

John 20 – Jesus and his Disciples

Setting: Last week we looked at Mary Magdalene's experience at the tomb of Christ. Scripture tells us she was there and saw 2 angels inside Christ's tomb where his body had been laying. The verses started off with Mary in despair and weeping and ended with her face to face with resurrected Christ. Mary tried to cling to him but he gives her comforting words and something to do (Go and tell). She was blessed to be the first person to see Jesus resurrected.

This week we get to look at Jesus appearing to the disciples who were basically in hiding at this point. As Mary had this personal experience with Christ post resurrection, the disciples are blessed in this bit of scripture to do the same thing.

John 20:19-31 - Read

1. Jesus visits his disciples

The same night as Jesus had met with Mary he goes to his disciples. First, we see that they were in a room with the door shut. Scripture tells us that it was shut for fear of the Jews. There are 3 things to take away from this first bit of details. 1) The disciples are together, which is a great thing. This means they didn't just part ways and say "well that's it" when they heard about Christ's body not being at the tomb and possibly taken. The fact that they still gathered together shows us that they hadn't "forsaken the assembling of themselves together" as Hebrews puts it. There are few things to look at here:

1) although the sheep do sometimes become scattered, the true Church will always be found in fellowship with one another.

2) The door was shut and locked. This was because of fear of the Jews. They had just saw these wicked men basically hand over Jesus to the Romans. In their minds, the only possibly thing that could happen next was that they would be coming for them also. What else is significant about the door being shut and locked?

3) The third point of this small piece of scripture comes in here...We see that Jesus came and stood in the midst. But I thought the door was shut and locked? How did Jesus get in? Some commentators believe he walked through the door, and some believe that he just appeared in the room with the disciples. Either way, this was Christ in a glorified body unlike the body that had just hung on the cross.

Now in the presence of his disciples Christ declares “Peace be with you”. This is not an uncommon Jewish phrase that is used. Jesus even used it prior to his resurrection in **John 14:27 “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.”**

I was reminded of the scripture earlier in John 6 when the disciples were fishing, and Jesus appears to them walking on water in the midst of the storm. They were afraid then, imagine the fear they had at this point. They thought he was dead, and now he appears in the room with them. It was probably a good reminder to hear him say “Peace be with you”. What he does next is so powerful.

2. His Hands and His Side

Scripture tells us he “showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord.” We see that Jesus is not just in some ghostly figure with them but also has a tangible body too as we see when he offers Thomas to touch his hands and side. I cannot imagine the image of what he looked like all I know is that scripture promises us when he appears at the resurrection, we “shall be like him”.

This brings great assurance to the disciples that this is Jesus Christ. Even though he is in front of them in resurrected form, we see that he still bares the marks in his hands and side. What does this tell us about things that are temporary? And what assurance does this give us as believers?

1) Christ death was temporary. Romans 6 tells us “We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God. So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.”

- A. Christ is now very evidently risen to these disciples. This is beautiful proof and reminder that as that scripture I just read says HE WILL NEVER DIE AGAIN.
- B. For us as believers it gives us the assurance and the hope that if Christ rose from the dead, then we can without a doubt confirm that our justification we have through Christ has taken our guilty plea and turned it into a not guilty! Though we still battle sin, we have victory over it because Christ has risen.

C. **Colossians 1:20** tells us **“For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.”**

a. Jesus brings peace as he said to these disciples “Peace be with you” meaning freedom from worry, but scripture also assures us that Christ “made peace” by the blood of his cross. Because of Jesus’ death, burial, and resurrection, those of us that believe have been reconciled to God. These marks in his hands and feet remind us of that fact.

2) Our sorrow is temporary. I won’t harp on this much because I talked at length about it last week, but we see this evident in Mary’s encounter, and now these disciples get the same experience, in a personal conversation with our risen Savior.

3. **I am sending you**

Jesus appoints the disciples to carry out the work of the kingdom while they remain here on earth. He says “As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you”. These disciples would take the gospel to the ends of the earth. It was later said of Paul and Silas in Act that these were the men that “turned the world upside down”.

Christ declaring “peace to you” was likely a reminder of this that he would say afterwards. Basically saying “because you are going to need reminded of this peace because this will not be an easy road”.

How would they be able to do this though? How could they carry on the ministry that Christ had started while he was here on earth? If the Son of God did all these things, how in the world could these regular people do it?

Thankfully scripture doesn’t leave us guessing. “And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, Receive the Holy Spirit.” The ability to do literally anything as a Christian comes from the work of the Holy Spirit that is working inside of us. These disciples in their own strength and abilities would have failed without a doubt, but with the indwelling of the Holy Spirit they were equipped to do the work that he would have them do. The term “breathed on them” references us back to **Gen 2:7 “Then the LORD God formed the man from the dust of the ground. He breathed the breath of life into the man’s nostrils, and the man became a living person.”** Just as God breathed life unto man’s nostril to become a living person, Jesus breathes life into us when we receive the Holy Spirit.

We came to life in Genesis and we “come to life” spiritually when we are indwelt by the Holy Spirit.

