

Jesus Appears to the Disciples

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[0 : 0 0] Let's turn again to John's Gospel, chapter 20, and there's that little section that we read from verse 19 down. On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being locked with the disciples, where, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, peace be with you, and so on. A couple of weeks ago, we looked at that marvelous meeting of Jesus with Mary Magdalene, and of how Jesus had revealed himself to Mary before he had revealed himself even to his immediate disciples. And I believe that Jesus revealed, gave Mary the first demonstration of his resurrection before anyone else as an honor, a testimony to her amazing devotion and love towards him. Remember how Mary went to the grave expecting to find or hoping to be able to get access to the dead body of Jesus. But she had met with the living Jesus. And what had happened to Mary was, it was, well, as it says in Psalm 126, you know, when it talks about when Zion's bondage, that God turned back, it says, as men had dreamed were we, as people had dreamed. And I'm sure that's how it was for Mary. She would almost say, is this really happening to me? She had gone in despair, and all of a sudden her heart was filled with hope. She had gone with tears of sorrow, and now there were tears of joy and laughter. She had gone in darkness, and now there was nothing but light.

The transformation was so extraordinary. And we find Mary, of course, saying, I have seen the Lord. And we suggested that, although it might not be as dramatic for any of us, the encounter that Mary had, when we meet with the Lord, when the Lord meets with us, when we come first to experience the forgiveness of sin, when we come to know what Jesus does within our heart, then we can just enter into a little of what Mary did, where we've seen, well, I've seen the Lord. Because the Lord changes everything. That's what he, one of the wonderful things he does. So we find now that Mary has given, the message to the disciples. And so we pick up the narrative on the same day, still the first day of the week. And as we said, Mary has delivered her message, and Peter and John have been at the grave.

But we find that the disciples have all met together, and they're in this locked room. Doors are locked, not just closed, but locked, because they're in fear of the Jews. Because what had happened to Jesus completely through them? Remember when they were in the upper room, and Jesus had this wonderful time of intimate fellowship with them? But he kept telling them, not just then, but he had been throughout the three years of ministry, and particularly as the time was approaching, that he was going to be put to death. He told them over and over again the sort of thing that was going to happen. And even on one occasion, when he probably, in his most explicit teaching to them, Peter told him to put that kind of thinking far away from you, Lord. No, no, these things aren't going to happen to you, Lord. So the disciples weren't ready for this. They weren't prepared for this. They didn't understand what was happening. And so their lives had been traumatized, to put it lightly, over the weekend, because they had left the upper room with Jesus and gone to the garden. I think John may have grasped some of the things, but some of the disciples had no idea, they had no comprehension of what lay ahead.

And they were all totally stunned. In fact, it tells us that they all forsook him and fled. They all ran away. It just, as we say, their world had been turned upside down. And then when they came to understand what had happened to Jesus, the fearful flogging, the fearful brutality, the, just the violence that was, sort of, where he was just hammered. It tells us in Isaiah 52 that his face was beyond recognition. Anybody looking at Jesus wouldn't know that was Jesus. All his facial, sort of, highlight, everything was so disfigured he was unrecognizable. Why? Because they hated him. That was hatred. And the disciples were saying, well, if they've done that to Jesus, they're now likely to turn their hatred and their anger on us. So that's why they were meeting behind closed doors.

And so here they are. And then all of a sudden, we find that Jesus is among them. That's what it says. The door's being locked for the disciples, where for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them. It's as if he had always been there. It's, you know, there are quite a lot of Bible stories or Bible experiences. And I would say to myself, you know, I'd really love to have been there.

[5 : 38] Well, this is certainly one of them. That you're there, and all of a sudden, Jesus is standing there. It's as if he had been there all the time. And you couldn't see him just all of a sudden, without any noise, not opening any door, not opening any window. He's just there.

