

**The Gospel of John (117):  
The Risen King reveals Himself to His Apostles (1)**

**Introduction:**

We are presently considering the Apostle John's record of our Lord's resurrection from the dead and the events that transpired as Jesus revealed Himself alive to His followers. The Lord first met and spoke with Mary Magdalene, to which we gave our attention last Lord's Day (John 20:11-18). Before us today is the account of Jesus showing Himself to His apostles (John 20:19-31). Jesus first appeared to ten of His apostles who were gathered together on the first evening of the first Lord's Day (vs. 19-23). We read that He later appeared to all eleven of the apostles, including Thomas, the following Lord's Day evening (vs. 24-29). John then provided a summary and concluding statement, in which he wrote of his selection of the signs of Jesus that he chose to recount in his Gospel (vs. 30f).

Let us read the entire passage before us—**John 20:19-31**.

<sup>19</sup>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." <sup>20</sup>When He had said this, He showed them His hands and His side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord.

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

<sup>24</sup>Now Thomas, called the Twin, one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. <sup>25</sup>The other disciples therefore said to him, "We have seen the Lord."

So 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."

<sup>26</sup>And after eight days His disciples were again inside, and Thomas with them. Jesus came, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, "Peace to you!" <sup>27</sup>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."

<sup>28</sup>And Thomas answered and said to Him, "My Lord and my God!"

<sup>29</sup>Jesus said to him, "Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

<sup>30</sup>And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; <sup>31</sup>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. (John 20:19-31)

John recorded for us the appearance of the risen Lord Jesus to His apostles. In doing so John revealed Jesus replacing the fear that had characterized them with faith in Him, pronouncing to them the peace of God. This peace of God was theirs due to God's forgiveness of their sins through faith in Jesus Christ. John then recorded Jesus commissioning His apostles, imparting to them the Holy Spirit, and giving them authority to pronounce salvation and judgment to the world to which He was sending them.

As we look over these verse we may easily discern the two major parts-- verses 19-23 and verses 24-29--with the addition of a concluding word from John in verses 30 and 31. Here is an outline that may aid us in our consideration of these verses.

I. Jesus appeared to ten of His apostles (vs. 19-23)

A. Jesus appeared and pronounced to them the peace of God (vs. 19, 20)

- B. Jesus set before them their mission for God (v. 21)
- C. Jesus bestowed upon them the Spirit of God (v. 22)
- D. Jesus declared their authority in their service to God (v. 23)
- II. Jesus appeared again to His apostles, including Thomas (vs. 24-31)
  - A. A note regarding the absence of Thomas from their first meeting (vs. 24, 25)
  - B. Jesus again appeared to them and again pronounced to them the peace of God (v. 26)
  - C. Jesus addressed Thomas directly and he responds to Jesus in faith (vs. 27-28)
  - D. Jesus pronounced those as “blessed”, who believe apart from seeing (v. 29)
- III. John gave an announcement regarding the signs of Jesus and the limited record he had provided of them in his Gospel (vs. 30-31).

Today we will only address the first portion of this passage. We will address verses 29 through 33. In these verses Jesus appeared to ten of His disciples.

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### **I. Jesus appeared to ten of His apostles (vs. 19-23)**

We had seen that the first “witness” to the resurrection of Jesus Christ was the empty tomb, in which the grave clothes of Jesus had remained. But the empty tomb itself had not resulted in the faith of the apostles to the resurrection of Christ, that is, for any of them except for John (20:8). And even our Lord’s appearance to Mary Magdalene (20:10-18) had not convinced them through her witness of His resurrection. But here we read that Jesus showed Himself alive to His apostles. It was a transformative encounter that would not only be an occasion for solidifying their faith in their risen Lord, but it would also be the occasion in which He commissioned them and empowered them to witness to the world of salvation through faith in Him.

