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On the 4th June 1940, Winston Churchill, stood up and said those famous words. *“Even though large tracts of Europe and many old and famous States have fallen or may fall into the grip of the Gestapo and all the odious apparatus of Nazi rule, we shall not flag or fail. We shall go on to the end, we shall fight in France, **we shall fight** on the seas and oceans, **we shall fight** with growing confidence and growing strength in the air, we shall defend our Island, whatever the cost may be, **we shall fight on the beaches, we shall fight** on the landing grounds, **we shall fight** in the fields and in the streets, **we shall fight** in the hills; **we shall never surrender.**”*

They are strong words, aren't they, fighting words. Words that galvanised a nation. A bit like those words of JFK when he said to Congress *“I believe that this nation should commit itself to achieving the goal, before this decade is out, of landing a man on the moon and returning him safely to the earth. No single space project in this period will be more impressive to mankind, or more important for the long-range exploration of space; and none will be so difficult or expensive to accomplish.”* But they did it didn't they? These strong words gave America its pride in the 60's.

Bob Hawke tried something similar, didn't he? On June 23, 1987 at an election campaign launch, he said these famous, no infamous words. *“We set ourselves this first goal: by 1990 no Australian child will be living in poverty,”*

Words, strong words, can have a powerful effect. And in Luke 22, we see that Peter decides that it is time for him to stand up with strong words of his own.

1. Strong Words

Let me set the scene for you. Jesus has had an incredibly successful ministry throughout Judea. He has arrived at Jerusalem and crowds have lined the streets, waving palms and declaring that he is the King. He has taught the crowds daily in the Temple. But the religious leaders and the teachers of the law are unhappy with all the adoration. They think he is leading the people astray. And so they are plotting to remove him, quietly.

And now just a day or two before the Passover, the high point of the Jewish year, Jesus has taken his 12 closest disciples & had a meal with them. He has spoken long and hard about what is about to take place. He will be betrayed, handed over to those who wish him harm. He will die. And it will be due to someone with him at the table.

Then Jesus turns his gaze toward Peter, the leader of the 12 and says, *“Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers.”*

Now Peter believes its time for some strong words. Peter feels someone has to stand up and be counted! Peter thinks the tone has to change from failure to success , from betrayal to trust, from defeat to victory. And as a leader, Peter knows the buck stops

with him. So he stands up and replies *“Lord I am ready to go to prison and to death.”*

Jesus I am with you 110%! Jesus the others might let you down but you can always rely upon me. Jesus, don't be worried the two of us can take on the world!

Now these are strong words, very strong words. And in a way I'm sure Jesus is heartened to hear them from Peter. After all this is the man who will lead the Church after he is gone. This is the man who will be a roving apostle from Jerusalem to Corinth to Rome to beyond. This is the man who will ultimately give his life for him. Who will go to prison for Jesus. Who will be the rock on which the Church is formed. Who will according to early tradition actually die by crucifixion himself, only he refused to be crucified like his Lord standing up, so he was crucified upside down!

Yes Jesus would be heartened by these words, because words are important, very important, aren't they? We don't just want to see acts of love by our family, we do need to hear those words “I love you” as well! Kaylene didn't want to enter a life long commitment with me as her husband, unless she heard those words, *“I, Stephen John Taylor, do take you Kaylene Cecily Philp/ As my wedded wife./ To have and to hold/ From this day forward,/ For better, for worse/ For richer, for poorer/ in sickness and in health/ until death do us part/ And today/ I give you me solemn promise.”*

Words are important, because they are a statement of intent. Words are important because they clarify what is on your heart. Words are important because they help you to make a stand on what you believe, what you really believe. That is why Jesus has already said to his disciples, in Matthew 10 *“Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven. But whoever disowns me before men, I will disown him before my Father in heaven.”*

Just as an aside, can I ask you, would you, be willing today to say the words that Peter did? *“Lord, I am ready to go with you to prison and to death.”* ? Would you stand up in front of the Church this day and promise that Jesus is indeed your Lord and Saviour? Would you defend Jesus the next time you are at the coffee shop and a friend of yours has a go at your Lord? Would you acknowledge Jesus as your Lord if it meant that you or your family would be persecuted?

She was just 17 year old. He stood glaring at her, his weapon before her face. “Do you believe in God?” She paused. It was a life or death question. “Yes I believe in God.” “Why?” Asked her executioner. But he never gave her the chance to respond. The teenage girl lay dead at his feet.

