

Jesus appears to the disciples

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Preacher: Rev. James Maciver

[0 : 0 0] This evening, let's turn, as we seek God's help, to John 20, and looking at verses 19 to 23 in particular, John chapter 20, and reading from verse 19. And the same day at evening, being the first day of the week when the doors were shut, where the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews, came Jesus and stood in the midst and said unto them, Peace be unto you. And when he had so said, he showed unto them his hands and his side. Then were the disciples glad when they saw the Lord.

And so on through to the end of verse 22, particularly. This was a remarkable day by any accounts. And I'm sure many of those that experienced what they experienced, someone like Mary Magdalene, for example, would be able at the end of this day to really say, well, what a day this was. There she was very early in the morning, while it was still dark, going to the sepulcher where Jesus had been buried and discovering that he was not there, that his body wasn't to be found there. And then she came and saw the two angels.

She went from there to speak to Simon Peter, to the disciples. They came, they saw for themselves, and then we read in verse 19, that the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, Jesus came and stood in the midst and said to them, Peace be unto you. This was a truly significant day, not just for them, but in the history of the church. Because here was the risen Lord coming to verify that he was risen from the dead and coming to commission these disciples to be missionaries for him, to go out in his name as he was sending them in a way that was parallel or very closely related to the way in which the Father had sent him into the world. As my Father hath sent me, even so send I you. And the two things we want to look at from this passage briefly this evening, first of all, is the arrival of Jesus in the company of these disciples, how we're told just matter of fact that he came and stood in the midst. Secondly, how the assignment that he gave them was an assignment in which they were being sent by him as the Father had sent him with his mission into the world. His arrival is spoken of, as we said, very matter-of-fact like.

We're not told how he could have come into the midst of them. We're not told the mechanics, if you like, of that arrival. We're not told how he could have done that, the doors being shut, and that's what they were. We're told very specifically that they were gathered, the doors were shut, because they were afraid of the Jews. The Jews, for their part, had got rid of, so they thought, got rid of the leader of this group of people who were such a nuisance to them. As far as they were concerned, Jesus was dead, they had got rid of him, and these followers of Jesus were now gathered together with fear of their lives. They had doors locked. They had shut them securely for their security, and yet Jesus came and stood in the midst. We're not told how it was, but we're told it happened. And that's all we need to know. Here is the risen Jesus. Here is Christ. It seems with properties to do with his risen body that he can come into the midst of a gathering like this, even despite the fact that the doors are shut, which you would ordinarily use to enter and leave a place. That's not how he came in. He came and appeared and stood in the midst of them. And although there's many people spend an awful lot of time speculating as to how this could be, as to what properties his risen body had compared to the body that he had prior to his death and resurrection, we're not saying that that's not profitable, that we shouldn't actually seek to discuss or engage in these things. But very often what you find is when you're taken up with such things that are not clarified for us in Scripture, you actually do miss out on the things which are, and on the things which are specified and are really the main points of emphasis in a passage like this. Because the fact is, one of the things that's being mentioned is that this risen Christ as he now is, is the Christ who comes into the midst of his people, even when he's not expected, even if it's against what human beings think possible, here is the Lord Jesus Christ in his risen power. And even now as he is risen and exalted to glory, he comes into the midst of his people, not bodily, as he is here. Nevertheless, the presence of Christ that you know in your life as a Christian, the presence of Christ that his people actually are aware of as they gather to worship him or in their lives individually, it's not a different

Christ. It's the same person, the same Jesus manifesting the fact of his resurrection, the fact of his power, the fact of his lordship over death to his people as they gather together in this room.

[6 : 01] And that is something that you yourselves know of in your experience as a believing community. It's significant that he has come here to this gathered group of people who have come to believe in him. And indeed, when you compare that with other parts of the chapter, especially the reference to Mary Magdalene, you see something quite wonderful. You see that the resurrection of Christ and Christ as risen has a direct bearing on people's lives individually and also collectively or as they are together as his church. In other words, the risen Christ is not risen just to meet with individuals.

