

The Heart of the Risen Christ for his followers

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[0 : 0 0] Now, I'm going to ask Steve Willis to come and read for us. So, we'll hear, first of all, from John chapter 16, and then in John 20. Thanks, Steve.

So, John chapter 16, verses 12 to 24. I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you in all truth. He will not speak on his own. He will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you. All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said, the Spirit will take from what is mine and make it known to you. In a little while, you will see me no more, and then after a little while, you will see me. Some of his disciples said to one another, what does he mean by saying, in a little while, you will see me no more, and then after a little while, you will see me, and because I am going to the Father? They kept asking, what does he mean by a little while? We don't understand what he is saying. Jesus saw that they wanted to ask him about this, so he said to them, are you asking one another what I meant when I said, in a little while, you will see me no more, and then after a little while, you will see me. I tell you the truth, you will weep and mourn while the world rejoices. You will grieve, but your grief will turn to joy. A woman giving birth to a child has pain because her time has come, but when her baby is born, she forgets the anguish because of her joy that a child is born into the world. So with you, now is your time of grief, but I will see you again, and you will rejoice, and no one will take away your joy. In that day, you will no longer ask me for anything. I tell you the truth, my Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. Until now, you have not asked for anything, my name. Ask, and you will receive, and your joy will be complete. Verse 33, I have told you these things so that you may have peace. In this world, you will have trouble. Take heart, but take heart, I have overcome the world. And chapter 20, verses 19 to 23. On the evening of the first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, Peace be with you. After he 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 his sins, they are forgiven. If you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven. This is God's word.

Thanks, Steve. So we'll be in John chapter 20, looking at the heart of the risen Christ for his followers. But let's begin with the idea that there are certain pieces of information that we discover, we think that they are too good to be true. Maybe you've had that news that comes in and you just can't quite believe that it could possibly be true. It seems to happen every now and again for a national football team. The squad is about to be announced and somebody is getting a call up to the national team and they'll report in the newspaper. We presumed it was a windup, one of our mates having a joke until it was all confirmed. Spare a thought for a man by the name of Hiroo Onada. He was a

Japanese soldier in the Second World War, fighting in the jungle of the Philippines. War broke out, peace broke out rather, in 1945. But Onada didn't believe it and he kept on fighting guerrilla warfare in the jungle of the Philippines until 1979. Thirty years refusing to believe peace had come. If we're not convinced of a particular truth, then while the reality has changed, our hearts don't. Our expectations don't.

[4 : 5 3] And what we see in this first Easter Sunday evening is that kind of disconnect. So we have this most glorious news of all that the Lord Jesus has risen, that he has conquered death, but we find the disciples locked behind closed doors in fear. Peter and John have been to the empty tomb. They've seen there is no body there. They've seen the grave clothes laid to one side. Jesus doesn't need them anymore because he's risen. They've heard the message of Mary Magdalene, I have

seen the Lord. And that message, that Jesus gave, I am sending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God. But still we find them fearful. It seems to them too good to be true. But then everything changes, doesn't it? As we read, the risen Lord Jesus comes and they discover he is both so good and so true. And he comes bringing gifts to these disciples to the church that I want us to see and then to apply in our own life and circumstances. The first gift that we see is that Jesus brings the gift of peace to their fearful hearts. So have a look at verse 19 with me. And there we read again, 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. So the disciples are in their own self-imposed lockdown because of fear. Fear because they are opposed. There are opponents. Those who had been the enemies of Jesus have now crucified Jesus and they figure that now they will continue to be intent on destruction and they might be the next target. So there is fear. There is also fear, no doubt, because now they find themselves alone. Because remember who Jesus was to them. Jesus was their master and their teacher and their friend. He was their savior. He was the one that they declared was the Christ, the son of the living God. And now Jesus is no longer with them.

Perhaps fear also because of uncertainty. For the last three years, they had a very clear direction to their life. Jesus was their master. They were following him on his mission. But what direction should their life take now? We can see reasons for fear. So Jesus was risen in victory that Easter Sunday morning. But to them, it seemed too good to be true. And so their hearts were still dominated by fear.

And before we look at Jesus' response to that, I think it'd be helpful for us to think about our own lockdown experiences and the fact that for many of us, our fears have increased and heightened. Maybe for some, it's because we feel a sense of opposition, that government policies and restrictions are making it hard for ourselves or our families or our businesses to live life as we would expect.

