:13** “For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.” But along with the good news of Romans 10:13, there is the somber news of **Romans 10:14-15a** “How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach, except they be sent?” And so Christ sends us—each of us—to share this good news with those in our circle of influence. Family, friends, co-workers, and neighbors all need to hear. If we don't tell them, who will?

B. Just as God sent the Son in the power of the Holy Spirit, Christ sends us

Jesus' ministry on earth was characterized by dependence on the Holy Spirit. What happened in conjunction with Christ's baptism and the beginning of His public ministry?

Matthew 3:16 “And Jesus, when He was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: and, lo, the heavens were opened unto Him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon Him:”

Luke 4:1 “And Jesus being full of the Holy Ghost returned from Jordan, and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness,”

Luke 4:14, 18 “And Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit into Galilee: and there went out a fame of Him through all the region round about. ¹⁸The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because He hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor...”

God sent Jesus to not only die for us—He also sent Jesus to show us how to **live** as a Spirit-dependent man. If everything Jesus did on earth was in the power of His **own** nature, it would be hopeless for us to imitate Him. Why? Because we don't have—and never will have—a divine nature. But if Jesus lived His life dependent on the Holy Spirit, we can do the same.

Acts 1:8 “But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses **unto me** both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.”

What does it mean “receive power?” It depends who you ask! One thing we know for certain from Acts 1:8 is that it is connected with **witnessing**. We see that in a couple of places in Acts. Here in John 20, Peter is one of the disciples locked in a room for fear of the Jews. He didn’t stay scared though, did he?

Acts 2:36 “Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made the same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ.” Not long after this, God used Peter and John to heal a lame man. When questioned as to how they were able to do this, notice Peter’s response:

Acts 4:8-10a “Then Peter, filled with the Holy Ghost, said unto them, Ye rulers of the people, and elders of Israel, ⁹If we this day be examined of the good deed done to the impotent man, by what means he is made whole; ¹⁰Be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified...” Again, we see the fearlessness of Peter in his preaching because of the power of the H.S.

The mission—go with the message that Christ is sending us with

The manner—go with a purpose and dependent on God the HS—not ourselves; and thirdly, go with

3. The message of forgiveness of sins

Verse 23 “Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained.” At first glance, this can be a troublesome verse. Some would say, ‘There you have it—here is the Biblical basis for one man forgiving another man’s sins!’ We know that’s not right, but how do we respond to that suggestion?

A. It doesn’t mean man has the authority to forgive sins. We know that for two reasons:

i. Only God can forgive sins against Himself

Mark 2:5, 7, 10 “When Jesus saw their faith, He said unto the sick of the palsy, Son, **thy sins be forgiven thee.** ⁷Why doth this man thus speak blasphemies? **who can forgive sins but God only?** ¹⁰But that ye may know that the **Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins,** (He saith to the sick of the palsy,)”

ii. No record of disciples forgiving sins against God

We have multiple instances of God using the disciples to heal people, but not one pronouncement is made like the one Jesus often made when He healed someone. Acts 2:43 says “many signs and wonders were done by the apostles.” Peter healed a lame man at the temple (Acts 3:1-7), but did not pronounce him forgiven. Philip did miracles in Acts 8, Ananias healed Saul’s blindness in Acts 9, and Peter raised Dorcas from the dead in Acts 9. Let me say it again—we cannot take it to mean that the **apostles** had the authority to forgive sins committed to God because they didn’t take it to mean that!

B. It does mean man can be authoritative regarding who is forgiven—and who is not

Aren’t you glad we have a “know-so” salvation—not a “hope-so” or “I think so” or “I’ll find out when I get there” kind of salvation? We can know—and God wants us to know!

I John 5:13 “These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that **ye may know** that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God.”

Can I *decide* if someone will get into heaven or not? Nope; **they decide** themselves and it is based on what **they have done** with Christ. Can I *declare* if someone sins are remitted—cancelled—or whether or not they are retained (remain)? I can—and so can you—and I believe that is what this verse is referring to.

Here’s what I mean. Notice **John 3:3** “Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” Based on the authority of God’s Word, I can say without apology that if you are **not** born again, you will spend eternity in hell—not heaven—when you die. Am I **deciding** if a person’s sins are forgiven or not? No; I’m just **declaring** what Jesus said. Here’s another:

John 1:12 “But as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His name:”

Again, I can say without any hesitation whatsoever that if you have personally repented of your sins and have consciously received Jesus as your Savior, you will be forgiven and made a child of God. Again, I’m not deciding—I’m just declaring.

I John 5:12 “He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life.” That covers everyone of us in this auditorium—we either have Christ; or we don’t. Those that have Christ—not just believe about Him—have everlasting life. Those who do not **have** Him; who do not **possess** Him—even if they believe ABOUT Him—do not have life and will die in their sins and be separated from Him forever in hell.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS:

1. I’m not the only one who can declare whether or not you are forgiven—you can declare it for **yourself** about yourself. What do you know to be true about you? Have you been born again? Do you have the Son?

2. For those of you who are a child of God—who have been forgiven of your sins—are you sharing the good news of that message with others? My desire is not to heap a pile of guilt on you, but I do want to give you some things to think about.

--First and foremost, recognize it is a command of Christ that He expects you to obey

--Second, ask God to **help** you be obedient. Pretty simple, isn’t it?

--Will God help you be more burdened—and less fearful—if we **never** ask Him? NO!

--Will God help you be more burdened—and less fearful—if we do ask Him?

Yes because that’s His will!

--Lastly, don’t focus on you and your fearfulness—focus on them and their need. They are the ones that should be afraid, not you!