

John 20:19-23

Sent Out by Jesus

Resurrection Day Commission

The Risen Jesus Imparts the Spirit
Jesus Calls and Equips his 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."

Last Sunday we saw what happened on that first Sunday morning when Jesus rose from the dead. His faithful follower Mary Magdalene was the first to discover the empty tomb. She ran and told the disciples, and Peter and John ran to the tomb to see what had happened. There they also saw the empty tomb, but they went in and saw the linen cloths that had been wrapped around Jesus' body – but there was no body in the graveclothes. There was also the face cloth folded up and neatly placed by itself to one side. Perplexed, the two disciples went back to their home.

But the distraught Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. Where had they taken her Lord? Then a man appeared before her. She thought it was the gardener, but when he spoke her name she realized it was Jesus himself! She was overwhelmed with relief and fell down and grabbed his feet and ankles. It was him! It was her Lord! She could be with him again like before!

But then Jesus told her to stop clinging to him, to let him go, for he would be ascending to his Father. He told her to go and tell the disciples that he would be ascending to "his Father and their Father." So Mary went back and told the disciples that she had seen the Lord. But they didn't believe her. They probably thought she was so overcome with grief that she had imagined she saw him, or she saw someone else, or something like that. But they scoffed at her news.

Actually, the fact that after his resurrection Jesus first appeared to Mary Magdalene and a few other women disciples also, which we read about in the other gospels, is confirmation of the factualness of the scriptural record. Since the testimony of women was probably considered less reliable than that of men in that culture, the fact that the gospels did not shy away from stating what actually happened confirms that the record was not altered to make it more believable in the prevailing culture of that day. God was pleased to reveal the resurrection of his Son to those whom men would not have chosen. The wisdom of God is greater than the wisdom of man. Hallelujah!

These were the events of that first Sunday morning, that resurrection morning. But the day was not over. Jesus appeared three more times on that day. He appeared to Peter, and he appeared to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus.

And then on that Sunday evening he appears again, this time to the group of disciples. This is where we take up our narrative today in John 20:19-23.

We read in John 1:19: **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."**

There are three great truths that I want us to see today in this passage:

I. The Appearance of the Risen Jesus to his disciples

II. The Commissioning of the Disciples

III. The Impartation of the Spirit to the Disciples

Let's consider, first, The Appearance of the Risen Jesus to His Disciples

The disciples' minds and emotions were in a state of turmoil. There was Peter and James and Andrew and Bartholomew and six others. They were all there except for Thomas. All were grieving over Jesus' crucifixion, they were confused about this message from the women that they had seen Jesus. What was going on? What had happened to Jesus' body? The doors to the room where they were staying were locked as they feared for their lives.

Then it happened! There he was ! He was standing in their midst! He was not bowed down and beaten up, but stood tall and strong. He not only stood before them, but he spoke to them and said, "Peace be with you." Jesus was communicating with them. He expressed concern for them – extending peace to them. This was no dead man; he was very much alive and well, and vibrant with life.

The expression that he proclaimed upon them, "peace be with you" was on the surface the standard, customary Jewish greeting. It was "Shalom" – "may health and prosperity and well-being be with you." But when Jesus said, "Peace be with you," there was much more in his meaning - the whole background of his life and death and resurrection lies behind this benediction, this pronouncement of blessing on their lives.

Jesus was issuing them peace passed on what he had just accomplished for them, his death for their sins, his resurrection to conquer death and give them eternal life. It was peace being given from the Son of God to his disciples because of what he had won for them. Death was defeated, Satan's power was destroyed, evil's chains were broken, sin had been dealt a mortal blow. All the benefits of reconciliation with the holy God, of forgiveness of sins, of removal of guilt and condemnation, of the bestowal of eternal life, the granting of peace and joy and holiness and righteousness - all these things were wrapped up in Jesus' pronouncement to them, "Peace be with you."

Wm Henricksen describes this peace as ...(in John 14:27): *“The absence of spiritual unrest and that assurance of salvation and of God’s loving presence under all circumstances which results from exercising faith in God and in his Son and from the contemplation of his gracious promises.”* p. 287

But Jesus not only stood tall among them and spoke to them, but he now showed them his body – he showed them his hands and his side. Why was he doing that? He was showing them the wounds from the crucifixion. God in his sovereignty and power had ordained that these crucifixion wounds would remain on the body of his resurrected Son. God could have healed these wounds and taken them away, but he allowed them to remain. It seems even in heaven Jesus will carry those wounds. We read in Rev. 5:6 John’s vision of the Christ: *“⁶ And between the throne and the four living creatures and among the elders I saw ^(a) a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain.”*

These wounds showed that his was the same Jesus who had hung on the cross. Had Jesus appeared to them without the wounds, it could be questioned: was this really Jesus resurrected from the dead? What happened to his wounds from being nailed to the cross and being pierced by the soldier’s spear? The wounds confirmed that this was the same body, the same person who had hung on the cross. Oh, the wisdom of God! He kept these wounds on Jesus’ body to show the disciples that this was their Lord.

