

John 20:18-31

On Sunday evening when the disciples gathered, why were they afraid (v. 19)? They were afraid of the Jewish authorities because they were disciples of Jesus and He had just been crucified for treason so it was reasonable to think that they might come after them as well. And now, the story is circulating that they had stolen His body (Matthew 28:11-15). Plus, the disciples had almost been arrested with Jesus (18:8).

What happened next? Suddenly they saw Jesus standing in their midst, and they heard His voice saying, "Peace." It seems clear that the Lord entered the room without opening the doors. This was a miracle. It should be remembered that His resurrection body was a real body of flesh and bones. Yet, He had the power to pass through barriers including grave clothes and a rocky tomb and otherwise act independently of natural laws.¹

How did their fear change (v. 20)? After announcing peace to them, He showed them the scars on His hands and His side from the Cross. Upon examining His wounds, their fear disappeared and the disciples were elated. Joy filled their hearts to realize it was truly the Lord. He had done as He said He would. He had risen from the dead.

"As the father has sent me, I am sending you" (v. 21). What does this say about the mission Jesus has given to His disciples? He had been teaching them as His disciples. Now He is recommissioning them as His apostles. He is sending them out as His representatives. Jesus gave the ministry baton to the eleven with the command to preach, teach, do miraculous signs and make disciples. His plan was to send them into all the known world just as His Father had sent Him on a mission (cf. 17:18) to carry out the work of reaching the lost with the gospel. Clearly, on this occasion Jesus was presenting His mission as a model for His disciples' mission.

Each Gospel closes with a commission from the risen Lord. It expresses God's will for every believer in the present age.²

Application: **In what ways do you see that baton as being passed to you....as a disciple of Jesus?**

Did the disciples receive the Holy Spirit at this time (v. 22)? More than likely they did not. John did not report anything out of the ordinary happening as a result of our Lord's actions. The disciples were not transformed as they would be at Pentecost. There was no immediate evidence that the Holy Spirit had been received. In fact, the next thing to happen in John's Gospel was that some of the disciples went fishing. Evidently there was only one coming of the Spirit on these disciples and that happened at Pentecost (Acts 2).

Most scholars believe Jesus is symbolically bestowing the Spirit upon His disciples, although it will not actually take place until Pentecost. John 7:39 makes it clear that the Holy Spirit could not come in His fullness until Jesus had gone back to heaven. This interpretation accounts for Thomas not receiving the Spirit before Pentecost.

Others claim that this reception of the Spirit was in anticipation of the day of Pentecost and should be understood as a partial limited gift of knowledge, understanding, and empowerment until Pentecost, 50 days later.³

What does v. 23 mean? By proclaiming the gospel they are in effect forgiving or not forgiving sins, depending on whether the hearers accept or reject Jesus Christ. If a person believes in Jesus, then a Christian has the right to declare his sins are forgiven and vice versa. God does not forgive people's sins because we (imperfect human beings) do, nor does He withhold forgiveness because we do. The rest of Scripture—including 1 John 1:9—indicates that forgiveness is not delegated. Only God can forgive sins (Luke 5:21). Only God knows the heart that is repentant.

Let us illustrate this view. The disciples go out preaching the gospel. Some people repent of their sins and receive the Lord Jesus. The disciples are authorized to tell them that their sins have been forgiven. Others refuse to repent and will not believe in Christ. The disciples tell them that they are still in their sins, and that if they die, they will perish eternally.⁴

What do these passages suggest about Jesus' post-resurrection appearances—especially concerning His body? He's not immediately or easily recognizable—maybe having a somewhat different appearance. He's able to pass through walls (v. 19) and other natural barriers. There were scars on His hands and side (v. 20), so His body must have been similar. Mary recognized Him by voice so that must have been similar.

What was Thomas' position relative to the risen Lord (v. 25)? Thomas had no doubts that Jesus had died. However, he refused to believe the other disciples' report that Jesus was alive without personal physical proof. He insisted on touching Jesus, and specifically His crucifixion wounds, not just seeing Him.⁵

Was Thomas' response to the news of the resurrection unreasonable (vv. 24-25)? No. Before we become too harsh with Thomas, we need to remember that the other disciples believed because they saw. Thomas was really demanding to see the same things that convinced the others. He was not asking for anything more than what the others saw, i.e., bodily proof of Jesus' risen state. Note that Jesus didn't rebuke him.....and Thomas was willing to believe when confronted with the evidence.

What did Jesus do a week later (vv. 26-27)? One week later the Lord appeared to His disciples again. This time Thomas was with them. Again the Lord Jesus entered the room in a miraculous way and again greeted them with "*Peace be with you!*" The Lord dealt gently and patiently with Thomas. He asked him to reach out and touch His wounds.....and to stop doubting and believe.

How did Thomas respond (v. 28)? Thomas then uttered one of the most profound declarations of saving faith in Scripture. For a Jew to call another human being "*My Lord and my God*" was blasphemy under normal circumstances (cf. 10:33). Yet that is precisely who Thomas believed Jesus was. He acknowledged the divinity he did not see by the wounds he did see.⁶

The purpose of this test was not just to satisfy Thomas' curiosity or as payback for refusing to believe the other disciples. It was to bring him to faith that Jesus indeed was the resurrected Messiah.⁷

Who was Jesus referring to (v. 29)? All the other believers who would come to faith without ever seeing Jesus in the flesh – including us! They would believe on the basis of the proclaimed gospel and the evidences for its validity. We are the recipients of a special blessing.

Thomas' faith was not the kind of faith that was most pleasing to the Lord. It was a faith based on sight. More blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.⁸

If Jesus did many other miracles (v. 30), why did John only record these specific seven (out of the 35 recorded in the 4 Gospels)? They are sufficient and exactly what we need to know in order to believe that Jesus is the Messiah. Another dozen or so miracles would not convince non-believers or strengthen Jesus' credibility.

What was the purpose of Jesus miracles according to John (v. 31)? So that we may believe in Jesus and have life in His name, i.e., so that many would be saved. This is perhaps the key verse in John's gospel.

Application: How are we like the eleven disciples of our Lord? Often times we are so frightened and lacking in faith that when called to action we do nothing, or like the women who are mis-focused and preoccupied with fears about how they can move a stone (Mark 16:3). How foolish these fears seem to us later, and yet often our own fears keep us from attempting what our Lord commands us to do.

¹ William MacDonald, *Believer's Bible Commentary: Old and New Testaments*, ed. Arthur Farstad (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1995), 1568.

² Dr. Thomas L. Constable, Notes on John, 2023 Edition (published by <http://planobiblechapel.org/soniclight/>), 531.

³ Edwin A. Blum, "John," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*: J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 343.

⁴ William MacDonald, *Believer's Bible Commentary: Old and New Testaments*, ed. Arthur Farstad (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1995), 1569.

⁵ Dr. Thomas L. Constable, Notes on John, 2023 Edition (published by <http://planobiblechapel.org/soniclight/>), 537.

⁶ William MacDonald, *Believer's Bible Commentary: Old and New Testaments*, ed. Arthur Farstad (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1995), 1569.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 538.

⁸ *Ibid.*