

Sermon Series: *The Gospel of John*

Do not Disbelieve, But Believe

John 20:19-31 (ESV)

Jesus to the Disciples

¹⁹ On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them 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 Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending 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 withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld."

Jesus and Thomas

²⁴ Now Thomas, one of the Twelve, called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came. ²⁵ So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe."

²⁶ Eight days later, his disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." ²⁷ Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe." ²⁸ Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" ²⁹ Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

The Purpose of This Book

³⁰ Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; ³¹ but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

Introduction

Last week we celebrated the most important event in the history of humanity—the resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth from the dead. If Jesus has not been raised, then Christianity is one massive lie. But if Jesus is raised from the dead, then heaven is open, God is with us, the kingdom of God has broken into this broken world, Satan is defeated, and death has been

given a death sentence. This is the wonderful testimony of the Christian religion. The answer to the problem of evil is that God Himself suffered and died, and then rose again to redeem all that Satan and sin had ruined.

If you find this hard to believe, then know that you are in good company. Jesus' own disciples found it difficult to believe as well. However, the point of this portion of Scripture is to provide you with physical evidence to believe in the resurrection Jesus and then give you an unshakable purpose to your life along with an unparalleled pleasure in living out that purpose.

If you find yourself here today struggling to believe all of this is real and true, then these words are for you. If you have friends who do not believe Jesus has risen, then these verses are for you to remember and share. If you are here and you think Jesus will abandon you because of your perpetual doubting and failing, then listen and watch how Jesus deals with these disciples who had just three nights before all abandoned him.

The passage breaks easily into two sections since there are two appearances of Jesus. The first is recounted in vs.19-23 and the second in vs. 24-29, which is followed by a summary in verses 30-31.

The First Appearance of Jesus (v.19-23)

The first appearance took place on Sunday evening of the first day of Jesus' resurrection.

John 20:19-20 (ESV)

¹⁹ On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them 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.

Recall that Peter and John had early that morning run to the tomb after Mary had told them that Jesus' tomb was empty and his body gone. John had believed that Jesus had been raised from the dead when he saw the empty tomb. We are not told what was going on in Peter's mind.

It is hard to imagine that Peter and John did not tell the other disciples about the empty tomb. Certainly they did. There can be no doubt that at some point during that morning that each disciple had ventured out to see the empty tomb for themselves. Notice the result of witnessing the empty tomb was not earth-changing courage, but rather corporate fear. For whatever reason, they all were fearful enough to gather together and lock themselves in a room. They were *afraid of the Jews*. Perhaps they were afraid of being arrested for supposedly having stolen Jesus' body, for this was the rumor that the chief priests had commanded the guards to spread abroad (Mt 28:11-15).

So it is the end of the day. The sun is setting. They have been debating all day whether or not to believe the testimony of Mary who had told them that she had seen the risen Jesus. Perhaps the debate is still going on when suddenly *Jesus came and stood among them*. The first words out of his mouth were, “Peace be with you” (v.19). This was a common greeting (*shalom alekum*), as it is to this day, and most likely would not have drawn any particular notice.

He Convinces Them With His Presence

Then apparently without any further words, Jesus simply holds out his hands and feet so they could see the scars. He lifted his tunic and showed them the wound on his side where the spear had entered his torso. The conclusion is obvious—this is the same Jesus whom they had watched die! Indeed he is risen!

Then smiles began to crack their previously perplexed faces. Their fear, sorrow, and confusion was suddenly gave way to gladness and joy. They were delighted at this wonderfully amazing man who stood in their midst.

Note that Jesus presents himself to disciples not his detractors. He appears to his friends (Jn 15:15) not to his foes. He offers proof of his resurrection to those who already belong to him. He did not go to the chief priests and Pharisees and say, “Here I am. You were very wrong.” No. He goes to those who are his own. He wants his followers to be convinced of the truth of his message and so comes and stands in their midst.

Jesus Enters Our Pain

This is what Jesus does—he enters into the middle of the painful experiences of his people. He does not always remove his people from the sorrows and pain of this world, but neither does he leave us alone in them. He comes to us in the midst of our fears and he stands before us and shows us that he is real and that he too has been scarred by the people of this world. He too has been beaten and flogged and mocked and spat upon and rejected and laughed at and taunted. He knows the pain of the cruel people on this planet. He knows the pain of being forsaken by His Father. He knows the grief of sin. He knows the alienation that comes from being buried under the darkness of sin upon sin. He knows the weight of it. He knows the burden. He knows the pain of death. And yet he came and stood in their midst. He came to be with them in the middle of their fear. He did not remain comfortably aloof on the edges. He did not hide himself and only show himself to really special disciples—Peter, James, and John. He came into the middle of them and revealed himself to them all.

