

The Ministry of the Risen Lord

John 20-21

By Phillip G. Kayser at DCC on 4-24-2011

Introduction – there is a difference between know about His ministry and knowing His ministry

I have a beautiful cuckoo clock that used to be on our library wall. It's been packed up in a box for a few years because the church library books encroached on its space. But even though we rarely look at it, I keep it for three reasons: I think it is a nice decoration, it's a collector's item, and it has sentimental value. But I don't look to that clock for my time. It doesn't keep my schedule. I don't trust its direction. It's really not a controlling part of my life.

In much the same way, I think it is nice when people respect Jesus and appreciate all that He has done in the past. I think it is nice when they respect Him by coming to church once in a while and winding up the clock to run for a few minutes. But it would be a sad thing if you were a Christian for only three reasons: 1) because it's a family tradition to worship Christ (which it should be), 2) because He has historical value (which He certainly does), 3) and because you've invested a lot in being a Christian (which of course I hope you have). Those are not necessarily bad reasons, but Scripture calls us to be in a vital relationship with Christ where moment-by-moment we are under His shepherding care. Perhaps like my clock, you pay attention to Christ once in a while, but He doesn't give direction to every minute of your life. You look elsewhere to get direction. If that is the case, then I think that John chapters 20-21 have a lot to say to you. I think in part they are saying to you that the kingdom of God is not in word only, but also in power (to quote 1 Corinthians 4:20). In fact, the Scriptures can be powerfully at work in our lives right now as the risen Lord ministers to us. May it be so.

I. The Risen Lord Gives Comfort To The Sorrowful (John 20:1-18)

We are going to be looking this morning at some of the ministry of the risen Lord in the lives of His disciples *after His resurrection*. One of the things that struck me in these passages is that it took the resurrected presence of Christ to make a difference in their lives. They had heard the doctrine of the resurrection many times, but until Christ *came* and *ministered* the Word

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to their hearts, they had doubts. Now the Scripture is clear that they shouldn't have had doubts – the Word should have been enough. But it was after they were in fellowship with the living Savior that their lives were on fire for this doctrine. The doctrine took on a whole new dimension. And we must not divide between Word and power. These Scriptures, when taken like a scalpel in Christ's hands, are powerful and sharper than any two-edged sword. And we see amazing changes in the lives of the disciples as the reality of both Word and presence were experienced in their lives.

I think Mary is a good example in chapter 20. Mary had heard Christ say that He would suffer, die and be raised the third day over and over again. She had affirmed that she believed that doctrine. In the Gospel of John alone I counted 20 predictions of the resurrection that Jesus had made. But like happens to us many times, her heart had not caught up with her head. I mean, that happens to us, doesn't it? How many times have you heard Romans 8:28 - all things work together for good to those who love God? Yet how many times have you doubted that in your own life; had frustration and anxiety and lived as if that were not true. The disciples are no different than us when they can't see Jesus through the tears.

In chapter 20:13 the angels say to Mary, **“Woman, why are you weeping?”** And the thrust of their question shows amazement. In light of all that Jesus has told you, why are you weeping? But she is so heart broken that she doesn't catch that. **“She said to them, ‘Because they have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid Him.’”** Their words don't dry her tears. **“Now when she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, and did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, ‘Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?’”** [Jesus too seeks to stir up her faith and question her need to weep, but] **“She, supposing Him to be the gardener, said to Him, ‘Sir, if You have carried Him away tell me where You have laid Him, and I will take Him away.’”** [She apparently turns her back on Him too, but when] Jesus said to her, **“‘Mary!’ She turned and said to Him, ‘Rabboni!’ (which is to say, Teacher),”** and she gets excited. When a soul is seeking Christ, nothing but Christ can satisfy it. This woman went on weeping when the angels talked to her, and even when Christ spoke His inspired words to her, she was not affected until she recognized the presence of Christ in those words.

