

Preacher's Pen points

Lessons from Jesus' Final Words on Earth!



After Jesus arose from the dead, He appeared to the eleven with instructions for their new mission as His apostles: *"Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved; but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned"* (Mk. 16:15-16).

Jesus wants all people to hear the gospel!

This text is sometimes referred to as the "great commission" in contrast with an earlier "limited commission" to the disciples to preach only to *"the lost sheep of the house of Israel"* (Mt. 10:5-6). In the parallel account in Matthew, Jesus commanded the disciples to *"go therefore and make disciples of all the nations"* (Mt. 28:19).

The Gospel is the only message that can bring salvation!

Lost men everywhere need to hear the gospel as the remedy for sin. Paul later wrote, *"I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek"* (Romans 1:16).

The church today must continue the work of taking the gospel to the world.

Inasmuch as Jesus wanted all men to hear the message of salvation, the church today must continue the work of the Lord in *"sounding forth"* the word of truth (1 Thes. 1:8).

There are only two responses to the gospel!

As Jesus contemplated the reactions of "all creation" to the message preached, He envisioned only two responses! The first response is to believe and be baptized; the second is to disbelieve. It was not necessary for Jesus to say, "he who believes not and *is not baptized* shall be condemned", because unbelief itself would prevent the further response of bap-

tism. In just the same way, Jesus acknowledged that all who believe will also respond by being baptized!

(Today, people often ask, "What about the person who believes, but is not baptized?" Such a question misunderstands the nature of both faith and baptism as Jesus used the terms in this text. To believe the gospel is to trust completely in the message so as to respond to the conditions of salvation God has given. To be baptized is to act out of faith in Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection for the remission of sins. In this sense, an unbaptized believer cannot exist! The force of Jesus' statement is that every true believer will be baptized!)

The conditions of salvation continue while miracles of revelation and confirmation have ceased!

Some who seek to avoid the force of Jesus' plain statement sometimes contend that if we accept Jesus' words about believers being baptized we must also accept Jesus' words about believers performing "signs" (Mk. 16:17). By so arguing, they hope to lessen the impact of Jesus' statements about baptism and, in some cases, even discredit the whole text as an unreliable insertion by a later copyist.

The answer to this argument is simple. In the first century context, baptized believers received miracle working power by the Holy Spirit upon their obedience to the gospel (Ac. 8:16-17). However, this practice was not intended by God to continue in perpetuity. Instead the practice of these gifts by believers was to continue until the revelation of God had been completed (1 Cor. 13:8-10). Now that the revelation of God has been completely revealed and confirmed these "signs" are no longer needed. However, everyone still needs to be saved from their sins; and the conditions of that salvation are still the same as Jesus first announced them—believe and be baptized! —Johnny Felker