

You must be born again

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[0 : 00] We thank you for this local church. We pray that you would cause us to be growing in our faith. That as we hear you speak in your words, as it is read and preached, that you would be drawing us ever closer to yourself.

We pray that you would enable us to love and serve one another, to encourage and build up one another, that we would be committed to praying for the church and for the church's mission, that we would be committed to the good of this local church. Lord, as we recognize the needs of our city and of our immediate community, we recognize how important it is that we live as the people of God and speak of the good news of salvation. And so we pray that you would help us and we pray for other Bible-believing churches in our city who also proclaim Jesus as the only way of salvation. May you be pleased to use the witness of your people to extend your church in this city.

And Lord, we pray for our nation and for the nations of the world, for your glory. We pray that you would continue to draw people to faith and obedience, to live lives of worship, acknowledging Jesus as Lord.

And we pray that you would give maturity and understanding of our need to live holy lives, that you would be our great purpose for living. Lord, we ask once again that you would continue to raise up laborers for the harvest field, recognizing that there are so many people who need to hear about Jesus. There are so many places where churches need to be established and strengthened. And so we pray that you would continue to save people and build them up in their faith and then send them out, send us out into our local community to be salt and light for the good of others and for the glory and praise of your name.

Lord, we thank you for this time that we have around your word and in worship. We pray that it would do our hearts good. And we pray that you would receive glory, that you would enable us to worship you in spirit and in truth. And we pray that you would use this time that we have together to equip us and strengthen us so that we would go into this new week as ambassadors for Jesus. And we pray these things in His name and for His glory. Amen. Now, we're going to read a passage from the Old Testament, the book of Ezekiel, chapter 37. If you're using a church Bible, it's page 868.

[3 : 02] Here is prophecy anticipating the powerful work of God in bringing new life, resurrection life, the valley of dry bones. So, Ezekiel chapter 37, I'll read from verse 1.

The hand of the Lord was on me, and He brought me out by the Spirit of the Lord and set me in the middle of a valley. It was full of bones. He led me to and fro among them, and I saw a great many bones on the floor of the valley, bones that were very dry. He asked me, Son of man, can these bones live?

I said, Sovereign Lord, you alone know. Then He said to me, Prophecy to these bones and say to them, dry bones, hear the word of the Lord. This is what the Sovereign Lord says to these bones. I will make breath enter you, and you will come to life. I will attach tendons to you, and make flesh come upon you, and cover you with skin. I will put breath in you, and you will come to life. Then you will know that I am the Lord. So I prophesied as I was commanded, and as I was prophesying, there was a noise, a rattling sound, and the bones came together, bone to bone. I looked, and tendons and flesh appeared on them, and skin covered them, but there was no breath in them. Then He said to me, Prophecy to the breath. Prophecy, Son of man, and say to it, this is what the Sovereign Lord says, come, breath from the four winds, and breathe into these slain, that they may live. So I prophesied as He commanded me, and breath entered them. They came to life and stood up on their feet, a vast army. Then He said to me, Son of man, these bones are the people of Israel. They say, Our bones are dried up, and our hope is gone. We are cut off. Therefore prophecy, and say to them, this is what the Sovereign Lord says, My people, I am going to open your graves and

bring you up from them. I will bring you back to the land of Israel. Then you, my people, will know that I am the Lord. When I open your graves and bring you up from them, I will put my Spirit in you, and you will live. And I will settle you in your own land. Then you will know that I, the Lord, have spoken, and I have done it, declares the Lord. Amen. A wonderful vision of the power of God to breathe new life into even dry bones. Now let's again stand together to sing, this time from Psalm 57, and we're going to sing verses 7 to 11, standing again to sing.

[5 : 56] My heart is steadfast, Lord, with music I will sing. Awake, my soul, wake harp and lyre, my song, the song will bring. Among the nations, Lord, to you I will give praise. Among the peoples of the earth, my songs of you I'll raise. Great is your steadfast love, which reaches to the sky. Your constant faithfulness,

O Lord, extends to heaven high. Above the highest heavens, O God, exalted be, and over all the earth below, display your majesty.

