

John 20:19-23 AM

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[0 : 00] Our loving Lord, we pray as we look at this part of your word where you appear to your disciples, that you would appear to us in our eyes and in our hearts, that you would assure us of your great grace to us, that you would commission us afresh to live for you, and give us that life that will last for eternity.

We ask it in your name. Amen. Well, John 20, not 90. There is no 90 chapters.

John 20, verse 19 to 22 on page 906 and 907. This is the last in our summer series that we follow along with the Bible camp, using the children's book, The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe, to tell the gospel.

And as we come to this passage, this little four verses, it's a passage, I think, of remarkable power. Because here is the thing. It's not just a wonderful children's tale.

It's the real thing. And the resurrection is pictured here as opening up a new world through the new life of Jesus from the dead.

[1 : 17] It's why verse 19 starts, on the evening of that day, the first day of the week. Because it's a new day since Jesus has risen from the dead.

It's a new world. It's a beginning of a new creation, which is why Christians, we move the day of when we worship from the Saturday Sabbath to the Sunday, because of the resurrection.

And the risen Jesus comes to his failed disciples, bearing gifts, more gifts than they can imagine, and more gifts than they can bear, as though the resurrection itself is a great gift to the world.

And receiving gifts is difficult for us today. We've become so much better at entitlement than gratitude. However, as we go through these three gifts, my hope is that you'll be gripped simply by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

So here is the first gift. It is his presence and his peace. So this is the third paragraph in this great resurrection chapter.

[2 : 26] It begins with the empty tomb. Then Jesus appears to Mary, who raises off and tells the disciples, the men. And now this is the third scene. And we're told in verse 19 that it's the evening of that amazing day.

And the ten disciples, without Judas and without Thomas, are hiding behind locked doors, likely in the upper room. And they're hiding because they're terrified of the Jewish leaders, I think for good reason.

I mean, the Jewish leaders managed to have their master and the lovely Jesus gruesomely executed. And there's no telling who's next.

And they're also deeply conscious of how they let Jesus down. They abandoned Jesus at the moment of his greatest suffering. And so they're cowering behind locked doors, which is exactly where we find the church so often, isn't it?

Behind locked doors, inside, thinking about our failures more than the greatness and goodness of Jesus. Fearful of what might happen if we begin to believe the report of the resurrection or even to share the news of the resurrection with other people.

[3 : 40] But the locked doors are no problem for Jesus. Verse 19, Jesus came and stood among them, literally in the middle of them, and said to them, Peace be with you.

So he's instantly with them. He doesn't have to unlock the doors. By a complete miracle, he stands right in the centre, right in the middle of them, which is the place that Jesus desires to be and deserves to be in every gathering of Christians.

Because a Christian church is not just a God-centred group, we're a Jesus-centred group, where the living Lord Jesus is present with us even today. And I have no idea what the look on the disciples' faces were, but I don't think they would have been happy.

I think they would have been in shock. I think they would have been saying, Oh no! How are we going to face him after we ran away and deserted him? What's he going to say to us? And what's the first thing Jesus says to them? Peace be with you. It's not what I would have said to them. And maybe not what you would have said to them.

[4 : 55] He doesn't scold them. He doesn't give them ten commands to pull up their socks. He knows they deserted him three days ago. He doesn't blame them or shame them or pour more guilt on them.

It's almost as though the gift of the resurrection is a gift that opens the door to reconciliation with the Lord Jesus Christ, no matter what we've done. Peace be with you.

Peace. My peace. Peace be with you. The words of love. The words of kindness. The words of the risen Lord Jesus. It is his first word.

And his first word is one of forgiveness and of grace. Sheer gift to the disciples. What he's done in his death and his resurrection is the embodiment of peace be with you.

So expensively won for us. Remember on the cross he said, it is finished. And now he is risen. He says to us, peace be with you.

[5 : 57] This is the first gift of the resurrection. It is his presence with us and his peace to us. Secondly, his second gift is his suffering and his sending.

Now I think the disciples are likely reeling at what Jesus has just said. Verse 20. When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side.

And then his disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. Glad is such a dreary translation, I'm sorry to tell you. It's the word ecstatic. They're full of joy.

Glad. Glad. What fills them with joy is they realize it's not a ghost. It's not a vision. It's the same Jesus they spent every day with for three years. It's the crucified Jesus who's now alive again.

And what does he show them? He shows them his scars. Because Jesus insists on being known by his scars.

[7 : 02] His very resurrection body bears testimony to that decisive battle and victory against evil on the cross. It's my view and I think the view of the majority of theologians throughout history that Jesus' ascended body still bears the scars in heaven.

And I think that because in the book of Revelation, Jesus in heaven is the lamb who was slain. And when he comes again, every eye will see him who is pierced.

And also because on earth his scars speak of the reality of his resurrection. And in heaven they speak of his interceding work for us and the reality of his sacrifice.

It is a beautiful gift to us, brothers and sisters. It shows that Jesus is in every way like us. He knows pain.

He knows our pain from the inside. He is unashamed of your wounds and our scars and our pain and our suffering. He reveals to us a God who is woundable, vulnerable.

[8 : 14] And I think we don't understand our own suffering. Often we'll go through life. We don't understand what's going on for us. We'll never understand it. And we ask God and he doesn't give us answers.

But what we know is that he knows. Jesus knows. And he's with us. And the fact that they are scars means the wounds have healed through the resurrection.

Because his suffering and the resurrection transform, are able to transform our suffering. Giving our sufferings a dignity that we could barely imagine.

And this is one of the things that makes Christianity completely unique. There is no other God who suffers for us and with us and on our behalf.

