

## John 20:18-23

*18 Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord"-- and that he had said these things to her.*

18 Mary will be the first in a string of people to be witnesses of the resurrection. Peter will see the Lord (1 Corinthians 15:5). Cleopas and his friend will too (Luke 24:18). Then Jesus will appear to the whole group. The Life Application Bible points out that Mary gives us a great pattern to follow. She examined the tomb and found it empty. She met with Jesus. Then she went to tell others about her encounter.

Everyone needs to look at the empty tomb and realize what it means. Jesus has conquered death! God accepted His sacrifice for our sins, and we can rise to new life with Him. The Resurrection means Jesus has reconciled us with God (Romans 4:25).

Next, we have a personal encounter with Jesus that brings us to a relationship that is personal and intimate. He is our rabboni, Master teacher. Finally, if it means that much to us, we will surely tell those that we encounter of how He has changed our life. We will tell how the grave is empty and that He lives within our heart. He is alive, and that makes all the difference in this world and the next!

*19 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."*

19 If anyone ever had sensory overload, it was the ten disciples who witnessed that moment. I wonder what the conversation was about the moment before He appeared. Perhaps they did not write it down because it was too embarrassing. I know what I would have probably been saying. It would have been something like, "I want to believe Mary and Cleopas, but I saw His body. No one comes back from that condition. Who would want to? The Sanhedrin is probably coming for us too. I think Mary and Cleopas saw what they wanted to see. I want to see Him too, but..." Suddenly there He was. "Peace be with you," He said.

Freeze frame that scene, eyes as big as saucers, mouths hanging open, and not a soul moving. How did He get in there? The door is still locked! He says, "Shalom!" How do you have shalom when you are staring at a murder victim who just came out of a grave? And slowly you start to accept the reality of what you are witnessing.

That scene reminds me of some testimonies of salvation. Suddenly, a soul encounters Jesus, like Paul will on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:3,4). Jesus can do it in many different ways, but every way is just as shocking. Suddenly, we must face the truth that we have refused to believe (Isaiah 1:18). It becomes undeniable and we must set aside our false perceptions and accept reality. That is when we see how depraved we are and how holy God is. We come to God for mercy and for the first time in our lives find shalom, peace with God. The guilt is gone. We have been made right with God. Peace at last (Romans 5:1).

*20 When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord.*

20a It was those marks that gained our peace with God, for the wrath of God upon our sins fell on Him so that we could be free. I have always looked at this display as not

only the proof that He was indeed Jesus of Nazareth risen from the dead, but the eager display of His love for them. It was like saying, "Look! See how much I love you! This is the price I paid so that we could be together forever." Fellow believer, when Satan tempts you to doubt God's love, run to the wounds. Look at His hands and His side and be reassured. He loves you that much (Romans 8:32).

Do you realize that those wounds do not go away? When the same John that wrote this Gospel saw Jesus before the throne of God decades later, he still saw the marks that caused His death (Revelation 5:6).

Seeing the wounds helped the disciples with the doubts that would naturally have risen in their minds. He is not an apparition or a non-physical entity (Luke 24:39-43). There was no doubt now for the ten in that room. <sup>20b</sup> *Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord.* (ESV) Their friend was back! They were not leaderless. Hope returned. The real reason to be overjoyed would take some time for them to understand. When we first "see" the Lord, we are overjoyed too. We do not understand it all either, but we know He is with us and that we are loved. For that transformational moment, that is enough.

*<sup>21</sup> Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you."*

21a Maybe He said it again because they were too shocked to hear it the first time. Or maybe it was because He had just presented His wounds as the reason that we should have peace. Or perhaps Jesus said it twice because that normal greeting was doubly significant that Sunday evening. It is still the common greeting in Israel, but the double peace is for those who know what those wounds can mean to them.

When Charles Cowman announced his first evangelistic meeting in Japan, he went through the streets with a megaphone and shouted, "Anyone desiring peace come and hear about the true God." One older Japanese couple were sitting on their balcony and heard the announcement. They had spent a great deal of their life searching for peace. The husband said to his wife, "Can it be possible that, after all our weary years of searching, at last we shall find peace?"<sup>i</sup> That night they were his first two converts to come forward and pray to know the Prince of Peace, Christ Jesus. They found the peace for which they had longed. Have you?