Now can you turn with me to John chapter 20? Now we're going to pick up the chapter at verse 19. This morning we looked at the first 18 verses, we thought about what happened that first Easter Sunday morning, and now we come to the evening of the week, and then the action moves to a week following.

So John chapter 20 at verse 19. On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders, Jesus came and stood among them and said, Peace be with you.

[8 : 53] After he had said this, he showed them his hands and sighed. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord. Again, Jesus said, Peace be with you.

As the Father has sent me, I am sending you. And with that, he breathed on them and said, Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone's sins, their sins are forgiven.

If you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven. Now Thomas, also known as Didymus, one of the twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, We have seen the Lord.

But he said to them, Unless I see the nail marks in his hands, and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe. A week later, his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them.

Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, Peace be with you. Then he said to Thomas, Put your finger here, see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side.

[10 : 01] Stop doubting and believe. Thomas said to him, My Lord and my God. Then Jesus told him, Because you have seen me, you have believed.

Blessed are those who have not seen, and yet have believed. Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book.

But these are written, that you may believe, that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing, you may have life in his name.

Amen. So we're going to think for a few moments about this seismic event of Easter. What do I mean by that?

Well, think about an earthquake. An earthquake is a very dramatic event that causes everything to shake, an event that has a powerful impact.

[11 : 03] Matthew's gospel records that at the time Jesus died, and when Jesus rose, there was an earthquake. And so I was thinking about that, and then I came across this from Tom Holland, who's one of the podcasters on The Rest is History, a Roman historian.

They did a few episodes on Jesus, Messiah. And he said, It is clear that a seismic event happened in the first century, and its reverberations are still felt today.

And he went further, and he said nothing, even closely resembling Christianity, would have happened unless the first generation of Christians believed a spectacular event had happened.

So what is this seismic, spectacular event that took place in the first century? It is the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. Or perhaps better, it's the combined impact of the life and teaching of Jesus, together with his death on the cross, where he goes as a willing sacrifice, demonstrating a willingness to embrace death on behalf of his people, coupled with the events of Easter Sunday and the resurrection.

And it's those events that have had this dramatic impact on believers on the world ever since. Earthquakes are measured with a seismograph.

[12:41] So after an earthquake, the instrument, which is now much more high-tech, but it used to be just needle points, it would record ground movement. The needles would draw spikes, and the level of the spikes would show the impact and the ferocity and intensity of the earthquake.

It would locate both where an earthquake happened and the impact of the quake. And John chapter 20, in a sense, is like a seismograph record.

It tells us, it locates the event of this great event. It's in the empty tomb, and the risen glorified Jesus, and it traces for us the impact of that event.

It traces the impact as people meet the risen Lord Jesus, an impact that continues to be felt today. So when you look at three features of that first few hours in the Sunday evening and then the week following, and we'll see the impact in terms of Jesus' resurrection bringing peace for troubled people, giving a sense of mission for fearful people, and provoking worship for doubting people. So peace, followed by mission, followed by worship. So let's begin thinking about peace. Consider again these disciples. Consider what's going on in their hearts that Sunday evening.

[14:17] There is grief in what they have witnessed happening to Jesus. Jesus. They were there during His arrest. They saw at least something of the beatings and the mockery, and they saw Him hanging on the cross.

They bore testimony to His death and to His burial. Couple that with the grief that they would undoubtedly experience, knowing that they had failed Jesus when He needed them most.

So remember, there were three who were invited to watch and pray, and instead they slept. When Jesus was arrested, they all ran and left Him alone, and Peter, under pressure, denied knowing Jesus and being one of His followers.

And as if that wasn't enough, there is also that sense of grief that we get in the accounts of the Gospels at the sense of hope that they have lost because Jesus has died. So Luke records a couple of Jesus' followers on the road to Emmaus.

Jesus comes to them. They don't know who He is. And they say in conversation, well, we hoped He was the one to redeem Israel. The implication, hope is gone because the Redeemer has died.

[15:30] How can the Messiah suffer and die was a question they had always wrestled with, and now they are still living with a sense of grief because they think the movement is gone and hope is lost.

So that first Sunday evening, there is a real storm of emotions going on in their hearts. They are deeply troubled people. But into that scene once again, the risen Jesus appears and three times speaks peace.