And the shock must have been quite extraordinary, must have been one of those extraordinary moments. And Jesus, as he stands there, he says very simply to them, peace be with you. Now, the actual word, as we know, is shalom. And it's a word that's maybe quite hard for us to understand. If we translate it as peace, yes, it is peace, but it's more than peace. When we think of peace, we tend to think of being freed from anxieties and worries where, you know, everything is peaceful and everything around us is, it's okay. And we say, well, I'm enjoying peace because there's nothing really troubling my mind. But shalom is far more than that. It is a sense of well-being. Yes, it includes peace, but it includes well-being. It involves every positive blessing from God. It is the full enrichment that God gives in all the gospel blessings of the kingdom. So shalom is a huge word. It's an amazing thing. And this is how Jesus greets them. Not just that you'll be freed from anxiety, but that you will know the fullness of well-being from God. It's a beautiful description, beautiful word. And so this is his resurrection greeting. And we could say, of course, that this is what Jesus is about. Because one of the things that a passion experiences when they come to faith in God through Jesus Christ is peace. It's one of the first things that a passion comes to know in that heart. It's a wonderful thing. I remember myself being personal just for a moment. Somebody asking me, what have you got as a Christian? And there's an awful lot of, there's so much I just couldn't understand. A lot of things I just couldn't figure out. But I said, well, I'll tell you one thing I have that I didn't used to have. I've got peace. There's this awareness that you all of a sudden are at peace with God. That the unrest, the uncertainty, this awareness, there was a deep rooted awareness that things weren't right between yourself and God. Now you know they are. That doesn't mean that you're free from sin. Of course, we're full of sin. And our sin can affect the peace. The way we live, the things we do can affect that peace. But deep down, there is a deep rooted peace. Because in and through Jesus Christ, because of what Jesus has done for us, there is now peace with God. We are accepted by God through what Jesus has done. And that brings peace. So it's one of the great gospel blessings. In fact, when Jesus was born into this world, the angels sang, glory to God in the highest and on earth peace and goodwill to men. So that peace was obviously one of the key blessings that Jesus was going to bring. You remember, in fact, when he was leaving the disciples, he said to them, I'm going to, you know what, I'm going to leave you. I'm going to leave you my, my peace. He said, I give you not as a world gives, give I unto you. And at the end of the great, is great teaching in the upper room. He finished it off by saying, these things I have spoken unto you that in me, you might have peace. So it's very interesting that the last thing that Jesus is speaking about to his disciples before he goes to his death is peace. And his first greeting of his disciples after the resurrection is again peace. That's what he says to them. Peace be with you.

And so I would, I don't know how the disciples, well, it tells us how the disciples reacted. But if I had been one of the disciples, right, and I was there and Jesus, all of a sudden, it's just standing there. It tells us that they were glad. That's what it says. Then were the disciples glad when they saw the Lord. But I think there would have been other emotions and other feelings as well. And I think one of them would have been guilt. There would have been an initial sense of guilt because the last that they had seen of Jesus was him being arrested and them legging it because it tells us they ran away in his greatest hour of need when he needed them most.

When he looked at them for comfort and help, where were they running for their lives? That's the last time. And I wonder how Peter felt. Peter, because the last time Jesus had looked at Peter, it was immediately after. He had denied him ferociously. So I think that it's almost inevitable.

[11 : 25] Yes, there was a sense of, whoa, this is amazing. But there would be, I think right at the very beginning, there would be a sense of guilt. But you know what I love about Jesus is he never mentions that. He doesn't say to them, ah, well, where were you when I needed you?

It doesn't, it doesn't come into the conversation. And it is very obvious that there isn't even a hint of it from his presence. And that is the wonderful way that the Lord deals with us. Because, you know,

we sometimes, I think sometimes we have a difficulty in understanding God's forgiveness to us. Because sometimes we struggle to forgive ourselves. I'm sure many of you in here today, you're wrestling with things in your life and you struggle to forgive yourself. And because you struggle to forgive yourself or you think others can't forgive you, you think that God can't forgive you either. But he does.