#### **A. Jesus appeared and pronounced to them the peace of God (vs. 19, 20)**

John recorded the appearing of Jesus to His disciples. Verse 19 reads,

**<sup>19</sup>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.”**

John provided a time reference for his readers: “the same day at evening, being the first day of the week.” If John were only concerned about providing his readers a time reference, it would have been sufficient for him to have simply written, “the same day at evening.” But John included the detail, “the first day of the week.” This is what he had written when he had opened this chapter in verse 1, “Now the first day of the week Mary Magdalene went to the tomb early...” This phrase once again signals a new creation begun with the coming forth of Jesus Christ from the dead in His glorified body—the first day of the week. As one expressed this matter:

This pericope begins with a temporal designation that explains that the events to follow are taking place on the same day as the previous events in chapter 20, though now in the evening. As we discussed before, the phrase “the first day of the week” makes this more than a chronological marker, for it simultaneously echoes again the Gospel’s creation motif. It is no wonder that the earliest Christians were convinced that this day, Sunday, the first day of the week, was the most appropriate day for the gathering of the church. Not only was it the day of the resurrected Lord, the day creation itself was reclaimed by God, but according to this pericope it was also the day the “church” met for the first time. While such a designation is a theological deduction, it is interesting that the gathered disciples also

qualified as a congregational quorum or minyan of ten men (no Judas or Thomas) according to Jewish regulations (cf. Numb. 14:27; Psa. 82).<sup>1</sup>

**Matthew Henry** (1662-1714) wrote that by Jesus Christ rising on the first day of the week, He sanctified it as the Christian Sabbath.

Here is a Christian Sabbath observed by the disciples, and owned by our Lord Jesus. The visit Christ made to His disciples was on *the first day of the week*. And the first day of the week is (I think) the only day of the week, or month, or year, that is ever mentioned by number in all the New Testament; and this is several times spoken of as a day religiously observed. Though it was said here expressly (v. 1) that Christ arose on *the first day of the week*, and it might have been sufficient to say here (v. 19), He appeared the same day at evening; yet, to put an honour upon the day, it is repeated, *being the first day of the week*; not that the apostles designed to put honour upon the day (they were yet in doubt concerning the occasion of it), but God designed to put honour upon it, by ordering it that they should be altogether, to receive Christ's first visit on that day. Thus, in effect, He blessed and sanctified that day, because in it the Redeemer rested.

We read that "when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled", Jesus appeared to them, standing "in the midst." They had the door locked because they were afraid of the Jews. After all, the Jewish leaders had arrested and crucified their Master, and it was likely that they, His disciples, would also be sought in order to be arrested. John declared this indirectly, "when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled, *for fear of the Jews*". One can understand why the disciples would be very cautious and fearful for what had transpired in recent days. One wrote,

God's people have been often obliged to *enter into their chambers, and shut their doors*, as here, *for fear of the Jews*. Persecution is allotted them, and retirement from persecution is allowed them; and then where shall we look for them but in *dens and caves of the earth*. It is a real grief, but no real reproach, to Christ's disciples, thus to abscond...

But further, "It is a comfort to Christ's disciples, when their solemn assemblies are reduced to privacy, that no doors can shut out Christ's presence from them."<sup>2</sup> The Lord graciously meets with His disciples whenever they gather together in His name.

Why had they gathered? John does not say. Perhaps it was due to the events of the day that had transpired. The tomb was empty, His grave clothes remaining, and Mary had testified that she had met and spoken with Jesus. Moreover, she had conveyed a message to them on behalf of Jesus. Jesus had instructed her, "go to My brethren and say to them, 'I am ascending to My Father and your Father, and to My God and your God'" (v. 17). We may assume that she had done so. And so, why these men gathered together this evening, we do not know precisely. Maybe they had gathered for prayer. It would seem that their intention was not to have a gathering for praise and worship, although that is what the Lord made of their gathering. To cite **Matthew Henry** again, he recorded these words respecting their gathering:

Here is a Christian assembly solemnized by the disciples, and also owned by the Lord Jesus. Probably the disciples met here for some religious exercise, to pray together; or, perhaps, they met to compare notes, and consider whether they had sufficient evidence of their Master's resurrection, and to consult what was now to be done, whether they should keep together or scatter; they met to know one another's minds, strengthen one another's hands, and concert proper measures to be taken in the present critical juncture. This meeting was private, because they durst not appear publicly, especially in a body (group). They met in a house, but they kept the door shut, that they might not be seen together, and that no one might come among them but such as they knew; for they feared the Jews, who would prosecute

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<sup>1</sup> Edward W. Klink, III, **John**. Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Zondervan, 2016), p. 858.