In the same way you have probably experienced times when you have been reading the Scriptures in devotions, and they are just as dry as dust to you. And you have had other times when God ministers those Words to your

heart so powerfully, you feel fit to bust. In the same way, you can come to church and listen to a sermon, but it is not until you recognize the presence of Christ that you are satisfied. Perhaps some of you have never felt the tender Shepherding care of Jesus because all you hear are the words of the preacher, or you read the words of the Bible as if it were only a history of what happened 2000 years ago. But the Resurrection story tells us that the Savior is alive, meets with His people, and is speaking those very words to you. What did He say to the Laodicean Church in Revelation? He said, **“Behold I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me.”** He was outside the church knocking on the door. There was an entire church that was worshipping and not experiencing the presence of Christ. That’s what the text says. He was not in that church. But Jesus went on to say that all it would take is one person to hear His voice, to respond by inviting Him in, and Jesus would commune with him in the Lord’s Supper. And that’s what I am getting at this morning. Are you content with hearing theology coming from my lips, or are you like Mary – longing for the risen Lord to be your shepherd. You see, Rodney, Gary, and I are only supposed to be under-shepherds. The ideal is for each of you to have the risen Lord ministering His Word into your lives every day.

Earlier in John 14 Christ had promised, “... **‘He who loves Me will be loved by My Father and I will love him and manifest Myself to him.’** **Judas (not Iscariot) said to Him, ‘Lord, how is it that You will manifest Yourself to us and not to the world?’** [He’s saying, how are we going to know your presence in a way the world doesn’t?] **Jesus answered and said to him, ‘If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him.’”** Christ promised more than doctrine in your head (as wonderful as that is): He promised to manifest Himself to us; to come to us and make His home with us. He is a risen and a present Savior.

In Matthew 18:20 Christ said, **“For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them.”** Now, He is not there visibly, but He is there just as really. Christ is here ministering to the needs of His flock. He is saying to you, ‘Why are you weeping? Mary, I am here for you.’ His last words in the Gospel of Matthew are **“...lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the Age.”** In Luke 24 the disciples did not know it was Christ speaking to them, but the affect of His presence was clearly seen. They could tell the difference. And they said to one another, **“Did not our heart burn within us while He talked with us on the road,**

and while He opened the Scriptures to us?” They knew it was different than other times that they had talked about the Scriptures. Has Christ enflamed your hearts with His presence? This is the Christ that I want to present to you this morning; a Christ who is alive and present with His people; a Christ who ministers to us; who speaks through my preaching and through the singing, and through the reading of the Word and who with the Father seeks those who not only worship in truth, but in Spirit in and truth.

II. The Risen Lord Gives Peace to the Fearful (John 20:19-20)

There was a second ministry that happened in verses 19-20. The disciples had not yet learned to enter into this relationship with Christ, and Christ in His mercy starts the ball rolling by presenting Himself visibly. Each time that Christ manifested Himself to the disciples it was to meet a need and through that need to draw them closer to Himself. And they needed a risen Shepherd in these verses. They had been overcome with a paralyzing fear of persecution. Have you ever wondered what it was that turned fearful disciples into bold witnesses for Christ? It was Christ's presence and the presence of His Spirit. I'm going to take points II and III together because the peace that Christ gave came with the Spirit that He gave. Look at verse 19: **“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 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. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.’”** When the disciples engaged in the Great Commission they lost this paralyzing fear, but it was only because they were convinced personally of the presence of Christ.

The women had already told them of Christ's resurrection, but they treated the story as an idle tale. Doctrine was designed to lead us into His presence. And Hebrews 13 quotes Christ as saying, **“I will never leave you nor forsake you.”** It may not be a visible presence, but His Spirit is powerfully present nonetheless.

Bishop Lajos Ordass of the Lutheran Church, was one of those Christians who suffered immensely under communist rule in Hungary. He was imprisoned by the communists for protesting when they confiscated the Christian schools. He said this to a gathering of Lutherans in Minneapolis.

They placed me in solitary confinement. It was a tiny cell, perhaps six feet by eight feet, with no windows, and soundproofed. They hoped to

break down my resistance by isolating me from all sensory perceptions. They thought I was alone. They were wrong. The risen Christ was present in that room, and in communion with him I was able to prevail.

Countless thousands of Christians have testified that the greater the persecution, the greater the sense of Christ's presence became. We can have a risen Shepherd with us. I've got some mental disciplines that I go through when I start getting anxious, and they help. but the presence of Christ instantaneously eases the tensions and brings me peace.

Is Christ just like the clock on my wall? Something that brings back good memories but gives no direction and comfort in life? It is not enough to value Christ like you value George Washington. He also wants you to enter more fully into fellowship and communion with Him. He promises His people, **“seek the LORD your God, and you will find *Him* if you seek Him with all your heart and with all your soul”** (Deut. 4:29).

