

WordBytes

The Communion on the Moon – Which Bible Verse was Read?

The 50th anniversary of the first moon landing has been recently celebrated with extensive media coverage including historical documentaries. However, a remarkable event has been largely ignored – the celebration of communion on the surface of the moon and the Bible verse spoken by astronaut Buzz Aldrin!

The First Moon Landing Celebration

The first moon landing on July 20, 1969, sparked off world-wide celebrations. However, the first celebration was when Buzz Aldrin took communion in the lunar module on the surface of the moon before he and Neil Armstrong began their famous moonwalk. Aldrin was an elder at the Webster Presbyterian Church near Houston, Texas, which still holds an annual commemorative service on the Sunday closest to July 20th. He took with him a portion for bread and small silver cup from a communion service at the church prior to the moon mission⁽¹⁾.

Aldrin's original plan was to share the event on radio⁽²⁾. But NASA told him to tone it down and keep his comments more general because of the recent lawsuit by atheist activist Madalyn Murray O'Hair after the Apollo 8 crew had read the Genesis creation account while orbiting the moon. As a result, the communion ceremony wasn't broadcast and did not become known till after the mission. Instead Aldrin said

"Houston, this is Eagle. This is the LM Pilot speaking. I would like to request a few moments of silence. I would like to invite each person listening in, wherever and whomever he may be, to contemplate for a moment the events of the past few hours and to give thanks in his own individual way."⁽¹⁾

Communion on the Moon

Then Aldrin took communion privately. Fellow astronaut Neil Armstrong looked on quietly but did not participate⁽³⁾. Just before he partook of the elements, he read from a scrap of paper he carried with him the words which he had chosen, to indicate his trust that as man probes into space we are in fact acting in Christ:

"I am the vine, you are the branches. Whoever remains in me, and I in him, will bear much fruit; for you can do nothing without me." John 15:5 (TEV)

Later he said that he "sensed especially strongly my unity with our church back home, and with the Church everywhere."⁽¹⁾

The Apostle John would surely have been astounded to know that his words were to be quoted from the moon!

Timely Words

During the descent to the surface Neil Armstrong saw that the computer's target landing area was unsuitable due to boulders, so he took semi-automatic control. He eventually found a suitable site with only 90 seconds of propellant remaining before he would have to abort the landing in order to have enough fuel for the ascent back to the command module which was orbiting the moon under the control of the third astronaut Michael Collins. When Buzz Aldrin chose that Scripture a week earlier, he was not aware of the challenge which would soon threaten the success of the mission and even their lives. As believers we too can be confident that Jesus is with us and will bring us through all the challenges of life which lie ahead of us when we have faith in His Word and acknowledge our total dependence on Him.



WordBytes

References

1. Communion in Space, By Buzz Aldrin, Guideposts Magazine, October 1970.
2. How Buzz Aldrin's Communion on the Moon Was Hushed Up, by Matthew Cresswell, The Guardian, 13 September 2012.
3. 9 Things You Should Know About the Communion Service on the Moon, by Joe Carter, The Gospel Coalition Website accessed 2 August 2019: <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/9-things-you-should-know-about-the-communion-service-on-the-moon/>

Alan Taylor

Managing Director
JO-AL Bible Teachings & Publications
www.jo-al.com

WordBytes are Bible teachings to inspire faith and spiritual growth.

JO-AL Bible Teaching & Publications is based in Melbourne, Australia, and was founded by Alan and Joan Taylor in 2009. Alan and Joan have experience in pastoring and pioneering churches, and in travelling teaching, worship and music ministry. At the same time they have established a successful secular technical consulting company.