

## PROVIDENCE CHURCH

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### **Jesus' Appearance to His Disciples**

**Pastor Ty Blackburn**

**John 20:19-23**

**June 12, 2016**

Please turn with me in your Bibles to John 20. As you do, I want to just say a word of welcome to you if you are new to Providence. We are delighted that you're here. And if it is your first time, or you've been coming for a little while, and haven't filled out a guest registration card, that's the yellow card in your bulletin, we'd love to ask you to fill that out. We'd like to have a record of your visit, and also the opportunity to send you some literature that we hope will be a blessing to you. So if you'd fill that out, and give it to one of our ushers before you leave, we'd deeply appreciate that.

We do have some special guests today, Jess and Melissa Arnds, and their three children are with us—Felicity, John, and Adeleine. Jess is taking the position of our full-time Associate Pastor beginning in July. So they've moved into town from California, just this last weekend. We are delighted to have them here, and excited about what the Lord is going to be doing in their lives, as they join to be a part of our church. But he will begin in July, he's just doing a little part-time work this month, kind of getting settled, getting used to Georgia from California, quite a transition. He said it's not as bad because he was born in Montana, so he is not really a true California person, you know, the land of fruits and nuts, or whatever they say about California. So it just affected him slightly. No, but we are thankful that the Lord has brought them to be a part of our fellowship, and we are really thankful also that our part-time Associate Pastor for the last six years, Steven Gaines, has agreed to stay on for a period of time, to overlap with Jess, and to help us with the transition. So continuing the work that he's been doing here at Providence for the last six years, and helping to make that transition smooth. So we praise God for His goodness to us at the church.

Now, turning to John 20, we're going to be looking at Verses 19-23 this morning, and as we do, the interesting thing, I pointed out in the first section, the first resurrection appearance, John basically presents to us four resurrection appearances of the Lord Jesus Christ, four times that the resurrected Christ appears. Now there were more, of course, but he presents these four as a part of carrying forth his message that Jesus is truly the Son of God, and that believing you will have life in His name. I mentioned when we looked at the last resurrection appearance, His first resurrection appearance was to Mary Magdalene. We read

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about that in the first 18 verses of the 20<sup>th</sup> chapter of John, and I mentioned at the beginning that as we go through these appearances, one of the things you'll want to watch, that it seems that the apostle was calling out for us, is watch the difference that coming into contact with Christ makes. That he will emphasize in each appearance, to each person, or group of people, their circumstances before they meet Christ, the resurrected Christ. Then there will be the contact with the risen Jesus, and then there will be some transformation that happens. We saw that with Mary Magdalene, we saw the emphasis on sorrow, her great sorrow, and that was swallowed up by unspeakable joy.

So look with me now, we're going to see that the disciples are going to be moving from a sense of fear, a sense of bewilderment, a sense of helplessness and hopelessness, to a sense of mission, and it all comes because they encounter the risen Christ. It is a very relevant message for us, particularly in our time, because I think in many ways our circumstances are like theirs, that first resurrection Sunday, that first Easter Sunday. Imagine what has happened to them.

Now we know that the ten are gathered. We are going to find out in the next passage that Thomas was not with them. Remember there were 12 disciples, Judas has betrayed Christ so there are 11. Well Thomas is not with them, so there are ten. The ten are gathered together and apparently with some other disciples. Possibly some of the ladies are there too, Mary Magdalene, and others, they are not mentioned, but it is certainly a likely possibility. We know from Luke's parallel account in Luke 24, that the two disciples on the road to Emmaus are with the disciples now. John doesn't mention them; Luke tells us about that. He tells us a story of the appearance of Jesus on the road to Emmaus. Remember those two disciples that are walking along, talking about the things that have happened in Jerusalem? Maybe they had gotten word that Christ may have been risen. They are discussing that, they are talking about the crucifixion and all that has happened, and they are just kind of in a state of bewilderment. Jesus appears to them, walks with them. They then go back to tell the ten that night, Luke tells us. As they are recounting, Luke tells us, as they are recounting, Jesus appears. Now John doesn't bother giving us those details because his emphasis is slightly different. Like any two people who experience the same event, you retell it slightly differently because of what hit you in the moment. And so John's account we have in Verses 19-23.

***John 20:19-23 ~ So when it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and when the doors were shut where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in their midst and \*said to***

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***them, “Peace be with you.” 20 And when He had said this, He showed them both His hands and His side. The disciples then rejoiced when they saw the Lord. 21 So Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you; as the Father has sent Me, I also send 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, their sins have been forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they have been retained.”***

Let’s go to the Lord in prayer.