<sup>2</sup> Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the* (Fleming H. Revell Company), vol. 6.

the disciples as criminals, that they might seem to believe the lie they would deceive the world with, that *His disciples came by night, and stole Him away.*

But even as they had gathered secretly, securely, and privately, “*Jesus came and stood in the midst.*” It is clear that Jesus had suddenly, physically appeared to them. One moment they were alone; the next moment Jesus was standing alongside of them. “As His resurrection body passed through the grave-clothes (vs. 6-8), so it passed through the locked doors and simply ‘materialized.’”<sup>3</sup> It must have not only surprised them, but it must have startled them. But in order to quench their fears, the first words that came forth from Jesus was the declaration, “*Peace be with you.*” John’s point of emphasis was not just the miraculous way that Jesus appeared suddenly to them, but what He had said to them, “Peace be with you.” We may see that this is the case in that John recorded these words spoken by the Lord three different times in this one episode.

Verse 19. “Jesus came and stood in the midst, and said to them, ‘*Peace be with you.*’”

Verse 21. “So Jesus said to them again, ‘*Peace to you!*’”

Verse 26. “And after eight days His disciples were again inside, and Thomas with them. Jesus came, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, ‘*Peace to you!*’”

Let us remember the last time that our Lord was with these men and what occurred on that occasion. They had all abandoned Him and fled. His sheep had scattered and He was left to deal with His prosecutors and tormentors alone. But our Lord gave no word of reproof or rebuke to these men for their defection and departure; rather, He gave to them a pronouncement of peace.

The first words that our Lord spoke to the disciples afford a beautiful proof of His loving, merciful, tender, thoughtful, pitiful, and compassionate spirit. He said, “Peace be unto you.” That expression, in my opinion, must on no account be taken as a mere formal salutation, without meaning. It was intended to reassure and cheer the minds of the disciples, by exhibiting at once His mind towards them. Not a word of reproof, or rebuke, or fault-finding, or blame falls from our Lord’s lips, notwithstanding all their sad faint-heartedness and desertion on the preceding Thursday night. All is forgiven and forgotten. The very first word is “Peace.” This was almost the last word that our Lord had spoken on Thursday night before He prayed: “These things I have spoken, that in Me ye might have peace” (John 16:33). This was the last legacy He had left His disciples: “Peace I leave with you: My peace I give unto you. Let your hearts not be troubled” (John 14:27). Can we doubt that this comfortable word would cheer and calm the minds of the little company, when our Lord suddenly appeared?<sup>4</sup>

And so it is, if you are a disciple of Jesus Christ, that is, a true believer, but you have defected and departed from the Lord for a time, when He comes to restore you, He does so in mercy and kindness, and speaks to you in gracious words, declaring, “Peace be with you.”

Through these words our Lord Jesus took a commonly heard greeting—“peace”—and infused it with deep, far-reaching spiritual importance. By this word Jesus declared that all of the fruit and effects of His life and death had now come to them and was their present possession. It took His death to confer, and to assure, these benefits to His people. The death of the Testator of the will must take place before the inheritance can be distributed to the heirs stipulated in the will. It took His death to secure these benefits for His people. Jesus Christ is both the Testator and the Executer of His will in which His people are His heirs, due to inherit all that is His.

Now one would think that as soon as Jesus spoke these words, “Peace be to you”, that their fear would have dissipated. But this is not what occurred. John simply records what happened after Jesus had said these words to them. We read in **verse 20**, “*When He had said this, He showed them His hands and His side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord.*” But we read in Luke 24 details that John chose not to include. There we read of the two disciples joining the other disciples upon their return to Jerusalem after

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<sup>3</sup> Donald Carson, **The Gospel According to John** (William B. Eerdmans. 1991), p. 646.

