

The following is a rough transcript, not in its final form and may be updated.

A Great Commission John 20:21b

Intro: We are looking at the 7 “last words” of Jesus Christ as recorded by the apostle John. These are 7 statements that were made by Jesus to His disciples after His resurrection and prior to His ascension back into glory. These are words of encouragement, instruction and great promise. They all concern different aspects of the Christian life but the one thing they have in common is that they are only now true because of the death and resurrection of Jesus.

The first of these “words” was a declaration of peace to the disciples (19). The risen Lord’s sudden appearance in their midst startled and terrified the small group of fearful followers but His word of peace to them was meant for more than just to calm their frazzled nerves. What Jesus was really announcing to them was that, because of His death and resurrection, they have been granted the gift of peace with God as a result of their faith in Jesus Christ.

Humanity is not naturally at peace with God. In fact, we are in open rebellion against God and think nothing of it because we are His enemies from birth. But, since Jesus paid the price for our sin on the cross and the Father accepted His payment, signified by the resurrection; God is now able to offer peace, real peace, to all who are willing to surrender unconditionally to His terms. Jesus offers a cessation of hostilities between repentant sinners and God

Of course, peace is not the only benefit we received from the death and resurrection of Jesus. Another tremendous gift is free and direct access into the presence of God through prayer (Rom 5:2). This is not to say that prayer never happened before Jesus died and rose again. It did; you see it quite often throughout the OT. But, the vast majority of these occurrences came about after much preparation – sacrifice, ceremonial cleansing, etc. But, because of the work of Jesus, the NT says that we have the right to come boldly before the throne of grace and make our requests known to God with confidence that He not only hears those requests but will provide them in accordance to His will.

We should also realize that this privilege of prayer is not for everyone. The Bible never says that God acknowledges, let alone answers, the prayers of those who are not believers in Jesus Christ. In fact, the Bible explicitly says that the only way anyone can come to God in prayer is through Jesus. He said, "I am the way and the truth and the life, no one comes to the Father except through Me" (14:6). The best person in this world is unable to come into the presence of God on the basis of their own merit. Yet, on the ground of the death of Christ, the worst sinner who ever walked the face of this earth, who has turned from their sin and accepted Jesus as their Savior, can come at any time, day or night, 24/7 and boldly speak out of the longing of their heart to God and receive what they ask for.

The Bible also teaches us that the death of Jesus gives us a sure and certain hope. Hope refers to the future, more specifically to what lies beyond the grave. Before Jesus died we knew very little of what lay beyond but Jesus said, "I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also" (14:2-3). He said these things, but how could we be sure of them? Then He died and rose again. Now we have Someone who has passed through the portal of death and returned again and it's just as He said. There is a future. There is a heavenly home, and He has gone there to make it ready for us.

These are not the only beneficial results of Christ's death and resurrection? There are plenty more. He gives us the Holy Spirit. He gives us eternal life. We have the Bible. We have a status before God as daughters and sons. We are heirs with Christ, coheirs with Him of God's glory. We have His promises, among which is His promise to meet all our needs "according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus" (Phil 4:19).

Jesus declares Peace to the disciples a 2nd time in vs21 "Peace to you!" This reminds us that He's not only offering peace with God but is, in fact, granting the disciples the peace of God. It's God's own peace that He's offering to us today. What kind of peace does God have? Perfect peace! Is God ever anxious or worried about anything? Of course not! He knows the end from the beginning; He sees all of human history laid out before Him and is never surprised by anything. That's the kind of peace Jesus offers to those who trust in Him; a perfect peace (Isa 26:3); a peace that will guard our hearts and minds through Christ Jesus; a peace that is actually a

necessary requirement of the next statement Jesus is about to make – the second of His “7 last words” in John’s Gospel.

21b – Since the disciples had just become the recipients of God’s perfect peace through faith in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ – as well as all the other gifts – they were no longer at liberty to keep the good news of these divine blessings to themselves. They were now to become messengers of this great, life-changing truth. Our text contains John’s version of the Great Commission.