*Father, we thank You for the preciousness of Your word, the riches of Your grace, the promise of Your Spirit to help us now. As we attend to Your word, may Your Spirit illuminate our minds, our hearts, to see and to understand wonderful things from Your word, and to be changed. We pray this in His name, in Jesus’ name, Amen.*

The big change here, what we’re going to focus on is the disciples are in a room with locked doors, for fear of the Jews. And what Jesus does is come to them and say, He says several things, and we’re going to look at all that He says, but essentially He says, “As the Father sent Me, so I send you.” That was not what they were probably wanting to hear that night because they were retreating for self-protection, and Jesus is saying, “You’ve got to go out into the world, and the same way the Father sent Me, I send you.” They were, at the end of that day, they had heard that Jesus, from Mary Magdalene, had seen the Lord. They had her testimony. Many believed that Jesus had appeared to Peter also some time on that first Sunday because of what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15:5, that He appeared to Cephas, and then to the 12. Cephas, another name for Peter, one of his other names. So that before He appeared to the apostles, He appeared to Cephas.

So He has appeared to Mary Magdalene, He has appeared to Peter, He has appeared to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus. Imagine now, what they’ve been through that weekend. The torrent, the storm, the hurricane that has come upon them when they saw their Master taken from them, arrested, they saw the crowds that had been praising Him a week before turn upon Him and scream, “Crucify Him! Crucify Him!” They had seen the wrath of God poured out upon the Son of God. They didn’t understand exactly what was happening, they just saw an incredible force of evil just sweep up their Master. They had not done well; they had not fared well through it. Only John remained at the cross, as far as we can tell

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from reading the Gospels, maybe strengthened by those courageous women around him. The rest of the apostles have fled. Peter has even denied Christ three times.

And so they're in this room, it makes sense that they would have a meeting that night, doesn't it? What in the world is going on? Mary Magdalene said she saw the Lord. Why don't we see the Lord now? What is going on? What is happening?" Then these two disciples rush in from Emmaus to tell them what they experienced. There has to be a sense of bewilderment, excitement, confusion, some trepidation because if Jesus is risen, and we've done such a poor job of staying beside Him, He may be very angry with us.

But what John focuses on is their fear of the Jews. The reason that their doors were shut, that is the doors were locked, is for fear of the Jews. That's a very reasonable fear. They saw the Jewish Sanhedrin, the rulers of the Jews, their rage against Jesus finally unleashed, and it stirred up the people so that Christ was swept away, and they know that reasonably they would be next. So for fear of the Jews, they are behind locked doors, they've retreated. The world has become a very uncomfortable place for them to be as followers of Jesus. In fact, what I want us to do as we consider this, the three points this morning, we're first of all going to note *Where Jesus Finds Them*. We are going to do three W's—*Where Jesus Finds Them*, *What Jesus Tells Them*, and *What Jesus Gives Them*.

### 1) Where Jesus Finds Them:

Where He finds them is hiding, this first point, *Where Jesus Finds Them*, He finds them in hiding behind locked doors. They are afraid, they are not thinking about the mission that He had sent them on earlier, "Go and preach the Gospel." That is the last thing they are thinking about. They are thinking about their personal safety, their well-being, their world has been turned upside down. I think for us, that is something that we can relate to. Don't you sometimes feel like that, especially those of us who have been around a little while especially can see this, the world is becoming, America is becoming an increasingly uncomfortable place to be as a Christian, isn't it? I mean, we see more and more darkness, morally, it is amazing the speed at which the decline is happening, isn't it? Intellectually, people can't even seem to think logically. I mean, some people can, but it is amazing, this growing number that are living with contradictions all over the place, and all of that is a reflection of the spiritual darkness that people are becoming more and more hostile to God, and to His word, more and more hostile to Christ. So the world is becoming an increasingly uncomfortable place, it is becoming an

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increasingly frightening place, it is becoming an increasingly undesirable place to be.

I mean, do you want to hang out with the people of the world? I'm not advocating that He is saying go out and hang out, that's not really the right word. But I mean, in many ways, we are much more comfortable among ourselves, aren't we? And that is actually reasonable and natural. I mean, Jesus told the disciples in John 15:19, "You are not of this world, even as I am not of this world." He prayed in His 'High Priestly Prayer', in John 17:16, "Father, they are not of this world, even as I am not of this world." That when you become a follower of Christ, when God changes your heart, like we saw the testimony of two young people today say, "I now have been born again. I've given my heart to Christ." What has happened? They move from the domain of darkness into the Kingdom of God's beloved Son, the Kingdom of Light. They were dead, now they are alive. And so the Bible speaks of us as strangers and aliens in this world. We are fitted for Heaven; our home is Heaven. We are strangers, aliens, passing through.

