

# John 20:19-23

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[ 0 : 00 ] Amen. Restoration is a wonderful thing. When a place is renewed, when it's rejuvenated into something completely new.

! I've told this story before but I think it's worth telling again. The story of Boston's Charles Street Prison. It used to be the home of the city's most notorious criminals but in the 1960s the building fell into disrepair.

It became overcrowded, riotous and filthy. It was condemned in 1973 and the building itself was destined for ruin.

But then a rich investor had a vision. A vision to overhaul the building. To renovate it. To rejuvenate it. To recreate it.

And 28 years later and \$150 million ploughed in, the Charles Street Jail is now a luxury hotel. You can get a room there tonight for \$5,000. Ironically it's called the Liberty Hotel.

[ 1 : 17 ] There's so much in this world and in our lives that begs for that kind of renovation, isn't there? Not just improvement. Not just a lick of paint here or there. Not just an evolution.

But a total renovation. From the ground up. From the inside out. Aching bodies. Troubled minds. Shamed hearts.

We cry out for this renovation, don't we? But in reality, is that just a pipe dream? Is there such a place for us?

Where can we find it? John here shows us the second of three appearances of the risen Jesus Christ. He appears to his disciples.

And we see again here, don't we, that the restorative power of his resurrection. A renovation in him from death to life.

[ 2 : 22 ] From an old creation to a new creation. He appears to them in a locked room on the first day of a new week of a new creation. And if we've been here for these last two or three Tuesdays, maybe as we've read John 20, we're slightly jealous of the disciples.

We want to be part of this too, don't we? We want to be renovated like Jesus, with him. And yet maybe we feel slightly removed from it.

As we look around the world as today, we see it still needs renovating. We feel removed. We want to know the promise of this life.

To dive in, in a sense, into this scene and to be there and to know Jesus and the power of his resurrection. But John here wants to show us that the place of Jesus' renovation is available.

And it's available today. It's open and available in a place that you might not expect. With Jesus' people.

[ 3 : 36 ] The place of resurrection life and renovation is in his church. Because in this little section here, Jesus makes his disciples the bearers of renovation blessing.

He makes them the bearers of the promise that Jesus' body signifies. And John says, if you want this renovation, you need to take note of the people of renovation.

If you're not sure where I'm going with this, let me show you how he means this. Because John shows us Jesus gives his church here three things.

He gives them three things. First of all, Jesus' people are the bearers of his resurrection peace. Jesus' people are the bearers of his resurrection peace.

And just look at verse 19 there at the beginning. Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, peace be with you. It's obviously an important thing, isn't it?

[ 4 : 47 ] Because in verse 21, Jesus says to them again, peace be with you. The place where renovation begins for you is here in this place with these people because they bear the peace of Jesus.

Now living at the time, peace be with you could have just been an ordinary greeting. It was kind of like saying to someone in the street, hi there, good to see you. Jesus appears in a locked room as if it's the most natural thing in the world, isn't it?

Hi there. Kind of adds to the surreal feel of it. There is peace in the way that Jesus speaks to them, isn't there?

He's not hysterical about the situation. There's a sense of cool calmness about him, which is certainly what the disciples need right now, isn't it?

But peace means more for Jesus than that. Earlier in the gospel, Jesus speaks to his disciples before he's arrested and crucified.

[ 5 : 54 ] You can read it in John 14. He says, my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives to you do I give it to you. Worldly peace is a precious thing, isn't it?

World peace, we want that. We strive for it. We should be thankful for it when we enjoy it in this land. The peace of the Roman Empire under which Jesus lived was obtained by Augustus with military power, the Pax Romana.

He erected an altar to it in Rome. But the peace that Jesus gives to his disciples here is something that no government and no human government can provide for its people, no matter how powerful they are.

Jesus speaks of a peace of biblical proportion here. The resurrected Jesus is giving his church a peace which includes, most importantly, the blessing of a relationship with God.

Peace with God. You know, as soon as you become a Christian, as soon as someone becomes a Christian, you will know this peace.

[ 7 : 12 ] Peace with God of guilt wiped away, of a fresh start, of a clear conscience. But at the same time, you will know war.

You'll get a lot of enemies if you become a Christian. You could say, actually, Christians have the most enemies of anyone in the world. And that is because before you become a Christian, before receiving the peace that Jesus gives to his disciples here, you only have one enemy.

God. God. We have declared war on him. And your only enemy, before you receive peace with Jesus and from him, is a good God, someone who loves you, someone who cares for you, but someone who ultimately, in the end, will give you what you ask for.

War with him forever. War with him forever. War with him forever. But for these people in this place, that is not the case, is it? That has changed. Their life isn't necessarily going to get any easier.

For some of them, it will get a lot worse, actually. William Barclay, the churchman, he writes, Jesus promised his people three things. To be absurdly happy, ferociously fearless, and always in trouble.

[ 8 : 38 ] I want to give you the right expectations of the peace that Jesus offers. Because his enemies will become your enemies when you make peace with him.

The world won't like it. But you've got to decide, haven't you, who you'd rather have peace with. The church, the body of Jesus on earth here, is the place where the people who bear this peace with God are.

And if you want to know this, in a way you've got to know them. You've got to get to know them. To be involved amongst the people. To be with them. Jesus' church bears his peace.

Secondly, Jesus' people bear his spirit. Jesus' people bear his spirit. Just look at verse 22. When he'd said this, he breathed on them and said to them, Receive the Holy Spirit.

If you get your Bibles later on at home and you read a little bit further on in the Bible, you get to the book of Acts. And in Acts chapter 2 we see what happens at the festival at Pentecost.