[8 : 10] And we are finding messages that are increasingly polarized. People are in camps and we can feel a sense of opposition perhaps. Or maybe we identify with the disciples in their lockdown loneliness that is now really taking root in our society. According to our recent survey, 8%, nearly 5 million in our population would identify as feeling a significant level of loneliness on a consistent basis because of isolation and separation.

Now that can happen physically, but maybe in the church we're also experiencing that spiritually. That we find it hard when we're separate from one another and maybe God feels distant in this season for us.

Perhaps like the disciples, we too feel a sense of anxiety or uncertainty. What direction is my life going to take when the future looks so unclear? Maybe we like to have the five-year plan and it's hard to have the five-day plan with the way things are. So perhaps we can identify in their fear because we understand that times and seasons change, but hearts don't and fears remain. But for our purposes, we want to think, how does Jesus respond to that?

And we see the loving heart of the risen Lord Jesus, first of all, most basically because He came to them. He didn't leave them alone in their fear. Perhaps you've asked yourself the question, why does John mention the locked doors? Interesting when those extra details are added. Why mention the locked doors? Well, certainly it highlights the fact that they are fearful, but doesn't it also highlight for us the miracle of what's just happened? That the risen Lord Jesus has appeared in the room with them in a physical resurrected body. Jesus' response to their fear is to be present in power with them and for them. Jesus had also said in verse 19 and in verse 21, peace be with you. The loving Lord Jesus wants to give us peace. It was a promise that He'd made to His troubled disciples before the cross. So Steve read for us, John 16, 33,

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. And then also in John 14, verse 27, peace I leave with you, my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid. Who speaks this message of peace? It's Jesus, the one who is identified as the prince of peace, the one who has come into this world to secure our peace, our peace with God by going to the cross to die for our sins and then rising to give us eternal life so that we might be reconciled to our God. This is Jesus who has established the kingdom of God and one of the essential marks of that kingdom is it's a kingdom of peace. Which isn't just the ending of war, the

idea of a whole life flourishing principally because things are right between us and God when our faith is in Jesus.

[11 : 46] Peace is good news, isn't it? How can you and I enjoy Jesus' peace in our fears? Well, in the first instance, we must believe in him. And one of the reasons that we don't have peace is because by nature as people we are hostile to God, that we are rebels against God. We see that in our pride where we want to rely on ourselves rather than depend on God. We see it in the idols that we set up, other people, other things that take God's place in our lives, good things that become too important to us. We see it in our breaking of God's law. So many ways in which we by nature live at war with God and we cannot bring peace ourselves. We need Jesus to be the peacemaker. And he comes and by his blood on the cross, there is reconciliation between sinful people like us and a holy God through faith in

Jesus. So we must believe in him to enjoy this peace that he speaks of. But we must also trust that our union with Christ is something that is real. If we are followers of Jesus, that we wouldn't think this is something that's too good to be true. But to recognize Jesus is with us, wants to bring his presence to be felt in our day-to-day life. We need to bring together two essential messages from the Easter story in our own experience. The fact that Jesus on the cross said, it is finished, meaning he has completed the work of salvation to deal with our sin, to bring us to God, and this message, peace be with you. With the result that, we can live with peace with God and enjoy the presence of the God of peace in our lives.

That we can enjoy friendship with the Lord Jesus. And that's a great comfort as we find ourselves so often perhaps more isolated than we would like to be. And of course, that sting of loneliness can't be removed entirely. We know things are not the way they're supposed to be when we can't enjoy friendship or we can't enjoy fellowship as we ought to, but here is Jesus extending the peace of his deep and meaningful friendship to have someone who's always with us. So that we would learn to turn our solitude to prayer. And as we pray, to recognize we are in the presence of our Father through the Son, by the Spirit. That we would learn from the experience of the disciples this Easter Sunday, as we come up to Christmas. And I'm really confusing everyone with days. But to recognize there are no barriers stopping the presence bringing Lord Jesus, the peacemaking Lord Jesus being with us in our trouble, in our fear, in our need. Rather, the risen Lord Jesus would come to us and say, peace be with you because I am with you. So that's the gift of peace for fearful hearts.

But then we also need to think about verse 20 and the gift of joy for despairing hearts. Because we recognize the fear, the sense of despair and loss the disciples were living in.