And don't you sometimes feel, when you are away from home, I mean, a lot of times when you are away from home you are having vacation or something, so it's really good, you enjoy that. If you've been to another country, we've had the blessing of being overseas a couple times in places where not many folks spoke English. Particularly in France, if they did, they weren't letting on that they did. I kind of suspected that maybe some did, it was university and nobody was acting like they spoke English. I thought, "Really, nobody has had any English here at college?" But anyway, that is another story. But when you are somewhere, and you can't speak the language, it makes you uncomfortable. When the train is different, when the food is different, the customs are different. One of the things I wanted when we were in Europe, we went to Italy a few years back and visited our missionary over there, Johnny Gravino, one of the things I was looking forward to so much after, I'd been over in Europe about ten days, was a big Coke with a lot of ice in it. You ask for ice, a couple of cubes, I was like, "What's that?" Anyway, sorry, I digress, but that is just one example of how we feel out of place when we are not at home.

But for us, it is a fundamental paradigm shift in the very fabric of our being. We are not at home in a fallen world, so it is an undesirable place to be, it is an uncomfortable place to be, it is a frightening place to be. And that is why they were in hiding, and that is why we are tempted to hide. Maybe not so obviously behind locked doors, but we hide from opportunities for conversation. We don't really

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seek to engage our neighbors like we should, to talk to the person at the store, because it is just more comfortable staying back here. The sentiment is that it is reasonable, we are not of this world, even as He is not of this world. So *Where Jesus Finds Them*, He finds them in hiding, but what does Jesus tell them?

### 2) What Jesus Tells Them:

The second point, *What Jesus Tells Them*. Now He says several things here, and we are going to unpack it little by little. He says essentially, “Peace be with you,” and He repeats that twice. We want to come back to that. That is very important. He says in Verse 21, He comes and stands in their midst. Now one of the things that is interesting about this is it shows us, John is careful to tell us the doors were locked, but suddenly Jesus is standing in their midst. Luke points out, in his account of this same event, that part of the conversation, when Jesus was telling them, He says, “Jesus showed them His hands and His feet.” So John says His hands and His side, so obviously Jesus showed them His hands, His feet, and His side. And Luke points out that Jesus says, “Look at Me, I’m not a ghost. Touch Me and feel the flesh. Ghosts do not have flesh and bones like this.” He had a material, physical body. His body, the tomb was empty, the resurrection body of Christ has come into the room, but the resurrection body of Christ is different than our bodies.

Apparently it has the power of passing through grave clothes, that is apparently what John was saying in the first part of the resurrection account, and it has the power of passing through walls. I heard someone say one time, it may have been my theology professor in seminary, Doug Kelley, that the body of Jesus was not less real, it was truly real. Our bodies are less real. His body was what the body of man was meant to be, so massive that it moves through the transient things of this world. But when He comes, John says, He stands in their midst, suddenly He is in the middle of them, and He says to them, “Peace be with you.” Now watch how the flow of this happens.

***John 20:20 ~ And when He had said this, He showed them both His hands and His side.***

He wants to keep the train moving, in a sense. He could have said, He said to them, “Peace be with you,” and then He showed them His hands and His side. But He said, “Peace be with you,” ***And when He had said this...*** you see he’s putting emphasis back on what He said. He wants us to really focus in on what Jesus said in this passage. ***And when He had said this, He showed them both His hands and***

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***His side.*** He is connecting the showing of His hands and His side to, “Peace be with you.” We’re going to come back to that because we want to continue to follow his train of thought there.

***John 20:20-21 ~ The disciples then rejoiced when they saw the Lord. 21 So Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you;***

It is as if, in a sense, He is continuing what He started to say in the beginning. He comes into the room and He says, “Peace be with you.” They are startled, He shows them His hands and His side to show them He is not a ghost, He is real, He is the resurrected Christ. After they have a moment to process that, He picks right up with, “This what I started to say in the first place,” and He reiterates, “Peace be with you.” Then He comes to what He really is telling them.