Again, a demonstration of the wonderful love, the patience, the compassion of Jesus. He doesn't come pointing His finger. Why did you run? Why did you abandon me?

He speaks peace. Verse 19, when the disciples were together with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders, Jesus came and stood among them and said, peace be with you.

Verse 21, Jesus said, peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, I am sending you. And again in verse 26, when they're still behind locked doors, Jesus came and said, peace be with you.

[16:43] Peace. I am really alive. You can have peace because your failure is not the final word on your life. There is peace because your life has purpose.

And there is that promise that Jesus would always be with His followers by the Spirit. There is peace that Jesus gives. He'd made that promise at least a couple of times.

So for example, John 16, verse 33, shortly before His arrest, I have told you these things so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble, but take heart, I have overcome the world.

Now He has overcome. Now He will be the source of their peace. Now He will make good on that promise. These words become a partner to His words on the cross, it is finished.

Jesus has come on a mission, a mission to make peace between God and humanity by way of sacrifice, that we would be reconciled by the way of the cross.

[17:48] And Jesus, now that He has finished that work, can bring that peace to troubled hearts and troubled lives. Notice that John again records for us that this is happening on the first day of the week.

John reminds us over and over by God's design, Easter Sunday represents a new beginning, new creation. Jesus' resurrection is the start of new creation life.

Paul will speak about Him as the first fruit. And it's a new beginning and there's new life because Jesus has done what He came to do.

He has made peace by His blood shed on the cross. He is the answer to the great human problem that emerged all the way back at the beginning in Genesis 3. Human guilt and human sin.

Adam and Eve believing the lie, thinking badly of God's character, turning their back on God. And God's answer all the way in Genesis 3 and indeed all the way back in eternity past was that He would provide a sacrifice to make peace.

[18 : 55] There was the promise even to Adam and Eve of one who would come who would suffer in order to save us. The only way to true peace, to have peace with God, to have peace of conscience, to have true peace with others, is through the finished work of Jesus.

And Jesus, having done His work, comes to His disciples and brings peace. peace. This word peace, the Hebrew word shalom, is much more than a greeting.

Sometimes it's used as a greeting and it's much more than the ending of wars. It's the idea of wholeness and flourishing.

It has the idea of knowing that we are at home and we belong and we're part of the family. There's that deep sense of well-being. The complete reconciliation that Jesus brings through His work on the cross brings a complete flourishing to His people.

So we can have this deep and lasting peace because Jesus has gone through that Easter journey. He has died and He has risen again.

[20 : 14] He has put the relationship between us and God right. And so Jesus continues to speak peace to troubled hearts. I am doing all things well.

I am the one who can make you whole. I am the one who will bring you home. I will bring you into what you and I were created for. That deep peace, that deep rest of life with God.

When we think about this message that Jesus brings, I think we recognize what a gift this is for the times in which we live, often known as the age of anxiety.

There are so many reports that say we've never had it so good in terms of our possessions, but yet there is much less happiness. We have a greater sense of freedom. We can be much more mobile and travel and change our jobs however many times we want, but there is at the same time less satisfaction and greater anxiety.

For many people, they're living with a sense of guilt, but there is nowhere to go with it. And into that confusion, Jesus would come and speak peace.

[21 : 25] In our own stories of faith, I wonder how many of us have discovered this wonderful gift. It's in the storms of life that we become profoundly aware of how significant it is to have God with us, to have Jesus come and to say, do not fear, I am with you, bringing us His peace.

Jesus brings good news in His death and resurrection, and because the sin barrier that separates us from God has been broken down by God's grace, we are truly reconciled and we can live by faith each day enjoying God's peace.

So, the impact of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus is peace for troubled people. But it's more than that.

As we go on in the story, we see it's also mission for fearful people. I think one of the vital questions that I guess historians, church historians, love to wrestle with is how do you explain the growth of the church?

It's a really interesting question. Well, I think it's a really interesting question. You know, how do you move from a small number of believers, so small that they can fit into a single upper room, that they can, within just a few centuries, go global and come to dominate the Roman Empire?

[22 : 51] And all of that in the context of conflict and battle of frequent persecutions from the Roman Empire in those early days. How did it happen?

