

## **John #55: Peace that Empowers (John 20:19-23)**

### **PRAY**

Do you ever feel small, insignificant, or vulnerable in this hard or hostile world? I know I do  
I feel small... I'm just one of 8 billion people here, with limited time, resources, energy  
Seemingly powerless to effect much change in the world—or even in myself!  
I feel insignificant... Who am I, and what can I really accomplish in this life?  
And I feel vulnerable... I'm not naïve to the real, growing opposition toward Christians  
It's relatively harmless when it's just trolling comments on social media  
But when those beliefs become part of the cultural milieu, it can be scary  
And it's a lot harder when someone you care about becomes hostile  
That's to say nothing of the spiritual forces that've always stood opposed to us  
Or how we so often lose the battles in our own flesh, too  
When I feel, small, insignificant, or vulnerable, it leads to anxiety and fear in my heart  
I don't know what's going to happen, and I don't expect to be able to stem the tide  
Will I really be able to stand firm when the day of evil comes? Or when it's already here?  
I feel powerless... And my heart has little peace

Now, feeling small and vulnerable isn't always a bad thing...  
It's good to be humble and aware of our humanity and weaknesses... It teaches us trust  
But it's not good to despair and to live, for all intents and purposes, *as if Christ isn't risen*  
That's the crux of the matter, really... If Jesus is risen, alive, and reigning, it changes everything  
And the way we think and act and see ourselves should be always coloured by that reality

When we feel vulnerable or fearful, we may not be in a good place, but we are in good company  
This is very much how Jesus' disciples felt *on the very day* that Jesus rose again  
But the way Jesus met them there—the way he treated them and spoke to them—changed them  
How Jesus apparently felt about them, even at one of their lowest points, was astounding  
And I believe our fears can be abated when we know how Jesus really feels about us  
What does he do for us? What would he say to you? I pray he meets us here today

Please **TURN** in a Bible to John chapter 20... John 20 **[page #906]**  
We have just a few more messages to go from the gospel according to John  
We have reached the pinnacle of action—Jesus' death and resurrection  
And today's passage takes place on Easter Sunday still  
So remember what we saw a couple weeks ago in the passage right before this,  
As Jesus' absence from where he was buried turned some disciples' fear to faith  
And Jesus' presence as the risen Lord turned Mary's sorrow to sight  
Just review a bit of the story of that morning: **READ v.6-9, 14-18**<sup>1</sup>

Later on, on that very day: **READ v.19a**<sup>2</sup>

So whatever Mary told them wasn't enough to convince them or take away their cowardice  
Why were the doors locked? They were afraid of what the Jewish authorities might do to them  
Not many hours before this, they'd watched their Lord and Friend get mutilated—  
All at the instigation of the Jewish leaders... They must've been traumatized

And they must've thought: 'If those guys successfully got Jesus killed,  
We could very easily be next'... And that was true  
Having chopped off the head of Jesus' movement, like dousing a bonfire,  
it wouldn't have been difficult to move now to try to snuff out the embers  
You'd think the possibility of Christ being alive again would've dispelled their fears  
But no... They were slow to believe or comprehend

Yet John talks about locked doors not just to point out how afraid they were  
He really wanted to show how miraculous Jesus' appearance to them was: **READ v.19<sup>3</sup>**  
All of a sudden, Jesus either walked right through the walls, or materialized out of thin air  
Imagine how high you'd jump... You'd already be on edge, super nervous about stuff  
When suddenly, an additional person just *appears* there in the room with you  
[jump] 'Augh! Where'd he come from? What's going on?'  
We don't know whether they recognized him right away or not—remember Mary didn't  
But either way, this would have been a startling moment

[tr] Even if he did look like Jesus, they wouldn't have known right away it was him, in the flesh  
Was this his ghost? An apparition of some sort?  
John doesn't say the disciples were happy until a bit later  
So I suspect they were apprehensive or confused...