And now he has a glorified body and yet it is a body that retains the wounds that once had caused his death. His wounds will forever be visible throughout all of eternity.¹ There will be continuity between our present pitiful bodies and our future glorified bodies. The disciples recognized Jesus. He still looked like Jesus, yet he was somewhat changed, glorified, and perfected, and yet he retained his scars.

¹ Rev 5:6, 12.

Jesus now has a body which cannot be inhibited by physical boundaries. Walls and doors no longer stop him. Gates and bars cannot keep him out. He enters into the very places in which we hide in order to protect ourselves. That which would keep other men out, cannot keep Jesus out. Some of us have built up our own walls to protect ourselves from the pain of this hurtful world. These walls while keeping others out, also become a kind of prison. Jesus would come inside those walls in the midst of all your fear and free you from your own enslavement.

He Calms Them With His Peace

After showing them his hands, feet, and side, he then speaks again. And he says exactly the same thing. “Peace be with you” (v.21). Repeating the same greeting two times in just a few short minutes would not have gone unnoticed. Just I greeted you twice at the beginning of the sermon and you noticed it and wondered why I done that, so too Jesus’ disciples were now wondering why had he just said the same thing twice? No doubt their minds went back to the words he had spoken to them just three nights before.

John 14:27 (ESV)

²⁷ “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives, do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.”

Peace was the very thing they needed most. They were terrified, confused, and trembling with fear. They had locked themselves away in fear. Their hearts were deeply troubled. They had lost their closest friend and leader. What were they to do now? Who was to lead them?

And Jesus comes giving them peace his peace, unlike any peace found in this world, other-worldly peace—the peace that Jesus gives. How sweet this must have been to hear! Jesus says nothing about their failure the other night. He does not mention the fact that all of them had abandoned him in his darkest hour. He does not remind them of their weakness. Instead, he offers to them his strength. He did not throw their cowardice back in their faces. He simply offered them his own powerful, heart-calming, soul-settling peace.

He Calls Them With A Purpose

After convincing them with his presence, calming them with his peace, he then calls them with a purpose.

John 20:21-23 (ESV)

²¹ Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.”

Jesus calls his disciples to a life of purpose. It’s the same purpose to which he himself had been called. “As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.” In the same way that the

Father had sent Jesus into the world, so Jesus was sending his disciples into the world. This causes me to ask, what does that mean? What was the purpose of Jesus' life? Jesus answered that for on a couple of instances.

The overarching purpose for which Jesus was sent to this world was to glorify the name of God the Father.

John 17:4 (ESV)

⁴ I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do.

The great work to which Jesus had been called was to that of glorifying God on this earth. Jesus did that by accomplishing the work the Father had given him to do. When Jesus stood before Pilate he said,

John 18:37 (ESV)

³⁷ For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world—to bear witness to the truth.

The truth to which Jesus bore witness to was that he was messiah chosen by God to be the sacrificial lamb who would take away the sins of all who would believe in him—both Jew and Gentile. The truth is that Jesus is the atoning sacrifice sent into the world to pay the price for the sins of all who would trust in him. The truth is that Jesus was sent into the world to take upon himself God's just wrath against sinners² so that those who exercise faith in Jesus can enjoy God's love rather than be consumed by God's anger. The truth is that Jesus came offer the everlasting experience of his own superior joy in exchange for our forsaking the diminishing pleasures of the world's temporal delights. This is the good news of the gospel of the kingdom of God for which Jesus said he was sent from town to town to preach (Lk 4:43).

This is the message that we too have been given. Go to work tomorrow and give glory to God. Do your work as unto the LORD, not merely as unto man. Be the best employee you can be. Work with all your might to do your best. Let the glory of God shine through your work.

Jesus was a carpenter for 30 years and an evangelist for 3. Do you think he failed to glorify his heavenly Father during the first 30 years of his life? When God said of Jesus, "This is My beloved Son with whom I am well pleased," do you think God meant, "Man, I'm so glad he finally gave up carpentry and found a real job—preaching?" Do you think God was only pleased with His Son for the final three years of his life? Go to work tomorrow with smiling face of God at your back and His shining radiance upon your face and answer phones to the glory of God and move boxes to glory of God and type papers and do research and take pictures and fix cars and make sandwiches and offer tech support and write software code and issue

² Is 53:4-7.

checks and manage investments to the glory of God and all the while bear witness to the glorious truth of the good news of the gospel of Jesus.

You might think, "I can't do that. I'm too weak. I fail."

What do think the disciples thought when they heard Jesus say, "**As the Father sent me, even so I am sending you.**" Do you think they may have thought, "What? All that you did, you expect us to do? We can't stand up to the scribes and Pharises! We can't preach like you. We can't heal like you! We can't pray like you! And we can't cast out demons and we can't...

we can't... we can't... we can't ...

