

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH, 3-31-13 AM NOTES (EASTER)
"THE DEATH CONQUEROR"
JOHN 20:1-23
#76 in Series, "Verse-by-Verse Through John"

Romans 4:25 (NASB) "He who was delivered over because of our transgressions, and was raised because of our justification."

1 Peter 1:3 (HCSB) "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. According to His great mercy, He has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead."

I. Responses to the Empty Tomb (vv. 1-18)

A. Faith Dawning (vv. 1-10)

B. Faith Shining (vv. 11-18)

Luke 8:2b (NKJV) "...Mary called Magdalene, out of whom had come seven demons."

Isaiah 52:14b (HCSB) "His appearance was so disfigured that He did not look like a man, and His form did not resemble a human being."

John 10:3b (NKJV) "He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out."

II. Revelations in the Upper Room (vv. 19-23)

Philippians 3:20-21 (NKJV) "²⁰For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, ²¹who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself."

A. His Peace in All Situations (vv. 19-20)

Luke 24:39 (NKJV) "Behold My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself. Handle Me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see I have."

B. His Power in All Service (vv. 21-23)

1. The Commission (v. 21)

Luke 19:10 (NKJV) “for the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost.”

Matthew 28:19-20 (NKJV) “¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, *even* to the end of the age.”

2. The Power (v. 22)

Acts 1:8 (NKJV) “But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”

3. The Authority (v. 23)

“Whosoever sins you forgive shall have already been forgiven them. Whosoever sins you do not forgive shall have already not been forgiven them.” [Literal translation from the Greek of John 20:23.]

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The resurrection of Jesus Christ is God the Father’s receipt that the payment Jesus made on the cross – His shed blood – was sufficient to satisfy the justice and wrath of God for sin. **Romans 4:25 (NASB)** “*He* who was delivered over because of our transgressions, and was raised because of our justification.” Truly the resurrection was God the Father’s “Amen” to God the Son’s “It is finished” or more literally, His “Paid in full”. In a world that seems to increasingly be filled with hopelessness, gloom and doom, the resurrection of Jesus Christ shouts out to the world, “There is hope! The risen Savior has conquered death, Hell and the grave.” Jesus paid it all. The Father is satisfied with the Son’s atonement for sin. **1 Peter 1:3 (HCSB)** Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. According to His great mercy, He has given us a new birth into **a living hope** through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead”.

Every time we meet together on the first day of the week, it is to focus on His resurrection, but on Easter there is a special focus and gratitude that we have a sure hope because He is risen. Let’s give attention to this chapter which contains some of the most encouraging truths in the Bible.

I. Responses to the Empty Tomb (V1-18)

In John 20:1-18 we see the response of three people to the empty tomb on that first Easter morning – Peter, John, and Mary Magdalene.

A. Faith Dawning (V1-10)

When we put the four Gospel accounts together, it seems that Mary Magdalene and several other women agreed to go to Jesus’ tomb early on the first day of the week (Sunday) to show their love for Christ by completing the burial preparation that Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus had begun two days earlier. Sunday would forever after that be the day that believers would set aside to commemorate and celebrate Christ’s supernatural resurrection. Sunday eventually became known as “The Lord’s Day” (Revelation 1:10). On that first Lord’s Day, Mary Magdalene it seems ran ahead of the other women and got to the tomb first. She was shocked to find that the huge round stone that was rolled on a track to cover the grave opening had been moved. Her assumption was that someone had broken into the tomb and stolen the body of Christ. Keep in mind that even though Jesus had told His disciples that He would be raised from the dead, they didn’t get it and a resurrection was the last thing that any of Jesus’ disciples expected.

Mary didn’t go into the open tomb cut out of sandstone rock. Verse 1 tells us that it was before daylight. Mary, being alarmed and not knowing what to do, turned and ran to tell Peter and John (who calls himself “the disciple whom Jesus loved”). While Mary was gone to find Peter and John, the other women who were following close behind her came to the tomb and encountered two angels who announced the resurrection (Matthew 28:5-7). When Mary found Peter and John, she told them of the missing body of the Lord, and Peter and John began running to the tomb. John was likely younger than Peter and got to the tomb first. When John got to the tomb, he stooped down and looked into the tomb. By this time there was enough light to see the linen cloths that had wrapped Christ’s body and to ascertain that the body of Jesus was not there. The grave cloths were lying on the shelf where the body had lain, but they were empty! This would be a good time to explain Jewish burial customs. While the Egyptians embalmed their dead and the Romans and Greeks often cremated their dead, the Jews had a custom that was entirely different. The dead were wrapped with narrow strips of linen (called swaddling cloths) with dry aromatic spices placed between the wraps. The body was then simply laid on its back on a shelf cut out of the sandstone rock in the tomb. The head was wrapped separately with a cloth twirled about it like a turban. This is what is called the handkerchief or face cloth in verse 7.

