

Christ Community Covenant Church
Famous Last Words: Last Words First
Pastor Dave Scherrer - July 27, 2014

We are launching a new series this week. Perhaps you saw the new artwork in the hall outside the worship center or downstairs in the lobby by Common Grounds. The idea for each is *famous last words*.

Now that idea has to be explored a little bit. We have to ask what makes for a 'famous last word'. Is it because the person is famous or is it that the words are worthy of fame? And by last do you mean the very last or the words toward the end of a life that reveal the character and weight of a person's lifework?

For instance some might think of these as famous last words:

"I don't think we need to go to the hospital."
Are you sure the power is off?
Pull the pin and count to what?
I've seen this done on TV.
These are the good kind of mushrooms.
I wonder where the mother bear is."

Or these famous people who uttered these very last words at their death . . .

Thomas Jefferson--still survives...
~~ John Adams, US President, d. July 4, 1826
(Actually, Jefferson had died earlier that same day.)

Waiting are they? Waiting are they? Well--let 'em wait.
In response to an attending doctor who attempted to comfort him by saying, "General, I fear the angels are waiting for you."
~~ Ethan Allen, American Revolutionary general, d. 1789

Am I dying or is this my birthday?
When she woke briefly during her last illness and found all her family around her bedside.
~~ Lady Nancy Astor, d. 1964

How were the receipts today at Madison Square Garden?
~~ P. T. Barnum, entrepreneur, d. 1891

Friends applaud, the comedy is finished.
~~ Ludwig van Beethoven, composer, d. March 26, 1827

I should never have switched from Scotch to Martinis.
~~ Humphrey Bogart, actor, d. January 14, 1957

That was the best ice-cream soda I ever tasted.
~~ Lou Costello, comedian, d. March 3, 1959

I am not the least afraid to die.
~~ Charles Darwin, d. April 19, 1882

My God. What's happened?
~~ Diana (Spencer), Princess of Wales, d. August 31, 1997

All my possessions for a moment of time.
~~ Elizabeth I, Queen of England, d. 1603

God will pardon me, that's his line of work.
~~ Heinrich Heine, poet, d. February 15, 1856

Let us cross over the river and sit in the shade of the trees.
Killed in error by his own troops at the battle of Chancellorsville during the US Civil War.
~~ General Thomas "Stonewall" Jackson, d. 1863

I am ready to die for my Lord, that in my blood the Church may obtain liberty and peace.
~~ Thomas à Becket, Archbishop of Canterbury, d. 1170

It is finished. Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit.
From Luke 23:46
~~ Jesus Christ

What do we hope to learn from our next study of famous last words? Is it asking too much to look at last words as particularly meaningful or revealing? I would say generally so except the words we shall be examining will be the last words of the patriarchs and the early saints.

"It is significant that the famous last words of prophets ancient and modern inevitably point us to Christ."

So this makes us want to put the last words first. Jesus said the first shall be last the last first.

In a couple of weeks we will be looking at Jesus' famous last words but we are going to start about 2000 years before Christ with Father Abraham and in this case I do believe that the words toward the end of his life do reveal the character and weight of Abraham's person's lifework and faith. Now to be fair, these are not the very last words of Abraham. Sarah has died as recorded in the previous chapter and he has buried her in the Promised Land – an incredibly important detail in the story. At this point in the story he is about 140 years old. He will live another 35 to 40 years and even take another wife before he dies, so maybe these were his last words after all (joking!).

Let's read this account about Abraham's intentions to find an appropriate bride for his son of the promise:

Genesis 24:1-9

Now Abraham was old, well advanced in years. And the LORD had blessed Abraham in all things. ² And Abraham said to his servant, the oldest of his household, who had charge of all that he had, "Put your hand under my thigh, ³ that I may make you swear by the LORD, the God of heaven and God of the earth, that you will not take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I dwell, ⁴ but will go to my country and to my kindred, and take a wife for my son Isaac." ⁵ The servant said to him, "Perhaps the woman may not be willing to follow me to this land. Must I then take your son back to the land from which you came?" ⁶ Abraham said to him, "See to it that you do not take my son back there. ⁷ The LORD, the God of heaven, who took me from my father's house and from the land of my kindred, and who spoke to me and swore to me, 'To your offspring I will give this land,' he will send his angel before you, and you shall take a wife for my son from there. ⁸ But if the woman is not willing to follow you, then you will be free from this oath of mine; only you must not take my son back there." ⁹ So the servant put his hand under the thigh of Abraham his master and swore to him concerning this matter.