Especially considering Jesus' first words to them: **READ v.19b<sup>4</sup>**  
You might picture them fearful, startled, shouting, aghast, trembling...  
And Jesus immediately speaks peace into the scene... Which eventually leads to joy  
That's what meeting the risen Christ did for them... And it's what it can do in us, even today:

### **Meeting the risen Christ elicits joyful peace (v.19-21)**

[r] When the risen Christ appeared to his disciples, it evoked joyful peace in them  
[r] Meeting the risen Christ elicits joyful peace

Now, the Hebrew word for peace, *shalom*, became the ordinary form of greeting, like 'Hello!'  
So was Jesus just greeting his friends? Or did he mean something more? "*Peace be with you.*"  
You might recall right before his death, he'd told his disciples:

***"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you.  
Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid."*** (John 14:27)

And now, that word of farewell becomes a word of greeting  
On one level, *shalom* was a normal, conventional greeting  
At first, the disciples might've thought little of it... But Jesus repeated it multiple times here  
So as they reflected on his words, they would've remembered Jesus promised them peace  
And then realized that the resurrection must've assured them of it

The word *shalom* meant a lot more than just peace of mind, too  
It was more of a far-reaching, all-encompassing well-being  
*Shalom* was to characterize God's people under God's rule (or his kingdom)  
So when Jesus announced 'Shalom be with you' on the first Easter, it was a declaration:  
The *shalom* of God, the peace of reconciliation and harmony and life under God  
Was now given to his people... A new kingdom had dawned

But consider Jesus' words on yet another level... Think of the last time we saw all his disciples  
They had an amazing last supper with Jesus, including a foot washing and Jesus' teaching  
But then in chapter 18, as Jesus was betrayed and arrested in the garden,  
Most of the disciples seem to disappear entirely from the story  
Other gospel accounts say how all the disciples abandoned Jesus and fled<sup>5</sup>  
John records that he and Peter slunk along, following from a distance,  
Just prior to Peter falling into terrible denials of his Lord  
Here, in chapter 20, are the very first words Jesus says to them, the next time he sees them: peace

I mean, that's crazy grace... I doubt I'd ever respond this kindly to failures around me  
Let's say you and I were playing a sport together, and our team was strategizing  
And I told you to go to a particular part of the field to try to make a play  
But then you immediately went to the opposite corner you were supposed to go to  
And your mistake ended up costing us the game  
I'd hope I would be gracious, but I'd obviously be disappointed  
You'd probably be even more disappointed in yourself,  
thinking you let the whole team down... And that's over something trivial  
The disciples knew they had failed Jesus, at the moment of his greatest need  
And then he'd *died*... They'd collectively let the whole team down, grieved Jesus,  
And their actions maybe even contributed to his death... Talk about failure  
And yet Jesus' first words to them after their failures, in the midst of an irrational state of fear:  
*'Peace be with you.'* ... No, this was no courtesy... This was no accident...  
He surely spoke with special reference to the events of the last few days<sup>6</sup>  
No disappointment in his voice... No blame or fault-finding or rebuke... Peace  
He didn't return after his resurrection to shame them for their cowardliness or denials  
He took their guilt and shame on the cross... He'd remember their sins no more  
Then he rose to announce: *"Peace be with you."*

So, in what ways does Jesus' rising again bring us peace?

Well, if Jesus is alive and reigning on the throne, we don't need to fret over the future  
If Jesus conquered the grave and defeated death, we don't need to dread death anymore  
Whether for ourselves or for loved ones who love the Lord  
We also have a secured spiritual and eternal peace because of Christ's resurrection  
Romans 4-5 claim that our restored righteousness before God depends on the resurrection  
It says our faith can be counted to us as righteousness because Jesus died and rose  
There, Paul says: *"It will be counted to us who believe in him who raised from the  
dead Jesus our Lord, who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our  
justification."* (Romans 4:24-25)... Notice those words: raised for our justification  
We are justified, or made right in God's sight, because Christ is risen  
And do you know what the very next verse is? *"Therefore, since we have been  
justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."* (5:1)  
In other words, we are no longer enemies with God—at war with him  
He has signed a permanent peace treaty with us in Christ's blood  
And Jesus' new life secures our new life and reconciliation and salvation  
That's why the Bible can now call the good news of Jesus *'the gospel of peace'*<sup>7</sup>

Do you know this peace? Have you turned away from your sins and turned to Jesus in faith?  
Have you been transformed from an enemy of God into his friend?  
I hope you have, or I pray that you will, even today... Jesus holds his peace out to you  
If you want to receive his peace, we'd love nothing more than to help you do so