The Great Commission occurs 5 times in the NT, once at the end of each of the 4 Gospels and once in the beginning of Acts. The repetition is significant. Anything God says is important; if He repeats it, it’s really important. Plus, in each case the emphasis is different. Matthew emphasizes the authority of Jesus (**28:18-19**). Mark emphasizes the final judgment (**16:16**). Luke presents it as the fulfillment of prophecy (**24:46-47**). Acts presents it as a plan for world evangelization (**1:8**). Each of these Commissions took place in a variety of circumstances and were relayed to a variety of people. John’s version here is unique among the 5 in that it is probably the earliest expression of this command and it closely associates our own commissioning with that of Jesus Himself.

The fact that this 2nd statement follows so closely to the 1st is not accidental; the reason for this should be apparent: we as God’s people, must have peace in ourselves – both inwardly and outwardly – before we can effectively preach the gospel of peace to others. The disciples were in hiding but Jesus tells them to abandon their safe space and go out into the world as His missionaries. This command is the exact opposite of what the disciples wanted to do but it’s still completely reasonable because of who’s speaking to them. It’s the risen Lord! He was arrested, beaten, crucified but He rose again. So, it’s the One who’s triumphed over sin and death that now speaks peace to His followers.

John Stott says, “We learn then that the Church’s very first need, before it can begin to engage in evangelism, is an experience and an assurance of Christ’s peace—peace of conscience through His death that banishes sin, peace of mind through His resurrection that banishes doubt. . . . Once we are glad that we have seen the Lord, and once we have clearly recognized Him as our crucified and risen Savior, then nothing and no one will be able

to silence us.” An experience of the peace of God is critical to our effective fulfillment of the Great Commission.

But, while the gift of peace is a necessary requirement of our commission, it's not the emphasis of our text. John's emphasis here is on the connection between our commissioning by Jesus and His commissioning by the Father. This statement is a command to evangelize but it's also more than this – it establishes a pattern for us to follow as we evangelize. The key words are *as* and *also*: meaning our mission in the world is to be patterned after His. Jesus was the first missionary; thus, our efforts and endeavors should be carried out just like His were.

What does this mean exactly? It means that we are sent into the world just as Jesus was sent into the world (17:18). We're talking about the principle of incarnation: becoming one with those we would help. How did Jesus come “into the world?” Did He stay in heaven and shout words of salvation to us from the safety of heaven's gates? Did He come to us in the brilliance of His divine glory? No, He divested Himself of that glory and appeared in humble form. He didn't even appear in a human disguise, like the Gnostics taught. He actually became a human being, just like us. He was born; He grew up; He suffered and eventually He died – the complete human experience.

This is what it means to come “into the world.” Since this is the way Jesus came into the world, this is the way we are to come too. We're to become one with those to whom we are sent. Most believers are guilty exactly at this point. Instead of invading the world we would rather retreat from it. The influence of the world is a real threat to one's spiritual walk but the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives and our constant surrender to Him as well as regular fellowship with Jesus through His Word and prayer are meant to not only protect us from the influence of the world but empower us to carry the Gospel message to the world. Retreating to a place of safety (church) is not wrong, but we're not called to live there – we are called, even commanded to go into the world, to rub shoulders with the lost and to affect them for the cause of Christ. If we don't, if we refuse to, then we fail to carry out both the spirit and the letter of our Lord's command here.

Proclamation is important, it's the essence of salvation and we cannot give it up. But Jesus didn't broadcast salvation from the sky. He visited us in great humility. Many Christians seem to be like those who shout advice to

drowning men from the safety of the shore. They refuse to dive in to rescue them because they're afraid of getting wet. But, true evangelism, the kind modeled after the ministry of Jesus, involves both proclamation and identification. We can send millions of dollars to overseas missions but we're not really fulfilling the Great Commission until we live with, befriend, love and enter into the experiences of those to whom we are sent. If we're going to go into the world like Jesus, we have to learn how to become friends with unbelievers and then work out the issues of life by their side.

The next area in which our mission is to be patterned on the mission of Jesus is in its purpose. We are sent into the world as Jesus was sent into the world—that's context. But why are we sent into the world?—that's purpose. It is seen in Paul's solemn affirmation to Timothy in [1 Tim 1:15](#). Christ came into the world to save sinners. And that's what we must also do, if we're going to be faithful to His commission.