III. The Risen Lord Gives The Spirit To Empower The Sent Ones (John 20:21-23)

It is when you find Him that you also find His power. He breathes the Spirit afresh into your lives (as it were) and strengthens you to walk in Spirit. A lot of Christians don't know what Galatians is talking about when it commands us to walk in the Spirit. That just seems so theoretical to them. But it is not theoretical. He is basically saying that we cannot sanctify ourselves. Just as it took the Spirit to overcome their fear, it takes the Spirit to give us Christian graces. Galatians 3 says, **“Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect by the flesh? ...He who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you, does He do it by the works of the law or by the hearing of faith?”** If the Christian walk was simply about learning doctrine and doing certain things differently, any unbeliever could do it. But it takes genuine faith to receive the shepherding ministry of the risen Lord day by day.

IV. The Risen Lord Gives Faith To The Doubting (John 20:24-31)

Let's move down to the next section – verses 24-31. It is a knowledge that Jesus is risen indeed that can enable you to believe even when you don't have all the answers. And in verses 24-31 we have the story of doubting Thomas. The resurrection didn't make sense to him. And there is much in this world that is difficult to understand. I don't have answers to everything. Christ's response to Thomas makes it clear that we should believe the Bible even if it doesn't make sense. But here is the point – the presence of Christ

illuminates our minds and helps the Bible to make sense. It doesn't turn off our minds; it illuminates our minds. John 1 says that Jesus is the one who enlightens everyone who comes into the world. Even pagans couldn't have any knowledge without Him. Isn't *that* an amazing thought? But when we lay hold of the presence of Christ promised in the Scriptures, He Himself gives us added understanding. I used to *struggle* over passages and *then* pray for wisdom when I could figure it out. But I finally learned to pray for His wisdom and insight on even the simplest of passages and Jesus taught me to dig deeper on even the most simple of passages. And I have come to be absolutely convinced that I simply could not pastor if I didn't have the risen Lord with me. On a weekly basis He gives me understanding that I would not have otherwise.

These disciples didn't have all the answers, but they had the Savior. Now don't get me wrong. The Bible can meet all the attacks of its critics. We saw that last week. There is an academic aspect to Christianity. Our faith is founded on fact. But without a risen Savior, without a present savior, the skepticism of a Thomas can come creeping in. Verse 24: **“But Thomas, called Didymus, one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. The other disciples therefore said to him, ‘We have seen the Lord.’ But he said to them, ‘Unless I see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe.’ And after eight days His disciples were again inside, and Thomas with them. Jesus came, the door being shut, and stood in the midst, and said ‘Peace to you!’ Then He said to Thomas, ‘Reach your finger here, and look at My hands; and reach your hand here, and put it into My side. Do not be unbelieving, but believing.’ And Thomas answered and said to Him, ‘My Lord and my God!’ Jesus said to him, ‘Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.’** And so Christ puts the Scriptures first. That is the foundation for our faith. But it is the Spirit of God who gives us faith, strengthens our faith, and focuses our faith on the living Lord Jesus. Without the experience of His reality in our lives, Paul says that the Bible becomes a dead letter. It's not untrue, but it is not quickened to our hearts. Hebrews 4:2 says, **“the word which they heard did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in those who heard it.”** Well Christ is the great mixer. He brings life to our hearts by mixing faith with the Word. He causes growth in our hearts by mixing faith and the Word. There is never a time when we are not dependent upon His Shepherding ministry in our lives; His mixing of faith and Word.

V. The Risen Lord Gives Food To Those Who Have None (John 21:1-14)

On to point V. You will probably never experience anything like John 21 portrays, where Christ spoke audibly to His disciples, filled their nets with fish, and cooked breakfast for them. That's incredible! That was unique. But the same one who said, "**Come and eat breakfast**" in verse 12 is the Shepherd who continues to be concerned about not just breakfast, but all of the details of your lives. He cares about your jobs. He cares when we worry about putting food on our plates. He cares about your sicknesses, your car issues, your pregnancies, and your pets. And throughout their lives Christ provided for the day-by-day needs that they had. Can you trust the risen Savior to do the same for you?

VI. The Risen Lord Restores One Who Has Fallen (John 21:15-19)

Point VI - When you deny Christ by falling into sin or by leaving undone what needs to be done, you need the assurance of Christ when He said, "**I will never leave you nor forsake you.**" Not even when you sin – "*I will never leave you nor forsake you.*" Peter probably felt forsaken. He must have gone through agony of heart during those three days since He denied Jesus. Verses 15-19 are some of the most marvelous verses in the Gospel and deserve a separate treatment. But they clearly show that even when we prove to be unfaithful, Christ is a forgiving Savior. In this scene He restored Peter and brought Peter to a humble sense of dependence.