He is that. But he is there as well to make it known to his people as they are gathered that he is significant to them in that context. That he is actually for them the risen Lord in order that he would be amongst them, in order that they will know his presence for themselves as a church as well as individually, personally, for each and every one of them.

Now that's got very important application, as you yourselves well know. Its application is that here for us tonight, these two aspects of what we take from this passage are so important.

Because this risen Christ has a business with your life and my life individually. The resurrected Christ, the risen Christ, the glorified Christ, bears upon your individual life, your personal life.

But he also comes to bear upon a believing community, if you like to call it that, or his church, whatever word you use, for his gathered people. It is there that he manifests himself also. You could put it this way, but it is there that he has a business with you. It is there that he has a business with you. It is there that he has that faith is initiated in an individual sense, in your individual hearts. And that faith as it is initiated, as it has begun in your heart, that faith which rests and trusts in God, is part of a believing individual relationship with him, of entering into that relationship with him. But he doesn't leave you then on your own as a believer.

[8 : 45] When he comes to create that faith in your heart, he places you along with others of the same faith. And it's in that, that your faith is strengthened. If your faith begins in the individual sense, it comes to be maturing and strengthening within the church. You see, that's why it's so crucial for us tonight not to accept the view that people can indeed successfully be Christians, and properly be Christians, and profitably be Christians, and yet at the same time, but I have no time for the church.

Because Jesus is saying to us here, I, as the risen Lord, I'm not just important to you individually, I'm also important to my believing people as they are together, as they form my church.

Nothing should be, or few things should be, more precious to you and to me tonight, than that we are reared within the church. That we belong to the church of Christ, even in its wider sense, whether we're communicants or not.

We believe to a people who, and a people, and with a people, we are part of a people who gather regularly together to worship this God. And it's to that church that God has given ordinances, means of grace, for faith to be strengthened, as well as faith to be initiated and begun.

Be thankful, as I say that to myself as well, be thankful that as you begin this new year, you begin it within the church of Christ.

[10 : 34] You begin it where Jesus himself is manifested to his people through the gospel, through the Holy Spirit. And it is he who is indeed manifested to us.

And as he came and stood amongst them, moving on from that, he spoke to them and said, Peace be unto you. Now he said this twice. He showed them his hands and his feet.

We'll see that in a minute. But then he spoke to them again and said the same thing, Peace be unto you. Now that too is so meaningful in this context of it being the risen Christ.

Because the peace that he speaks about here, as he spoke in the upper room before he went out to face the cross, he spoke about giving his peace to them. Now our world desperately needs to know peace.

We need it ourselves individually, but we need to see in this troubled world so filled with violence tonight, so full of things which cause people terror and so much anxiety, so filled with war and with killing, a world that needs peace.

[11 : 48] But this peace is a lot more than just the absence of war or the ending of dispute. This peace is so rich.

when you go back to the Old Testament and look at the word, one of the main words used there for peace, the same peace as described here, it's a word you know well yourselves, the word shalom in Hebrew.

It's so often used in the Old Testament, but the idea in that word shalom in all its richness is actually life as good as it gets.

that's what Christ has for his people. It's life as good as it can be. Remember who this is.

Remember where he now is as he comes into this room. He is the Lord who stands above death. Death has been conquered by him. Death has been overcome.

[12 : 49] And it's the peace that he has purchased thereby, the peace that stands above death, the peace that has overcome sin and death related to it.

That's the peace that he gives to his people. It's not based on their outward conditions. It's not based on things that they experience in their daily lives.

It's not based or dependent upon whether they're disappointed or not with the things of this present life. It's based on the fact that he is the risen Lord who bestows this peace.

this life that he gives that it's as full as possible. Of course, we know that death in the physical sense will still be experienced by his people when they come to die and leave this world.

Yes, if that's going to be a lot before the Lord comes, that's still going to be death in a physical sense. But remember what he said to Martha in chapter 11 of John, I am the resurrection and the life.

