

Humanity Redeemed

Week 8 - The Locked Room

John 20:19-31

Mary and the other women had reported to the disciples what they had seen. It appears the men were skeptical and reticent to accept their account. Evidently, even Peter and John's eyewitness account from that morning of the empty tomb and the vacant grave clothes had little effect. After all, the day (Sunday) was far spent, evening had come and Jesus had not appeared to any of them. Furthermore, the little forlorn band of men were heartbroken and grief-stricken. In the last three days one of their own had betrayed the Lord. They had witnessed the mock trials and the miscarriage of justice. They had seen Jesus crucified (although most of them quickly scattered). And they were very afraid, making it doubly difficult to sort out the recent events and nearly impossible to consider what life would look like without the Lord.

I. Peace - John 20:19-23

On the evening of the third day after the crucifixion, the disciples were still cowering behind bolted doors and shuttered windows, afraid they might be arrested and suffer Jesus' fate. They were keenly aware that the Sanhedrin had plotted Jesus' murder and had circumvented their only judicial system with a mock trial. They had successfully manipulated the Roman legal system to get Pilate to release a guilty man (Barabbas) and sentence an innocent one to death.

Any hope that they could retain anonymity had vanished, considering that just a few days before Peter had been recognized three times in the courtyard of the high priest Caiaphas' house. A slave-girl recognized him first. Then some of the officers warming themselves near a fire on the patio identified him as a follower of Jesus. And in a bit of a divine coincidence, a relative of Malchus, "whose ear Peter cut off" (John 18:26) had seen him in the garden and outed him as a disciple of Christ. It was impossible to escape the fact that all of them were known associates of Jesus, making them marked men.

Hidden away, the day drug on. The two disciples the Lord had met on the road to Emmaus (see Luke 24:13-16) had arrived at (presumably) the upper room where His followers had sequestered themselves. With great excitement, the men shared their encounter with Jesus. Mark's Gospel tells us that "they did not believe them either" (Mark 16:13). The recent catastrophic events of the cross, although clearly a part of Jesus' teaching, were clouding their understanding, creating a false narrative not based on the Truth, and leading them to an incorrect conclusion. (Do I even need to comment on the need for Bible literacy in order for us to maintain an accurate Biblical world view? I think not! Here is a perfect example of the peril of Bible illiteracy.)

Suddenly, "Jesus came and stood in their midst and said to them, "Peace be with you" (John 20:21). They heard His voice and His familiar greeting, "Shalom!" He was right there with them. Meeting them in their fear. Jesus was demonstrating to them that He comes to His own when they are afraid. He doesn't wait for them to have faith to

overcome their fear. He comes to help them have the faith to overcome their fear (Bellevue Women 11/09/2020 email).

Jesus addressed His disciples with the everyday Jewish salutation, but there is a double meaning here. On one level it was a simple greeting, but on a deeper level the “peace” He offered was fraught with a new spiritual meaning - the blessed assurance of “the peace of God which surpasses all comprehension” (Philippians 4:7).

However, so inexplicable and unconventional was the means of His sudden appearance in a locked room that the disciples “were startled and frightened and thought that they were seeing a spirit” (Luke 24:37). The Lord quickly dismissed any such notion when He “showed them both His hands and His side. The disciples **then** rejoiced” (John 20:20, emphasis mine).

The Prince of Peace spoke peace to the hearts of His troubled disciples. Jesus is still doing that. He comes to us when we call out to Him in fear. He comes to us with a promise: “Do not fear, for I am with you; Do not be afraid, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, I will also help you, I will also uphold you with My righteous right hand” (Isaiah 41:10). And He comes to us with peace: “Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Do not let your heart be troubled, nor let it be fearful” (John 14:27). Don’t let fear rule over you. Look to Jesus. He will meet you where you are. And He will help you have the faith you need to overcome your fear and fulfill God’s plan for your life (Bellevue Women 11/09/2020 email).

Again Jesus said to them, “Peace be with you” (John 20:21), reminding them of the peace He had promised, just prior to the cross, when they were gathered previously in the upper room. “These things I have spoken to you, so that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world” (John 16:33).

Blessing them with His presence and His peace, Jesus commissioned His disciples, “As the Father has sent Me, I also send you” (John 20:21). The disciples now were (fully) being brought into the divine plan to share the redemption story. This task would require supernatural power. He “breathed on them” (John 20:22). To enable them to fulfill this command to go into the world and continue His ministry, they received a precursor of the full coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost - almost as a deposit for what was to come fully 50 days later (see Acts 2) when the Spirit of God would descend to indwell every believer.

The task before them was a humanly impossible task: to evangelize a God hating, Christ rejecting world of unregenerate people, dead in trespasses and sins, and organized into a satanically energized system and society. How could they do it? By the Holy Spirit now indwelling their mortal bodies. The Son had received the Holy Spirit for his mission (John 1:32–34; 3:34) and now he gave them the Holy Spirit for their mission. (John Phillips, *Exploring the Gospel of John: An Expository Commentary*)

Jesus reminded them that those who repent of their sin, believe savingly in Jesus, and receive Him as Savior, can have the assurance of their salvation knowing God has forgiven them. “If you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; for with the heart a person believes, resulting righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation. For the Scripture says, ‘Whoever believes in Him will not be disappointed.’ For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, about in riches for all who call on Him; for Whoever will call on the name of the Lord will be saved” (Romans 10:9-13).

II. Proof - John 20:24-29

In Jesus’ first appearance to His disciples, Thomas was absent, causing him to continue to wrestle with the facts of the resurrection, in spite of the other disciples were testifying of it. Filled with skepticism he said, “Unless I see in His hands the imprint of the nails, and put my finger into the place of the nails, and put my hand into His side, **I will not believe**” (John 20:25, emphasis mine). His cynicism virtually destroyed his faith. He flatly refused to believe the witness of the women or his fellow disciples.

Eight days later, when Jesus appeared in their midst, Jesus offered Thomas the opportunity to examine His wounds. Jesus gently rebuked Thomas, “Do not be unbelieving but believing” (John 20:27). Thomas was struggling with doubt. For the child of God, doubt is dissolved by careful attention to the Word of God. Otherwise, we are easily deceived by our own emotions, our past life experiences, the prevailing circumstances, or the lies of the enemy.

It appears Thomas did not need to touch the wounds of His Lord. Thomas’ confession, “My Lord and my God” demonstrated his commitment and total surrender to the Lord. Jesus affirmed Thomas’ response, and then added a blessing on those who accepted the truth of His resurrection because of faith in God’s promises rather than physical evidence. This blessing rests on the generations of future believers, the part of the body of Christ to which we belong! Peter wrote, “Though you have not seen Him, you love Him, and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory” (1 Peter 1:8).

III. Purpose - John 20:30-31

John had been an eyewitness to many signs and miracles performed by the Lord. Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, he had chosen to record just a few of them (in comparison to those he had seen). This was most likely to de-emphasize miracles as a basis for faith. John’s purpose was to underscore the deity of Christ. Although He was fully human in His incarnation, He was fully God. His humanity did not diminish His deity; nor did His divine nature diminish His deity. Jesus was the God-man sent as the sinless Savior, the once-for-all time sacrifice for sin, to redeem lost humanity. John desired that his Gospel would be used to cause people to “believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing [might] have life in His name” (John 20:31). Hallelujah! What a Savior!