***John 20:21 ~ ... as the Father has sent Me, I also send you.”***

“You guys are all boarded up in this room right here, but I’m telling you, I’m sending you out.” Now they will struggle with this. In fact, they will continue to struggle with this until they receive the Holy Spirit because I think what we’ll find is they don’t really understand what is going on. That is why Jesus later will appear to them at the Sea of Galilee where they are fishing. It is like they are going back to their old way of life, but He is teaching them, during this time, between His resurrection, the 40 days between His resurrection and His ascension, He is continuing to teach them, and then after His ascension He will send the Spirit. ***...I also send you.”*** And look how the train continues, Verse 22:

***John 20:22 ~ And when He had said this,...***

He connects what He is about to do right back to what He said before.

***John 20:21-23 ~ “Peace be with you; as the Father has sent Me, I also send 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, their sins have been forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they have been retained.”***

And that is the end of this account, except to tell us that Thomas wasn’t there, in the next couple of verses. What Jesus tells them is, “You are not to remain in your comfort zone. You are not to do the things that you might desire, you are called. In

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the same way the Father sent Me into the world, I'm sending you into the world." He sends the apostles into the world, and then He sends every disciple into the world. Every Christian, if you are a follower of Jesus Christ, you are called to take up your cross and follow Him. Part of taking up your cross is going into the world. Many times we'd like to retreat, this is why the monastic movement, the monasteries, it is easier to live separated from the world. But we are not to be of the world, we are not to love the world, but we are to be *in* the world.

One of Jesus' favorite terms for Himself in the Gospel of John is the verb '*sent*'. Over 40 times you have Jesus saying that He is '*the sent one*'. Look with me, let's look at this a little bit in John's Gospel. First of all, John 4:34, this is after He has spoken to the woman at the well, the disciples have come back. "Rabbi, we urge You to eat." "I have food to eat you don't know about." They are arguing among themselves. "How did He eat? Did one of you guys give Him food?"

***John 4:34 ~ Jesus \*said to them, "My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me and to accomplish His work.***

Turn over to Chapter 5, Verse 23. This word, this verb '*sent*' occurs seven times in Chapter 5, starting with Verse 23.

***John 5:23 ~ so that all will honor the Son even as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him.***

Verse 24.

***John 5:24 ~ "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life,...***

Look at Verse 30.

***John 5:30 ~ "I can do nothing on My own initiative. As I hear, I judge; and My judgment is just, because I do not seek My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me.***

Verse 36, that is another use of the word '*sent*'.



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***John 20:36 ~ But the testimony which I have is greater than the testimony of John; for the works which the Father has given Me to accomplish—the very works that I do—testify about Me, that the Father has sent Me.***

What do they testify about Me? That the Father has *sent* Me.” Over and over and over He refers to Himself as the one sent by the Father.

***John 6:38 ~ For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me.***

Now think about that. How hard is it for us to move into the world? How hard is it for us to befriend unbelievers who are just really messed up in their lives? Don't you sometimes feel, as you talk to someone, as you start to have a conversation, it feels like it is impossible for me to get from where I am to where you are? That just to even have a meaningful conversation, because their ways of thought, and just their ideas, and their life is built upon things that are so foreign from a biblical world view, and you feel helpless in that, don't you? But the Father is sending us to people like that. If we feel that gap, you know maybe you've been a believer for a long time, you grew up in the church, and so you feel like your whole world view was formed really well, and children that have been raised in the church, they've learned biblical ways of thinking. So the distance seems so great. Maybe you've come to Christ recently, and you can remember more of what it was like, but you still feel like, from your friends that you used to hang out with, that the distance is just so great, instantly. What are we to do with that? Jesus is sending us to them, even though it appears impossible, even though it is undesirable for us, we'd rather do other things, He is sending us.

Now think about the distance that we have between the believer and the unbeliever, and think about the distance Jesus was sent from glory into this world. I mean, He dwelled with the Father in the Spirit, in a joyful, continual communion of love, face-to-face. In that sense, though God does not have a body until Jesus was born, God does not have a body, He is Spirit, and yet the sense the Lord shows us that His communion was that kind of, He tells us in John 1, He was before the face of the Father. The beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, the Word was before the face of God. That communion, and having the angels around Him all the time, praising Him. I mean, it is like the most wonderful worship service we've ever been too. Have you had those moments when you wish it could just last? “I wish this moment could go on forever.” Maybe it is a time when you are sharing with another believer, and the Lord is meeting with you, dealing with