When Peter got to the tomb, he went in without hesitation. Peter saw the grave clothes and also the material used to wrap the face and head neatly folded separate from the linen strips that had been wrapped

around the body. These details are included in this narrative for a purpose. Grave robbers do not carefully unwrap the corpse and leave the linen strips neatly placed where the body was. Grave robbers would have left the grave clothes on the corpse for two reasons. First, the body would have been much easier to carry that way, and second, the spices that were wrapped in the folds of the linen strips were very valuable and could have been sold. What had happened? There was only one explanation for John. The resurrected glorified body of the Lord Jesus simply passed through the linen wrappings as it would soon pass through a closed door where His disciples were meeting.

We see the progression of insight into what happened by the use of some different words that are used for “seeing”. John uses three different Greek words in this passage for seeing. In verse 5, the verb means to glance in. In verse 6, the word means to look carefully, to observe. The word “saw” in verse 8 means to perceive with intelligent comprehension. John saw, perceived, knew that Jesus had been raised from the dead. Do you see the progression of faith? Genuine faith looks at the evidence. John is the first one to believe that Jesus is alive! The grave was empty! The grave clothes were like an empty cocoon retaining the shape of Jesus’ body, but there was no body. This was not the work of grave robbers. Remembrance of what Jesus said about being raised on the third day must have begun to flood back into John’s mind. Now he believes; Jesus has risen just as He said He would.

Allow me to take a short break here to share some evidence for faith that Jesus truly did rise. The one thing that the Jewish leaders, the Romans and the disciples agreed on was that the tomb was empty. That is an undisputed fact of history. The question is, “Who would have taken the body”? We have already seen the evidence that it was not a common grave robber. A grave robber would not have unwrapped the body and would not have left the valuable spices behind. Some have said that no one stole the body; Jesus was not really dead. This has been called “the swoon theory”. In other words, Jesus didn’t really die; He just swooned (fainted). The theory is that Jesus because of blood loss and the beatings passed out and they only assumed He was dead. When He was placed in the cool tomb, He revived and walked out and when His disciples saw Him they only thought that was resurrected. Think of all that would have had to happen for that to be true. Having survived in the tomb three days without food and water in this weakened dehydrated condition, He would have had to get out of His own grave clothes (something Lazarus couldn’t do when Jesus raised him from the dead – John 11:44), pushed aside a stone probably weighing well over a ton, overpowered a Roman guard, walked several miles to Emmaus on feet that had been pierced through with a large nail, and finally, He would – in that condition – have had to convince His disciples that He was resurrected. No, the body wasn’t stolen by a grave robber, and Jesus didn’t swoon instead of die. Also, it was not the Jewish leaders who took the body. That was the last thing that they would have wanted. To stop the rapid spread of Christianity that we see in the book of Acts, all they would have had to do is produce His body. The primary message of the early church centered on the cross and the resurrection. The Romans would not have taken the body for reasons similar to why the Jewish leaders would not have taken it. To stop this movement called Christianity that turned the empire upside down all they would have to have done is to produce the body. What about the disciples? Could they be the ones who stole the body. That theory falls apart quickly. If the disciples had stolen the body, then they would have known that the living Christ was a lie. Yet the Bible combined with reliable history tells us that every one of those disciples / apostles were martyred for their faith in the resurrected Christ. The only exception was John himself who was persecuted and banished to a penal colony on an island called Patmos for preaching the gospel of the resurrected Christ. In history, many people died for a lie, but here is the difference. Those who died for a lie believed it was truth that they were dying for. If Jesus did not rise from the dead, these apostles died for a lie that they knew was a lie. Nobody dies for a lie that they know is a lie. There is no other option. Faith’s evidence says the only explanation is that He rose from the dead just as the Bible says! Faith has dawned.