And while the thought was still rolling around in their brains, Jesus took a deep breath and said, "**Receive the Holy Spirit**" (v.22).

He Conveyed To Them the Power of His Spirit

Jesus convinced them with his presence, he calmed them with his peace, he called them with a purpose, and now he conveys the power of his Spirit.

John 20:22-23 (ESV)

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 withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld.**"

These verses are somewhat difficult to understand. What's happening? Jesus has just reminded them of what their purpose will be—to preach the good news of the gospel of the kingdom of God through the name of Jesus. Just as the Father has sent the Son, so the Son was sending the disciples.

How had Jesus been so successful in his ministry? How could Jesus have said, "Father, I have accomplished the work that you sent me to do?" Was it because he was 100% God in the flesh and so doing all he did was no problem? But Jesus was also 100% human, and humans need help. Was it not that the success of Jesus' mission was due to the anointing of Jesus with the powerful presence of the Holy Spirit?

Do you remember when the Holy Spirit came upon Jesus? It was at his baptism (Jn 1:32). Was the Holy Spirit then absent from the life of Jesus up to that point? Certainly not. The point of the anointing of Jesus by the Holy Spirit at his baptism was to demonstrate that for a new phase of Jesus' life and ministry he would have a special anointing of the Holy Spirit who would rest (and remain) upon him in order to provide him with the power he would need to accomplish all that God was calling him to do.

In this moment, was it true that the disciples did not have the presence of the Holy Spirit in their lives before this moment? Certainly not. Jesus had earlier said to the disciples about the Holy Spirit,

John 14:16-17, (ESV)

¹⁶ And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever,
¹⁷ even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you.

The Holy Spirit was already “dwelling” with the disciples. The already “knew” him and yet, Jesus said, He “will be in you.” So what is going on here in v.22?

You will note that the ESV says, “He breathed on them,”³ however, the words “on them” are not present in the Greek.

22 καὶ τοῦτο εἰπὼν ἐνεφύσησεν καὶ λέγει αὐτοῖς, Λάβετε, πνεῦμα ἅγιον⁴

Literally the sentence reads, “And he breathed and said, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit.’” Some have argued that the preposition (‘on’ or ‘in’ something) is always inferred, but D.A. Carson has demonstrated that is not always the case.

The lexica give as the meaning of the verb (*emphysaō*) ‘he breathed in’ or ‘he breathed upon’, but actual usage outside the New Testament (this is the only place it occurs within the New Testament) does not encourage the view that the preposition ‘in’ or ‘upon’ was part of the meaning of the verb itself.⁵

I believe the clearest explanation of what is happening here is that Jesus is symbolically enacting what will take place in a little over a month at the day of Pentecost. He is once again telling them that they will receive the Holy Spirit in a way that they have not yet received Him. If Jesus was now giving them the fullness of the Holy Spirit, as some claim, then He made little difference since one week later they are still all locked up in the room still living in fear (v. 26) and poor Thomas truly missed out, because he was not with them.

So how are you to accomplish the purpose for which I am sending you out? You will do it by receiving the power of the Holy Spirit into your life, and He will be as close to you as my breath is to me. It will be as though you have my breath in you.

³ So KJV, NIV, NASB.

⁴ Kurt Aland, Matthew Black, Carlo M. Martini et al., *The Greek New Testament, Fourth Revised Edition (Interlinear With Morphology)* (Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1993; 2006), Jn 20:22.

⁵ D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, MI: InterVarsity Press; W.B. Eerdmans, 1991), 651.

Who Forgives Sins?

What about this forgiveness of sin talk in v.23? Is Jesus granting the disciples authority to forgive or not to forgive a person's sins? I do not think so. Only God can forgive sin (Mk 2:7). No human has ever been given that prerogative, except Jesus alone (Mk 2:10).

What I believe Jesus is saying is that when those who are sent by him for purpose of proclaiming the gospel to sinners through the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit, they will do so with the authority of Jesus himself. When the disciples of Jesus proclaim the gospel of Jesus through the power of the Spirit of Jesus it will be as if Jesus himself were speaking through them.

And because Jesus is risen from the dead his disciples will be able to authoritatively claim that sins have been forgiven. If anyone receives and believes that gospel message then their sins have been forgiven, not by the person preaching the message, but by the Savior proclaimed in the message. And if anyone rejects that message, then forgiveness of their sins has been withheld from that person.

The Second Appearance of Jesus (v.24-29)

Before we get to the second appearance of Jesus, John makes us aware that Thomas had been absent from Jesus' first appearance. When the disciples had told him that they had seen Jesus, he refused to believe them.

John 20:24-25 (ESV)

²⁴ Now Thomas, one of the Twelve, called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came. ²⁵ So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe."