We worship a suffering God. And I just say to those of us who are in deep, dark suffering, you may never know the reason why God is allowing this to happen to you.

[9 : 20] But Jesus offers us something way better than answers. He offers us himself. And he offers us himself with scars to be present with us and bring us through them to himself.

And it's very interesting. What does he do immediately after? Immediately after showing the scars, he then sends them into the world. It's because his scars are the basis of his sending.

See, verse 21 follows immediately on verse 20. And for a second time, he says, peace be with you. Now it's not the peace of reconciliation, forgiveness. It's the peace of his presence and his suffering presence.

And that is the launching pad for the mission he gives to us. Verse 21, it's very simple. As the Father has sent me, so I am sending you. We don't replace Jesus.

We don't die for the sins of the world. But we do embody and speak for Jesus. And the peace he brought to the world through his cross and his resurrection, we share with others as we share the gospel of grace.

[10:26] This is not just for paid clergy. He includes us in his mission. He came as the Father's gift to give the gift of eternal life.

And now he gives us as a gift to the world to share that life with others. So the first gift in this passage is his presence and peace. The second is his suffering and his sending. And the third is the gift of his spirit and the power to deal with sin. Being sent to represent Jesus in the world is a very tall order for every disciple.

Where are we going to get the ability and strength or the insight and wisdom to do this? Verse 22, when he said this, he breathed on them and said, receive the Holy Spirit.

Actually, the word on them is not in there. He just breathed as a way of demonstrating this is not just for the men in the room there. It's for all believers. And it's an echo of the creation verse where God forms man from the dust of the earth and breathes into his nostrils the breath of life and made a living creature.

[11:41] You know, in the Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe, after Aslan, the lion comes back from the dead. The white witch exercises her terrible power by turning people into stone statues.

And she has a castle, which is a literal graveyard of stone statues. Of all these creatures, she's turned into stone. And Aslan, as he comes back from the dead, takes some of the children and goes to the castle.

And he moves about with each of these creatures and he breathes on them. And when he breathes on them, they come back to life. And they begin to frolic and run after and play with Aslan.

It's a great picture. This third gift, he breathes on them and says, receive the Holy Spirit. It's a little drama looking forward to Pentecost.

Because the resurrection is enough to create new worlds and a new humanity and a new mission and a new people. And the first thing that he gives the people, this new people to do, is to bring the forgiveness of sins.

[12:51] Isn't that interesting? Verse 23. If you forgive the sins of any, they have forgiven them. If you withhold forgiveness from any, it's withheld. Do you remember at the start of Jesus' ministry in the Gospels, when he's baptized in the Holy Spirit, the Holy Spirit comes on him and drives him out into the wilderness to do warfare with Satan and sin in the temptations.

Just so, when the Holy Spirit truly comes on any person today, we too do battle with Satan and sin. But the way that we do it is not by fighting people or taking up swords.

The way we do it is through the forgiveness of sins. Both ours and the sins of others. We have to be careful here. We don't have power of forgiveness.

It's Jesus alone who has the power to forgive sins. But with the Holy Spirit, we have the privilege of bringing that forgiveness of sins into our lives and into the lives of others.

By going to Jesus constantly and into the lives of others, by drawing them to the Lamb of God. And explaining to them that if they repent of their sins, God promises that he will forgive them.

[14:10] And if they don't repent of their sins, they will not be forgiven. I don't know if you've ever noticed this, but in the confession and absolution, both in communion and in morning prayer as Anglicans, we clergy don't have the power.

We don't say, we don't say, I forgive you. We don't have the power to forgive. What we do is we declare God himself is willing to forgive all those who turn to him in faith.

And this is the fundamental and basic blessing of the Christian gospel, forgiveness. This is how men and women and boys and girls are reconciled to God. I mean, all our troubles and darkness in our world come to this, sin.

And there is no power strong enough and there's no love wide enough and there's no authority high enough to deal with sin apart from the promise of the risen Lord Jesus Christ. This is what makes a Christian church Christian.

That forgiveness is the essential activity. It's the essential practice for all who have the Holy Spirit. We ought to be constantly seeking forgiveness for ourselves and forgiving one another through repentance and reconciliation and repentance and reconciliation.

[15 : 25] That's what ought to make up our life together. I mean, the best way to resist the Holy Spirit is to nurse your resentments and coddle your contempt for others and smile and pretend to be polite to each other.

The path of the Holy Spirit is for us to be honest with ourselves and honest with each other and come to each other with forgiveness and the freedom of reconciliation. Excuse me just a moment. Boys and girls, one minute, a little bit more, depending on how I go with my conclusion. It's time. This is a very rich passage and each of the three gifts I've mentioned is actually a double gift. Did you notice that? Where the second part of the gift is based on the first part. It's as though with each gift, Jesus himself gives a purpose and an application of those big three gifts. So the gift of his presence brings us peace. So if you're not experiencing his peace, if your soul is troubled and distressed and anxious and confused, the way we gain the peace of Jesus Christ is not by seeking that peace for ourselves.

[16 : 46] It's by seeking Christ. In the same way, our zeal for mission doesn't come by trying to work up our zeal for mission.

Where it comes from is from the wounds of Christ. It comes from understanding the vulnerability and the depth of his love for us that he would suffer for us. That is how we understand we're sent. And thirdly, the gift of the Holy Spirit brings forgiveness. Forgiveness comes only as we pray for the gift of the Holy Spirit to be more and more filled with the Holy Spirit and that our community might be filled with the Spirit so that we would become a place of genuine reconciliation and forgiveness. These are some of the gifts of springtime in the kingdom of God. Amen. Amen.