<sup>4</sup> J. C. Ryle, **Expository Thoughts on John**, vol. 3 (The Banner of Truth Trust, 1987, orig. 1869), p. 440.

that had met and talked with the Lord on the road to Emmaus. We read in Luke 24:33ff that they were with the apostles on this occasion when the Lord had appeared to them.

<sup>33</sup>So they (the two disciple) rose up that very hour and returned to Jerusalem, and found the eleven and those who were with them gathered together, <sup>34</sup>saying, “The Lord is risen indeed, and has appeared to Simon!” <sup>35</sup>And they told about the things that had happened on the road, and how He was known to them in the breaking of bread.

<sup>36</sup>Now as they said these things, Jesus Himself stood in the midst of them, and said to them, “Peace to you.” <sup>37</sup>*But they were terrified and frightened, and supposed they had seen a spirit.* <sup>38</sup>*And He said to them, “Why are you troubled? And why do doubts arise in your hearts? <sup>39</sup>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.”*

<sup>40</sup>When He had said this, He showed them His hands and His feet. <sup>41</sup>But while they still did not believe for joy, and marveled, He said to them, “Have you any food here?” <sup>42</sup>So they gave Him a piece of a broiled fish and some honeycomb. <sup>43</sup>And He took it and ate in their presence. (Luke 24:33-43)

We may be thankful that we have four Gospels from which we may find many details that may not be recorded in any one of them.

But again, the emphasis of John is on our Lord’s words, “Peace be with you” (v. 19). This was the customary way that Jews greeted one another. It was an expression that connoted the desire that the peace of God would be experienced and enjoyed to the one addressed. It carried the idea that God would bless that one with “peace”, which is set forth in the Old Testament by the word “*shalom*.” Shalom carried the idea of a secure and blessed existence without danger or threat. But through the person and work of Christ, this idea of “peace” or “shalom” encompasses a far greater blessing, even a spiritual well-being and security, a state of blessing before God that could not be shaken, interrupted, or diminished. It was viewed as an essential blessing of the coming messianic kingdom, when all of Israel’s enemies would be overthrown and would no longer trouble or pose a threat to Israel’s well-being. It would signal a restored relationship (covenant) with God, which was the blessing of the promised kingdom. In Jesus’ pronouncement, He informed His disciples that the long-desired and anticipated age of peace had arrived through His death and resurrection from the dead.

The days before and during the time when Jesus ministered on the earth was not a time of peace between Israel and God, but rather it was a time when God had been warring against His people since the days of the Old Testament prophets. Because Israel had broken its covenant relationship with God that He had established with them at Mount Sinai, the curse of God had come upon them. Israel’s transgression (breaking) of its covenant with God incurred His wrath upon the nation. God had turned against them. God no longer regarded them and treated them as His people; God had begun to speak frequently of them as “this people” no longer, “My people.” But God had promised that He would raise up for Himself a faithful Servant who would redeem His people unto Himself. He would be a suffering Servant who would bear their sins, atone for their transgression against their covenant, thereby restore them to God’s favor, bringing them into a state of true peace with Himself. This is what we read in the fourth Servant song of Isaiah 52:13-53:12. Here is a portion of that prophecy declared 700+ years before the cross of Christ.

He was oppressed and He was afflicted,  
Yet He opened not His mouth;  
He was led as a lamb to the slaughter,  
And as a sheep before its shearers is silent,  
So He opened not His mouth.

<sup>8</sup>He was taken from prison and from judgment,  
And who will declare His generation?  
For He was cut off from the land of the living;  
***For the transgression of My people He was stricken.***

<sup>9</sup>And they made His grave with the wicked—

But with the rich at His death,  
Because He had done no violence,  
Nor was any deceit in His mouth.

<sup>10</sup>Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise Him;  
He has put Him to grief.  
When You make His soul an offering for sin,  
He shall see His seed, He shall prolong His days,  
And the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in His hand.

