

The Gospel of John

The First Message from the Resurrected Jesus

John 20:21-23

INTRODUCTION:

This morning we are continuing in the Gospel of John. Jesus has risen from the dead. He has appeared to Mary Magdalene at the tomb, to two believers on the road to Damascus, and, even though we do not have the details, according to Luke, even to Peter.

Let's start by reading a part of Luke's account concerning the evening of the resurrection when Jesus was with the two men from Damascus. He had discussed with them how He had fulfilled all of the messianic prophecies from the Old Testament. But they did not recognize Him. Then He agreed to enter their home.

Luke 24:30-37 (NASB)

³⁰ And it came about, when He had reclined *at the table* with them, that He took the bread and blessed *it*, and He broke *it* and *began* giving *it* to them. ³¹ And *then* their eyes were opened and they recognized Him; and He vanished from their sight. ³² They said to one another, "Were our hearts not burning within us when He was speaking to us on the road, while He was explaining the Scriptures to us?" ³³ And they got up that very hour and returned to Jerusalem, and found the eleven gathered together and those who were with them, ³⁴ saying, "The Lord has really risen and has appeared to Simon!" ³⁵ They *began* to relate their experiences on the road, and how He was recognized by them at the breaking of the bread.

³⁶ Now while they were telling these things, *Jesus Himself suddenly* stood in their midst and *said* to them, "Peace *be* to you." ³⁷ But they were startled and frightened, and thought that they were looking at a spirit.

The disciples of Jesus had started the day not expecting a resurrection. They did not at first even believe the testimony of fellow believers when they were told that the Lord had risen from the dead. But as Jesus appeared to more and more of His followers, they were beginning to remember what Jesus had taught them that He was going to die and raise again on the third day. Lord willing, we will be examining their disbelief next week.

Now we are in the evening of the resurrection. Ten of the eleven disciples along with the two men on the road to Damascus, and several other men and women who were followers of Jesus were assembled together in a locked gathering place for fear of the Jews. Thomas was not there. They were discussing together all of the events that had happened that day. They were, no doubt confused and were trying to make sense of it all. Then we are told that Jesus simply appeared in their midst and said "**Peace be with you**" because they were very afraid.

This is precisely where our scripture text brings us this morning.

Stand and Read Scripture

John 20:21-23 (NASB)

²¹ So Jesus said to them again, "Peace *be* to you; just 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."

Prayer

This is a passage of scripture that can be easily overlooked during a casual reading, but it is very important for us to see and understand. Jesus begins by calming their fears and telling them who He is and showing them the scars on His hands and His side. Then He continues with this short sermonette.

Here in this passage is the initial revelation of the Great Commission. It has three parts. The first part is found in verse 21: "**Just as the Father has sent Me, I also send you.**" This is the first phase of the Lord's commission: "I am sending you into the world as the Father has sent Me."

BODY:

I. THE GREAT COMMISSION.

Later on when Jesus ascends into heaven before the disciples He will reiterate this same Great Commission as recorded in Matthew and Luke. But here is the first declaration of the Great Commission.

Did you realize that the great commission was also found in John?

It touches all of us, because, as believers, we are all included in fulfilling that commission.

Now we all know the Matthew account:

Matthew 28:19-20 (NASB)

¹⁹ Go, therefore, and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to follow all that I commanded you; and behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

That is the Great Commission: go to the world, take the gospel, baptize believers, and then teach them in the truth of Scripture. We all know that.

Why did the Father send Jesus into the world?

"The Son of Man is come" – Jesus said – "to seek and to" – what? – "save the lost." Let me show you an example that you are all familiar with.

Luke 19:1-10 (NASB)

¹⁹ Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through. ² And there was a man called by the name of Zaccheus; he was a chief tax collector and he was rich. ³ Zaccheus was trying to see who Jesus was, and he was unable due to the crowd, because he was short in stature. ⁴ So he ran on ahead and climbed up a sycamore tree in order to see Him, because He was about to pass through that *way*. ⁵ And when Jesus came to the place, He looked up and

said to him, “Zaccheus, hurry and come down, for today I must stay at your house.” ⁶ And he hurried and came down, and received Him joyfully. ⁷ When *the people* saw *this*, they all *began* to complain, saying, “He has gone in to be the guest of a man who is a sinner!” ⁸ But Zaccheus stopped and said to the Lord, “Behold, Lord, half of my possessions I am giving to the poor, and if I have extorted anything from anyone, I am giving back four times as much.” ⁹ And Jesus said to him, “Today salvation has come to this house, because he, too, is a son of Abraham. ¹⁰ **For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost.**”

That is why He came. His purpose was to bring salvation to all mankind. The Father sent the Son to seek and save the lost. He died on the cross to provide the perfect sacrifice necessary to pay for our sins. He rose from the dead to prove that all that He had taught was of God and true. His death on the cross brought salvation to all of God's chosen people, all believers, through all of redemptive history.

