

Last Things First

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Preacher: Ray Sweet

[0 : 00] Well, hey, good morning. My name is Ray Sweet from First Christian Church in Greensburg, Indiana. And as always, we want to encourage you, if you'd like to learn a little more about us, you can go to FCCgreensburg.com or you can check out the FCC Greensburg Facebook page.

But hey, thank you so much for tuning in today. We are excited to get into the Word of God. Before we do that, let me just give you one more announcement. So starting in May, I will be on what is called a sabbatical, something that the church offers to all ministerial staff every seven years, where I will be away for the month of May.

So how that affects you is you will have four different people preaching in the month of May that will be on the radio. So feel free to tune in. They're going to do a great job.

A couple pastors that are on staff here and then a couple guest preachers as well. But thank you for allowing me this time of rest and rejuvenation to truly come back recharged and excited to preach God's Word.

And I'll look forward to preaching again June the 1st. But thank you for just your heart of understanding on that. But I want to start off today with a story about one of the most notoriously bad characters that ever lived in New York City.

[1 : 21] It was a guy named Orville Gardner. He was a successful prize fighter in the mid-1800s who also became one of the most famous trainers in the country.

He kept very bad company, doing detestable things, even spending time in Sing Sing prison. His reputation was widely known as he was given the nickname Awful Gardner.

But even the most ungodly have people they love dearly. And Gardner loved his little boy. Sadly, his boy died. And this sent Dad into a tailspin.

And one night, he was at his saloon doing everything he shouldn't. It was also a sweltering hot night. So he stepped outside to get some fresh air. And as he looked up beyond the high buildings all around him, he saw a star that was shining down, what felt like, directly on him from the night sky.

Immediately, he asked, I wonder where my little boy is tonight. As quick as the question came out, a response came back to his mind.

[2 : 28] You'll never see him again unless you change your life. In that moment, he felt the power of God all around him. He left the saloon. He took off toward his God-fearing mother's home.

And that night, she prayed over him and she led him to the Lord. It was sincere. He hurried home and got his jug of whiskey, knowing it had to go. He didn't pour it out because he knew the fumes would set him wild.

So finally, he dug a hole far away from his home, put the jug in the ground, covered it up, and walked away a delivered man. As God began to transform and grow his faith, Orville was a willing vessel, ready to serve wherever the Lord called him.

Developing into a powerful preacher of the word, everyone was amazed at the change in Awful Gardener as he led so many people to the cross to discover hope in Jesus' name.

That included some influential people of New York who would carry on his legacy of sharing Jesus. 2 Corinthians 5.17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come, the old has gone, the new is here.

[3 : 43] So hey, welcome back here to the seventh and last week of our series called Just Jesus. And while all scripture is God-breathed, it's pretty cool to simply look at the words in red that show us the heart behind the kingdom of God here in Matthew.

So if you want to grab your Bibles, start heading toward Matthew 28, roughly three-quarters-ish through your Bible. We're going to close out this series with the last words that Matthew, through the power of the Holy Spirit, that he shares as he ends his account of Jesus' life.

And as I studied this book in context, I realized that Matthew is putting last things first by sharing the vital mission of the church of Jesus Christ.

The last statement in this entire, entire inspired gospel should come first as the central mission of the church.

And by the power of Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection, we as the church of Jesus Christ, filled with the Holy Spirit, have this incredible purpose as we're empowered by the Lord.

[4 : 51] It's been called the Great Commission. Not the Great Suggestion. Not the Great Commission for only preachers, elders, and church staff. Not the Great Task for extroverted believers who have the gift of evangelism.

Because Jesus has changed everything. Because we as children of God have been forgiven, redeemed, saved, set free.

We have an amazing purpose in a very dark world. And I'll tell you, I stand in awe of how God uses broken vessels like us.