His forgiveness is total. It is complete. And that's one of the things sometimes we really struggle to get hold of. But the Lord shows us this over and over and over again. He completely forgives. And so there's not even a mention of it here. Anyway, we find Jesus has said very simply, peace be with you. And as I would say, and I think we all know, it should be one of the hallmarks, it should be one of the characteristics of the Christian. We know that, and we've always got to distinguish between what we would turn religion and what we would turn Christianity. Of course, Christianity is a religion, but there is so much that is not of peace in the whole world of religion.

But there should always be peace in the promotion of Christianity. It is part of what we're about. An angry, divisive Christian is a contradiction, in fact. If somebody is, that their way of life is divisive and somebody who is breaking up and somebody who is angry and somebody who is hostile and somebody who causes division and problem, you have to say to yourself, that is not Christ-like.

[13:44] You know, we tend to think and look at certain things and say, look at them as awful sins. I believe one of the very worst sins that can be committed is by a Christian who is divisive and who breaks up constantly. It is, in fact, it tells us in the Bible there are certain things that are an abomination to the Lord. And you know what one of them is? The person who sows discord amongst brethren.

The person who is going in and by their action and by what they're saying, they're kind of breaking things up. That in God's sight, not just a sin. It is termed an abomination in God's sight. And we're very good at sort of dismissing these sort of things, but that's God's verdict. That's God's judgment. So the Christian is somebody whose life ought to be in and about promoting peace. And then Jesus reassures the disciples that he is not a phantom. He's not here as a, I'm not a ghost.

I'm real. And that's what he does. He then shows them his hands on his side. Shows them the nail prints. Shows them the gas that was on the side. Now, of course, it is a matter of much discussion. A lot of Christians will hold to two differing views here. Because some Christians believe that the mark of the nails will never be seen in the hands of Jesus in glory. Because they say that in heaven there can be no imperfection. And scars would be imperfection. And so they will say that there is, that there will not be in the glorified Jesus any scars.

[15:36] Then you argue and say, well, here is the risen Jesus. And there are the scars. But of course, this is just three days after. So there will still be them. The argument that people use is that there was a difference that Jesus, although he was, we believe, going back and forth to the Father in that 40-day period, that in his final ascension and into his glorification, that then every imperfection was taken away. But then others will argue and they will say, but the scars will always remain in Jesus. Because the picture given to us in the Bible, for instance, from Revelation, is that he is a lamb slain from the foundation of the world. And so that there is, there will always be this identifying sign as just as sometimes warriors when they came back after a sense of triumph. The actual scars, rather than disfiguring, were something that proved their value, their worth, their heroic qualities. So there are the two schools of thought. But you know what? We'll find out when we get there. Because it's not something that the scripture is absolutely clear on. And as we say, it's what is important here on this particular instance is that Jesus is showing that he is still a body. That the resurrection of Jesus, that as he rises from the dead, it is with an actual body. Here he is physically in the presence of the disciples. And we see that the disciples, it tells us then were the disciples glad. I think that must be one of the understatement of all times. Because sometimes when you say about being glad, you say, oh, well, yeah, I feel glad about that. Which means you're relatively happy. That's good. I think at this moment they were euphoric. It was just joy almost without control. And so then we find from verse 21 that Jesus is coming to them to show them not just that he has conquered death, but that they have a mission.

This was part of, if we, it wasn't as we worked our way through John, I should have paid more attention to this part of it. Because Jesus all the time was preparing them for the fact that although he was going to be dying for their sins, and although he was on a mission from the Father, that they in turn were going to be on a mission from him. And now Jesus has come to this particular point, and that's what he's saying to you. Just as the Father sent me, so I am even so, he said, I am

sending you.

I'm going to send you out into the world. And that is why it is so important that we know and experience God's peace within our heart.

Because if we don't have, if we're not aware of being right with God, we're not going to be right as evangelists. We cannot, it's not going to work. If we do, if we are not right within ourselves, then we cannot be right as we seek to share the gospel with other people. It just doesn't work.

You know, people see through. People will know. People will, people know when words are true or not. People, you can't pull the wool over people's eye. People will know whether you're talking about what you know or something that you've read. People will know whether this is heart experience or whether it's just something that you've heard from other people. You can't fool people.