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you, and you are feeling His love and acceptance, and “I want this to go on forever.” It will eventually, but we can’t in this life. How quickly those things fade. But imagine what Jesus had, perfect bliss and joy, holiness, and the Father sends Him into our ugliness, and nastiness, and filthiness, and He comes because He loves His Father who sent Him. And His strength is found in doing the will of Him who sent Him, so that He’s not thinking about the circumstances that He’s encountering. He’s so focused on the one who sent Him and the honor it is to represent Him to those that He comes to. And that’s the key for us. We can’t focus on how dark things are around us. Focus on the fact that God placed me in this moment at this time to represent Him, that I’m representing Jesus. Jesus came from the Father, the Father sent Him, and now Jesus sends me and He sends you. And so in that moment, wait a minute. The Lord has put me in this circumstance that appears hopeless. The Lord has let me now start a conversation with this person where I don’t have any idea what to say. Christ has put me here and He wants me to continue to engage this person, to show His love, His concern, and to speak His truth. Even though it may be the strangest thing to them, we know that His truth has power, life changing power. So what He tells them then, our second point, what Jesus tells them is, “As the Father sent Me, I’m sending you.

You and I are sent ones also. When He said, “Go and make disciples...” we were sent. If you’re a Christian, you are sent by the Lord Jesus Christ into this world, for as long as you have opportunity, you’re sent to carry His message. Now, it is an uncomfortable place to be. It’s a frightening place to be. It’s an undesirable place to be, and so it’s so good of Jesus not to send us, just telling us, “This is what I’m telling you to do.” Our first point was *Where Jesus Finds Them*. Our second point was *What Jesus Tells Them*. The third point is so important. It’s *What Jesus Gives Them*.

### 3) What Jesus Gives Them:

What Jesus gives them is going to enable them to do what He’s called them to do. What He gives them is two things. He gives them the gift of peace and He gives them the gift of the Spirit. So there are two sub-points under this third point *What Jesus Gives Them*.

#### A) He Gives Them the Gift of Peace:

We noted how He repeats that in the passage. His first words to them are, “Peace be with you.” These were wonderful words for them to hear. I mentioned earlier

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that they probably had doubts and fear. When the Shepherd had been stricken, they had fled. They didn't stay with Him. But His first words are, "Peace to you." Now, the word *peace* translated in the New Testament, the Greek word, means absence of conflict, and it means the security, and safety, and prosperity that comes from that. But when you're doing a New Testament word study, it's so important to look at the Old Testament background. The word that was really in mind of the Jews when they heard this, the disciples when they heard this in the early church, when they heard this message preached, when Jesus said, "Peace to you," what they were hearing was *shalom*, the Hebrew word for peace. It doesn't just mean an absence of conflict. It does mean that, but it means more. It means the wholeness and completeness and harmony that comes from there being no disturbance. It is unimpaired relationships that result in prosperity and joy. It's perfect, undisturbed, untouchable.

In fact, the way the Old Testament builds up, this is a word that is really closely related to what it means to be saved. To be saved is to have peace, to have shalom, to be at peace with God, to be rightly related to God, and to have harmony, again, in your relationship with Him and in the relationship with the world. Basically what happened when sin entered the world was there was the end of peace. We became at war with God, and the ground became at war with us. We became at war with each other. You look at what happened in the garden. God curses the ground. Now you're going to labor for food, but you're going to receive thorns, and thistles are going to grow up by the sweat of your brow. There's going to be pain in child birth. A woman's desire shall be for her husband, and he shall rule over her.

It pictures conflict, and you see it evidenced where first of all, that the Lord comes to walk with Adam and Eve in the cool of the day, and they're hiding. The Lord of course knows they're hiding, but in showing them that they're hiding, He asked them, "Where are you?" "We're hiding because we're naked." "Who told you that you were naked?" "That woman You gave me, she's the problem." They pass the buck. Conflict is everywhere because of sin, and so that the reversal of the curse, the reversal of the fall is the restoration of peace, of God's shalom, where you're rightly related to God. Unimpaired relationships with God lead to unimpaired relationships with one another. The Love of God shed abroad in our hearts makes us love one another, and in Heaven we'll experience the fullness of that.

What John is telling us that Jesus said to His disciples that first day is on the basis of what He had accomplished in His death, in His resurrection, and what He's going to accomplish in His ascension in the giving of the Spirit, is that they are in a

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state of peace. He's telling them essentially, "You guys are hiding. You feel internal conflict, bewilderment, fear, but in reality, peace is upon you. The shalom of God is all over you. Nothing can change that." The gift of peace is a gift that is irrevocable and perfect. The completeness and totality of this blessing was untouchable. One of the commentators points out that the people of God were looking for an eschatological peace, that is, a peace that would come when the Kingdom of God came, and they weren't clear on the fact. They thought that when God did it, it would be a onetime event, and that everything would be fixed all at once. Well, what God did was it was a onetime event in the sense that it happened in the coming of Christ, and yet the Lord is allowing this fallen order to continue, but the supernatural eschatological peace has come upon the people of God. We possess it, and the fact that we have this peace changes everything.