I still, after almost two decades of ministry, I have my moments where I say, Jesus, I don't get it. I don't know why you'd choose to use a wretch and a goober like me. But God, I'm grateful you do. And I feel blessed to be a tiny part of your big plan, sharing the hope of Jesus with those who wander in the darkness like I used to. And here's the thing.

[5 : 49] You're a part of God's plan too. And he doesn't want us to just be pure potatoes. He wants to use you with your unique personality.

And boy, some of you, you are unique. I'm probably the one to talk, right? But he wants to use you with your gifts, with your skills, life experiences, successes, failures, everything, to tell the most amazing story of Jesus to those who need his hope, training them up to also be disciple-making disciples.

So, let's read five verses here, starting in Matthew chapter 28, and then we'll break it down into kind of bite-sized pieces here. So, Matthew 28, verse 16, and we'll read through verse 20.

Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. When they saw him, they worshipped him, but some doubted.

Then Jesus came to them and said, 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 the Son and the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.

[7 : 08] And surely I am with you always to the very end of the age. Now, today I want to share with you just one sentence. It's kind of a long sentence, but one sentence that I pray that God will stir in our hearts.

So, grab your sermon outline, and you can always do that by going to the YouVersion Bible app. That's Y-O-U version Bible app, free download.

If you go to the menu, go to events, go to First Christian Church, Greensburg, Indiana, you can see the outline that way. But here's the very first part of this sentence I want you to see. Because he's awesome.

You know, a couple years ago, I was having a conversation with a church member about how easy it is to use words like awesome that probably should be reserved just for Jesus, and yet how we often use them too much for ordinary things.

For example, that pizza was awesome. Well, I bet it was really good, but you know, Jesus is awesome, and there's a difference. And I'm not here, listen, I'm not trying to play word police.

[8 : 14] I'm not going to beat you up for using the word awesome in other contexts. But that simple conversation, just made me think a little more about the words I use and where they are ascribed to.

And because he, Jesus, is awesome in power, from speaking into existence everything we see and don't see in creation, to knitting us together in our mother's womb, to his perfect plan that cannot be thwarted, because God in the flesh stands above it all, and nothing in the world compares to his majesty.

That's why he could make that massive statement in Matthew 28, 18. Jesus said, and by the way, he had just died and rose from the grave.

Jesus said, all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. So what does that even mean? Well, the word authority in the koine, or common Greek, that the New Testament was primarily written in, the word in that Greek is *exousia*.

And it means the freedom and the right to speak and act as one pleases. Now, most of us think we have that freedom, but Jesus is probably the only one who should because of his authority.

[9 : 35] Authority that is absolute and universal. And the reason Jesus stands head and shoulders in authority above anyone else who's ever walked this earth, you can read in the pages of Scripture, even see in the details of his creation.

He showed authority over disease and sickness time and time again, overflowing with compassion to those suffering, oftentimes in silence.

Authority over the winds and the waves calming the storms. Authority over demons as they trembled in his presence and couldn't help but obey his commands.

Even displayed his authority by delegating power to his apostles to heal in Jesus' name. Over sin and death as he died to take our place, rose again to offer life.

Even the authority, the sovereign authority to rule both heaven and earth, defeating Satan and his demons and casting them into the lake of fire. And if our Savior is that awesome, then it calls us to submit to his perfect authority.

[10 : 43] And although we don't like the S word, submission, none of us like that. Why? Because my pride doesn't like to be told what to do.

But we do get a lot of chances to practice. The Word of God teaches children to submit to their parents. All of us to submit to governing authorities, to workplace leadership, to elder governance in the church.

Wives submit to husbands as the head of the family. Even a mutual submission for husbands and wives to one another out of reverence and love for Christ. And all this submission honors the Lord. The only exception is when those authorities try to make you go against the Lord and his word. And that's when you can rebel against that authority. But the ultimate submission is to Jesus because he's awesome.

Because he has the authority over his bride, the church, over us. And I like how Philip Yancey put this. He said, to let God be God, of course, means climbing down from my own executive chair of control.