<sup>11</sup>He shall see the labor of His soul, and be satisfied.  
By His knowledge My righteous Servant shall justify many,  
***For He shall bear their iniquities.***

<sup>12</sup>Therefore I will divide Him a portion with the great,  
And He shall divide the spoil with the strong,  
Because He poured out His soul unto death,  
And He was numbered with the transgressors,  
And He bore the sin of many,  
And made intercession for the transgressors. (Isa. 53:7-12)

In the following chapter of Isaiah's prophecy we read of the announcement and celebration of what the Suffering Servant achieved for His people through His sacrificial death.

For the mountains shall depart  
And the hills be removed,  
But My kindness shall not depart from you,  
Nor shall ***My covenant of peace*** be removed,"  
Says the LORD, who has mercy on you...

And a bit farther God declared:

<sup>17</sup>No weapon formed against you shall prosper,  
And every tongue which rises against you in judgment  
You shall condemn.  
This is the heritage of the servants of the LORD,  
And their righteousness is from Me,"  
Says the LORD. (Isa. 54:10, 17)

Here in this upper room our Lord announced and pronounced to His disciples that His kingdom, characterized by a people at peace with God and God at peace with them, had been established through His death and resurrection, "for He Himself is our peace" (Eph. 2:14).

John recorded that Jesus showed His disciples the nail marks in His hands and His side that had been pierced. ***"He showed them His hands and His side."*** He had died, but here He was, standing before them and standing with them! But His coming forth from death unto life must have also convinced these men that the Lord had indeed overcome the world. Or as one put it, "He then displays to them His wounds, less to establish His identity than that their joy might be filled by the sight of the signs of His victory over the world" (16:33).<sup>5</sup>

This sight of Jesus' wounds convinced them that it was the Lord in His own body. He showed them the wounds He received from His cross. Thus He proved His love for them that He had died for them. But He also showed them by His wounds that even death itself would not prevent Him from achieving His

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<sup>5</sup> Edwyn Clement Hoskyns, **The Fourth Gospel** (Faber and Faber Limited, 1947), p. 544.

Father's will, in fact it was by that means God's peace was secured for them. Through our Lord's death and resurrection, He conquered and overcame death itself. Why should they fear? Death has no power over their Master and He has assured them that because of His death, death would never have power over them.

Many witnesses had seen Him die upon His cross just a few days beforehand. But now they are shown that this same Man is standing before them in the body which had been abused, battered, and crucified. The marks of His crucifixion remained on Him, and they will forever be so as ever present reminders of what He endured for our redemption. Moreover, when He returns at His second coming these marks will still be evident, for there will be those who see Him, the very ones who had "pierced Him." When Jesus had ascended into heaven not long after this appearance, He would even then enter the throne room of God bearing the marks of His sacrificial death; He "stood a Lamb as though it had been slain" (Rev. 5:6). Jesus would have them give a close inspection of His body in order to show that, indeed, it was He. After He had declared peace to them, He then "*showed them His hands and His side.*"

The disciples were convinced. "*Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord*" (v. 20b). And because we read these words and believe their truthfulness, and knowing that we stand in faith before our Savior just as His disciples were standing and hearing His words, we, too, are assured that we presently enjoy the peace of God through His death on our behalf. Because He lives, we will live also. It had not been long before this occasion that Jesus had told His disciples, "A little while longer and the world will see Me no more, but you will see Me. Because I live, you will live also. (John 14:19).

## **B. Jesus set before them the mission of God (v. 21)**

Jesus again mentions the peace that He had conferred upon them, but here He couples it with His commission of His apostles to bring salvation to the world. **Verse 21** records, "*So Jesus said to them again, 'Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you.'*" To what purpose did Jesus commission these men? Here are the words of **Donald Carson** (b. 1947):