You may remember that Peter had boasted that he would never deny the Lord. And then he went ahead and denied Christ three times. He had earlier said, "**Though all men deny You, yet I will not.**" There was His claim that He loved Christ faithfully more than the other disciples. So Christ's first question is, "**Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me more than these [do]?**" The word for love here is agape love - the highest form of sacrificial love, but he is also comparing Peter to these disciples just like Peter had compared himself to those disciples. Peter refuses to compare himself to others anymore. He has learned his lesson. And he doesn't even know if he can claim to have agape love, so he says, "You know that I have *phileo* you." "You know that I have friendship love or affection for you." Christ then drops the comparison of Peter's love with the love of the others and asks merely, **Do you love Me?** Do you have any *agape* love? Since agape love is divine love, Peter again only dares to claim *phileo* or affectional love. He says, "Yes Lord, You know that I have friendship love for you." The third time Christ comes down to even the lowest level and

questions it. He's not comparing to others; He's not even asking if Peter has agape love. He asks, "Simon, son of Jonah, Do you *phileo* Me?" Do you have friendship for Me? Peter has already twice said that He had friendship for Christ. Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, "do you *phileo* Me?" – "Do you have friendship love?" "And he said to Him, 'Lord, You know all things; You know that I *phileo* You.'" You may think that the three-fold questioning was kind of rough and unnecessary. But it was a threefold affirmation of love even though Peter had blown it.

Even though the three-fold question was humbling, it reminded Peter of his threefold denial, and reminded Peter that without Christ he could do nothing. But I think the cool thing about each response of Jesus was that He was restoring Peter to ministry; And He restored Him three times. Three times you denied me and three times I'm going to restore you. Those three restorals would stand forever in Peter's memory as a reminder of Christ's love and grace.

What a marvelous restoration; what tremendous forgiveness Christ has. He is restored to the full position that he had before. Peter is not a second-class citizen. Some of you have been beating up on yourself just like Peter did and feeling so ashamed that you have let the Lord down. And Jesus is telling you this morning that He is pleased to restore as many times as you fail Him.

This is the kind of Shepherd who is present with us and who ministers to our hearts the same forgiveness today. Resurrection is more than a doctrine. Because the doctrine of the resurrection is the truth of a God who cannot lie, it gives us a resurrected Lord who knows our hearts, brings conviction to us, loves His sheep deeply, provides for us, takes away our fears and sorrows. His love and His personal relationship with His sheep cannot be questioned.

What is questioned at the end of this book is not His love for us but our love to Him. We may *know* much, and *do* much, and *profess* much, and *talk* much, and *work* much, and *give* much, and *go through* much, and *make much show* of our religion, and yet the question still comes – "Do you love Him?" Do you love Him? Loving Him involves relationship, not just doctrine. Loving Him involves communicating with Him. It's not the amount of love, but whether there is love present that counts. So don't be beating up on yourself because of how shallow your love is. Peter knew that his love was shallow. But with what little love he had he clung to Christ. And it is as we love Him with all of our heart, soul, strength, and mind –

however shallow and little that love may be, that God causes the capacity of our love to grow, and causes our relationship to grow. The Puritan writer, John Owen, has a marvelous book on Communion with the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. It is one of the chief things that His grace ushers us into. 1Corinthians 1:9 tells us that the Father has called us into the fellowship of His Son. Will you follow that call?

VII. The Risen Lord Corrects One Who Has The Wrong Focus (21:20-25)

There was one more ministry of Christ while on earth that John mentions, and it was His correction of Peter for having a wrong focus. When Peter was told in verses 18-19 that he would be crucified too, Peter asks in verse 21, **“But Lord, what about this man?”** And Christ’s reply is, **“What is that to you? You follow Me.”** And I find those words fascinating. Peter’s question seems perfectly appropriate. John is his friend, and he is curious about John’s future. But though I could not have rebuked Peter in that situation, Jesus sees some weakness in the heart that needs to be corrected. And commentators try to guess at what that weakness might be. We won’t know for sure, but all are agreed that it is possible to let concern for others make us miss our own walk with God. Perhaps you miss a close walk with God because you are so busy being concerned for your children. It’s not an either/or. You do need to minister to your children and friends. After all, God had told Peter, **“Feed My sheep.”** But Jesus is saying, **“Make sure that you follow Me. Don’t just make sure that your sheep follow Me. Make sure that you follow Me.”**

Personally, I am glad that the Lord does not usually give us insight into the future of others or of ourselves. We might spend a whole lot more time worrying about the future. Our concern should be to follow Jesus.