[11 : 51] And it's amazing the difference in our lives when we truly learn how to surrender all of me to all of him giving up control. And when Jesus starts off the Great Commission showing his authority, we are called to submit to that loving and that grace-filled authority knowing that his purpose for the church is perfect.

So, he's awesome. And because he's awesome, let's keep going with this sentence here, I have the privilege to make disciples. I get the privilege to make disciples.

Now, this verb for make disciples literally refers to two things. Believing and learning. Believing and learning.

What does our mission statement say? Belong to, believe in, become like Jesus. That's kind of what it means to make disciples. So, look at verse 19 and now the first part of verse 20 where Jesus is just abundantly clear of what a disciple of his looks like.

Matthew 18. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.

[13 : 08] Now, a disciple in Jesus' day went everywhere his rabbi went. So much so that there developed a blessing that other rabbis would pray over disciples because they would walk everywhere they went.

So they would say this to them. May you be covered in the dust of your rabbi. Here's the literal translation. May you be so close to him. May you walk so closely behind him that whatever dust and dirt and muck he steps in kicks up all over you.

That's what that means. But here's the spiritual translation. May you stick so close to Jesus that you become just like him. So that verb for make disciples refers to two things.

Salvation and sanctification. Belief and growth. And it's interesting that Jesus doesn't say go make disciples of all nations as they accept me into their heart or go make disciples of all nations as they pray a prayer to receive me.

Uh-uh. I think it's really interesting that he says baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Why would he say that? See, our conviction here at FCC is because baptism is that final part.

[14 : 25] It's not the only part, but it's the final part of surrendering your life to him. We have something that we have in our brotherhood of churches, the Christian churches, that is called the five-finger plan of salvation.

It's not some mechanical, if you check these boxes, you'll get your get-out-of-hell-free card. That would be the wrong heart to approach this with. Okay? You can't trick God.

He sees the heart. But it starts by simply, first, hearing the good news of Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection. That offers forgiveness and life through him.

Okay? And then second, so hear, and then believe that Jesus is the Christ, that he is God, God in the flesh. He is who he says he is, and I'm not going to water that down.

And we know that true belief always calls us to action. And then third, so hear, believe, repent, turning away from that sinful lifestyle, making a real commitment to follow him.

[15 : 30] So yes, I feel bad for my sins, but it must be more than just emotions. And then next, make that confession of your faith showing that you're unashamed.

I will follow Jesus no matter whether it's popular or not. And then last, it says be baptized. The word in Greek literally means, okay, immersed in Christ.

Okay? So baptism means immersion. Immersed in Christ. The biblical picture of going down into the water in your sins and then coming back up a new creation in Christ.

And Peter tells us in Acts 2 that we will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. That's God living inside of us, transforming us daily into his image.

So why is this so important to Jesus? That one of the last commands that he gave his disciples was to baptize in the name of God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit.

[16 : 33] Why? Why would he say that? Because you, because I, because we matter that much to him. I have to tell you a funny story and I'll just be vague because I grew up here in this community, but I had an elementary teacher that I did not connect with at all.

I know I was a kid who was far from perfect, but I'll be honest with you, I didn't get in a lot of trouble. But she did not like me for whatever reason. In fact, one time I remember begging her to go to the restroom probably three or four times even telling her it's an emergency.

But she wouldn't let me. And guess what? I peed my pants. I know, it's embarrassing. My mom even shared that parent-teacher conferences were interesting because she didn't seem to be a fan of me either and I couldn't wait to get out of that grade and move on.

I never had that kind of issues with any other teacher. Well, as I progressed in school, any time her name came up, man, I had some bitterness attached to that, okay? And then one day, shortly after I became a Christian, became a Christian at 18 years old, I was probably 19 or 20, I was asked to serve at a local church camp.

And lo and behold, there she was serving in the same role as me, but for the girls, okay? She was a dorm mom. And I said, God, there is no way that this lady follows you.