Here it is the perfect obedience of the Son that is especially emphasized (e.g. 5:19-30; 8:29), an obedience that has already been made a paradigm for the relation of the believers to Jesus (15:9-10). Jesus was sent by His Father into the world (3:17) by means of the incarnation (1:14) with the end of saving the world (15:19), they must also be sent back into the world (20:21) in order to bear witness, along with the Paraclete (the Holy Spirit) (15:26-27) – though obviously there is no mention of the incarnation along the lines of 1:14, and any parallel must be certainly derivative. In so far as Jesus was entirely obedient to and dependent upon His Father, who sealed and sanctified Him and poured out the Spirit upon Him without limit (1:32; 3:34; 4:34; 5:19; 6:27; 10:36; 17:4), so far also does He constitute the definitive model for His disciples: they have become children of God (1:12-13; 3:3, 5; 20:17), the Spirit has been promised to them (chs. 14-16) and will soon be imparted to them, they have been sanctified by Christ and will be sanctified by God's Word (17:17) as they grow in unqualified obedience to and dependence upon their Lord.<sup>6</sup>

They were on the one hand no longer to fear. They were no longer to cower together in closed, confined quarters, fearful that harm might come to them. Rather, they were to go forth into the world as heralds of His Kingdom, carrying forth this message of peace with God through faith in Him. The meaning of the Greek word **ἀπόστολος** (*apostolos*), translated, "apostle", is the noun meaning, "one who is sent forth." Jesus declared that the Father had *sent* Him. This is why Jesus Christ is called "the Apostle" of our confession. Hebrews 3:1 reads, "Therefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider *the Apostle* and High Priest *of our confession, Christ Jesus.*" God the Father had sent Him into the world to save His people from their sins. And now Jesus was sending these men forth as His Father had sent Him. They were to go into the world as His ambassadors, bearing His message on His behalf.

Notice that Jesus Christ claimed to have the same sending authority as His Father. This alone speaks of His equality with the Father, for He is the Son of God.

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<sup>6</sup> Carson, pp. 648f.

He had a power to send them equal to that which the Father had to send Him. Here the force of the comparison seems to lie. By the same authority that the Father sent Me do I send you. This proves the Godhead of Christ; the commissions He gave were of equal authority with those which the Father gave, and as valid and effectual to all intents and purposes, equal with those He gave to the Old-Testament prophets in visions. The commissions of Peter and John, by the plain word of Christ, are as good as those of Isaiah and Ezekiel, by *the Lord sitting on His throne*; nay, equal with that which was given to the Mediator Himself for His work. Had He an incontestable authority, and an irresistible ability, for His work? so had they for theirs. Or thus, *As the Father hath sent Me* is, as it were, the recital of His power; by virtue of the authority given Him as a Mediator, He gave authority to them, as His ministers, to act for Him, and in His name, with the children of men; so that those who received them, or rejected them, received or rejected Him, and Him that sent Him (13:20). (Matthew Henry)

But it would good for us to understand that Jesus was not telling these men that they were about to replace Him, that He had accomplished His work and now they have a work to do separate from His. Rather, we should understand that Jesus is continuing His work, but that here He is calling forth His disciples to work with Him in this world-wide mission of saving the lost from their sins. This is overtly stated in the manner that Jesus spoke these words. John recorded the words of Jesus very precisely. When Jesus said, “*As the Father has sent Me*”, the perfect tense of the verb for “sent” is used. The verbal idea conveyed by this tense is that God the Father had sent Him in the past, but that state of having been sent continues in force. Jesus is acting as the one who has been sent on a mission and that to the entire world, and here He is calling forth His disciples to join Him in this mission. In John 17:18 Jesus had prayed to His Father, “As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world.”

It is probably wrong to think of the disciples simply *replacing* Jesus now that He is returning to His Father. The perfect tense in ‘As the Father has sent Me suggests, at the risk of pedantry<sup>7</sup>, that Jesus is in an ongoing state of ‘sentness’, Just because He ascends to His Father does not mean He is no longer the ‘Sent one’ *par excellence* (cf. 9:7). Thus Christ’s disciples do not take over Jesus’ mission: His mission continues and is effective in their ministry (14:12-14). ‘The apostles were commissioned to carry on Christ’s work, and not to begin a new one’.<sup>8</sup>

But how shall they go forth? Here they were, hunted and frightened, few in number with little strength and little influence. But the Lord would not only commission them, but He would empower them for their work.

### C. Jesus bestowed upon them the Spirit of God (v. 22)

After He declared that He was sending them into the world, we read in **verse 22**, “*And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit.’*” Jesus commissioned them, then He empowered them by giving them the Holy Spirit.