[13 : 55] Whoever believes in me though he dies yet shall he live and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die.

Do you, he said, then believe this? And she answered with a confession that she believed that he was the Christ. In other words, she was more or less saying, yes, Lord, I believe that this is what you are able to give, what you are able to bring and what you are able to give to your people.

You know, we shouldn't expect anything less though we deserve nothing like it, but we shouldn't expect anything less from this risen Christ, from the Christ who has overcome death than life in its fullness.

That's what he said in chapter 10 of this same gospel, wasn't it? When he spoke about himself being the good shepherd who laid down his life for the sheep, all that came before me were thieves and they were robbers, they just came to ravage the sheep.

I have come that they might have life and that they might have it in all its abundance. Is that what you have tonight?

[15 : 08] what kind of life are you and I living? Do you have this personal knowledge of Christ for yourself?

Is it this Christ that you know rather than the Christ you and I might prefer for ourselves? A Christ that will go easy on us? A Christ that will make few demands on us?

Is it this Christ that we have our hopes in? This Christ who died and rose again from the dead and comes to claim our life for himself? Is this the life that we have?

Is this the peace that we enjoy? Do you have already in your possession by faith, having this Christ by faith, do you have this life that is indeed as good as it gets and will be crowned eventually where there is no death and no sorrow when it's brought to its completion in heaven?

What's more important than that as we begin a new year? And then he said, as he said this, he showed them his hands and his side.

[16 : 19] These, of course, were evidences of his sufferings, but he showed them his hands and his side here to prove to them, to verify, so that they could be absolutely sure that this was the same person they had known before he died.

He's now in the state of resurrection life. He has gone beyond the grave, if you like. It's difficult, really, to put words on these things because they are so beyond our understanding presently.

But here is Christ having died, having risen from the dead, and here is this Christ now showing them his hands and his feet so that they can be absolutely sure it's not a different person.

It is the same person who died and died the death of the cross, whose body was laid in the sepulcher, and who rose, who was now risen from the dead.

Now again, it's one of the things that we spend sometimes much time on, the question as to whether these wounds are still obvious in the risen body of the Lord.

[17 : 34] They were obviously here shown to the disciples. His hands and his side, his hands as he had been nailed to the cross, his side as it had been pierced with the soldier's spear, as John tells us.

Are they still seen in the risen or in the glorified body of the Lord as they were seen here in his risen body?

A lot of dispute about that. People say one thing or another. Yes, they are or no, they aren't and have all kinds of arguments for that. And we're not saying again that it's wrong to go into these things, but at the end of the day, you reach a point where you really cannot be absolutely sure one way or the other.

And sometimes, as we said earlier, you miss the kind of points that are really important for us in terms of what the passage is saying to him. So in a sense, it's not.

The important thing is not whether or not these marks are still evident in his risen glorified state. What it's saying to us is this, that this Lord has not left behind him the benefits of his sufferings, that he has not left behind him his own experience of these sufferings in order to minister comfort and strengthening to his disciples.

[18 : 58] He's showing these disciples his hands and his side and by that, not only is he saying, I am the same person who died, but I have taken what I've experienced with me into my risen life.

And if you go through that great epistle to the Hebrews, you'll find repeatedly there how through the ministry of Christ from heaven, his people are ministered to from his experience of having suffered for them.

He is able to succor us in our temptations because he has suffered being tempted. He's not left that behind. He's not now suffering, of course.

He's beyond all of that. That's behind him. But he's not a Christ who does no longer understand what it is for you and I to be tempted, for you and I to be distressed, for you and I to know wounds in the providence of God.

And tonight, as we begin this new year, truly we are all thankful that this is the Christ we know in the gospel and that we trust this is the Christ we know for ourselves, one who relates personally in his ministry to our souls, who relates personally to our sufferings and our temptations.