We get an even better understanding of the work they would go on to do here as Jesus tells them **“If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld.”** What does this mean though? Would these disciples really have the authority to forgive peoples sins and withhold forgiveness? I think John Calvin best describes it like this:

“The principal design of preaching the Gospel is, that men may be reconciled to God, and this is accomplished by the unconditional pardon of sins; as Paul also informs us, when he calls the Gospel, on this account, the **ministry of reconciliation**, (2 Corinthians 5:18.) Many other things, undoubtedly, are contained in the Gospel, but the principal object which God intends to accomplish by it is, to receive men into favor by not imputing their sins. If, therefore, we wish to show that we are faithful ministers of the Gospel, we must give our most earnest attention to this subject; for the chief point of difference between the Gospel and heathen philosophy lies in this, that the Gospel makes the salvation of men to consist in the forgiveness of sins through free grace. This is the source of the other blessings which God bestows, such as, that God enlightens and regenerates us by his Spirit, that he forms us anew to his image, that he arms us with unshaken firmness against the world and Satan. Thus the whole doctrine of godliness, and the spiritual building of the Church, rests on this foundation, that God, having acquitted us from all sins, adopts us to be his children by free grace.”

Christ alone forgives sins on account of his finished work. To sum up this passage of scripture in simple terms, I believe what we see is the power given to these disciples (and to the church) to preach the gospel. The gospel is a declaration of what has been accomplished. Some will receive this declaration, and some will reject it but these disciples’ duty and our duty is to “Go and tell” as Jesus had told Mary previously. We also know that within the Church, the Lord has given authority to leaders to make spiritually discerning decisions concerning spiritual health of the Church. I believe that is what we see here, Christ enabling his people to do the work he has called them to do.

4. **Jesus and Thomas**

Next, we look at Thomas’ experience with Christ. We know from scripture that he was not with them originally when Jesus came to visit the disciples. We are told the other disciples told Thomas “We have seen the Lord.” Thomas did not believe their account and basically said, I need some proof. Unless I see and

touch his wounds, I will never believe. We now find that Christ comes again 8 days later to the disciples while Thomas is present.

We often call Thomas “Doubting Thomas”, but I was listening to a sermon recently and a man called him “Honest Thomas”. I guess both statements about him were true. He did doubt what he had heard from the other disciples, but he was also honest about his thoughts of the situation. We see often in the scripture, that even though the disciples were familiar with who Jesus is and his teachings, they are often slow to understand and believe (not much different that us). Thankfully the Lord is longsuffering with Thomas and with us. Often times through, in our own ignorance we neglect the clear teaching, and say and do things, like Thomas.

We do not see in scripture if Thomas actually placed his finger in Christ’s hands or his hand in his side, but what we do see is that once invited by Christ, Thomas proclaims “MY Lord and MY GOD”. Thomas has now gone from the verge of unbelief to sweet realization that this is the risen Christ. He has now made this statement that Jesus is not only his Lord but also his God. Honest/Doubting Thomas affirms what we know is true by acknowledging Jesus as God. We remember from **John 1:1 “In the beginning was the Word, the Word was with God and the Word was God.”** God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit have always dwelt together in unison since before the world began. For someone who was “seeking proof” so to speak, Thomas affirms one of the fundamental truths of Christianity as soon as he comes to this realization.

5. **Seeing and Believing**

Jesus said to him, “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.

We are reminded from this scripture, although Thomas and the other disciples, saw the resurrected Jesus and believed, blessed are those who have not seen. These disciples did have a supernatural experience with Christ and were blessed to view him in a resurrected state. The beautiful thing about salvation for everyone that came after the time of Christ’s ascension back to the Father, no matter if it was during this first century or if it was yesterday, is that God, by the death and resurrection of his Son Jesus, and work of the Holy Spirit through the preaching of the Gospel still transforms us by a supernatural experience. Our blinded eyes are opened, and our dead hearts are made alive.

Peter writing to elect exiles in **1 Peter 1:8-9** reminds his audience of this exact believing that John's gospel talks about. He says **"Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls."**

Our joy is not dependent on what we see. We talked about last week how the things we see today are temporary and our minds and hearts as believers are set on what is eternal. These exiles Peter wrote to and those of us who believe today are still considered no less blessed than any other believer throughout history. The faith that we have is not based on Thomas, or Mary or Peter, but based on what we hear and what we believe. **Romans 10:17** tell us **"Faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ"**. I want to refer back to the work that Christ gave to his disciples earlier that we talked about in John 20:23 and that we have as the church today. The proclamation of the Gospel is a means of grace for the church. By the power given by Christ, and the work of the Holy Spirit, the gospel is preached, and believers are gifted faith to believe. Thank God for this truth! This takes us rightly to our closing of John's gospel as we are told **"Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name."**

The Gospels tell us so much about the life of Christ leading up to his crucifixion, death, and resurrection. We are overloaded with information about Jesus and the details of his life. We learn about public ministry, his ministry to his disciples, and even learn about many miracles that he performed. John's gospel is summed up by saying, "there were a lot of other things that are not even written that Jesus did" to basically say, the main purpose is not to believe miracles or seek signs, but to believe that Jesus is the Son of God and have life in his name.

We are given all the details in John's gospel that do without a doubt, prove the resurrection of Christ. The hope we have today in the gospel is because of the resurrection of our Savior Jesus. Without the resurrection of Jesus, there would be no need to study John 19 and read about his crucifixion, there would be no need to study all the details of his life or think about the miracles or things that he said about himself.

John MacArthur said "The truth of the resurrection gives life to every other area of gospel truth. The resurrection is the pivot on which all Christianity turns and without which none of the other truths would much matter. Without the

resurrection, Christianity would be so much wishful thinking, taking its place alongside all other human philosophy and religious speculation.”

How true! All the theology that we hold dear to in Christianity are based on this resurrection. I know during the Easter season it is the “custom” to focus in on the resurrection, but if we think about it, every single time we gather, we are basically saying, Christ is risen from the dead. We are commanded to gather, and we have the ability to do so. We are able to live the life we live as believers with the confidence that because of the resurrection, we have hope beyond this life. Praise the Lord for this comfort and truth!