[19:22] And so that's why it's so important that they themselves personally will know the reality of this peace within their own life before they can tell others about the peace of God in and through the Lord Jesus Christ. And so Jesus then is telling them that although he's sending them out, they won't be going out in their own strength. And this is what Jesus does. And when he had said this, even, well, sorry, as the father has sent me, even so I am sending you. And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, receive the Holy Spirit. Now, again, this is sort of confused people to a certain extent. This wasn't the moment that the disciples received the Holy Spirit. One level, they already had the Holy Spirit. Every believer has a Holy Spirit. Every person who comes to faith in Jesus Christ comes to faith in Jesus Christ through the work of the Holy Spirit, who will forevermore remain within your heart. And this isn't the moment either when the Spirit is going to come on them with real power, enabling power that we read about in Acts chapter 2. That was

Pentecost. Jesus at that moment, as he breathes on them saying, receive the Holy Spirit. This was, as it were, a kind of a pledge of what was to happen. Jesus is saying to them, I'm commissioning you to go out. And I'm breathing on you. The Holy Spirit is going to come on you in power. And that's what happened. It doesn't say at that moment that he said to them, receive the Holy Spirit, that they actually received it. We know, in fact, that it was in Acts chapter 2, because what happened in Acts chapter 2 changed the disciples completely. They aren't changed here. Because it tells us, see in verse 26, eight days later, the disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them, although the doors were locked. And Jesus does it again, he reappears. How do we find the disciples? Just the same.

They're still scared men. They're still hiding. They're still in fear of the Jews. But you see, when the Holy Spirit came in power at Pentecost, that all changed. It's like they threw caution to the wind. They weren't afraid of the authorities anymore. Even when they were threatened with prison, with death, they carried on preaching. The transformation in their way, their demeanor, their attitude was the difference of night and day. So what Jesus is saying to them here is, it's a pledge of the Holy Spirit coming upon them in power. And so, excuse me, we find then that Jesus says, if you forgive the sins of anyone, they are forgiven. If you withhold forgiveness from anyone, it is withheld. Now again, this is a verse that has caused a lot of debate and a lot of, I suppose, division in the Christian church throughout the centuries. Does that mean that those in authority in the church have the power of absolution where you can absolve people's sins?

I don't believe that. I think it's very, very simple. We've got to remember the context. The context will always tell you how things are. This is in the context of Jesus sending his disciples out to evangelize, to preach, preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ. So this is what I believe very simply it is saying, that as you preach or as you talk to somebody and somebody says to you, I have repented of my sins. I have asked the Lord into my heart that you have the right and the authority to say, well, God has forgiven you your sins. Remember, this is in a gospel context.

You and I have the right and the authority to say that to people. Why? Because God's word says it. That if we believe within our heart and confess with our mouth, if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

[24:03] You see, we, if somebody says to you, you know, I, the Lord, I don't know what's happened, but you know this, I've come to a place in my life where I have just had to go down on my knees. I've had to ask the Lord to come into my heart. I, I'm so aware of my sin and I've asked the Lord to forgive me my sin. I'm so sorry for my sin and I've asked Jesus to be my Lord and my Savior. You can't then turn to that person and say, oh, well, that sounds really good. But you know what? When, when you die, you'll discover whether God has saved you or not, because you'll open

your eyes either in heaven or hell. That's not what the Bible says. The Bible is very clear that if we believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, if we repent of our sin, that the Lord will receive us. And so we have the authority to say to somebody who has done this, your sins are forgiven. Because the Bible tells you. It's not that we're not absolving the people. We do not have the right to do that. Because we can't, the sinners. I can't.

Probably more sin than anybody in here. That's the way. So we can't, we can't do it. But on the authority of what God has said, we can. And similarly for somebody who rejects the gospel, who refuses to believe and says, you know, I, I don't believe that. I refuse to lay hold upon that. Then you have to say to that person, well, forgiveness is being withheld from you because of what you're doing. So I don't, I think it's a very simple thing. Remember, it's in the context of evangelism, the context of sharing the gospel. And so I don't think it's saying any more than that. And then we see, and this is just the last thing we just ignored of for a moment. Now, Thomas, one of the 12 called the twin, was not with them when Jesus came. Why wasn't Thomas there? I don't know. Thomas was kind of complex disciple.

He was one of those who looked on the dark side of life. He was a loyal disciple. There's no question about that. When Jesus said he was going to go up, remember at the time when Lazarus, the message came that Lazarus was seriously ill. And the disciples were kind of warning Jesus about going up because the Jews had been threatening to kill Jesus. Thomas said, let us go with him that we may die with him. So you can see there was a commitment to Jesus that was unswerving. Thomas was a loyal person, but straight away he looked on the dark side. Oh, I were going up to Jerusalem. That's death.

And Thomas was one of these really slow learners. When Jesus was in the upper room, he was saying, you know, he was telling them he was going to go away. And Thomas says, Lord, I don't know where you're going. I don't know the way. I'm so glad Thomas was a wee bit slow on the uptake because that's where Jesus gave these words. He said, I am the way, the truth, and the life. So it was in response to Thomas's slowness to grasp things that Jesus gave us that great truth. But Thomas was this sort of the disciple who, he looked on the dark side. He was the uncertain one, the doubt he got.

He's got the name, the doubting Thomas. But the one thing that we're highlighting here is, I don't know why, and we might be, I don't want to be unkind to Thomas, but knowing what scripture shows us as being this kind of person who looked on the dark side. He was obviously a kind of a depressive character.

[28 : 05] He maybe was saying, I need time all on my own. Sorry, guys, I can't come with you. I'm too upset. Just my world has utterly collapsed. And they'd say, so as ours. Oh, no, no, no. Not like mine.

So maybe that's why Thomas was just, he says, I'm out of this just now. I need time on my own. Whatever it was, Thomas wasn't there. But you know, by being absent, he missed. What a blessing he missed.

Poor Thomas was left for another week in the condition he was in simply by not being there. And I think this is a great encouragement to us to come to gather together, to be where Jesus has promised to be, because we don't know when Jesus may come in power. We don't know that moment when he may choose to reveal himself personally to you through his word in a way that he will flood your soul.

And that's why it's so important that we are there in case we miss the blessing. Thomas, by being absent, missed the blessing. Let us make sure that where God's word is being preached and where God's word that we, if possible, will come because we put ourselves in the place, in the opportunity, opportunity to meet with Jesus. Let us pray. Oh Lord, we pray that as we've been under your word, that its reality will go into our hearts. We pray that we will be encouraged by it, and that we will lay hold more and more upon the wonder of what you're saying to us. We have so much in the gospel. We're sometimes a bit like Thomas, where we might find that we're slow to learn, slow on the uptake.

Sometimes our thoughts are dark when maybe they shouldn't be. Not in any way saying that that's not dark because of difficult providences, but sometimes because of our lack of understanding, our comprehension of just what we do have in Jesus Christ. So we pray, Lord, to encourage us in the faith and to build us up and have mercy upon us. We pray to be with us.

[30 : 28] Bless the cup of tea in the hall after and watch over us and take away your sin in Jesus' name. Amen. We're going to conclude singing in Psalm 133 from Sing Psalm, Psalm 133.

And the tune is Bishop Thorpe. It's from Sing Psalm, Psalm 133. I'm going to sing the whole Psalm. Psalm 133. You'll find that on page 175.

How excellent a thing it is, how pleasant and how good, when brothers dwell in unity and live as brothers should. For it is like the precious oil poured out on Aaron's head, that running over down his beard upon his collar spread.

Like Herman's dew upon the hill of Zion, it descends. The Lord bestows his blessing there, the life that never ends. Psalm 133. The whole Psalm to the tune Bishop Thorpe. How excellent a thing it is.

How pleasant and how good, when brothers dwell in unity and live as brothers should.

[32 : 01] For it is like the precious oil poured out on Aaron's head, that running over down his beard upon his beard upon his beard.

His collar spread.

A life that never ends. Now may the grace, mercy, and peace of God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit rest and abide upon each one of you now and forevermore. Amen.