

The Blessing of Belief – *John 20:19-31*

Introduction – And so we come to the end of the story of Jesus, the Son of God, according to apostle whom Jesus loved (Chapter 21 serves as an epilogue of sorts). It was written so that we might “*believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing (we) may have life in His name*” (v31). Therefore, the book was certainly written for unbelievers as a testimony of the Good News. But just as surely it was written for believers to enrich that “*life in His name,*” to spread out the blessings of belief and deepen our devotion to the Lamb that was slain, and to join with the disciples who “*were glad when they saw the Lord*” (v20).

Stoking Faith on the Lord’s Day with the Disciples – John made it clear that Jesus rose from the dead “*on the first day of the week*” (20:1) and reiterates that “*on the same day at evening, being the first day of the week...*” (v19). Thomas wasn’t there and missed the blessing of belief that evening. John tells us that eight days later (another Lord’s Day by Hebrew counting) Jesus appeared again with the disciples along with Thomas (v26). The eighth day Sabbaths were special sabbaths, new-week sabbaths. It was on the eighth day of the Feast of Tabernacles that Jesus cried out, “*If anyone thirsts...*” (John 7:37-38). Males were circumcised on the eighth day, marking them as covenant members. In the old creation there were six days of work followed by a day of rest. John gave us seven signs in the Book of Signs (Chs 1-11) and then an eighth sign on the eighth day, the first day of the new week. In the new creation the first day is a day of rest. We rest because the work of the new creation has been finished and so we now work the rest of the week, working out what Christ has worked in (Eph 10:8-10, Phil 2:12b-13).

This is all tied to why Christians assemble on the Lord’s Day every week. It is here that we corporately meet with Jesus (Heb 12:24) in covenant renewal. This is why it is such a blessing and critical to attend the Lord’s Day worship *with* your brothers and sisters in Christ. Thomas missed the blessing. For those who are wavering in their faith or faithfulness – don’t miss the blessing. At this gathering we begin the service with words much like Christ’s first recorded words here – “*Peace be with you.*”

The Blessing of Belief: Peace with God (vv19-20) – Just as Jesus somehow passed through the linen cloths of His burial, so He somehow passed through the locked doors and stood in the midst of them. He proclaimed Peace to them, and while this might be overlooked as a common greeting, John connects it with Jesus showing them the signs of that procured peace with God – His hands and His side. In his Revelation vision, John records seeing “*a Lamb as though it had been slain*” (Rev 5:6, 9). Jesus’ wounds were signs of glory, the glorious work of redemption. Three times John records Jesus saying “*Peace be with you*” (v19, 21, 26).

The doctrine of our justification by faith alone is rich and glorious and worthy of great study (Rom 4:1-25). But in our passage, we see the results of that justification which Paul makes clear in Rom 5:1, “*Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ...*”

Many refuse to believe that they were enemies of God with the full wrath of God justly upon us, but we all were (Rom 5:10-11) and it is only by the saving work of Jesus that we can be reconciled to God. At peace. Friends. What happens when this gets ahold of you? “*Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord*” (v20).

The Blessing of Belief: Power, Authority, and Commission (vv21-23) – This might be considered John’s version of the Great Commission (Matt 28:18-20) and the promise of the coming Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8). The words are cryptic and have been subject to much interpretive debate. New Creation language is here, for when He breathed on them, John uses the same word the LXX uses in Gen 2:7 where God breathed on Adam and he became a living soul. Now they can speak with the authority of the breath of God and this recalls the resurrection imagery of Ezek 37:1-6. Sent to preach this good news in the power of the Spirit, the church declares the forgiveness of sins to all who would repent and believe. The church does not have the power and authority to forgive or retain sins. It does have the power and authority to declare that Jesus has forgiven your sins when people have confessed them and to declare that Jesus retains His judgment against them when they have not repented (see also Matt 16:19, 18:17-18, 2 Cor 2:6-8 and WCF XXX.2). This is all part of the work of taking dominion of the earth and disciplining the nations. “*For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith. Who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?*” (1 John 5:4-5).

The Blessing of Believing: Evangelical Faith (vv24-28) – Thomas was the straggler. Remember, he was the one who thought they were all going to die if they went up to Judea where they wanted to kill Jesus (11:16). So, he had not assembled with the disciples on that *first* eighth day. They must have sought him out, telling him “*We have seen the Lord*” (20:25), but Thomas said he would not believe unless he put his own finger into the wounds (v25). Thomas did assemble with the believing disciples the next Lord’s Day, and Jesus again appeared (v26), “*Peace to you.*” This reminds me of the end of the hymn that Paul records, “*If we are faithless, He remains faithful; He cannot deny Himself*” (2 Tim 3:13).

Jesus knew Thomas’s frame and grants the demand. It appears it wasn’t the touching but simply the seeing that was all he needed. And these commands: “*Do not be unbelieving, but believing*” from the One Who grants such faith. Faith is the natural response to the faithfulness of God and this faith leads to a profession and a devotion, “*My Lord and my God!*” Church history teaches us that Thomas would lead the apostolic work of church planting all the way to southern India (and possibly beyond).

The New Way of Believing (vv29-31) – Signs accompanied the ministry of Jesus and then afterwards with the apostles and through that generation (2 Cor 12:12). A new blessing now comes to those who believe without seeing, but rather by hearing. And so verse 31, “*These are written that you may believe...*” It is through the written Word (which would be read aloud in assemblies), the preached Word, that God brings forth faith (Rom 10:14-15). So, who is John talking about? His comment is for you, and for you, and you too. These things were written so that you might believe.

And we, the church, have been sent with these Words, empowered by the Spirit to proclaim forgiveness of sins to the nations. The church needs to repent of its angst and embarrassment with the Word of God, for it is the power of God for salvation (Rom 1:16-17).

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