“**Just as the Father has sent Me, I also send you.** Jesus said the Father sent Me to seek and save the lost through the gospel and now I am sending you to do the very same.” That is why you are here. Once you have believed and been born again and have become a child of God, you have been given the task of telling the gospel to others just as it was originally given to Christ.

Everything we do, whether it is our ministry, our worship, our study of Scripture, or our spiritual testimony as we shine as lights in the world, must display a transformed life. A life transformed by God through the gospel so that the gospel has credibility when we proclaim its truth.

Listen to how Matthew and Peter describe the life of a Christian.

Matthew 5:16 (NASB)

¹⁶ Your light must shine before people in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.

1 Peter 2:12 (NASB)

¹² Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles (referring to unbelievers), so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may because of your good deeds, as they observe *them*, glorify God on the day of visitation.

You may be with people who do not share your faith. You may be captured by an enemy in war. They may shun you or treat you badly. But we are taught to love our enemies. When they experience the light of Jesus reflecting from us they will notice. This may plant a seed that God may cause to grow and draw them to Himself and believe. Then they, in turn, will glorify God.

If you say Christ changed your life, you had better have a changed life. If you have a changed life, somebody might observe that “You are very different and it is very obvious. Why?” That opens the door for you to explain, “**It is Jesus Christ**” shining through me. The purpose for everything we do in our lives is to let our light shine so that men can see the good works and glorify God who is in heaven who transformed us for such good works. We then accept that as an opportunity to share the gospel of light.

One writer said, “Christians are like a whole lot of people with colds; they are all sneezing at each other, but nobody gets it because everybody’s got it.” We have got to find the people who have not "got it", that is our mission field.

What is your plan? What is your strategy? Yes, you are here to worship, because worship is part of your witness. Worship is part of your spiritual maturing process. Yes, you are here to learn the truth. Yes, you are here to serve. Yes, you are here to love. All of that is evidence of a transformation that makes the gospel believable.

But what is your gospel plan? What is your gospel strategy? We are the continuing believers who carry into this generation the very same commission. The Lord sends us the same way the Father sent Him; and it also entails some sacrifice and rejection, along with acceptance and usefulness.

The first phase is the commission to go. The second phase is found in verse 22:

II. THE POWER OF THE HOLY SPIRIT WILL BE WITH YOU.

John 20:22 (NASB)

22 After saying this, he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit.

When the Father sent Christ into the world and Jesus began His ministry, the Holy Spirit came upon Him at His baptism. This launched Him into His ministry. Just as the Father sent Jesus into the world, Jesus now sends us. As the Father empowered Jesus with the Holy Spirit, Jesus also empowers us with the Holy Spirit. He is our Spirit-filled model.

Throughout the evening before, in John chapters 14, 15, and 16, He kept saying to the disciples, "When I go, I will send the Spirit. It is better for you that I go, because then the Spirit will come, and He will lead you into all truth, and He will teach you all things concerning Me."

Acts 1:8 (NASB)

8 but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem and in all Judea, and Samaria, and as far as the remotest part of the earth."

The way in which He says this is so interesting: "He breathed on them." God breathing on those who belong to Him to spiritually awaken and empower them is nothing new. If you go back into Genesis, chapter 2, you remember that when God had created Adam it says, "He breathed into him the breath of life, and Adam became a living soul." That is the expression of God's creative power.

"He breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit."

Why does Jesus breathe on them and tell them to "Receive the Holy Spirit" now? Don't they receive the Holy Spirit again on the day of Pentecost 50 days later?

Yes!

Acts 2:4 (NASB)

4 And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with different tongues, as the Spirit was giving them the ability to speak out.