And believer, I hope you can see how this keeps applying to you, even long after salvation  
You may be spiritually hiding away today, like the disciples behind locked doors  
You know you've fallen short in countless and disgraceful ways  
You're burdened by so much shame... Fearful over what Jesus thinks of you  
I urge you to picture Jesus standing among us today, and smiling, and making eye contact  
with you, and saying, "*Peace be with you.*"... Hear him speak that to your torn-up heart  
Should you now run? Dare hide your face? When in his eyes there is only grace?  
Completely free, the shame is gone... He bore your sin; you bear his love  
In our Scripture reading earlier, we read this prayer from **Psalm 85:8**: "*Let me hear what  
God the LORD will speak, for he will speak peace to his people, to his saints; but let them  
not turn back to folly.*" ...Pray that again right now!

After speaking peace to his people, Jesus then showed them his wounds—as if to say:  
'I've finished what I set out to do—what I said I would do... I've won peace for you.'  
**READ v.20<sup>8</sup>**... When they were finally convinced this really was Jesus, alive again,  
of course this led to gladness! That understates it: they were overjoyed—ecstatic  
They must've gone from jumping in fright to jumping around in delight—celebration  
They had a new joyful peace... And why? They had *seen* the Lord with their own eyes—  
The one they imagined they'd never see again

John wrote this later in the Bible, connecting their seeing Jesus with believers' enduring joy:  
*"That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our  
eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of  
life... we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us... And we are  
writing these things so that our joy may be complete."* (1 John 1:1-4)  
You haven't yet seen Jesus with your eyes... Because we still walk by faith, not sight  
But through the eyewitness testimony of those who did see and hear and touch,  
We can have our faith grow, our peace increase, and our joy swell

Their faith apparently wavered, until Jesus showed them the living proof of his resurrection:  
**READ v.20a<sup>9</sup>**... 'See where the nails went through my wrists...  
See where the spear pierced my side... It's really me!'  
This wasn't a ghost... This was a real, physical body... This wasn't an imposter  
Out of all crucifixion victims, only Jesus would've had a spear wound in his side  
This was, without a doubt anymore, the crucified Lamb of God *and* risen Lord  
Their hearts could be flooded with the peace Jesus spoke about now  
Because they knew it was true... And when we believe it's true, so can ours

Now, Jesus' glorified body showed that something very spiritual happened  
And Jesus' scars showed that something very physical happened  
Just think: The disciples recognized him not by blazing glory, but by the scars!  
We don't know all the details about what Jesus' resurrection body was like

Though Scriptures tell us glorified bodies will be imperishable, glorious, and powerful  
For believers, one day our bodies will be transformed to be like Christ's

But I find it fascinating and comforting that Jesus' glorified body still bears the scars  
Forever displaying that the price has been paid  
Forever showing how far the Lord stooped in order to love us and save us  
And forever encouraging us that Jesus knows what it's like to suffer like us  
If you've got scars—real or metaphorical—so does your Saviour!

Edward Shillito wrote a poem called 'Jesus of the Scars',  
shortly after the devastation of World War I... In it, he says:

*If, when the doors are shut, Thou drawest near,  
Only reveal those hands, that side of Thine;  
We know today what wounds are, have no fear,  
Show us Thy Scars, we know the countersign.*

(In other words, 'Your scars are the sign that proves it's really you'... The poem concludes:)

*The other gods were strong; but Thou wast weak;  
They rode, but Thou didst stumble to a throne;  
But to our wounds only God's wounds can speak,  
And not a god has wounds, but Thou alone.*

Take comfort, suffering saint: Only our God has scars, like us

Jesus repeats his greeting of peace in v.21, hinting that this was no mere greeting: **READ v.21a**<sup>10</sup>  
His resurrection brought them true, lasting, joyful peace... Has it done the same for you?  
When Jesus shows up in your life—when he meets you—this can be yours

[tr] But after repeating *shalom*, Jesus takes things in a new direction  
Instead of only focusing on his followers' well-being,  
he says this should move us to care about others' well-being too  
See, peace between God and man isn't just our salvation  
Spreading this peace is the church's ongoing mission... And so we learn that:

### **Meeting the risen Christ empowers gracious mission (v.21-23)**

[r] When Christ meets us, his resurrection imbues us with power from the Holy Spirit  
[r] Thus, meeting the risen Christ empowers gracious mission

Look what I mean: **READ v.21-23**<sup>11</sup>

Throughout John, Jesus has repeatedly been described as being sent from God

He was sent into the world on a mission

He was God's representative and messenger, heaven's ambassador

And now, as he was leaving earth, he passed his work on to his followers: **READ v.21b**<sup>12</sup>

Like Father, like Son... The Father sent him, now the Son sends his people

The Father poured the Spirit out on the Son, now the Son pours the Spirit out

And so, Jesus' disciples—including us today—are now the sent ones

Since we no longer belong to the world, we are *sent* back into it on mission

The original apostles may have been on a special level of sent-ness

But the church as a whole is called to carry on the work of Christ's kingdom

This isn't just the job of missionaries and pastors and professional evangelists...

And it's not for some future day when we're better trained...

We can't only hang out in holy huddles... We're already *sent*  
Christ was sent into the world so that whoever believes in him won't perish but have eternal life  
He came to seek and save the lost... He came that we may have abundant life and full joy  
We can't save people like he can... But we can pass on his message and point people to him  
And then we can baptize and teach one another to observe all that he commanded us  
This is our privilege and our responsibility... Do you see yourself as sent by Jesus?

Now, some people suppose that since Jesus was also sent to do a bunch of miracles, so are we  
But that's reading stuff into the text that isn't there... He was sent to bring salvation  
And we are sent to spread the gospel of salvation... We know this because:  
Right after this, he doesn't talk about miracles, he talks about forgiveness  
So our mission isn't just to copy everything Jesus did  
Our mission is to take his message everywhere we can... Wherever we are

Now, I personally tend to see evangelism as a burden, not a joy... But this should excite us!  
If we have joy and peace, it's really just those overflowing  
As God overflows in love and sends us Jesus, so we overflow with Jesus and love others

**Michael Reeves** explains how this totally changes what mission looks like:

*"It is not, then, that God lounges back in heaven, simply phoning in his order that we get on with evangelism so that he might get more servants. If that were the case, evangelism would take a lot of self-motivation—and you can always tell when the church thinks like that, for that's when evangelism gets left to the more adrenaline-stoked salespeople or professionals. But the reality is so different. **The truth is that God is already on mission: in love, the Father has sent his Son and his Spirit. It is the outworking of his very nature. That means that when we go out and share the knowledge of God's great love we reflect something very profound about who God is. For when Jesus sends us, he is allowing us to share the missional, generous, outgoing shape of God's own life.**"*

**READ v.22<sup>13</sup>**... Earlier, Jesus had promised to send the Holy Spirit to them  
He said it would actually be better for them

to have the Spirit inside them than to have Jesus himself beside them  
But there's a lot of confusion and debate about this verse here in chapter 20:

Was Christ actually bestowing the Spirit on them right then?

Because elsewhere he said the Spirit wouldn't come until after he left  
And Acts 2 records the Spirit coming in power on them at Pentecost, 50 days later

So what's happening here? Well, John doesn't record much changing for the disciples

They still locked their doors, they still struggled with fear and doubt,

And by chapter 21, they're going back to their old jobs, sorting out  
basic restoration with Jesus, and still comparing service records<sup>14</sup>

So D.A. Carson concludes that *"All this is a far cry from the power, joy, exuberant witness, courageous preaching, and delight in suffering displayed by the early Christians after Pentecost in Acts... If this is understood to be [John's version of] Pentecost, it must be frankly admitted that the results are desperately disappointing, and the promises of John 14–16 vastly inflated."*

Instead, this seems to be a symbolic promise of the coming gift of the Spirit

It was an object lesson, an acted parable, or a dramatization  
of what would come to them in the near future

This would be why John emphasizes that Jesus breathed on them... That's surely symbolic  
It brings to mind God breathing the breath of life into Adam in Genesis 2  
Or God breathing life into the valley of dry bones in Ezekiel 37  
So Carson proposes: *"This is the beginning of the new creation, the awakening of the dead."*  
And breath is such an appropriate picture,  
As the Hebrew word for breath is the same word used for 'wind' and 'Spirit'  
And at Pentecost, a mighty wind would blow through the house as the Spirit arrived  
It's like Jesus was saying, "Get ready! I'm going to breathe the Spirit out on you soon"  
'I'm giving him to you... Be ready to receive the gift.'