This is something the apostle Paul is trying to make clear. And if we really understand this, it changes the way we see everything. In Romans 5-8, he's making the point of what the peace of God means in our lives, what it means to be justified, the blessings upon the justified. In Romans 5:1, he says:

***Romans 5:1 ~ Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,***

And then he begins to unpack the blessings of justification, and he kind of comes to a crescendo in the last nine verses of Romans 8, and he starts those off when he says in Verse 31:

***Romans 8:31 ~ What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us?***

Now, think about the disciples in the room that they're in, in hiding. They're afraid. They're terrified. They don't want to go out on mission into the world. They want to protect themselves because they're afraid. They know that the world is at war with them, but what Jesus is saying is that when you have the peace of God, it doesn't matter what the world is doing to you, because as Paul says, "If God is for us, who's against us?" If you have God's peace, the one who reigns over everything, then everything that happens in your life is part of His blessing upon you. He goes on to say in Verse 32:

***Romans 8:32 ~ He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things?***

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Paul is proving. He says, “Listen, if God didn’t spare His Son (the argument is from the greater to the lesser), if God did not spare His Son but was willing to give Him for you, then can you not understand that all He’s going to do for the rest of eternity is give good things to you?” How will He not also with Him freely give us all things? He’s going to give you all things, all of His bounty and goodness. So what this means then practically is on a daily basis to be at peace with God means that God is always giving you good things. The Christian should walk through life not afraid. This is how we should be.

Let me apply it in a way that maybe will help a lot of us too. A number of you shared that when I’ll mention traffic analogies, you can relate. It’s an area where the Lord is working on you too. We get frustrated when we’re driving through Atlanta traffic. I was talking to a gentlemen yesterday who’s not from Atlanta, and he really just had a hard time in the Atlanta traffic yesterday, and went on, and on, and on about it. It was kind of pitiful, and I thought, “Welcome to Atlanta. That’s the way it is.” And anyway, but we want things to go a certain way, and when things happen badly in this world, it’s unsettling. Well, part of it is that we were created for a perfect world, but wait a minute. Where are we now? We’re in a fallen world. We’re in a world where things mess up, but we are in a world where our Father whose attitude toward us is perfect peace, and love, and kindness, is governing everything. So the person that pulls out in front of you going too slow, or the person that honks at you too quickly because you were a little slow hitting the gas at the green light, or the person who cuts in front of you, all of those people have been ordained by God who is at peace with you. They are tokens and expressions of His loving kindness to you.

Now, a lot of times that loving kindness is being expressed to remind us, “Hey, I’m not here for things to go my way. I’m not here to hit every green light all the way home.” The other night I got twelve out of fifteen. I was counting them. I didn’t tell my family. But I was just kind of counting, thinking, “That’s pretty neat. Twelve, thirteen, fifteen.” I almost had eleven in a row. But that’s not really the point of life, is it? That’s just an interesting little sidelight. It doesn’t really matter. We’re here for God, and so when things don’t go, when every light is red when you really need to hurry, there’s red light, after red light, after red light, what is God doing? He’s reminding us that it’s not about us. We’re on a mission from the One who sent us. It’s not about Him fixing my life to be the way I want it. He sent me for a purpose, and He’s lovingly reminding me. And oftentimes those people that are interruptions are the things He sent for me to do. That’s the wonder of it,

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and being at peace with God really means that everything is good, so that every time we find ourselves, if someone comes up to you and is being unkind because they see you carrying a Bible, or they sense you're a Christian, then, "Wait a minute. This is an opportunity. The Lord has ordained this." We should look at that person with kindness and love, and some mild sense of curiosity, saying, "Really, Lord, what are You up to here? What are you sending me to do now?" There's no real problem. There can't be a problem for me, because I am in Christ. Even if it's the time where someone's going to take my life, it's in God's hand. So there need be no fear. Lord, what would You have me do? That's the peace that Jesus gives.

Now, it's not just the gift of peace. We have two sub-points, peace and the Spirit. But the gift of peace, finishing that first sub-point, He shows them the proof of peace. Back in John 20, we said earlier, "Peace be with you," and when He had said this... Remember how we noted that that connects what He's about to do with what He just said.

***John 20:19 ~ "Peace be with you." 20 And when He had said this, He showed them both His hands and His side.***

"You are now in the era of peace that I told you about a few hours before I died. Remember I said, 'My peace I give to you. Not as the world gives give I to you. Let not your hearts be troubled. Neither let it be afraid.'" That's what he said in John 14:27. In John 16:33, He said:

***John 16:33 ~ In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world."***

"I'm giving you My peace." And so He says, "Peace be with you. Now the peace that I have promised is yours because of what happened on the cross and what happened in the resurrection." And to prove that, He shows them His hands and His side. You can know that you are at peace, because Jesus conquered death. No matter what the world looks like, no matter how bewildering it is, no matter how confusing it is, we know He is risen, and therefore all is peace for the people of God. All is blessedness.

### B) He Gives Them the Gift of the Spirit:

Not only the gift of peace, though, but He gives them the gift of the Spirit. When He picks up again in Verse 21, it says:

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***John 20:21 ~ “Peace be with you; as the Father has sent Me, I also send you.”***

We’ve made that point that that’s the main thing He’s driving home here is that we are sent ones, but look what He does next in Verse 22.

***John 20:22 ~ And when He had said this, He breathed on them and \*said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit.***

He connects this next act of breathing on them, and what He says next, “Receive the Holy Spirit,” with what He had told them, “I’m sending you.” To be sent, you have to know that you have peace with God. And to be sent into any circumstance, you have to have the Holy Spirit. When He breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit,” it’s interesting commentators talk about this and discuss what it means. His breathing, it actually doesn’t say *on them* in the original. It says He breathed. In a sense, the word in Greek doesn’t say exhaled or inhaled. It just says breathed. But context seems to be clear when He says, “Receive the Holy Spirit,” He’s breathing kind of an enacted parable. You see the word for spirit in Greek is the same word for breathe. *pneo* means to breathe, and *pneuma* is the Spirit. And so Spirit, breath, and wind are one. It’s the same in Hebrew. And so when He breathes on them, He’s telling them, “You need to receive the breath of God. I’m going to send you the breath of God.”

Now, this doesn’t happen at this moment. He’s telling them what’s going to happen at Pentecost. Remember in Acts 2, what happens? The wind comes swirling through where they are, and that’s the Spirit, the wind of God, the breath of God, the Spirit of God coming upon them. And Jesus is telling them, “Listen guys, I know that you’re afraid. I know that you’re bewildered, but My peace is yours and I’m sending the Spirit. Receive the Holy Spirit, the gift of the Spirit. And when you have the Holy Spirit and when you’re walking in My peace, then you will have power in your work.” That’s why He tells us what He says in Verse 23:

***John 20:23 ~ If you forgive the sins of any, their sins have been forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they have been retained.”***

When you really analyze that, that’s an amazing statement of power. We talked about the gift of peace and the proof of peace, the gift of the Spirit and the power

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of the Spirit, basically. Verse 23 is the power of the Holy Spirit, that when you are sent in My Name, walking in My peace, depending upon My Spirit, when you go out—He’s talking to the apostles first, then through them, the church, the church leaders, and all Christians who go out with the Gospel, that when you proclaim the Gospel and someone receives it, and you tell them on the basis of their profession in faith that their sins have been forgiven, they will have been forgiven. That’s actually the perfect passive tense. *Have been forgiven them* emphasizes the point that we go out and we don’t actually make it happen. We go out in the power of the Spirit, sent by the Lord. We speak the Gospel. We tell somebody based on what we see in their repentance and their expression of faith, “Your sins have been forgiven,” and in reality what has happened, when that transaction happens in our experience, we know that God has done it by acting upon them. That’s why He says their sins have been forgiven them. When you say that their sins are forgiven, it’s already happened that their sins have been forgiven by God. So the picture is the power that goes with us when we go out.

I was talking with a pastor friend yesterday about one of the most powerful testimonies I’ve heard is the testimony of Rosaria Champagne Butterfield, a lady who was just wrapped up in such ungodliness and worldliness of mind, not really any spiritual background at all in her life. She was a professor at Syracuse University in Feminist studies, a tenured professor there. She was a lesbian living with her female partner for a number of years, hanging out with folks that are of that mindset all the time. She talked about how in her life before she came to Christ, that they would spend time just holidays together, and it was like a family of these folks that were just in that lifestyle. And it seemed to her to be the most reasonable thing in the world, and when Promise Keepers came to Syracuse in the last 90s, she wrote a letter to the editor excoriating the patriarchy and the evil of the biblical worldview in Promise Keepers. And a pastor in the area wrote her a letter responding to her letter. It was not really a letter. It was printed in the paper her article that she wrote to the paper. She got a lot of responses, and this pastor wrote a response. She said most of her responses were hate mail, and then she had some that were cheering her on. And so she would file her responses accordingly.