Operating as a minority, operating as exiles, being so different from the society around them, but somehow turning this society upside down by preaching the risen Jesus as Lord, being willing to live for Him and to die for Him?

How do we explain it? And when we come to a text like this, the question becomes even more pressing because we look and we think, well, the raw materials are not very promising.

Here is a group of believers. Here are the leaders of the church. Verse 19, where do we find them? We find them with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders.

And it's the same again in verse 26. They are in hiding. They are fearful. Now, Jesus said to them, you are the light of the world, but the disciples are trying to hide their light under a basket behind closed doors.

[24 : 09] So, what is the event that is going to shake the church with sufficient impact that it will move them out to boldly proclaim Jesus as Lord, to live for Him in such a way that these communities of believers would be recognized as the people of Christ and be so different that they would draw all kinds of people into that community and into faith in Jesus?

What explains it? The only plausible explanation is the resurrection, that Jesus truly rose from the dead and the impact of that as they believed then that all His promises, all that He said about Himself were true, that He is the ultimate good news for the world.

That and that alone explains the existence, never mind the growth, of the church. And so, here we come to this point where the risen Jesus comes and speaks with them and He shares three truths about the mission of the church, which are hugely significant then and for us today.

perhaps we can identify with the disciples having that sense of being fearful about mission, perhaps enjoying the comfort and security of, you know, being behind closed doors.

What is it that will move us into this community, into this city with a sense of mission for Jesus?

Well, let's look at verses 21 to 23.

[25 : 49] After Jesus showed them His hands and His side, the disciples were overjoyed. When they saw the Lord again, Jesus said, Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.

So, here's the first important thing. It's Jesus' authority. It's this idea of sending. So, notice first that Jesus was sent by the Father. Jesus was the ultimate man on a mission.

He understood His purpose. And so, we see Him always obeying, always seeking the glory of His Father, coming deliberately to complete His task, which is to live a perfect life and then to suffer and die in the place of sinners that we might be forgiven and saved.

And now, this one who was sent by the Father says, I am sending you. And so, the disciples and the church, we go under the authority of Jesus our King.

And that's important. I think it's important in our age because sometimes we can have the impression that if we share the gospel with someone, it might seem that we are being intolerant. You know, everyone's entitled to their own belief.

[26 : 58] And that's true. But it's really important that we are faithful to King Jesus who tells us to go and bring good news. But it also reminds us as well that Jesus is the one with authority in this mission.

He is the one who will save people. He is the one who builds His church. Our responsibility is to be faithful, to do what we are called to do, to use our spiritual gifts, to be committed to praying, to be committed to seeking the welfare of the church, to look to live as His witnesses, to tell others about His glory and His goodness.

But Jesus has authority over the church and over the mission of the church. And that's something that's really important, I think, when we think about the whole idea of mission. So there's Jesus' authority.

The second thing that we see in verse 22, also essential, is He talks about the Spirit, Jesus' Spirit. And there's that idea of breathing.

Verse 22, with that He breathed on them and said, receive the Holy Spirit. This breathing seems to be some kind of like an acted sort of parable or a sign.

[28 : 13] I think taking us back to a couple of passages in the Old Testament, one of which we read. In Genesis 2, if you know the account of creation, God forms the man, Adam, from the ground and then He breathes life into the man.

Our God is a life-giving God. And then we read Ezekiel 37, God breathing life into the dry bones. And so here, we're being reminded that Jesus is the life-giving Lord.

And He gives life by sending the Spirit. And we see what happens when the Spirit comes in the book of Acts and in the history of the church and in our own lives. that when the Spirit comes, He brings new birth.

When the Spirit comes, He brings new power. When the Spirit comes, we enjoy the presence of Jesus and the Father with us.

And we have this wonderful thing anticipated by Jesus that the same Spirit that came and anointed Jesus at His baptism, the same Spirit that filled and empowered the Lord Jesus to do His mission on earth is the same Spirit that is now gifted to His people.

[29 : 30] There's a wonderful promise for our mission when we feel fearful. We don't do it in our own strength. We do it in the strength that Jesus provides by the Spirit.

And the last thing about the Spirit,