The Son’s mission in the world is entrusted to them, since He is returning to the Father; but as the Son had received the Spirit in unrestricted fulness for the discharge of His own mission (John 1:32-34; 3:34), so they now receive the Spirit for the discharge of theirs. At an earlier stage in Jesus’ ministry the evangelist had said, “the Spirit was not yet present, because Jesus had not yet been glorified’ (John 7:39): now the time for imparting the Spirit has come.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> i.e. giving too much attention to detail that is not important or relevant.

<sup>8</sup> Carson, p. 649.

<sup>9</sup> F. F. Bruce, *The Gospel of John* (William B. Eerdmans, 1983), pp. 391f.

Now with this event questions are commonly posed such as this: How does this imparting and empowering of the Holy Spirit relate to what would occur after some weeks on the Day of Pentecost? Some have suggested that this empowering of the Spirit was to enable His disciples to live for Him and to understand and receive our Lord's post resurrection instruction for the 40 days prior to His ascension into heaven, which occurred ten days before Pentecost, the event which is recorded in Acts 1.

It would seem that John was showing the connection of the death and resurrection of Jesus with the promised age of the Holy Spirit that are set forth in the Old Testament prophets. It indicates that the Messianic Kingdom age has dawned upon the world. This is not a replacement of Pentecost, but it does anticipate it and show forth the need for it. Perhaps it could be said that here Jesus empowered His apostles and on the Day of Pentecost He empowered His entire church along with the apostles. The point is this: the one that Jesus calls forth to a task, He enables and empowers that one to fulfill His will.

But this event may also be another allusion to the new creation drawn alongside the original creation. Just as God breathed into the lifeless body of Adam and he became a living soul (Gen. 2:7), so Jesus breathes into His disciples spiritual life and vitality. We can draw again on **Matthew Henry**:

Christ here seems to refer to the creation of man at first, by the breathing of the breath of life into him (Gen. 2:7), and to intimate that He himself was the author of that work, and that the spiritual life and strength of ministers and Christians are derived from Him, and depend upon Him, as much as the natural life of Adam and His seed. As *the breath of the Almighty* gave life to man and began the old world, so the breath of the mighty Saviour gave life to His ministers, and began a new world (Job 33:4).

But Jesus not only gave His disciples a commission and power, but He also gave them authority to fulfil their mission.

#### **D. Jesus declared their authority in their service to God (v. 23)**

We have the words of Jesus recorded in **verse 23**, ***"If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."*** Sadly, these words have been twisted and abused by many through church history. One question that might be asked is this: Were these words to the apostles as apostles or to the institution of the church(es) going forward? The answer should probably entail both.

One particular branch of the power given them by their commission particularized (v. 23): *"Whosoever sins you remit, in the due execution of the powers you are entrusted with, they are remitted to them, and they may take the comfort of it; and whosoever sins you retain, that is, pronounce unpardoned and the guilt of them bound on, they are retained, and the sinner may be sure of it, to his sorrow."* Now this follows upon their receiving the Holy Ghost; for, if they had not had an extraordinary spirit of discerning, they had not been fit to be entrusted with such an authority; for, in the strictest sense, ***this is a special commission to the apostles themselves*** and the first preachers of the gospel, who could distinguish who were in the *gall of bitterness and bond of iniquity*, and who were not. By virtue of this power, Peter struck Ananias and Sapphira dead, and Paul struck Elymas blind. ***Yet it must be understood as a general charter to the church*** and her ministers, not securing an infallibility of judgment to any man or company of men in the world, but encouraging the faithful stewards of the mysteries of God to stand to the gospel they were sent to preach, for that God Himself will stand to it. The apostles, in preaching remission, must begin at Jerusalem, though she had lately brought upon herself the guilt of Christ's blood: "Yet you may declare their sins remitted upon gospel terms." And Peter did so (Acts 2:38; 3:19). Christ, being risen for our justification, sends His gospel heralds to proclaim the jubilee begun, the act of indemnity now passed; and by this rule men shall be judged (John 12:48; Rom. 2:16; James 2:12). God will never alter this rule of judgment, nor vary from it; those whom the gospel acquits shall be acquitted, and those whom the gospel condemns shall be condemned, which puts immense honour upon the ministry, and should put immense courage into ministers. (Matthew Henry)

This authority is similar to what we read of the authority entrusted to the churches. This is shown in a word that Jesus gave first to Peter the apostle, but later He declared that this same authority was given to the local church. First, here is our Lord's words to Peter, in Matthew 16:13-20:

<sup>13</sup>When Jesus came into the region of Caesarea Philippi, He asked His disciples, saying, "Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?"