[20 : 31] There's a great poem by a man called Edward Shilto, which he wrote shortly after the horrors of the First World War. the terrible loss of life, the ghastly events of that time.

We're not sure whether he himself served in the war or not, but he was certainly very aware of the horrors of that time. We may quibble over one or two references he makes, but this is what he says.

It's called the Jesus of the scars. If we have never sought, we seek thee now. Thine eyes burn through the dark, our only stars.

We must have sight of thorn pricks on thy brow. We must have thee, O Jesus, of the scars. The heavens frighten us, they are too calm.

In all the universe we have no place, our wounds are hurting us. Where is the balm? Lord Jesus, by thy scars we claim thy grace. If when the doors are shut thou drawest near, only reveal those hands that side of thine.

[21 : 47] We know today what wounds are. Have no fear. Show us thy scars. We know the countersign. The other gods were strong, but thou wast weak.

They rode, but thou didst stumble to a throne. But to our wounds only God's wounds can speak. And not a god has wounds, but thou alone.

There are many in the world looking to other gods. There is only one wounded God. The Son of God in our nature.

But they are his wounds. They were his sufferings. It's not sufficient for us to say, yeah, but that's just the human nature of Jesus Christ.

Who is he? What's his identity? He is the Son of God. It is he, as the person of the Son of God, in our human nature, who entered into these conditions, who took these sufferings willingly to himself, and all in order that would be for us our great strengthener.

[23 : 08] One who could take from the experience of having suffered all that we need to have our hearts comforted in our sufferings too.

Yes, he brings all of that with him as he comes into the presence of these disciples. And then he comes, secondly, to commission them for mission, for service.

And there are three things about the church's mission or mission work by Christians that you come to see from this passage. It is, first of all, something of the highest importance.

You notice the parallel that Jesus is drawing between his being sent by the Father and his sending of the disciples. As my Father has sent me, even so send I you.

I am sending you. And there's a very close correlation then and relationship between the Father sending him on the mission that he had in the world and he now sending his disciples on the mission that he gives them to be witnesses to him in the world.

[24 : 22] How important is mission to us? How important is evangelistic mission to us? Because that's really what he's saying. As he brings this to them, of course, they came to realize that this was indeed going forth with the gospel that he intended by this reference.

That's what they came to do. How important is mission to ourselves? Well, you can go beyond that and ask another question first of all. Because of the relationship here between the mission of his church and the mission Jesus had in his ministry, you can ask first of all, how important was it to him?

And the level of importance that it had in his own experience is the level that it should occupy in our mission and our experience. As the Father sent me, even so, I'm sending you.

As you look into the gospel descriptions of this Jesus and how he went about his mission that God had given him, that God the Father had laid upon him, that he came willingly to take to himself, you can see again and again and again how he is burdened and constrained to accomplish it beyond anything else.

Nothing is of greater importance to him than to do the will of the Father. and to finish the work that the Father gave him to do. Even when he comes to Gethsemane and to the agony of the garden, though we always know it's less than the agony that he experienced on the cross, nevertheless, it's profound agony.

[26 : 01] As he looked into the cup of suffering, including death, that God the Father had placed in his hand and required him to drink. Yes, he said, Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me, yet not my will, but thine be done.

Let me finish it. When he came out of the garden, this was his resolve, this was now his steady resolve. Indeed, he had never departed from it, though that request had been real.

The cup which my Father has given me, shall I not drink it? Shall I not finish it? Now, you see, there's the relationship between Jesus in his ministry, Jesus in the work the Father had given him to do, and what he now gives his disciples to do, as the Father sent me.

Even so, in like manner, I am sending you. We cannot say that mission is of less importance to us in terms of gospel mission than Christ's own mission was to him.

There's a direct correspondence, and it is he himself who has mentioned it and established it. That's why it's so important for us to realize that gospel mission comes absolutely almost foremost.

[27 : 30] I say almost foremost because there's only one other thing surely that comes before it, and that is our worship, our worship of God.