Thomas needed physical evidence in order to believe that Jesus had physically risen from the dead. He'd have to see and touch Jesus before he would ever believe. Thomas often gets a bad rap but if someone told you a person had been raised from the dead, would you not do the same? I suspect you would. However, there does seem to be a little stubbornness in Thomas, since he quiet emphatically states that unless certain conditions are met, he will never believe.

John 20:26-29 (ESV)

²⁶ Eight days later, his disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." ²⁷ Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe." ²⁸ Thomas answered him, "My Lord

and my God!" ²⁹ Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

A week went by before Jesus showed up again. If last Sunday Jesus rose from the dead, then it is today that Jesus appeared to Thomas. The disciples still have the doors locked and they are still indoors, evidently still living in fear. Jesus arrives and once again the locked doors are unable to keep him out. Again, he came and stood in their midst. Just as before, the first words out of his mouth are, "Peace be with you." Amazingly, it remains Jesus' first priority to give his disciples his own peace, a peace which they cannot otherwise find in this world, even among themselves.

Jesus then immediately turns his attention to Thomas who is now present with the other ten. No one has to tell Jesus what Thomas had previously said. Evidently Jesus knows what is said among the disciples even when he is not with them. Jesus offered Thomas the proof he previously stated that he required. Jesus is patient with his obstinate disciple, even though we may wonder if Jesus rebuke to the Galileans were resounding in Thomas' ears, "Unless you see signs and wonders you will not believe" (Jn 4:46).

However, finding Jesus standing before him, somehow frees him from the need to actually touch him and put his finger in Jesus' hand and his hand in Jesus' side. Jesus offers a bit of a rebuke⁶ to Thomas, "Do not disbelieve, but believe." Jesus is patient with doubting, but he does not leave Thomas comfortably in it. No doubt Thomas had heard Mary's testimony as well as that of all the disciples and yet he refused to believe any of them. So the Master, the risen Savior says, "Thomas, stop disbelieving and start believing."

Some of us in this room need to do the same. We need to stop telling ourselves that our patient Savior is OK with our disbelief. He is patient. But his words this morning are, "Stop disbelieving and start believing." Jesus is standing here in our midst this morning saying these same words. If any of you have ears to hear, may you hear this.

Thomas replies with, "My Lord and my God" (v.28).

Thomas' response has been called "one of the greatest Christological confessions in the New Testament."⁷ D.A. Carson writes, "The most unyielding sceptic has bequeathed to us the most profound confession."⁸

Thomas got it right. He refers to Jesus with the respectful term, "my lord," which would be roughly equivalent to "Sir," or "Master," but he does not stop there. He goes much farther,

⁶ Cf. Mk 16:14.

⁷ D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, MI: Inter-Varsity Press; W.B. Eerdmans, 1991), 656.

⁸ Ibid., 659.

and calls Jesus “my God.” He got it perfectly right. Jesus is both. He is Lord and he is God and this wonderful confession comes to us from the lips of someone whom many think was the least of the disciples. (Maybe he is or maybe he isn’t.) Jesus takes the least disciple and uses him to proclaim the greatest message.

This is where John began this gospel. He has now taken us full circle. He began this book with,

John 1:1-2, (ESV)

¹ In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

John 1:14 (ESV)

¹⁴ And the word became flesh and dwelt among us...

He now, here in the end, brings us back to where he began—a confession that Jesus is rightly understood to be one with God the Father.

Thomas’ confession is astounding coming from a monotheistic Jew. And yet Jesus does not rebuke him for misunderstanding, but instead announces blessings to all who would come to a similar conclusion.

John 20:29 (ESV)

²⁹ Jesus said to him, “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”

There await tremendous blessing for all who would believe this gospel. The blessing of Jesus will rest upon all who believe this message. John then summarizes the reason for which he wrote this gospel.

The Purpose of This Book

³⁰ Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; ³¹ but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

John too wants you to believe and stop disbelieving. And all who believe this will have **life in his name**. Life is possible because Jesus is living. He is alive today. Today he is risen.

Conclusion

Jesus appears to his disciples. Jesus does not appear to his enemies. He enters into the midst of their fear and he **convinced them with his presence**. He **calmed them with his peace**. He does bring up their past failures, but simply gives them peace. He offers himself as living proof and convinces them of his resurrection by his physical presence. He **calls them to the purpose**

of proclaiming the God-glorifying message of the gospel. And he **conveyed to them the power of the indwelling presence of his own Holy Spirit** to help them accomplish the purpose. He is patient with doubters and offers them his peace, but commands them to stop disbelieving and start believing. He promises great blessings to those who believe. He gives them life and the enjoyment of his own Holy Spirit.

This book was written so that you may believe and not disbelieve.

Do not disbelieve the lies of Satan. Do not be deceived by the angel of light. Believe in Jesus the risen crucified Savior. Only he can satisfy all the longings of your soul.