But verse 20 says, after Jesus had said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord. So there's a cause and effect going on here. Jesus shows them his hands and his side. And the significance of the hands and the side, that's the unique wounds that Jesus bears from the crucifixion. And when they know it's the risen Lord Jesus, that's when the joy comes.

[15 : 50] They are overjoyed when they realize he is here with them. This is none other than the Lord Jesus. But it seems maybe counterintuitive. How can we have joy from the wounds of another? How do we explain that biblically? That's why we read Isaiah 53, because it's so important to our faith. So in Isaiah 53, we have that promise of the suffering servant and what he came to do. And we discover there, among other things, that he bore our suffering. He was pierced for our transgressions. The punishment that brought us peace was on him. And by his wounds, we are healed. There's the connection between the wounds of Jesus and the joy of his disciples. There's healing in those wounds. There's healing in his work on the cross, because Jesus has come to be our great high priest. Not to offer an animal sacrifice, but to offer himself as the perfectly righteous sacrifice to cover our sin, to make fellowship with God possible, to enable us to be in the presence of our God. For the disciples, that meant joy. But of course, that's only half the good news. The cross is half the good news. We also need the resurrection. That's why Paul in 1 Corinthians 15 will say, if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile. You are still in your sins. If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied. The point is, for our faith, we need a risen Lord Jesus. And so, these unique wounds bring joy as we recognize, as Don Carson says, the central confession of the church has always been that the risen Lord Jesus is none other than the crucified Savior. Now, an illustration, perhaps, to help us to see how these things connect. This week, I went to a shop. I don't tend to go to shops very often, but I had a significant bill to pay, such

that I couldn't just do contact lists. I had to do the old chip and pin. And we have to do chip and pin. Maybe you're like me at this time of year. You have that anxious wait for those few seconds. Is my card payment going to be accepted, or is it going to be declined? And there's that awkward embarrassment. I have this debt to this company. Have I got enough to pay that debt?

Think about what's going on in the story of the gospel. The cross of the Lord Jesus is the place where payment is made for the sins of His people. That's what happens on Good Friday. But then the question still remains, will God accept that payment of Jesus' death on behalf of others? And that's why the resurrection brings joy, because the resurrection is proof that the payment made by Jesus was accepted by His Father, so that everyone who puts their faith in the risen Lord Jesus will know sin's forgiven and will have eternal life. Our greatest debt is not a financial one. Our greatest debt is a moral and a spiritual one. Because each and every day of our lives, because of our sin, we are robbing God of the honor and glory that He deserves. We are failing to show Him and to the world the love that we ought to.

We fail to give God the obedience that He demands in His law. So, we have a debt that we owe to God, and if we try to pay that off with our own moral performance, that card will be declined. But also, if we simply push that to one side and ignore the reality of that debt, the Bible is clear, if we don't trust Jesus to pay off, to cancel that debt, we will stand before Jesus the judge, and we will face eternal condemnation and punishment for that debt. So, we can see why joy comes in the person of the crucified and the risen Lord Jesus, because He is the only way that our sins can be forgiven. He's the only way for us to know that deep joy of not having to live with our guilt, of being right before God, of having the hope of eternity in our hearts. And so, the risen Lord Jesus comes to us in our despair, seeking to turn it to joy by offering us Himself. It's Jesus and Jesus alone, the Bible says, who provides that deep and unbreakable joy that's deeper than circumstances. Maybe you've seen what some people are trying to do to now, and it absolutely makes sense at one level, with Christmas. You know, we recognize there's so much pain, and there's so much sadness, and there's darkness, and there's much that we're missing out on, and so the tendency of some is to make Christmas bigger than ever. Let's make it brighter and splashier than ever as a way to try and meet some of that need and some of that loss. But the reality is that Christmas lights aren't going to be able to sort of dull the pain. They're not going to be able to deal with all that's wrong in the world. But Jesus, the light of the world, can. And He's come to do that for us, and to give us deep and lasting joy as we trust in Him. There's one more thing, one more gift that Jesus gives to His disciples, and it's the gift of mission to the world. Maybe you can identify with the feeling of having blown it in some particular experience. You've been given a responsibility or a position of trust, and you've totally messed up. You've disappointed others.