This scene could have happened in the Roman coliseum. It could have happened in the Middle Ages. And it could have happened in any numbers of countries around the world today. But it happened in America. At Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado. And so if it can happen there, it could happen to us here in Australia as well. To cope with those sorts of things will require strong words. As well as

2. Strong Actions?

For Peter has now said those strong words, but would he have the strong actions to back those words up? Jesus doesn't think so, for in verse 34 it declares "*I tell you Peter before the rooster crows today, you will deny three times that you know me.*"

And it seems at first Peter will come through with the goods. Jesus tells the disciples from now on if they have a purse, they should take it, if they have a bag it should be with them and if they don't have a sword, they should buy one. The point being that this is going to be a dangerous time to be a follower of Jesus. They won't always be able to rely on the charity of others. They are going to have to be prepared to give everything they have.

And in a matter of hours, there they are on the Mount of Olives. When a crowd comes up with clubs and torches. And Judas is at the front and he goes up to Jesus & betrays him with a kiss. And according to verse 49 one of Jesus' followers say to Jesus "Lord should we strike them with our swords?" And another disciple, & John identifies this disciple as Simon Peter, strikes the servant of the high priest, cutting off his right ear.

There is no way that Peter is denying Jesus here. Peter takes on the mob and against the huge odds before him shows a defiant show of strength. If Jesus is going to prison, he will go down fighting. Yes, Jesus I am proving to you that I am ready to die for you

But Jesus isn't a man of violence. Jesus doesn't believe in putting up an armed rebellion. Jesus isn't going to overthrow the authorities, even if they are corrupt. And so he puts Peter in his place. And he touches the man's ear and heals him. So in a way Peter might be impetuous, he may be hot blooded, but he is keeping his word. His actions and his words are currently working together.

But then, it all falls apart. Jesus is seized. He is led off to the high priest's house and Peter follows at a distance. Jesus is taken into the house and Peter stays outside in the court yard. He keeps a low profile. He minds his own business. And then a servant girl looks closely at him and says to others "this man was with him." Without thinking, Peter blurts out "Woman I don't know him."

Oh dear. Soon after someone else sees him and says Peter must be one of them. Man I am not! Strike two. And then an hour later "Certainly this fellow was with him, for he is a Galilean." Peter replies, "Man, I don't know what you're talking about!"

All Peter's strong words have evaporated. All have vanished before him. Disappeared. Dissolved. Evaporated. Gone. In the end the pressure got to him. He couldn't cut the mustard. He had talked the talk but he had failed to walk the walk.

But before we are too hard on Peter, haven't we done exactly the same? We have stood up in Church and promised to have Jesus as our Saviour and Lord and then we have tried to save ourselves by our own good deeds. Or made money, or children or sport our lords because in the end they make less demands on our lives.

Haven't we promised in our prayers to put God first and yet when we wake up the next day, & we have forgotten all about our promises the night before. Haven't we

said amongst our Christian friends that God is number 1, but then amongst our non Christians friends we went quiet when they were speaking irreverently about Jesus?

For we, like Peter, have had our strong words, haven't we? But at times our actions haven't been as strong as our words. Even at Easter time it is no different. We come to Church on Good Friday, but often we have forgotten the message by Saturday. We say our prayers, we sing our songs, we ponder our Lord and then we live the same sort of lifestyle next week, as if Easter had never happened.

So what are we going to do? We can't just try harder, that never works. We don't just pledge ourselves to God again, what makes this pledge any different to the last one? We can't just resolve to pray more, to come to Church more, to give more, those things are like new years resolutions they get swallowed up in the busyness of the next week. The only thing we can possibly do is to turn back to the gospels and hear Jesus

3. Stronger Words.

For throughout our passage there were some bold promises by Peter and by the other disciples but it's the words of Jesus on the cross that really take the breathe away. For think about it. There is an innocent man. There is a good man, a godly man, the Bible says a perfect man. A man without sin who is willing to put his own goals, desires, will even, aside and love God with all his heart and all his mind and all his strength and to love his neighbour as he loves himself. And it is this man, who when he is on the cross, mutters some incredible strong words.