Nothing is a greater privilege than to engage in the worship of God. and we have to put things the right way around according to Scripture itself and the pattern of Scripture.

Our thinking must not be let's do mission and then from that will come the desire to worship. It's the other way around. It's let's engage in the worship of God and from that we will come to have the desire for mission actually increased because the more you worship this God and the more you come to adore this God and realize why you adore Him and why He is worthy of our worship the more you come to examine and look into His beauty as revealed in Scripture the more you see that beauty as a beauty that you come to worship the more you will feel constrained to remember that there are lost sinners in the world and you go with the gospel to them and you want them to know this God.

As the Father sent me into the world even so I am sending you. We are sent disciples. Every single believer is a sent disciple and they are not just sent in the individual sense they are sent collectively.

This congregation and my congregation and all our congregations are congregations of commissioned disciples. Disciples that Christ Himself has given a mandate to to go forth in His name and engage in gospel mission.

[29 : 22] And it's not a new mission. We mustn't think that this is in terms of Christ having had His mission and then here He stopped His mission and He gave a new mission to the church to the disciples to carry on once He was gone.

There is a sense and a very real sense in which it is still Christ's mission in the saving of sinners. It is He who saves.

It is He who opened the heart of Lydia in the book of Acts. It is He who poured out the Spirit of God on the day of Pentecost. It is He as the glorified Lord who engaged in all these activities and it is He who still opens people's hearts and changes people's lives through the Holy Spirit.

But it is this Christ who does it. But He now does it through the gospel ministry of the church. Christ is, I'm not saying in any sense Christ is utterly confined to that or dependent upon that.

But this is the means by which Christ Himself sets about the saving of souls and the sanctifying of His people through the gospel ministry that He has given to His church to engage in.

[30 : 40] And that really gives the gospel ministry, the evangelistic ministry of the church, its validity and its authority. Because if we go along with the idea that these things didn't really happen, that these were just things that the disciples remembered about the Lord and they kind of invented these things about His resurrection and just took some of the teaching and put it together in this way, well, that's for one thing making these apostles like John simply untrue and unreliable.

That's not our view of Scripture and how Scripture came to be formulated the way it is, the way we have it. But for another thing, the opposition that you meet with, that the church meets with, and it's there in our day in abundance, people will tell you, you have no right to actually call for people to be converted.

And we're not far off in this country from having laws that are designed to prevent Christians from trying to convert other people into the religion of Christ.

That's what authorities are presently engaged in. That's the kind of mindset that you face as you go out with the gospel of Christ. You will find this objection frequently raised.

You shouldn't go about trying to convert Jews and to convert Muslims and seek that they become Christians. All religions are valid.

[32 : 19] Let's just leave them together. Well, that does not fit into this passage, does it? And it doesn't fit into the other passages where Christ sends forth His disciples to make disciples of all nations, as Matthew puts it.

Because if people aren't converted, then they're lost. Just as you and I are lost. Just because people are sincere in other religions or in no religion at all, sincere in following out their beliefs, doesn't mean that they're alright, that they're safe when they come to die.

Without Christ, we are lost. Without Him, people go to hell and will spend eternity in hell.

That's what He Himself made very clear. It's not very palatable in the political correctness of our day to say such things, but it's been true to the Lord.

You know that He lives. You know that He's Lord. You know that He's Lord of His church. You know that He's Lord of the gospel. You know that He's Lord of the universe.

[33 : 41] You know that He's Lord to whom every knee will ultimately bow. And so He says to you and to me, as the Father has sent me, even so I'm sending you.

I'm sending you to a lost world. I'm sending you to evangelize. I'm sending you to present the gospel of which He Himself is the substance to lost souls.

And not only so, but He then goes and speaks of this gospel ministry having not only the highest importance, but also the greatest resources.

When He said this the second time, peace be unto you, He breathed on them and said, receive ye the Holy Ghost or the Holy Spirit. And again, there's quite a lot of dispute amongst commentators and theologians as to what exactly happened at that moment.