This can be understood in 2 ways. 1st, our purpose must actually be to see others saved. We can't just assume we have fulfilled our duty as witnesses by merely delivering a presentation of the gospel to them. Now, it's true that we can't save anyone ourselves and, in a sense, our duty is simply to be Christ's witnesses. We are to share the gospel with others whether they believe or not, knowing that ultimately the drawing of the unbeliever to salvation in Jesus is God's doing. But this doesn't mean we're not interested in whether they believe or not or that we shouldn't use every means possible to see that they do. Jesus said, "No one can come to Me, unless the Father who sent Me draws him" ([John 6:44](#)). But that did not stop Him from doing everything in His power to teach others and persuade them of the truth of the gospel.

The 2nd way Paul's exhortation can be applied is by emphasizing the word sinners. In the first case, we stressed the word "save." Now we must focus on those whom Christ came to save. You might be saying, "Aren't we all sinners?" Yes, but Jesus also once said, "I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance" ([Matt 9:13](#)). Jesus had been eating in the house of Matthew, the tax collector; many of whose low life friends came to eat with Him. The Pharisees were scandalized by Jesus associating with such people. They thought it was beneath His dignity as a distinguished rabbi. Jesus did not concur. Instead, He taught that it was precisely to such persons that He was sent.

Jesus didn't come to minister to those who could give back to Him, He came to minister to the bankrupt. If we are to go into the world as Christ went into the world, we must also go to such people.

There is one more thing that comes from Paul's statement. It is an explanation of why we do not naturally think as Christ thinks. Notice that when Paul said, "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners" he went on to add "of whom I am chief." Jesus came to save sinners. Paul likewise went to sinners, and the reason Paul went is that he knew he was one of them. In fact, he was the chief. This hints at why we fail to go. We think we are better than others and want to maintain our position. We may feel that we'd have to stoop to save sinners, and we don't want to do it. Jesus had to stoop. He laid a real glory aside in order to become man and die for our salvation ([Phil 2:5-8](#)). We don't have to stoop. We're beggars among beggars. Our job is that of one beggar telling another where to find bread. When we get that into our heads we will actually go to those who really need us and help them as the Lord did.

Not only should our mission be like Jesus' in its context and purpose, it's to be like His in its goal too. What is that goal? In John 17, in the middle of His High-priestly prayer, Jesus prays for the kind of lives His disciples (followers) should live. First He said, "I have glorified You on the earth," (4) then later He added, "All Mine are Yours, and Yours are Mine, and I am glorified in them" (10). These verses (and others) teach that the ultimate goal of Jesus' coming was to glorify the Father - to make His glory known. So, since our goal is to be patterned after His, we are also to bring glory to Jesus by our thoughts, words, and actions.

This is our mission: (1) We are to go into the world, as Jesus entered into the world; (2) We are to go so that people might be saved through faith in Him; (3) We are to glorify Christ, just as He brought glory to the Father.

The story is told of a medical missionary, a woman doctor, who went to India on short notice because of a pressing need in a certain hospital. She didn't have time to go to language school but was immediately put to work in the hospital, where she spoke through an interpreter. After she had been there a while she reported back and expressed frustration and discouragement. She'd been trying to show love and gentleness to the people, but they didn't seem to be responding. She asked her home church to pray about it. A few

weeks later another letter came, this time saying that she had discovered what the problem was. It was the translator. She had been loving, but he was apparently a rude, arrogant fellow who never conveyed her concern for the patients at all. He was a barrier to her message.

We are interpreters for the Lord Jesus Christ in this world. What is the picture of Jesus that others have through our speech and actions? What picture do they have of Him from me? Do they see His glory, compassion, grace and forgiveness? Or is that image blocked by my lack of concern, pride, and impatience? May God make us interpreters for Christ who present and demonstrate Jesus as He truly is!

Is this message for us today? Absolutely! If Jesus Christ is your Savior, if He is your Lord, then this commission applies to you and you are responsible for fulfilling it, as am I. How will you respond? Will you begrudgingly give God the barest minimum of effort or will you give Him your entire self to be used by him as He desires? Is that scary? Only until you realize that He alone knows what's best and will only do what's best for you on a regular basis.

If you don't know Jesus as your Savior (or are not for sure) then this commission isn't for you but it is about you. It's our job as believers to not only share the truth of the Gospel with you but also display the reality of the gospel before you. Jesus came to bring life, salvation, forgiveness – peace! Will you accept these things from Him or will you choose to continue on your way down the road that leads to destruction. Those are your choices. The pickens may be slim but the choice is clear – come to Jesus today and accept Him as your savior. 😊