And what a gift the Spirit is! Think about it: this is nothing less than receiving God as a gift!  
God himself to be with us and live in us, filling us with his love, joy, and peace  
And empowering us for his mission on earth  
In order to do the work Christ sends us to do, we desperately need the Holy Spirit  
But thanks to the generous grace of God, we have the Holy Spirit!

And do you see? This all flows from the peace Jesus has given us  
Because he made peace between God and man, God's Spirit can come indwell man  
His peace leads to our empowerment...  
And therefore, We don't need to feel small, insignificant, and vulnerable  
We don't need to be afraid anymore  
*"For he who is in you is greater..."<sup>15</sup>*

But our mission isn't to fight the world or take over the world... Jesus overcame the world!  
Our mission is a mission of mercy... A gracious mission  
Hence Jesus' final words in this passage about our power of forgiveness: **READ v.23<sup>16</sup>**  
So having Christ's peace and the Spirit's power leads to us handling forgiveness  
That's the mission! To declare both God's condemnation of sin and his free offer of forgiveness  
It's not that we actually have the power to forgive all sins, even those not against us  
God is the one who forgives or doesn't forgive... Our job is to proclaim it  
We're to go out with the gracious message that our sins can be forgiven, if we'll have it  
As the apostle Paul later proclaimed in **Acts 13:37-38**—speaking of Christ:  
*"He whom God raised up did not see corruption. Let it be known to you therefore,  
brothers, that through this man forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you..."*

It might sound stern or harsh that we can withhold forgiveness from someone  
But really, that's just the result of preaching the gospel  
In response, people either repent and receive forgiveness  
Or they reject the offer of forgiveness, and thus are left in their sins  
Simon Manchester explains: *"When you say to somebody who has repented and believed,  
"You have forgiveness," you are basically telling the truth. You are telling them that they  
are safe. But when the person says to you, "I don't believe, and I won't believe," we have  
the serious responsibility of saying, "You're not forgiven, and you're not safe.""*

So we proclaim to one another today, and to you, depending on your response to Jesus,  
That if you reject him, forgiveness is not yours—at least not yet  
And if you receive him, there is now no condemnation for you... You are forgiven!

## CONCLUSION

So come to him... Be cleansed... Take heart... Be at peace... And rejoice!  
When we are truly met by the risen Christ, we are blessed with peace and power  
We cowards become empowered for God's gracious mission  
So brother and sister, whenever you feel small or powerless, remember Jesus' words here:  
*"Peace be with you... Receive the Holy Spirit..."*

Because he's been breathed on us, we can now breathe easier

**PRAY:** Phew... Holy Spirit, living breath of God, breathe new life into our willing souls!

## Benediction: prayer, 5min, Num. 6

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<sup>1</sup> Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen cloths lying there, and the face cloth, which had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen cloths but folded up in a place by itself. Then the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; for as yet they did not understand the Scripture, that he must rise from the dead... Having said this, [Mary] turned around and saw Jesus standing, but she did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?" Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away." Jesus said to her, "Mary." She turned and said to him in Aramaic, "Rabboni!" (which means Teacher). Jesus said to her, "Do not cling to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to my brothers and say to them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'" Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord"—and that he had said these things to her.

<sup>2</sup> On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews

<sup>3</sup> On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you."

<sup>4</sup> Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you."

<sup>5</sup> Matthew 26:56

<sup>6</sup> HT Ryle

<sup>7</sup> Ephesians 6:15

<sup>8</sup> When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord.

<sup>9</sup> When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side.

<sup>10</sup> Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you.

<sup>11</sup> Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you." And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld."

<sup>12</sup> As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you

<sup>13</sup> And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit.

<sup>14</sup> HT Carson

<sup>15</sup> 1 John 4:4

<sup>16</sup> If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld."