

The Lord's Post-Resurrection Appearance to His Disciples

John 20:19-23

John 20:19-23: *"Then, 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, Jesus came and stood in the midst, and said to them, "Peace be with you."²⁰ When He had said this, He showed them His hands and His side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord.*

²¹ So Jesus said to them again, "Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you."²² And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit.²³ If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."

Background Notes

The occasion in these verses was the evening of Resurrection Sunday. The disciples were gathered behind closed doors because they were afraid of the Jewish authorities. The "disciples" mentioned here probably included more than just the original twelve (now eleven) disciples. At the time of the ascension, we read, *"These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers. And in those days Peter stood up in the midst of the disciples (altogether the number of names was about a hundred and twenty)" (Acts 1:14-15).*

So there is a good possibility that, here in John 20, more than just the eleven disciples were gathered together behind closed doors. Possibly they were in the home of Mary, John Mark's mother. She had a home in Jerusalem, and the disciples were meeting and praying in her home when Peter was released from prison (Acts 12).

Verse 19: *"...Jesus came and stood in the midst, and said to them, "Peace be with you."* The Lord "appeared" when the doors were shut. Back in my Sunday school days, I remember thinking that the Lord walked through the wall, or something like that. I visualized the Lord's arms coming through first, and then finally His body. But notice - it doesn't say that the Lord walked through the walls or walked through the doors. No, He simply *"appeared in their midst, the doors being shut."*

This sudden appearance is a capability of the resurrected body – a body that is not limited by gravity or walls or doors. This will characterize the believer's glorified body. Our resurrected bodies will not be limited by gravity, or by other limitations of this space/time/matter universe. But of course the greatest fact about the resurrected body is that **it will not be subject to sin!** I'm looking forward to that time, aren't you?

In a parallel account, Luke 24:36-43 says: *“Now as they said these things, Jesus Himself stood in the midst of them, and said to them, “Peace to you.” But they were terrified and frightened, and supposed they had seen a spirit. And He said to them, “Why are you troubled? And why do doubts arise in your hearts? Behold My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself. Handle Me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see I have.” When He had said this, He showed them His hands and His feet. But while they still did not believe for joy, and marveled, He said to them, “Have you any food here? So they gave Him a piece of a broiled fish and some honeycomb. And He took it and ate in their presence.”*

Verse 20 says that He showed them His hands and His side. There’s no idea here that the Lord showed His scars the way we might show the scars of an accident or surgery! No – the Lord was showing His scars to prove to them that He was really the Lord. He wanted them to know that He was not a disembodied spirit, but the *“flesh and bones”* Jesus who was capable of eating fish and honey! This was the same Jesus who had died on the cross, and now He was alive bodily, and He was appearing bodily with them.

So we see that our Lord’s resurrected body was a physical body - a glorified body, but definitely a tangible, material body.

Doctrinal/Teaching Points

1. Because of the resurrection of Christ, believers have a peace that cannot fail!

Notice that the first words of the Lord to His disciples were, *“Peace be with you”* (v19), and *“Peace to you”* (v21 and Luke 24). This was a typical Hebrew greeting, but now Jesus filled it with new meaning, fuller meaning.

Peace **with** God is now available to anyone who believes, because Jesus died on the cross for the sins of the world. Colossians 1:20 says that Jesus Christ *“made peace through the blood of His cross.”* And this peace is guaranteed! It can’t fail! How do we know that? Because of the resurrection of Christ! Jesus is alive today, **guaranteeing** the peace with God that He made for us at the cross.

The peace **of** God is available to every believer today as well. What do we mean by the peace **of** God? The peace of God is the peace of mind, the rest for our souls that is available to every believer. We don’t have to fear or be anxious about our circumstances.

The peace of God is available to us! How do we get that peace? Philippians 4:6-7: *“Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”*

The disciples were cringing in fear for their lives, hiding behind closed doors. They may even have been discussing the best way and the safest way to escape from Jerusalem because of the Jewish authorities. But the Lord appeared to them and said, *“Peace be with you.”* Instantly their fears disappeared! Verse 20 says, *“Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord.”*

That same peace of heart and mind, the peace of God, is available to every believer today. Do you have that peace of God? Jesus offered it, and it is guaranteed because He is alive!

Right now, Margie and I are in the process of selling our house. It will be listed tomorrow, and we'd like to sell it quickly. But suppose it doesn't sell quickly? There will be a tendency for us to become anxious and begin to worry. Why isn't it selling? Maybe it won't sell? What have we done wrong? Have we misread God's will? But we don't have to get anxious, because the peace of God is available to us if we present our requests to Him. And that peace is guaranteed! The Lord is alive and He is in control - even in the details of selling a home!

Do you have that peace of God? Because of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, believers have a peace that cannot fail.

2. Because of the resurrection of Christ, believers have a mission that cannot fail!

In verse 21 the Lord said to the disciples, "*Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you.*" That was the disciples' mission, and that's our mission, too. We are to go into all the world and preach the gospel. That's the Great Commission, and that's our mission.

And it is a mission that can't fail. That's the idea in verse 23: "*If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.*" This verse has nothing to do with the idea of confessing your sins to a human priest who has the power to forgive your sins. No, only God can forgive sins! This verse means that we have the right and the responsibility to declare that if anyone truly receives Jesus Christ as Savior, their sins are forgiven. Not "maybe forgiven" – **totally forgiven!** It's guaranteed! And if anyone refuses to receive Christ as Savior we also have the right and responsibility to declare that their sins are retained. This is an awesome mission, but it is a mission that can't fail because it is backed by the authority of Christ. He died for those sins and He is alive to prove it.

Another reason that the resurrection of Jesus Christ guarantees an unfailing mission is that we now have the enabling power of the Holy Spirit. Verse 22 says, "*And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit.'*" This was a foretaste of Pentecost, when all believers would receive the Holy Spirit and from that time on would be indwelt by the Spirit.

Notice in the context. **The Holy Spirit was given to empower the disciples for the mission of proclaiming the gospel!** In the context, verse 22 follows verse 21: "*So Jesus said to them again, 'Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you.'*" *And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit.'*

How can we fail when God the Holy Spirit is empowering us? Because of the resurrection of Christ, believers have a mission that can't fail.

When I was in military service, I was part of a battalion in the U.S. Army Signal Corps. Our responsibility was to introduce newly developed equipment into the field of operations. The Iron Curtain and the Berlin Wall existed at that time. Drones were new military equipment, and one of our units was working in West Germany with a drone that was developed to do

reconnaissance, so there was a lot of sophisticated equipment in that drone - photographic equipment, radar, infrared camera, etc. The unit's mission was to fly this drone over Communist East Germany and collect information. Well, the mission failed miserably! The drone flew into East Germany and was lost. We never got it back – equipment and all. It was a major failure of the mission, and I can assure you the Pentagon was not too pleased! (And I'm very glad that I was not directly connected to that particular unit!)

Like the drone unit, we may fail in a lot of our earthly missions - but we have a heavenly mission that can't fail! We can be sure that our mission can't fail if we preach the gospel that was given to us by our risen Lord. Isaiah 55:11 is a well-known verse: *“So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; It shall not return to Me void, but it shall accomplish what I please, and it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it.”*

Because of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, believers have a mission that can't fail!

Practical Application

Aren't you glad that Jesus is the same - yesterday, today, and forever?

Hebrews 13:8 says, *“Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.”* And here in John 20, when the Lord came to His disciples, He said to them, *“Peace be with you.”*

Notice that He didn't reprimand them for their cowardice at the time of the crucifixion, and He didn't scold them for hiding in a closed room. He would talk to Peter later, in private, but at this point all He spoke were words of encouragement.

And He's the same today, because the Bible promises that He is the same today as He was yesterday! How often our Lord could reprimand us for our anxieties, and for our fear and lack of courage, and for our many shortcomings and failings. But instead He encourages us - just as He did with the fearful and discouraged disciples! And then He strengthens us to go on! And even when He does have to reprimand us and discipline us, it is always done with patience, love and grace – just as He dealt with Peter.

Aren't you glad that Jesus is the same - yesterday, today, and forever?