You've failed, and you have a sense of shame or sadness, perhaps, a sense of being good for nothing. Can you imagine the disciples maybe had some of those thoughts as they slept when they should have been praying for Jesus, as they ran rather than standing by Jesus? Someone like Peter denied even knowing Jesus. But the grace of Jesus is such that not only does He give them peace from and with God, not only does He come to bring them deep and lasting joy as they see His glory and experience His presence, He also sends them back on mission. Verse 21, 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. Very briefly, these verses give us helpful principles for the mission of the disciples and the mission and the work of the church.

[23 : 26] So the disciples here, they are told they are sent by Jesus. The word apostles actually means sent ones. They are sent by Jesus in a unique way. We see that in the book of Acts. But the church, Christians, we are also sent, we are called to be ambassadors. Jesus is our King, and we are told to declare His message to the world. Jesus came, we're told, as the light of the world. And then He said to the church, You are the light of the world. So we are to reflect the light of the glory of the Lord Jesus so that others might be drawn to Him as the true light and find life in Him. So disciples, the church, were sent by Jesus to continue the work of Jesus. And that's the language in verse 23, which maybe we find a little bit striking, at least. If you forgive anyone's sins, their sins are forgiven. Jesus is not giving this huge amount of power to the church as institution. Rather, what He is saying is that Jesus is going to continue His mission through the people of God. The power is not ours. The power is in the

Word of God, in the Gospel of God, all about Jesus. So that as we proclaim who Jesus is and what Jesus has done, some people will believe and they will be forgiven. But others will not believe and they will not be forgiven. So what Jesus is referring to there is exactly what we see in His own ministry. He is faithful as a truth teller. Some people listen, some people don't. And that's where we are as a church as well. We have this call to proclaim, knowing that there'll be those different responses. But we are to continue the work of Jesus. And we're not to do that in our own strength. Rather, we are to do it in the power of the Spirit. And that's the point of verse 22. With that, Jesus breathed on them and said, receive the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is so crucial to our mission and ministry as a church.

So I asked Steve to read John 16 for us. In John 16, if you've got time, read it again. But there's so much in there of the work of the Holy Spirit in God's people and in the world. So in verse 8, it's the Holy Spirit who acts to convict people so as to convert them, to draw them to Jesus.

In verse 13, it's God's Spirit who guides His people into the truth to help us to speak the truth of God's Word to others. In verse 14, it's the Spirit in us who seeks to glorify Jesus so that we would see and delight in the glory of the Lord Jesus more and more so that our hearts and lives would be filled with worship so that others would be drawn to worship Jesus too. We pray and we work so that others would also see the glory of Jesus in their lives. So that's our mission. We continue to point people to Jesus, to do His work with the help of the Spirit, because we recognize that that's our greatest need. It's our nation's greatest need. It's our world's greatest need.

That's why we're making time to pray on Wednesday. So as we think about continuing mission today, in the first instance, we should take heart, recognizing it's Jesus who continues to build His kingdom, and He will do that through His disciples. He'll do it through people like us, as we seek to depend on the Spirit. So we take heart, but we are also to trust, trust in God's words and not our own wisdom, to trust in God's Spirit and not in our own competencies as we seek to live out this commission that we have. So here we find this wonderful reality for the disciples, that the resurrection is not something for them or for us that's too good to be true.

[27 : 29] That while the disciples didn't see it coming, despite Jesus having taught them, the gracious Lord Jesus came to them and changed their life forever. He brought the peace of God to them.

They experienced true and lasting joy through Him. And we see in the book of Acts, they would boldly go on mission because they met with the risen Lord Jesus and they were empowered by the Spirit. And we see them moving through the world, turning the world the right side up, bringing people back to God. And you know, the loving heart of the risen Lord Jesus would love to do the same for us today.

He would love to give us peace in the middle of our fears. He'd love us to look to Him and to find deep and lasting joy in knowing Him and His salvation. In looking to Him to equip and enable us to serve others, to serve others, to draw others to Jesus, the light of the world. Because at the end of the day, He is the one who are fearful and despairing and anxious nation, city, world needs to know. He is and the one who is rising ■■■■. And so don't join us with the Lord Jesus Christ in the realm of ■■■■■■ and eternal life. And I guarantee His salvation. And He loves receiving thousands of years. And of fact, ■■■■ a lot of life is Santana wrestler, and which at the end of the day, every for his birth, every will reveal counsel and food the right side of His civilization will help us to do- You know, the best friend of sovereign voyez God today.

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