

Sermon – 15/04/2007 pm

Jesus Appears to the Disciples

Study Text: John 20:19 –23

After appearing to Mary, Jesus appeared to the other women who went to the tomb (Matthew 29:9). Luke tells us that he also appeared to Cleopas and his friend as they walked to the village of Emmaus, and also to Simon Peter. It was still the same day, the first day of the week when he appeared yet again, this time to his disciples. They were huddled together in a locked room for fear of the Jews. Reports of appearances Jesus kept coming in as they were gathered in this room.

Why were the disciples afraid of the Jews? The Jews had captured and crucified their leader. Success in this venture may well spur the Jews on to capture the followers of Jesus of Nazareth. In addition, reports of the empty tomb were beginning to circulate. The Jews might come after them to charge them with stealing the body of Jesus.

It was not a good time to be follower of Jesus! But then, is there ever a good time to be a follower of Jesus as far as the world is concerned? Jesus had told his disciples that the world would hate them because of him. They hated Jesus without a cause and would hate his followers also.

Peace Be With You

The doors were secured but still Jesus entered and stood in their midst. Some think Jesus suddenly caused the doors to open and entered, while others maintain that he appeared without disturbing the doors. Either way it was a miracle. Either way indicates that in his resurrection body Jesus could vanish at any moment (as at Emmaus Luke 24:31), and that he could materialise at any moment.

The resurrection body of Jesus was identifiable by the wounds/scars on his hands from the nails and the wound in his side from the spear. He showed these wounds to his disciples as he stood before them. Later on Thomas made special reference to these wounds. The nail pierced hands may have contributed to the brothers recognising Jesus as he broke bread at Emmaus.

Jesus also asked them for food which he took and ate (Luke 24:37). At first they thought they were seeing a ghost. But Jesus demonstrated to them that he was not a ghost but was the same Jesus whom they had followed before his death. He was the same in that he bore the marks of his death, but yet different in his resurrection body.

There is a mystery here that we will not fully understand until we see Jesus in heaven. But even then Jesus will bear the marks of his death. John saw the Lamb who looked as if he had been slain (Revelation 5). Nail pierced hands and a spearpierced side are not marks of defeat or shame but of victory and glory. They will forever be marks of our glorious Saviour.

The risen Jesus was not just a ghost. He ate food and also spoke. He spoke in the same way that he did before his death. It was his speech that led Mary to recognise him. Jesus spoke with authority and grace as he did before his death.

The first word he said to his disciples was *peace be with you*. This was a common greeting of the day – and still is among Hebrew speakers – *Salaam alikum*. But for the disciples in this locked room it was more than just a conventional greeting. It was not just a ‘Hello’ or ‘G’day’. These were

men who had recently deserted Jesus in his darkest hour. One of them had even denied knowing Jesus.

This one whom they deserted and left to die was now standing before them alive. What would he say to them? Would he accuse them of being unfaithful? Would he rebuke them? What shame they must have felt. They had much to fear as they huddled together in this room. *Peace be with you.* How those words must have calmed the troubled hearts of the disciples. At least Jesus came in peace even as he came back from the dead.

The word peace may have reminded them of what Jesus spoke just a few days before in the upper room. *My peace I give to you* he said (14:27). Jesus spoke of a peace the world cannot give; he spoke of inner peace, of peace in the heart.

My peace means first and foremost peace with God through the Lord Jesus Christ. It means peace on earth, peace among men as the angels proclaimed to the shepherds the night Jesus was born. In this resurrection appearance Jesus twice assured his disciples of ‘my peace’.

Jesus appeared to his disciples in grace not in condemnation. He greeted them in peace, the peace of God. The disciples never forgot these words of their risen Lord. They probably greeted one another in the grace and peace of Jesus Christ. We know that they wrote their letters with such a greeting. ‘Grace and peace to you from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ’.

The disciples relaxed and began to rejoice in seeing Jesus again. He went on to teach them many things from the Scriptures – or rather remind them of what he had taught before he died (see Luke 24). John records two more specific words Jesus spoke to them during this appearance.

As The Father Has Sent Me, I Also Send You

In the Greek there are two different words here translated as ‘send’, but it is difficult to maintain any fundamental difference in meaning. In his High Priestly prayer Jesus said *as you have sent me into the world I also have sent them into the world* (17:18). This prayer is now spoken to the disciples as a divine commissioning.

Jesus was ascending to heaven. He had completed the work he was sent to do. He now commissioned the disciples to go into the world and proclaim the gospel. Jesus came to Galilee preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God saying *the time is fulfilled and the Kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe the gospel* (Mark 1:15).

Jesus did many miracles. He healed the sick and cast out demons, but, contrary to what many think these days, this was not the essence of his ministry. These were signs pointing people to the gospel. Jesus called upon men and women to repent and believe the gospel. His apostles would also do mighty works; they would heal the sick and cast out demons but this would not be the focus of their ministry any more than it was of Jesus’. They would preach the gospel, the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. They would call for repentance just as Jesus did.

Receive the Holy Spirit

The disciples would go forth as men divinely commissioned. They would go forth in the power of the Holy Spirit. Jesus promised them in the upper room that he would send the Holy Spirit when he returned to his Father via the Cross, resurrection and ascension. But here in what could well be the same room he said *Receive the Holy Spirit*. Do these words conflict with the Holy Spirit coming upon them at Pentecost? Is this John’s version of Pentecost as many think?

Firstly notice that the words *on them* are not in the original. It is simply *He* (Jesus) *breathed*. The breath of Jesus can be seen as a symbolic action. His words do not necessarily mean that would receive the Holy Spirit immediately. Jesus had already told his disciples in the upper room that he was going back to heaven and would send the Holy Spirit to them (15:16) he made it clear that he must go before the Holy Spirit came (16:7).

Here in this passage (20:22) we find ‘symbolism anticipating the endowment of the Spirit that the church at the time of writing had already experienced’ (D.A. Carson). Carson also points out that if this is John’s Pentecost and the disciples actually received the Holy Spirit then it made little difference to their activity for they went back to fishing! (21:3)

Forgive Sins

Jesus was sending the disciples with a divine commissioning to preach the gospel, and he was sending them as men who would shortly be endowed with the Holy Spirit. Jesus reminds them of yet another truth, a truth which he had also taught them before his death.

Jesus reminds them of the authority that will accompany their preaching. These men would be apostles (‘sent ones’); they would be men who witnessed the resurrection of Jesus and who were filled with the Holy Spirit. Only ten were present in the room at that time, but Thomas would shortly join them, and Paul would later see the risen Jesus and also be commissioned by Jesus.

These 12 apostles would become the inspired writers of the New Testament, a task which ceased with their death. There is no apostolic succession in the Scriptures. The task of mission, however, would continue as the church or assembly sent members into all the world.

What then about this authority to forgive sins (20:23)? You will remember similar words in Matthew 16:19 where Jesus addressed Peter with regard to the church. We also find such words in Matthew 18:18 with regard to discipline in the church. In all cases the correct reading is ‘what you bind on earth **will have been** bound in heaven’ and ‘if you forgive the sins of any **they have been** forgiven in heaven’. It is God who is acting. No man has the power to forgive sins.

Nevertheless, when the gospel is preached it goes forth with power. It has power to convict men and women of sin. When someone confesses their sin the church can say on the authority of the Word of God that their sins are forgiven (e.g. John 3:16, I John 1:9). Of course only God know our hearts and whether or not that confession is genuine. On the other hand if someone rejects the gospel we can declare unto them from the Bible ‘you are still in your sin and the wrath of God remains on you’ (John 3:36).

It was solemn task which Jesus gave to his disciples They were slow learners, they were cowards, even deserters, but Jesus chose them and commissioned them to this solemn task. How wonderful is the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. How great is his power and the power that he gives to you who believe.

Our Gospel did not come to you in word only, but in also in power and in the Holy Spirit, and in much assurance (I Thessalonians 1:5). Will you go forth and proclaim this glorious gospel of Jesus Christ with the assurance that it is the power of God unto salvation for everyone who believes – or are you ashamed to do such a thing (Romans 1)?

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