So it seems to me that there are two lessons to learn from this story. One is that we can know God's will for our lives and that we can live according to these promises. The other is that God really does work powerfully for those who aim to do his will. Let's take a look at the first conclusion of these last directives of Abraham:

Abraham's last words: Are a testimony to faith in the promises of God and a resolve to act on them

What do we know about the promises to Abraham?

Genesis 17:9

⁹ And God said to Abraham, "As for you, you shall keep my covenant, you and your offspring after you throughout their generations."

There were very specific rules of behavior that needed to be obeyed – The Abrahamic Covenant spelled them out. And we also know that there were rewards for obeying God.

Genesis 15:5

⁵ And he brought him outside and said, "Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them." Then he said to him, "So shall your offspring be."

Sometimes God spoke to Abraham directly and made his will unmistakably clear. These passages are part of God's direct communication of His will for Abraham and his descendants. But as far as we know from Genesis, those times were few and far between. Most of the time it seems Abraham had to trace out for himself his own understandings of obedience from what God had said and done in the past. I think that is what's happening in Genesis 24:1–9. And that is what we have to do in our lives since few of us have direct communication with God regarding his specific will. We do what Abraham did – ***Know the promises of God and then act in accordance with them.***

These statements from God's Word combine to show Abraham what God's will is at the time of this story. Abraham determines how to act on the will of God by forecasting where the trajectories of God's past revelation are leading. The first is that Isaac, his son, must have a wife. Second, the wife may not be taken from the Canaanites. Third, Isaac may not return to the land which Abraham had left. As Abraham ponders these three realities of God's Word, he sees them merge into a single line of decision. The decision is: I will send my trusted servant to find a wife for my son among my own kindred and in my own land, and he will bring her back. And Abraham is so confident that this is God's will, he says to his servant in verse 7, "God will send his angel before you, and you shall take a wife for my son." Once we know the will of God, we can have tremendous confidence that God will use his supernatural power to overcome obstacles for those who aim to do it.

I think most of us here want that very much. We want to be able to project God's will for our lives into the future from the trajectories we have seen in the past. We want questions answered about marriage, and children, and job changes, and major purchases, and schooling, and the use of leisure time, and involvement in special ministries, and church affiliation, and what percentage of our income to give away, and on and on. And we want to enjoy that same confidence Abraham did—that when we aim to do God's will, he will send his angel before us and overcome the obstacles. We want to be led by God, and we want to be led victoriously.

Let's unpack the thinking of Abraham in the light of the known promises of God. First Abraham can see that Isaac must have a wife.

Isaac Must Have a Wife

As I noted earlier God said, "Look toward heaven and number the stars, if you are able to number them... So shall your descendants be" (cf. 22:17). So clearly, Abraham's child must marry and have children. In Genesis 17:19 God said to Abraham, "I will establish my covenant with Isaac as an everlasting covenant for his descendants after him." So for Abraham God's will was clear—Isaac, who was forty years old in Genesis 24 (cf. 25:20), must have a wife.

Isaac's Wife Must Not Be Taken from the Canaanites

When Sarah couldn't have children for Abraham, Sarah offered her handmaiden Hagar, who was Egyptian, and had a son by her. He hoped that the promise would be fulfilled through Ishmael. But God said, "No. But Sarah your wife shall bear you a son . . . I will establish my covenant with him."

In Genesis 15:16 God tells Abraham that his descendants will be oppressed 400 years in Egypt and then says, "And they shall come back here in the fourth generation; for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete." The Amorites here represent all the pagan peoples of Canaan. They are marked out for judgment because of their sin, but God will not drive them out until the history of their sin is so appalling no one will accuse God of injustice when he sweeps through Canaan destroying these nations.

