

John 20:19-23 PM

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[0 : 0 0] Father God, we pray that you would open our ears and soften our hearts, that we would hear your word and live. Amen.

Well, friends, I don't know about you, but around this time of year, funny enough, I find it really easy to lose track of the meaning of Christmas.

And it's bizarre because we're doing so many Christmas things. But I find it really easy to sort of get off track in this time of year because there are so many things that are vying for our attention.

There's Boxing Day sales. There's New Year's plans. There's feasting with friends and family. It's good things. There's new movies coming out that I want to see. Some of us have to work. Some of us are traveling.

And if you're anything like me, sometimes you just need to take a little breather. Otherwise, you're liable to miss the point of Christmas altogether.

[1 : 0 7] And if you are like me and you need a little breather, then you're in luck because our passage for tonight is short and to the point. And it invites us to pause and simply reflect on the goodness of God.

This passage reminds us of the good news of Christmas. That in Christ, God makes himself present to us.

And through his presence, our lives are transformed for a new purpose. So that's what I want to talk about tonight. So that amidst all the distractions, all the hubbub of the holiday season, we would be reminded that God meets us in our most hidden places.

And that he fills our lives with real meaning. So let's pause together for a few minutes and be reminded of the gospel. So first, God's presence with us.

This passage in John chapter 20 picks up after the crucifixion and the resurrection of Jesus. And you'll notice the disciples are in hiding.

[2 : 2 6] And they're in hiding because they are fearful. They're fearful because they're worried that the people who killed Jesus are going to kill them too.

And they're also in hiding because they're ashamed. They had all, each one of them, abandoned Jesus at his most desperate moment.

So they're hiding behind locked doors. Hunkered down, anxious, fearful, and ashamed. And into this scene of anxiety and fear, we see Jesus come in.

Let's take a look at what Jesus does in these verses because I think it's really important. First, verse 19, look with me.

Jesus came and stood among them. Jesus came and stood. Notice that the disciples are not out looking for him.

[3 : 3 3] They are not out investigating why his body is missing from the tomb. Jesus took the initiative to come and find them, even behind their locked doors.

He showed up. He showed up. Miraculously, unexpectedly, in their place of fear and shame. He came and stood with them.

Second, at the end of verse 19, Jesus spoke to them. And contrary to how I might have been tempted to respond to the disciples, he does not accuse them for their lack of courage.

He doesn't shame them for their cowardice. He doesn't say, I'm so disappointed in you, disciples. Rather, he says, peace be with you.

Jesus is saying, all is forgiven. Because I have made peace between man and God. It's a personal forgiveness between teacher and disciple.

[4 : 55] And it's also a universal declaration between the Savior and all of mankind. Jesus comforts the broken heart.

He calms the anxious spirit. And he settles us into this new reality of forgiveness and peace. Third, verse 20, we see that Jesus shows them his scars on his body.

He presents his body to them. And just like in the transfiguration on the mountain where Peter and James and John saw his body become gloriously white, revealing his transcendence and divinity, Jesus here shows them his new resurrected body.

Scars and all. So that they would believe. He wants them to believe that he's not a ghostly apparition.

He's not a figment of their imagination. He is their Savior. He has suffered for their sake. He has paid the penalty for sin.

[6 : 15] He has defeated death. And now he's living forever. And his scars tell the story. Jesus convinces their mind by showing them his body.

And because of this, it says the disciples were glad. They went from anxiety, fear, shame, to joy.

And friends, this means that no matter how badly we mess up, no matter how terribly we turn our backs on God, he continues to seek us out.

He always, always speaks peace and forgiveness. He presents himself to us. And he asks us, will you believe?

Will you trust that I have done everything needed to secure your eternal life? There's no hiding place too hidden for God to come and find you.

[7 : 26] And he comes to find you because he wants to be with you. And he wants you to believe in him so that you would be transformed by his presence.

So that's the first point. The good news of Christmas is that Jesus is present with us. And he wants us to believe. And so as the disciples in this passage received and believed in Jesus, they were transformed for a new purpose.

The disciples became apostles, those who are sent. So look at verse 21 with me. Jesus speaks peace to them again.

But this time when he speaks peace, it comes with a commission. Jesus said, verse 21, Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.

Notice that Jesus' peaceful presence, his forgiveness, his atonement for sin, his searching love, his inexhaustible grace.

[8 : 49] That presence is the fountain for their new commission. It's Jesus' peace that fuels it. When we believe and receive in Jesus, his presence stirs us up and sends us out on his mission.

And this is not a special calling, something only super-Christians do. But it happens to anyone who encounters the risen Savior.

And what is the mission? Well, we see in verse 23. Look with me. He says, If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them.

And if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld. It's very interesting, isn't it? And this does not mean that the apostles are authorized to give forgiveness to whomever they decide.

Rather, it means that the apostles are to proclaim forgiveness to anyone who trusts in Christ, because he has already died for them.

[10 : 13] And the apostles are also to proclaim warning to those who reject Jesus, because they are still bearing the weight of their own sin.

And this mission, to put it simply, is to become a proclaimer of the gospel of grace, to represent Jesus in the world, to take Jesus' ministry of reconciliation to everyone who will hear it.

And this is incredible, friends. Just think about it. The mission of reconciliation that God has accomplished in Christ Jesus is now given to us to take up, to carry forward, and to proclaim.

This is the new life purpose which is given to every believing Christian. And it's deeply meaningful, because it's what we were made for.

We are made to be people who proclaim forgiveness. We are made to live the life of God in Christ. I'm going to be done in just about two minutes, kids.

[11 : 36] But you probably also notice in this passage, Jesus doesn't say, I'm giving you this mission. Good luck. Don't blow it.

No. In verse 22, it says, When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, Receive the Holy Spirit.

And I know it's a little strange, isn't it? We see Jesus breathing on his disciples. It's a fascinating image. This is Jesus empowering his disciples for their new purpose.

He breathes on them. Think of Genesis chapter 2. Just as the man from the dust is empowered by God's breath of life to be a living creature.

The disciples are empowered by the Holy Spirit. Jesus' holy breath to be representatives of God in the world.

[12 : 47] That's what it is to be a Christian. We are empowered by the Holy Spirit to carry forward his peace and his forgiveness.

And you may wonder, like I have at many points, just how is the Holy Spirit my helper in this? Well, in so many ways, and too many to mention now, but just, I'll mention two.

In John chapter 14, where Jesus is promised that he will send the Holy Spirit, Jesus tells us that the Holy Spirit will do two things.

He'll be our helper because he will remind us of everything that Jesus taught. And he will fill us with faith in what Jesus has done.

So the Holy Spirit will remind you of everything that is taught in Holy Scripture. And he will fill you with faith to trust with confidence in the salvation that we have in Christ.

[13 : 57] And this is the power of the Holy Spirit. And it is everything that we need to proclaim God's grace to other people. So brothers and sisters, let us receive the presence of Christ.

let us believe in him and take up this new purpose for his mission in the world to preach forgiveness to the world. Let us proclaim the gospel in our lives in whatever ways he has called you, in whatever circumstances he has called you.

and let us remain in prayerful dependence on the Holy Spirit for discernment and for faith as we live out this joyful commission.

Amen. And the gospel