21b This is the disciples' commission. It is ours as well. How did the Father send Jesus? We could take the whole study time to elaborate on this one verse but let me summarize it briefly. We have seen over and over again that Jesus was totally dependent on God's direction (John 5:19). We have seen that He only did and said what He saw and heard from the Father (John 12:49). He was sent as a light in the darkness. He was humble and meek but firm and clear. He trained others, gave witness to the truth, and laid down His life for His sheep (John 15:13). That is a tall order, but remember it was preceded by shalom. When you are in God's will, you walk into life's situations with the amazing peace of God. That gets attention and influences lives! Will you receive your commissioning? <sup>21b</sup> *"As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you."* (ESV) This is not just an assignment but also a way of life. Not my will but Yours be done!

*<sup>22</sup> And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit."*

22 This was a powerfully symbolic and prophetic act. The first time that God breathed into man, he became a living soul (Genesis 2:7). More than mere animal, man had the awareness of self, the ability to be creative, and a will that could decide things other than mere survival. That life of the first Adam has come down through the generations to these disciples, to you and me, but this soul life that we have received is corrupted with the fallen and sinful nature of Adam (Romans 5:17).

Jesus breathed on the disciples and invited them to receive the Holy Spirit. This is more than the breath of life. This is the very life of God in us. This is rebirth, a restoring of the image of God in the soul. It is the spiritual birth Jesus described to Nicodemus (John 3:3). The first breath of God gave us physical (soul) life. The second breath of God gives us spiritual life.

The disciples would not actually receive the Holy Spirit until Pentecost. Jesus will tell them to wait in Jerusalem until this second breath fills them (Luke 24:29). He describes it as the power to be a witness to the world (Acts 1:8). That is just what He has asked them to do, to be sent out by God as He was sent into the world. Jesus insisted the Holy Spirit was the power needed to fulfill this commission, and yet many people attempt to be a witness in their own power. Without the Spirit, witnessing is obeying Jesus as the Pharisees obeyed the Law, out of wrote compulsory obedience without the life of God. Our witness must be led and empowered by the Holy Spirit if it is to bear fruit that remains.

I have passed out more tracts than I can count. It was a duty, an obligation, a fulfilling of the law, but I do not know of any fruit that remained (John 15:16). I am not saying God cannot use tracts or literature. I have heard many testimonies of people saved by those very means. I am saying that I was not led by the Spirit to do so. But when the Holy Spirit led me to put up the sermons on the sidewalk here, we have seen fruit that remained. When the Holy Spirit led a conversation to take a spiritual direction, I have seen fruit that remained. As the Father sent me, Jesus said, so send I you. That is to be in continual communion with the Father, seeking His leading, not compulsory performance (1 Thessalonians 5:17).

*23 If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld."*

(Matthew 16:19) This is a difficult passage because other Scripture indicates that only God can forgive sin (Mark 2:7; Daniel 9:9). We cannot forgive people for sins against God, but we can forgive those who sin against us. God grants us the power to forgive (Matthew 6:14). The world does not seem to be able to truly do that, as it is a work of the Holy Spirit. I think Jesus is saying that in the case of believers, the sins of those who sin against us will not be held to their account if we forgive them. That does not mean that the sins against God will be forgiven. How important it is for us to be like Jesus and forgive!

Another interpretation of this passage is that the idea is not that individual Christians or churches have authority on their own to forgive or not forgive people, but rather that as the church proclaims the gospel message of forgiveness of sins in the power of the Holy Spirit it proclaims that those who believe in Jesus have their sins forgiven, and that those who do not believe in Him do not have their sins forgiven—which simply reflects what God in heaven has already done.<sup>ii</sup> This would seem to fit the context and

even the commission, as the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you. Jesus said that He judges justly because He bases His judgment on what pleases the Father (John 5:30). We are to do the same.

#### Questions

What was the Mary Magdalene pattern that we follow?

What does Jesus' resurrection prove to us?

What had taken place that Sunday?

What was the first thing Jesus did after greeting the disciples? Why?

Why did He give them a second greeting of peace (shalom)?

How is that encounter like many salvation stories?

What was the commission to the disciples and us?

What did Jesus' breath symbolize?

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<sup>i</sup> Charles Cowman, *The Oriental Mission Society*, pgs 128-129

<sup>ii</sup> ESV Study Bible