[17 : 58] I remember how wicked she was to me in that grade, okay? And he said, Yahweh. And you know what? I talked to her that week and we really got along well and I found out that she loved Jesus and I'm not sure what happened in elementary school.

It really doesn't matter. But God showed me early on just how much he loves every person made in this image, including that teacher and anybody else that you may have in your mind.

Now, 2 Peter 3.9 says, The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead, he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

Luke 19.10 even tells Jesus' purpose when it says, For the Son of Man came to seek and save the lost. He cares so passionately about every soul that once we are saved, he puts us on a mission to share that same hope with others.

And then the other part of making disciples is kind of messy and it takes a lot of time and that's why most churches, including us, could probably do better in this area.

[19 : 10] So, first is baptized. We're talking about the salvation part. And then Jesus says, And teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. This is the discipleship piece.

This is the, Okay, I've come out of the water. I'm forgiven and filled with the Holy Spirit. Now what? Be faithful to Jesus until the day you die. But trust me, the enemy will do his best to squash your

faith quickly.

So this is where you grow. Your baptism isn't the end of the story. It's the beginning of this great journey in your faith that hopefully will have many more years of every day you walking faithfully and growing more and more and more into the image of Christ.

And 1 Peter 2, verses 2 and 3 says it like this. Like newborn babies. See, that's the picture. When you come out of the water, you're not this full-grown adult Christian. You're a newborn baby. Like it or not, that's how the scripture explains it. Like newborn babies crave pure spiritual milk. That means the word of God. So that by it you may grow up in your salvation now that you have tasted that the Lord is good.

[20 : 20] Salvation is a free gift, that gift of grace. And it comes as we put our faith in Christ, but growth and obedience and spiritual maturity, those things will cost you.

And it's okay. It's one day at a time where it takes discipline, commitment, humility, sacrifice, time, talent, treasures, surrender, more.

And let me take you back to our vision here at FCC. Jesus first. So this goes right along with what we're talking about. Matthew 6, 33.

But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness and all these things will be given to you as well.

And church, I'm going to be 100% honest with you here. I struggle with this too.

It's hard to discipline yourself in spiritual habits of focused Bible reading and study and memorization, of prayer and fasting, reflection and self-examination, serving and giving and doing community faithfully.

[21 : 20] It takes focus. It takes discipline to say no to even some good things so you can say yes to the best things, spending time growing in Jesus Christ.

And I know we've talked about my upcoming sabbatical and the elders are going to, if you're here on Sunday morning this April 27th, the elders are going to talk a little bit more about it at the end of the service.

But I've got to tell you, I'm looking so forward to just sitting at Jesus' feet, letting him deal with some junk and fill my cup at the same time. So when Jesus gives us this command to make disciples, what a joy to see people come to know the amazing grace of Jesus.

But we can't forget the second part, the coming alongside part to teach them to obey his word. And listen, that's the responsibility of the whole church. Not just the staff, not just the preacher, not just the elders, but the whole church to help those who are new spiritual babies in their faith grow up to spiritual maturity, experiencing the fruits of their salvation, the fruits of the Spirit.

And I love how if we go to Galatians 5, and I'm going to start in verse 1 and then jump ahead a little bit, but Galatians 5.1 says, it is for freedom that Christ has set us free.

[22 : 42] Stand firm, then do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery. Okay, that's the discipleship piece. You continue to walk in freedom. And then verses 22 and 23 of Galatians 5, but the fruit of the Spirit is what?

Love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

Against such things there is no law. So truly walking in freedom and the fruits of the Spirit only happen as the church comes alongside new believers and we get serious about growth in Christ.

So let me say this sentence one last time and I'm going to finish it out, okay? Because he's awesome, I have the privilege to make disciples, here we go, knowing the Lord is with me.