Look with me at Luke 23:34. There after all the taunts, the injustice, the beatings, the cruelty, the betrayal, the denials, the abuse. There after all of those things have happened to him, we hear Jesus say, "*Father forgive them for they do not know what they are doing.*"

Father forgive Pilate for having no backbone and not standing up to the religious leaders. Father forgive the religious leaders for unjustly condemning an innocent man. Father forgive the disciples for running away. Father forgive Judas for the kiss of betrayal. Father, forgive the crowds for choosing Barabbas over your son. Father, forgive the world for their self centredness, their idolatry, their greed, their wars, their unequal distribution of food. Father forgive that Stephen Taylor for his hypocrisy, for his complaints, for his lack of love and compassion. Father forgive them all for they don't not know what they are doing.

Now they're big words. Forgiveness. Reconciliation. Restoration. And Jesus says they are all available at the cross. There God finds a way of being just and justifying us despite our sins. He takes all the sins of the world and heaps them onto Jesus, and takes all the righteousness of Jesus and give it to those who are his followers. So that Jesus takes the punishment that we deserve and we get his offer of forgiveness, no strings attached.

But Jesus continues. Verse 43. When the thief on the cross next door, has finished venting his spleen at Jesus and the other thief rebukes him, admits his sins and asks Jesus to remember him when he comes as the king in the future kingdom. Jesus, answers him, "*I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise.*"

What amazing words. You, my friend will not go to hell but to heaven. You sinner will soon be in paradise with God Himself. For you, life is not the end, but it is like walking through the doorway into eternity. Not just forgiveness. But dwelling with God. Not just reconciliation but a permanent place in Jesus kingdom. Not just life but eternal life.

And then if that is not enough. Jesus last words are found in verse 46. And what strong words they are. *“Father into your hands I commit my spirit.”* And John adds that he concludes his life with the words, *“It is finished!”* Words of commitment, faithfulness, completion. Words of faith, trust and complete handing over of ones life to his Father.

Jesus words at the end, his strong words declare the way of forgiveness, the way of faith, the way of hope, the way of love, the way of complete & utter trust in His Father God. But they are not just words are they? Unlike Simon Peter who spoke strong words at the end but failed to deliver, Jesus matched his stronger words with

4. The Strongest of Actions.

Because he not only forgave, he did what was necessary for us to be forgiven. He lived a perfect life and then was willing to die for you and your sins.

Because he not only promised reconciliation, he achieved reconciliation. For by his death he brought those who were far away from God, near to God.

Because he not only spoke words about Paradise, he enabled us to go to Paradise. For on the third day he defeated death and promised all those who die in Christ, will live with Christ in eternity.

Because he not only spoke about commitment and faithfulness to the end. But even when he had the sins of the world. Even when his Father God had to turn his face away from His son. Even when it was him against the world. Jesus' will did not buckle. His resolve did not falter. His commitment to you and I did not waver.

He had talked the talk, now he walked the walk. He had used strong words and now had backed them with strong actions. He had spoken about forgiveness, about restoration, about heaven, about commitment and now he offered all these things to us as gift. He graciously promised to give those things to all who would turn from their sins, accept his offer of eternal life and lived for him and for him alone.

As someone once said, He was The Greatest Man in History

Jesus had no servants, yet they called Him Master.

Had no degree, yet they called Him Teacher.

Had no medicines, yet they called Him Healer.

He had no army, yet kings feared Him..

He won no military battles, yet He conquered the world.

He committed no crime, yet they crucified Him.

He was buried in a tomb, yet He lives today.

So friends its not our strong words, our promises that ultimately impress God, its Jesus strong words that mean so much to the Father. And it not our strong actions or even our weak actions that determine our eternity. It is putting our trust in Jesus strongest actions, his death and resurrection that makes all the difference.

So sure, make your promises to God, he is our Lord and our Saviour. They are a statement of intent that we need to make. Go on seek to be faithful again this week, even if you let him down last week. But don't put your faith in your words or your actions. Invite Jesus into your life. Seek his strength, look to his faithfulness, pursue his Spirit. It is him and him alone that determines your forgiveness, restoration and eternity.

Look to Him. The author and perfecter of your faith. And don't lose heart. For his words are trustworthy. You can see that in the cross and the resurrection. And his faithfulness changes everything. Because now we live not in our strength but in his strength. And that makes all the difference in the world.

Its Good Friday. Not because you are good but because he was good. Not because what you do is good enough, but because what he did was good enough. Now go and live in the light of what Jesus has done for you. With the joy, the peace, the assurance, the thankfulness that only Jesus can give you. And make sure that Jesus strong words and stronger actions find their mark in your life, your soul, your all.