Conclusion – Jesus shepherded the disciples even when He wasn’t visibly with them

In chapter 10 Christ said, **“I am the good Shepherd, and I know My sheep, and am known by My own.”** (v. 14) **“My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me.”** What is clear from these narratives was that Jesus was shepherding these sheep even when He wasn’t visibly with them. This is important – this is where everything in this sermon has been heading.

He knew all about Mary’s heartbreak and was motivated to help her not only find peace, but to find growth. He knew the fear that the apostles

were living under, and He knew what it would take to help them conquer their fears. He didn't have to find out about these things by questioning them when visibly present. His shepherding was obviously going on in between those visible visits. He had heard the denials of Peter and had later heard the denials of Thomas, even though He was not physically next to them when they failed Him.

He ends chapter 20 by saying that he didn't record these physical visits to make us wish that we could have the same physical visits. He recorded them to convince us that He continues to be the Messiah and the Son of God at the same time and He continues to be worthy of our trust. In chapter 21 Jesus knew that the disciples had been fishing all night without luck. Oops. There is no luck, is there? He had providentially designed that night so that they would not catch anything, because He wanted them to know that our frustrations are designed to drive us to Him. He wasn't just shepherding them when he told them where to cast the net and when He fixed them breakfast. He had to have been shepherding throughout the whole night to prepare for that lesson.

For those of you who long for the physical presence of Jesus and forget about the power of His spiritual presence, I want you to think of the last verse of the Gospel. It says, **“And there are also many other things that Jesus did, which if they were written one by one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that would be written. Amen.”** Many people take that as hyperbole or exaggeration. But it is not. First, “I suppose” can be translated “I think.” Secondly, “Amen” means, “truly.” But that doesn't totally capture the essence of the Greek, which the dictionary simply says, is “a strong affirmation of what is stated.” This is not hyperbole. But if John's intentions were just to record every move that Jesus did as man, then it would be hyperbole. But John has already stated that the whole goal of this book was to make us believe that Jesus was not only the Messiah, but that He was the Son of God. The Son of God upholds all things by the Word of His power and directs all things providentially. This means that Jesus not only upholds every cell of your body down to the subatomic level, but every cell in every plant, every atom of every star, every solar flare, every dust particle that falls onto the moon, every ray of light, the movements of the stars, as well as the movements of the electrons in the atoms of those stars. He upholds the billions of angels and the quadrillions of ants and aphids around the world. And then you get into the random actions in Quantum physics, and very literally, if everything that the Son of

God did was written down one by one, our whole world could not contain the books.

And this is the Shepherd who ministers to each of you individually. John wrote these last accounts of the ministry of our risen Lord not to convince you that He needs to be physically seen to be a worthwhile Shepherd, but to convince you that you can trust Him, know Him, be guided by Him, relate to Him, be provided by Him, and be Shepherded in every way by Him both now and forever. As chapter 20:31 says, “...**but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name.**” And what kind of life is it that He wants you to have? He’s already told you in chapter 10. He said, “**I have come that they may have life, and that they may have *it* more abundantly.**” If you don’t have that more abundant life, then come back to your Shepherd and tell Him that you need the ministry of the risen Savior and you plan to trust His ministry for the rest of your life. Amen.

Charge: Brothers and sisters, 1Corinthians 1:9 says, “**God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.**” My charge to you is to more fully enter into that fellowship.

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- I. The Risen Lord Gives Comfort To The Sorrowful (John 20:1-18)
- II. The Risen Lord Gives Peace to the Fearful (John 20:19-20)
- III. The Risen Lord Gives The Spirit To Empower The Sent Ones (John 20:23)
- IV. The Risen Lord Gives Faith To The Doubting (John 20:24-31)
- V. The Risen Lord Gives Food To Those Who Have None (John 21:1-14)
- VI. The Risen Lord Restores One Who Has Fallen (John 21:15-19)
- VII. The Risen Lord Corrects One Who Has The Wrong Focus (21:20-22)

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