They not only receive the Holy Spirit, but they are "filled" with the Holy Spirit as He was "poured out" upon them. This is a period of transition after Jesus' resurrection and before

His ascension, after which the era of the Holy Spirit's ministry on earth will begin. The apostles receiving the Holy Spirit as Jesus breathed on them will take them through until they are filled with Him fifty days later.

This filling allowed them to do miraculous things in order to prove that they were teaching the truth concerning the Gospel. Remember there was no New Testament when the apostles began their ministry. It was their job to present the new gospel to the world and to write it down for all who would come after them. This was going to require the power of the Holy Spirit in order to accomplish that seemingly impossible feat!

The apostles had the power of the Holy Spirit in order to be the foundation of the church. As Christians, we have the indwelling of the Holy Spirit within us. And although we are not raising people from the dead, causing the deaf to hear, the blind to see, or removing evil spirits from people as the apostles were empowered to do, we still have the Spirit within us in order to accomplish what God places before us.

Romans 8:9 (NASB)

9 However, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him.

So our Lord's commission then is to evangelize in the power of the Holy Spirit.

III. PROCLAIMING THE GOSPEL.

John 20:23 (NASB)

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.

This message was not just for the disciples and followers that Jesus appeared to that night. It is for every believer.

And you may ask, "Well, wait a minute. How can that be possible?"

Mark 2:7b (NASB)

...Who can forgive sins except God alone?"

You are correct. God does not forgive people's sins because **we** say so, nor does He withhold forgiveness because **we** say so. Rather, those who proclaim the gospel are in effect forgiving or not forgiving sins, depending on whether the hearers accept or reject Jesus Christ. We cannot go around and declare "saved" to some people and declare "unsaved" to others on our own authority.

I want to remind you that the gospel is a message of forgiveness. And we **have the right** to say to someone what Jesus said in John 8:24...

John 8:24 (NASB)

24 Therefore I said to you that you will die in your sins; for unless you believe that I am, you will die in your sins.

I have the right to say to any soul, "Your sins are forgiven or your sins are retained based on what you do with Jesus Christ. That is not on my authority, that is on God's authority based upon the truth of His Word. I am just the messenger." Anyone who is repentant and

desires the forgiveness of sins by trusting in Christ receives forgiveness". I do not have that on my own authority. I do not have the authority to forgive anybody's sins. But I have been called to proclaim the message of forgiveness based upon the authority of God's word in Scripture.

CONCLUSION:

This speaks to the issue of, "What is the gospel?" The gospel is not about perfect health. The gospel is not about a comfortable life, it is not about prosperity, it is not about solving all the problems you face in this world, it is not about getting everything that you want, it is not about fulfilling your dreams and ambitions, it is not about suggesting that a moral life in and of itself will get us into heaven. The gospel is about forgiveness based on repentance and faith in Christ.

The gospel proclaims that all have sinned and have died spiritually. This death separates us from God. We need salvation and the only way we can be saved is to have the price for our sin paid for. We cannot pay that price regardless of how morally we live our lives. Jesus came to earth and **lived a life without sin** in order that He could die on the cross as a sacrifice for our sins. This paid in full the price required for our sins to be forgiven by God. Jesus died, was buried, and rose again on the third day to prove that God was satisfied with His sacrifice for us. And in order for us to claim the salvation that Jesus set before us, we must believe and be "born again" into a new life in Christ. We give up the sinful things of this world and begin living a life in Christ according to His word.

I would like to finish with a passage of scripture from Matthew.

Matthew 7:21-23 (NASB)

21 "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who **does** the will of My Father who is in heaven *will enter*. 22 Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' 23 And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; leave Me, you who practice lawlessness.'

I ask you. Have you fully surrendered your life to Christ? Can others see Christ in you? Do you have concern for the lost? Do you share the gospel with others as God places opportunities before you? These are all evidences that the Holy Spirit dwells within you.

Too many people claim they believe. But if we truly believe we will be working for God. James says that "**Faith without works is dead.**" It is not enough to say I am a basically good guy. I don't live a horrible life. I am moral. I don't murder people. I am religious. I go to church. I have been baptized.

God is going to look beyond your outward appearance and look at the heart. And He is going to be able to determine if your faith is real...if you really love and serve Him.

Our faith comes from hearing and hearing from the word of God. Spend time in the word to ensure that you are "**doing the will of the Father.**"

Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who **does** the will of My Father who is in heaven *will enter*.

He is Lord!