B. Faith Shining (V11-18)

Mary Magdalene loved the Lord Jesus. Who was she? We meet her in the book of **Luke 8:2b (NKJV)** “...Mary called Magdalene, out of whom had come seven demons”. Mary had been a tormented woman possessed by multiple demons. Jesus had set her free and her love for Him was deep. After the other

women, Peter, and John had left the tomb, Mary returned. She did not know about the angels and the grave clothes. She just knew that body of Her Lord was gone. Mary was weeping. The Greek word used here translated “weeping” means to wail. It was constant unrestrained gut-wrenching sobbing. Though she was weak in faith that the Lord would rise as He promised, her love was deep and Jesus would not leave her in such sorrow. Mary, her body convulsing with uncontrolled sobs of grief, stooped down and looked into the tomb. In the tomb, she saw the two angels in white who had taken on human form. It is implied that she didn’t even recognize them as angels. She only wanted to know where they had taken her Lord. Mary still believed that He was dead and she seems consumed to do the only thing she knew to do – to show her love by preparing His body for permanent burial. She was about to find out that this task would not be necessary! We don’t know what alerted Mary to the fact that someone was behind her, but she turned around, and there was the resurrected Lord Jesus. But amazingly, she didn’t recognize Him. Why was that? We don’t know for sure. Mary thought he was the gardener and turns away from Him. Perhaps it was because the last memory she had of Him was as one hanging on a cross, bloodied, beaten and as Isaiah prophesied about Him in **Isaiah 52:14b (HCSB)** “His appearance was so disfigured that He did not look like a man, and His form did not resemble a human being”. Perhaps her eyes were blurred with tears – we just do not know. Then, with a single word from Jesus, Mary knew who He was. Jesus said her name and she knew it was Him. **John 10:3b (NKJV)** “...He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out.”

It is interesting that the first person that the resurrected Christ revealed Himself to was a formerly demon possessed woman who seems to have had little social standing. Mary responds to Jesus’ speaking of her name with the title “Rabboni”. That title in the strengthened form of Rabbi and was used as a title to great honor and extreme reverence. Overcome with joy and delight, Mary fell at Jesus’ feet and began to cling to Him. The weeper had become a worshipper. What Jesus says next sort of sounds like a rebuke in English, but it was not. Jesus was simply saying. “Mary, things are different now. Our relationship will be different, though in many ways better. I will be going to My Father and you will still know Me and worship Me, but my physical presence will not be here. I will send My Spirit to indwell you, empower you, and guide you.” Then Jesus gave her an assignment. **John 20:17b (NKJV)** “...go to My brethren and say to them, 'I am ascending to My Father and your Father, and to My God and your God.'" Mary humbly obeyed.

II. Revelations in the Upper Room (V19-23)

When we put the Gospel accounts together, we see that there were five resurrection appearances on that resurrection Sunday. We will focus on His appearance to His disciples (minus Thomas) who were meeting probably in the same upper room where Jesus gave them His farewell discourse recorded in John 13-16. It was by now resurrection Sunday evening. The doors were locked because they feared that the Jewish leaders might come after them next. What happens? The language implies that suddenly Jesus was there. In other words, He didn’t come through the door. He appeared suddenly. His glorified resurrection body wasn’t bound by the things that these earthly bodies are bound by. It was a real body that could be touched and could eat, but it was not limited by what we call “the laws of nature”. Here is something exciting that I don’t have time to develop – only to just toss it out to you. For those who are His disciples, our resurrection bodies will be like His! **Philippians 3:20-21 (NKJV)** “²⁰ For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, ²¹ who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself.”

Let’s look at what Jesus gives to deal with the disciple’s distress.

A. His Peace in All Situations (V19-20)

I think these words “Peace be with you” were much more than just a formal greeting. Now, because of His “It is finished” that was accomplished on the cross, they could have true peace with God and also the peace of God reigning in their hearts in all situations. Even though their lives were in turmoil, Jesus offers them peace. In your situation, I remind you that the resurrected Savior offers you His peace. Peace is not found in circumstances. Some of you are perhaps thinking that if only your job wasn’t so unstable or if

you had a job you could have peace. Some think that if they were just married, they would have peace. Some think that if they were just married to someone else or not married at all, they could have peace. Some think that if they had their health back they could have peace. You are looking for peace in all the wrong places. Peace is not in a circumstance; peace is in a person! The disciples of Jesus were in turmoil, life controlling fear, and uncertainty. When Jesus appeared, everything was different. His “peace be with you” changes their turmoil into rejoicing.

To reassure them that it was really Him, Jesus shows them the nail prints in His hands and the entrance wound of the spear in His side. Luke puts it like this in **Luke 24:39 (NKJV)** “Behold My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself. Handle Me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see I have.” He was no disembodied spirit as some of the cults teach. Convinced that it was really Jesus, there is no more fear of the Jewish leaders – Jesus is with them. An awareness of His presence chases out all fear.

B. His Power in All Service (V21-23)

When the disciples fear turned to joy, Jesus proceeds to commission them and give them an amazing promise of what was about to come.

1. Their Commission (V21)

In each of the four Gospels and again in Acts chapter one the resurrected Christ gives a commission, marching orders to His disciples. He gives peace and hope in a hopeless world, but His disciples are not to just sit around with one another and talk about how wonderful it is to have peace and hope in a world with turmoil and hopelessness. He commissions them to go into the tumultuous hopeless world as His representatives with the Gospel of peace and hope. Here in verse 21 He commissions them to go into the world to fulfill what the Father sent Him here to do. What did the Father send Him here to do? It is best summarized in **Luke 19:10 (NKJV)** “for the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost.” This is the condensed version of the full commission He would give them a little later in **Matthew 28:19-20 (NKJV)** “¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, *even* to the end of the age.”

Please do not misunderstand me. The peace He gives is beyond description; the joy – the unexplainable joy of forgiveness is amazing; the hope of knowing that He has conquered death and taken away the sting of death (which is sin) is exhilarating beyond description. However, these mega-blessings aren’t an end in themselves. We are to be consumed with sharing this good news until those from every tongue, tribe, and nation hear.

2. Their Power (V22)

Let me share what I believe happens in this verse. I am convinced that what Jesus does here before He ascends to the Father is to give them the pledge and a parable of sorts of the power that they would receive in a short time on the day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit came to indwell and empower His disciples to represent Him on the earth and to go into all the earth to make disciples. What Jesus does here is similar to what many of the Old Testaments prophets did (Jeremiah 13:1-9; 19:1-11; Ezekiel 4;1-4). The Greek word for breath and spirit is the same. Ezekiel pictures the Holy Spirit as God’s breath in Ezekiel 37:9-14. As He blew His breath toward them, it was an object lesson of the soon coming of the Holy Spirit. **Acts 1:8 (NKJV)** “But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”

The fact that Jesus ties in the coming of the Holy Spirit to His going to the Father (John 7:39; 16:7), and the fact that these disciples were waiting in the upper room when the Holy Spirit came on the day of Pentecost indicates that this was only a promise and parable of the coming of the Holy Spirit to indwell them in a few days.

3. The Authority (V23)

Much of Christendom has really messed up this verse. The perversion is that Jesus gave the apostles the authority to forgive sins and that authority was passed down to the church. Scripture teaches very clearly in other places that only God has the authority to forgive sins (Mark 2:7; Daniel 9:9). The New Testament does not contain any incidents of any human being (including the apostles) forgiving sin. The authority is

in God's Word. Any disciple can proclaim what God's word says about forgiveness. If you repent of your sins and trust in Christ alone, I can authoritatively tell you your sins are forgiven. That authoritative proclamation is based on the authority of God's Word; it is not because of some special authority God has given me. Greek scholars tell us that the original language says, "Whosoever sins you forgive shall have already been forgiven them. Whosoever sins you do not forgive shall have already not been forgiven them". That sounds awkward in the English, but it is accurate to the text. We (any Christian) have the authority to proclaim what God's Word says is true.

CONCLUSION

On this day that we focus on the resurrection of Christ, do you have this peace that only the resurrected Christ can give? Do you have the assurance that your sins are forgiven because you have trusted in the living Lord Jesus Christ **alone** to save you? "Alone" means that you trust in nothing else – only the crucified resurrected Lord. Why not turn from everything and everyone else to the risen Savior today?
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