Abraham heard something from God that probably went like this: "Through your son I will fulfill my covenant to be the God of his descendants and to bless all the nations through him. So take heed lest he marry a woman who worships other gods and could bring him into a snare." That's the way Moses warned Israel hundreds of years later when they were about to enter the Promised Land: "You shall not make marriages with them, giving your daughters to their sons or taking their daughters for your sons. For they would turn away your sons from following me, to serve other gods" (Deuteronomy 7:3-4).

Isaac Must Not Return to the City of Nahor

The third realization Abraham saw was that Isaac should not return to the city of Nahor, Abraham's brother. Abraham is adamant on this point. He says to his servant in verse 6, "See to it that you do not take my son back there." And at the end of verse 8, "You must not take my son back there." Why? What had God said that made Abraham so sure of this?

I believe the answer is that God had called Abraham out of his land and promised him and his descendants a new land. To go back could only mean unbelief in God's promise and power to fulfill it. God said (Genesis 13:14-15) ***"Lift up your eyes and look from the place where you are, northward and southward, and eastward and westward; for all the land you see I will give to you and to your descendants forever."*** And in Genesis 17:8 God said, ***"I will give to you and to your descendants after you the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan for an everlasting possession."*** Abraham could not even contemplate seeing Isaac leave the land of promise.

We want to know and to obey God's will. This reality reminds me of the words of Christ when he taught the disciples to pray:

"Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven."

Everyone who confesses Jesus as Lord aims daily to know and do the will of God. If we do not make it our aim to do the will of God heartily and consistently as the angels do it in heaven, then we probably do not belong to Christ. For Jesus himself said, "Whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother." ([Matthew 12:50](#)). The family resemblance of all the people of God is not the perfect performance of God's will, but the persistent purpose to do it. The mark of the child of God is not that he always hits the bull's-eye, but that he aims at the targets appointed by the Father. The great aim of the church is to do God's will on earth the way it is done in heaven. That was the substance of Father Abraham's last word.

There are a lot of things about God's will for your life I do not know, but I am convinced of one. I know this for sure - The will of God is that you be saved through faith in Jesus Christ. How do I know this about your life? God says so in His Word;

John 6:40

For this is ***the will of God***, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in him ***should have eternal life***; and I will raise him up at the last day."

This is the will of Heaven and Jesus said we are to pray that His will be done on earth. This is my hope for everyone in this room and for the people we all love and for the people that we all don't even know.

Jesus is the Promised Son who was foreshadowed in the narrative of Abraham's only son who was almost sacrificed on Mt. Moriah. 2000 years later God's Only Son was indeed sacrificed on Mt. Moriah; tradition tells us on the very same rock Abraham raised his knife over.

Abraham's last words: We can know God's will and maintain trust in His help

Abraham is confident, confident that God will keep his word. So confident that when his servant says, "Maybe the woman won't be willing to follow me to this land," (v. 5), Abraham says in verse 7, "The Lord, the God of heaven, who took me from my father's house and from the land of my birth, and who spoke to me and swore to me, 'To your descendants I will give this land,' *he will send his angel before you*, and you shall take a wife for my son from there."

And this trip was no easy stroll to another neighborhood. It was about 300 miles and a trip like this could take many months and dozens of people would travel together to pack resources and to provide safety. This was a lot of work and expense.

Abraham believed in the God of the promise. He glorified God because he was fully convinced God could do what he promises. In Romans 4:20 Paul even comments on Abraham's faith saying ***"Abraham never wavered in believing God's promise. In fact, his faith grew stronger, and in this he brought glory to God."***

When the promises of God's Word merge to form a decision in our heart, we can count on all God's sovereign power to carry it through. He will send his angel *before us* and overcome all obstacles.

"Go. And take heart: the Lord will send his angel before you."

Go – if you are waiting to determine the will of God, seek an elder here at the church and pray with them. Search the Scriptures with them. Ask the Holy Spirit to lead you and to reveal His mind to you. Then take heart, and act on that. Use the eyes of Faith, because we walk by faith not by sight and 'Go'. Get going and persevere! God will send an angel before you!