<sup>14</sup>So they said, "Some say John the Baptist, some Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets."

<sup>15</sup>He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?"

<sup>16</sup>Simon Peter answered and said, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

<sup>17</sup>Jesus answered and said to him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven. <sup>18</sup>And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. <sup>19</sup>***And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.***"

<sup>20</sup>Then He commanded His disciples that they should tell no one that He was Jesus the Christ.

Jesus declared that He would build His church in the faith and upon the confession that He is the Christ, the Son of God. He then declared that Peter (and the apostles) had authority granted that they could either pronounce God's favor or curse upon people based upon their representing Him among His people. God would endorse or confirm the actions taken by them in their apostolic claims and declarations.

But then we read in Matthew 18 that our Lord gave this same authority to the gathered local church in its deliberations and assertions. Jesus said these words regarding church action against an unrepentant, sinning member:

<sup>15</sup>"Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother. <sup>16</sup>But if he will not hear, take with you one or two more, that 'by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.' <sup>17</sup>And if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the church. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector.

<sup>18</sup>"***Assuredly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.***

<sup>19</sup>"Again I say to you that if two of you agree on earth concerning anything that they ask, it will be done for them by My Father in heaven. <sup>20</sup>For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them." (Matt. 18:15-20)

This was the same kind of authority voiced by Jesus to His apostles here in Matthew 16:19 and here in John 20:23, "If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."

I believe that **Leon Morris** (1914-2006) addressed the matter well in his commentary on John's Gospel:

On the basis of the gift of the Spirit whom the Lord Jesus has given to His church, that church is now given authority to declare that certain sins are forgiven and certain sins are retained. This is not to be understood in any mechanical way. It is the result of the indwelling Spirit and takes place only as that Spirit directs. The verse is sometimes understood as though it gave the apostles, and through them the individual Christian minister, the power to forgive or not to forgive the sins of individual men. There are, however, objections to this. In the first place it overlooks the fact that there were almost certainly others that the apostles present... The gift Christ made was made to the church as a whole. We have no reason at all for thinking that those present formed a "ministry". They were rather representatives of the whole church... Those who refer the words to the ministry usually concentrate on the power of absolution. They think of the Christian priest as a man with a God-given authority to declare to men that their sins are forgiven. It ought not to be overlooked that the power to declare sins forgiven is on all fours with the

power to declare them retrained. I do not think that this verse teaches that any individual Christian minister has the God-given authority to say to a sinner, "I refuse to forgive your sins. They are retained." But unless this can be said the words about forgiveness cannot be said. The one goes with the other.<sup>10</sup>

God alone forgives sins. He has given authority to His churches to declare that those who truly repent of their sins and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior, have their sins forgiven them. But of those who fail or refuse to repent of their sins and fail or refuse to believe on Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, the churches have authority from Christ to declare to them that they remain in their sins and are damned by Him for their sins.

May our lord empower us with His Holy Spirit that we would both proclaim faithfully His gospel to the world to which He has sent us and may He give us the grace of wisdom to know to whom we may declare the forgiveness of their sins by God and to know to whom we should declare that they remain lost in their sins.

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Yours, O LORD, is the greatness,  
The power and the glory,  
The victory and the majesty;  
For all that is in heaven and in earth is Yours;  
Yours is the kingdom, O LORD,  
And You are exalted as head over all. (1 Chron. 29:11)

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<sup>10</sup> Leon Morris, **The Gospel According to John** (William B. Eerdmans, 1971), pp. 847-849.