It's incredible how after this massive commission for the church to impact the world for the kingdom of God, Jesus comes back and says, and surely I am with you always to the very end of the age.

And I love the bookend of this passage. He starts out by sharing the authority that's been given him by the Father as Jesus just died on the cross and then rose again to offer life and so he stands before them as the Messiah, as a God who is omnipotent, full of power and authority, the Lion of the tribe of Judah to give his life-changing purpose to the church.

[24 : 11] And now the last words Matthew records show his tender care and shepherd's heart over you, knowing that this task may seem impossible and it is in your own strength that he wants you to know that it's only by his power, by his tender care that we can fulfill the Great Commission, that our job is not to change hearts but to simply be willing vessels that he can use.

And First Christian Church, I gotta tell you, I am so proud of this church family, the impact that you are making, you are bringing your friends, we have, man, so many sets of visitors and guests every single Sunday because you are excited about what God's doing and you're excited about your own

walk with Jesus and you are reaching out into this community truly showing the hope that Christ can give.

William Booth was the founder of the Salvation Army and he was greatly stirred by the needs of the poor in London, realizing that most churches were doing nothing to reach the quote-unquote undesirables, you know, at that time, the drunkards, the morphine addicts, the prostitutes, the poor. So he set out to reach them with what he called the three S's, soup, soap, and salvation.

Thousands were saved among those that most churches had no interest in reaching and Booth poured everything he was into this ministry for the cause of Christ to reach others.

In his 80s, and listen, we're going back. I mean, we're going way back into the start of the 1900 when he was in his 80s. Booth's work began to be hindered by blindness.

[25 : 56] He was, he briefly lost his sight and then he recovered it again, but then he lost his vision permanently and his son Bramwell had talked to a doctor and came to give him the bad news that he would never see again.

And here's Booth's reply. He said, God must know best, Bramwell. I have done what I could do for God and the people with my eyes. Now I should do what I can do for God and the people without my eyes.

And I'll leave you today with this quote. It's a little bit longer, but I love this quote by William Booth that calls us to be serious about the Great Commission. Here's what he said.

Not called, did you say? Not heard the call, I think you should say. Put your ear down to the Bible and hear him bid you go and pull sinners out of the fire of sin, the fire of hell.

Put your ear down to the burdened, agonized heart of humanity and listen to its pitiful wail for help. Go stand by the gates of hell and hear the damned entreat you to go to their father's house and bid their brothers and sisters and servants and masters to come there.

[27 : 01] Then look Christ in the face whose mercy you have professed to obey and tell him whether you will join heart and soul and body and circumstances in the march to publish his mercy to the world.

Because he's awesome, I have the privilege to make disciples knowing that he is with me every step of the way. You know, last things first.

Let's pray. Father, we are just so grateful for your word this morning. Thank you for speaking this truth to us.

Thank you for the great purpose that you give us in the church. Not to just be all about ourselves and to stay inward focused, but we are called to love those around us, to focus on discipleship and growth, but also always be looking outside the walls of our church to love and reach those who don't know Jesus.

Help us to have a passion and a fire to do that. And Father, I just pray right now that you will speak and stir your words in the hearts of those listening that if they don't know you, today can be a day where they surrender everything to your Lordship.

[28 : 20] Thank you, Jesus, for your amazing grace. We worship you, we adore you, and we pray this in your precious name. Amen. Hey, let me share a quick invitation.

If you have questions about First Christian Church of Greensburg, if you would like to know more about faith, or if you just want to talk about surrendering your life to the Lordship of Jesus, I want you to know we're here.

You can reach out to us in a few different ways here. First, you can call the church office 812-663-8488. 812-663-8488.

My name is Ray. You could ask for Steve, Tyler, Mitch, any of us. We'd be glad to help you. And then also, you can go to your email and go to ray at fccgreensburg.com or info at fccgreensburg.com and email us and we'll start the conversation that way.

Hey, God bless you. Hope you have a great week. Thank you.