The death of Christ for our sins is so crucial to the whole reason for his coming to earth that we need never forget it or lessen it. Along with his resurrection from the dead, we have the centerpiece and foundation of our salvation. The disciples saw those wounds and it seems one day we will also. And what shall we do on that day? Like Mary Magdalene, we will fall down and worship him!

Notice that this demonstration of the identity of Jesus was not without effect. The last sentence in verse 20 says, **“Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord.”** God’s plan to display the reality of the resurrection of his Son was not lost on these disciples! All these demonstrations of his resurrection from the dead: Jesus miraculously appearing to them behind locked doors, standing tall before them, speaking peace to them, showing them the wounds from the cross – all these things removed all doubt from their minds. The scripture doesn’t say, “the disciples were still doubtful” or “they were struggling to believe” or “they were reluctant to accept the evidence,” but what does it say? **“They were glad when they saw the Lord.”** They were no longer sad and grieved and upset – but their whole outlook was changed – from sadness to gladness. From depression to exaltation. From worry to confidence. From fear to courage.

So the appearance of the risen Jesus confirmed to the disciples that he really had risen from the dead. The report of Mary Magdalene and the other women was true. The tomb was empty because Jesus was alive!

Perhaps they thought about it at that time, but we know they realized this later – that Jesus' resurrection was predicted in the Old Testament. The resurrection of the Messiah was foretold. We read in Psalm 16:9-11

***Therefore my heart is glad, and my whole being rejoices;
my flesh also dwells secure.***

***¹⁰ For you will not abandon my soul to Sheol,
nor let your holy one see corruption.***

***¹¹ You make known to me the path of life;
in your presence there is fullness of joy;
at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.***

What we see here in this Psalm is the Messiah speaking to Yahweh. Peter, in his sermon on the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2, points out that David, the writer of this Psalm, died and was buried. But the one speaking in this Psalm is the Messiah speaking to Yahweh – expressing his confidence that he would not suffer corruption of his body in the grave but would be raised to enter the presence of God.

So besides all these physical manifestations of Christ's resurrection, there is the element of prophetic fulfillment also. Christ's R'n from the dead was predicted in the Old Testament and confirmed to his disciples by his physical appearance to them.

He appeared in a physical body to his disciples, yet as the resurrected Son of God his body had taken on new powers that his previously incarnated body did not have. He could now, for example, appear and disappear. So his body of his incarnation had been enhanced and empowered in his resurrection body. The apostle Paul describes Jesus' resurrection body in Philippians 3:21 as "**his glorious body.**" Christ's resurrection body shown forth the glory of God.

So we see that the Appearance of the Risen Jesus to his disciples confirmed to them that he had truly risen from the dead.

Next, in v. 21 we see...

II. The Commissioning of the Disciples

In v. 21, Jesus says to them for the second time, "**Peace be with you.**" But this seems to be a different kind of peace. The first peace he proclaimed upon them in v. 19 was the peace of comfort and assurance – to let them know he had risen from the dead. This second issuance of peace is the peace of commissioning to service. It is the message: you are forgiven for your unfaithfulness to me, for deserting me at the cross. But I am restoring you and putting you back into my service. Be at peace, for you are my children and I will use you for my glory. What does Jesus say? **Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.**"

One of Jesus' constant themes in his preaching was that he had been sent by the Father. For example, we read in John 12: 44-46, "*And Jesus cried out and said, "Whoever believes in me, believes not in me, but in him who sent me. And whoever sees me sees him who sent me. I have come into the world as light, so that whoever believes in me may not remain in darkness. "*"

John 17:18 Jesus said in what we call his "high priestly prayer," to his Father, "**As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world.**"

Indeed, Jesus had sent out his disciples into the towns and villages to preach and teach and heal and deliver people from demons. We read for example, in Mark 3;14-15 - ***And he appointed twelve (whom he also named apostles) so that they might be with him and he might send them out to preach¹⁵ and have authority to cast out demons.***

Jesus had sent out the twelve, later he sent out 72 of his disciples. So, as the Father had sent him down from heaven and sent him into the world to preach and heal and deliver, so Jesus now issues a fresh commissioning command to his disciples after his resurrection, **As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.**"

Now to those who had deserted him, who had not stood by him in the Garden of Gethsemane in his agonizing prayer as he faced the cross, who had fled when the soldiers came to arrest him, who had not stood by him at his trials before the Jewish and Roman officials, and who had not stood by him at the foot of the cross – to this bunch deserters who had left him alone in all these situations, this was very good news. Jesus still embraced them as his disciples and is sending them out on mission. "Peace, my friends, I forgive you for all that times you failed me. I died on the cross and rose from the dead to forgive you of these sins and all other sins you committed against me. But take heart. I want to send you out again, I want to re-enlist you into my service, I want to use you for my glory."