She came to this one letter from this pastor in that town, and she didn’t know which place to file it. It wasn’t hate mail, but it certainly wasn’t cheering her on. He basically invited her to come to his house and to have dinner with his wife, that he would love to have the opportunity to talk with her about the things that she was writing about, and about the biblical worldview, and just to have a dialogue about it. She wrestled with that for days, kept coming back to her desk and there it was in



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the middle of the desk, and finally she called him and started a friendship. She went to his house and had dinner, and over a period of a couple or three years, he just had her read the Bible, and as she began to read the Bible, she happened to be an English professor, so she loved literature, and she thought, “This book is an amazing literary masterpiece, all of the different genres of the Bible.” It’s amazing how this has come over this period of time, even if you have a liberal view of the time, thousands of years ago, here is this amazing book.

And so that began to grab her, and she continued to read the book and to be loved on by this couple who cared about her, until finally reading the word of God, she came to see that God had made claims in His word that were completely contradictory to the way that she was living, and she came to a crossroads that said, “I have to die to everything that I’ve been if I want to follow Christ.” She wrestled with that and she finally bowed her knee and said yes to Jesus Christ. She was born again. She’s now married, the mother of two or three children, and she has a powerful testimony of what God has done. She shared that and she’s such an amazing speaker in the way that she can help us learn how to relate to folks that are coming at life from such different vantage points. And in fact I encourage you to just Google Rosaria Champagne Butterfield, and you can watch her testimony.

But that’s the kind of thing that Jesus has sent us to do. He’s not sent us to retreat from the world. He’s not sent us to be comfortable from the world. He’s sent us to be wise, yes. Not to love the world, not to give ourselves to the world, no, but to be salt and light, holiness, but holiness with love and compassion. But love and compassion speaks the truth. There is only one way to God, and it’s Jesus Christ. And when we realize that we’re sent by Him, we’re sent by the most wonderful human being that has ever lived, because He was not only a perfect human being, but He was fully God, and He was willing to leave the glory of Heaven and to come into this world—we have the best news in the world. God is a God of love. That’s why He says, “God is love.” He will have compassion on you if you turn to Him. He will help you if you repent. May the Lord help us to remember that in these days, not to be discouraged as the world gets darker, not to be unsettled by all that we see around us, but to realize that we are at peace.

If America crumbles, does that change the reality of the person in Christ? It does not. It doesn’t matter what happens. The economy can fall. We are still His people. He’s just giving us this opportunity to walk through that circumstance proclaiming His Name. So there really is nothing. What can we fear? Nothing, if we’re thinking rightly and thinking biblically. Isn’t that a wonderful place to live, to know that for

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the Christian, life only gets better, because all you get tomorrow is what Jesus has for you to add on to what He's already done. He's using His grace to make you like Him. That's what the Father is doing, to make you like His Son, and that's going to continue all the way to the end of your life, and then you get glory. It's not bad to get old. It's good. I mean, sure it hurts. I have things that hurt all the time. You stand up after sitting down for half an hour, and now I know why older people will do that kind of slow. I remember it took me years to figure out why they wore reading glasses. I just thought all these old people had glasses on. That's pretty dumb when I was a kid, I know, but it doesn't matter. This world is passing away. But for the people of God, we are in the peace of God and we'll experience the blessing of God forever and ever no matter what happens in this world.

Let's go to the Lord in prayer...

*Father, we thank You for so great a salvation in Jesus Christ that You could truly take us who were enemies and make us not only Your friends, but Your sons and daughters, to draw us into the communion of the Trinity, to fill us to all the fullness of God. And Father, help us not to be people who hoard that for ourselves and who hide away. Help us to learn how on a daily basis to have eyes to see like Jesus, to have compassion on those that are harassed and helpless, and to be moved with love. And help us to be tender but also bold, and help us to remember that our calling is not so much to win the lost. It is to win the lost, but not so much to win the lost as it is to represent our King. Help us be content in that. We ask this so that Your Name will be made more and more glorious, Amen.*

"Jesus' Appearance to His Disciples"

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