Did Jesus indeed convey the Holy Spirit to them? Were they actually given the Holy Spirit at that moment? And how does that, if that's the case, how does that fit with the emphasis in Act 2 of the day of Pentecost as the time when the Spirit came upon the church then gathered?

[35 : 01] And there are disputes, well, not disputes, but there are certainly differences of opinions as to which of those we should actually choose. And it's sometimes not easy to actually decide one way or the other.

But it seems best to regard this as not an actual bestowal of the Holy Spirit, not an actual giving at that moment. Because if the Spirit was given to these disciples, how is it in the next chapter that they are not really Spirit-powered people?

Because there's Peter, for example, and he leads the others with them and says, I'm going fishing. And it's only after then they meet the Lord again that they come more into a realization of what it means that he's now living and beyond death and risen from the dead.

But this was certainly, at least it was certainly a teaching of them as to where this Holy Spirit, remember he had spoken about the Holy Spirit in the upper room a number of times.

The Comforter he called it when he was come. He would lead them into all the truth and show them the things that belong to him. And now he is, in a way, giving them foresight of where that Spirit is going to come from and especially the fact that it is he himself who gives the Spirit to his church, as he did on the day of Pentecost.

[36 : 29] He breathed on them and said, Receive the Holy Spirit. And there are some fairly remarkable verses in the New Testament that bring to us the closeness, the very, very close relationship between the Holy Spirit and the person of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

not so as to lose sight of the distinctiveness of each of these persons in themselves. And yet you think, for example, of 1 Corinthians 15, 45, where it compares Jesus to the first Adam, the Adam that is our ancestor, where it says that the first Adam was made a living soul, the last Adam became or was made life-giving Spirit.

2 Corinthians 3, verse 17 has another remarkable verse there which says, The Lord is the Spirit. And where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty or freedom.

The Lord is the Spirit. There is a distinction between the two persons as they belong to the Trinity that God is.

But they are so close in the application of redemption, so close in this respect of bringing us life and dwelling amongst us that where the Spirit is, Christ is, and where Christ is, the Spirit is.

[38 : 09] The Lord is the Spirit. And these are our resources. These are our resources for gospel ministry, for gospel evangelism, for mission in the name of Christ.

You know, we often complain, and with reason, that we lack certain resources, and if we had some resources more than we do in terms of finance, in terms of more time, in terms of buildings, in terms of personal gifts, or more people in the church, we could say, well, we would be in a much better position than to do mission work.

But the greatest resources are those we already have. And these resources, Christ Himself and the Holy Spirit together, they're not dependent on what our personal gifts are.

They're not dependent on the extent of our finances, and we're not saying these things are unimportant. What we're saying is, these are the primary resources.

If you have Christ and if you have the Holy Spirit, you can do mission work. Not only can you do mission work, but you have the greatest resource for success in God's eyes, in God's terms, for success in it.

[39 : 33] Let's never say that we have enough in terms of physical resources. We can add to what we have, certainly. But let's never say we don't have the basic resources, because these are Christ Himself and the Holy Spirit.

And indeed, you remember how in the equivalent passage, if you like to call it that, in Matthew, at the end of Matthew's Gospel, when He said to the disciples, Go and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost, teaching them to observe all things whatever I have commanded you.

That was His command to them. That was His instruction to go and make disciples of all nations. Then we've left out the beginning and the end of a statement.

And these words that I've mentioned are actually within the words that begin and the words that end that statement. What are they? Jesus said, All authority in heaven and in earth has been given unto Me.

Go, therefore, and make disciples. Go on the basis of what I am and of what I've been given and make disciples.

[40 : 59] And then He finished it by saying, Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. The authority and the presence of Christ.

That's what we have. That's what God has ensured for His church. We have no reason at all that we cannot be mission-minded, mission-active as God's people because He Himself has given the basic resources to us to that end.

Go and make disciples. Let's pray. and let's pray. One challenge is all the permitt to Kiowym that is the progress to to