Remember the words Jesus had told Mary in the garden, "...go to my brothers and tell them that I am ascending..." John 20:17. Here is the same message. He knows that we are frail and weak, but he wants to use these imperfect vessels for his glory in the earth. ***He wants to use you and me.*** Oh, what a gracious Savior is Christ our Lord! Let us worship and serve him and adore him, now and forever. Amen!

So we have seen...

I. The Appearance of the Risen Jesus to his disciples

II. The Commissioning of the Disciples to the service of the gospel

And now. let's look at ...

III. The Impartation of the Spirit to the Disciples

"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."

What we see here is the fulfillment of the prophecies that Jesus gave earlier in his ministry about the gift of the Holy Spirit to his people.

John 14:16-17:

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.

During the disciples' ministry as they served with Jesus for those three years, the Holy Spirit was with them and enabling them to preach and teach, and heal diseases, and deliver people from demons. All these wonderful works could only be accomplished by the work of the Holy Spirit. But as yet the Holy Spirit had not entered their hearts to abide there and live there permanently.

After all, this was the ancient promise of Yahweh to his people:

Ezek. 36:26-27

26 And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. 27 And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.

God's promise to his people is that he would "put his Spirit within them."

Our Lord Jesus Christ, was the Messiah, that is, the anointed one of God, the one anointed of the Holy Spirit. And he was the one whom John the Baptist said would baptize not in water, but in "the Holy Spirit and fire." All of God's people were to receive the indwelling Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit was active among the people of God in the Old Testament, under the Old Covenant, but he did not permanently indwell them. The permanent indwelling of the Spirit would await the work of Christ; his death and resurrection were the prerequisite and foundation for the impartation, the giving of the indwelling presence of the Spirit.

Recall John 7:37-39 - ***37 On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and cried out, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. 38 Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.'" 39 Now this he said about the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were to receive, for as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.***

Jesus is clear here; he was going to give his Spirit to his people. But he had not yet given him at that time. The giving of his Spirit would await another time, the time after he would be glorified. But now the time had arrived. Verse 22:

22 And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit.

This action of Jesus recalls what God did for Adam in Gen. 2:7, - ***then the Lord God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature.***

What the Lord God had done for Adam, Jesus now does for his disciples: he breathes on them and gives them the Holy Spirit. From the depths of his being Jesus is pouring forth the Holy Spirit into the hearts and lives of his disciples. What greater gift could he give them?!

He had been glorified by his suffering on the cross and his resurrection from the dead. So now he was ready to give his Spirit to his disciples. But notice the context in which he gave the Spirit. It was in the context of his commissioning them to Gospel service. The giving of the Spirit was not only for their own blessed spiritual communion with God but for service to God, in order to make Christ known to the Jews and Gentile nations.

It is similar to the reason they were to be empowered with the outpouring on the Day of Pentecost some 50 days later - to enable them to be his witnesses to the ends of the earth.

And so Jesus goes on to say in. v. 23: ***23 If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld.***

Now the Roman Catholic church likes to run with this verse and use it for justifying their priests' authority to pronounce or withhold forgiveness to those confessing their sins to the priests. But the Biblical understanding is to view this in relation to the proclamation of the gospel and the call to faith and repentance.

Those who do respond by repenting of their sins and placing their faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, receive forgiveness of sins. Those who do embrace Jesus Christ, remain in their sins without forgiveness.

So the impartation of the Holy Spirit as Jesus breathed on his disciples was a fulfillment of the New Covenant established in Jesus' blood which include the permanent, indwelling presence of the Spirit in the heart of the believer. This anointing of the Spirit equipped the disciples and equips all believers to proclaim the Gospel and announce forgiveness of sins to all who will come in repentance and faith to Jesus Christ.

Upon the authority of God's Word, we can declare to all people that if they come to Christ and confess him as their own Lord, he will save them, forgive them of their sins, and give them eternal life in fellowship with himself.

So on this resurrection day evening the reality of Jesus Christ's physical, bodily resurrection from the dead is made clearer and further confirmed to the disciples. We have seen...

I. The Appearance of the Risen Jesus to his disciples

II. The Commissioning of the Disciples to carry on the work of Jesus as he will be ascending back to the Father.

III. The Impartation of the Spirit to the Disciples for both their own personal blessedness and assurance of fellowship with God, as well as their equipping for proclamation of the Gospel and the announcement of the forgiveness of sins through faith in Jesus Christ, the risen Son of God.

Let us be assured that Jesus rose, that he appeared bodily and physically to his disciples, that he commissioned them to step in and continue his own ministry of preaching, healing and delivering. It was the impartation of the Holy Spirit which enabled them to do this.

Let us join the disciples back then, and the church throughout the ages up to the present time to worship the risen Jesus and to receive his Holy Spirit.

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