[ 9 : 55 ] And God pours out his spirit upon his church in a new way, in a different way. So what's going on here? Well, I think what's happening here is that Jesus is giving a token.

He's giving a sign and a token of that future day when God will give his spirit to the church in a fuller way. But it's odd how Jesus does it, isn't it?

He could just give it without any sign of it. But John tells us here that Jesus breathes on them. It's not that the Holy Spirit is made up of the content of Jesus' lungs.

The Holy Spirit is a person. He is God. He is spirit. He is supernatural. He is not made up of carbon dioxide and oxygen, is he?

But what is happening here is that Jesus is giving them an acted out sign. He is giving them a picture. And he rings a bell in the disciples' minds.

[ 11 : 06 ] Because suddenly the first week of the resurrection reminds them and us actually of the first week of creation.

If we flick back to the very beginnings of our Bibles into Genesis where Moses talks about how God created the world. We read in Genesis 2 that God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils.

He breathed into him life and the man became a living creature. God's spirit is the power that gives human beings life in the beginning in creation.

And so what we see happening here is that God is once more breathing into his people. In a moment of recreation.

Jesus is recreating his people. He is renovating them through his Holy Spirit from the inside out.

The Apostle Paul, as we read earlier, describes becoming a Christian in creational terms.

[ 12 : 23 ] In that verse there. If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away. The new has come. The language that Paul wrote that letter to in Greek is a bit more terse.

It's a bit more ambiguous. We want to kind of make it all clear, don't we? And tie up all the loose ends. But it simply reads in the original Greek. If anyone is in Christ, new creation.

These are the people that stand on this created earth. But are given rebirth for the next.

The church here in John 20 is being consolidated as the embassy of a new creation. Lenin observed that in revolution there are decades where nothing happens.

And there are weeks where decades happen. And this week, this new week marked by the resurrection of Jesus, marks the beginning of a renovation of everything that blows all kind of human revolutions out of the water.

[ 13 : 35 ] As Jesus breathes his spirit on his disciples, he is answering the prayer that he taught his people to pray, isn't he? May your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

They are being transformed into envoys of a new creation. Ambassadors of a new world order of life and of righteousness and of freedom.

Honestly, I don't know what you think about the church when I say that word. All sorts of things could be going around your heads. It's full of broken and sinful people whose lives are a mess and are complicated.

Come to our church and you'll find that out pretty quickly. But the true church that is faithful to Jesus' word and his commands is the embassy of heaven on earth.

An embassy of the new creation. Jesus breathes his spirit into them and makes his church the people with whom we find peace and renovation and the beginnings of a recreation.

[ 15 : 00 ] It isn't an accident here that John pictures this meeting behind closed doors. That's the scene, isn't it?

The room is closed, the doors are shut. John tells us that is because they were fearful of the religious people, the Jews. But there is clear here that there is a separation between the disciples inside the room and the world outside.

They are afraid but there is now peace in this place with these people and there is not out there.

You can ask Jesus for peace and for his Holy Spirit.

You can do that today, you can do that this afternoon. You can trust in him and he will give it. He will. But if you really mean it, metaphorically speaking, you've got to come into the room.

You've got to come into the embassy. You've got to come into the place and be with the people who already have those things.

[ 16 : 12 ] They have this peace, they have his Holy Spirit. And thirdly and lastly, the church are the bearers of his authority. The church are the bearers of his authority.

The 19th century theologian James Bannerman has written a brilliant book on the church. It's called The Church of Christ. And he says in that, He's saying there isn't he that no one else can believe for you.

Not a priest or a church or a leader or another Christian. No one else can get peace with God on your behalf for you.

You can't go into a church and light a candle and expect the church to do that for you. God must deal with you and you must deal with God.

And he can, he can do that whether you go to church or not. Whether you go to a church building or whether you're a member of a church.

[ 17 : 29 ] Okay. But we've got to be really careful. Because we live in a very individualistic culture, don't we? And we might not see the significance of the church that Jesus gives it here.

In our own salvation and in our own renovation. Because the disciples, the church here, bear his peace and his Holy Spirit. And they bear an authority.

John says famously, God so loved the world that he sent his one and only son into the world that we might not perish but have eternal life.

And Jesus Christ, he comes, doesn't he, as the son of God with the authority of the father. And the incarnation is ascending from heaven into earth.

The creator is sent into his creation to bring peace. But that sending and that giving of authority does not stop when Jesus returns to heaven.

[ 18 : 36 ] Look at verse 21. As the father has sent me, so I am sending you. The sent one is sending his church, isn't he here, as his agents in the world.

Jesus is sending here members of the new creation back into the old creation. And he sends them with authority to pronounce his forgiveness on others or to withhold it.

Verse 23. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them. If you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld. That is what only God can do, isn't it?

Forgive sins. But in some way here, Jesus is saying, I am giving you, my church, the authority, insofar as you are faithful to my law and to my commands, to tell someone you are forgiven by God. Or you are not. And when you say that, it will really mean something. John uses the language of a judge binding or loosing a person from condemnation.

[ 19 : 51 ] This isn't something that individual Christians, that we can go around just doing haphazardly, you are forgiven, you are not forgiven. But he gives this authority to the body of his disciples here who have been given special care of his church.

He gives this authority to the government of his church. Now, there are lots of things we could say about this and we're short of time, aren't we?

But I want you to just see the main thing here. And the main thing here is that you need to take God's people, you need to take the church seriously.

You need to take seriously the authority that has been given to church elders and leaders. Not because they are great, because they are God.

Not because they have power in themselves, but because they are ambassadors. They are sent ones from Jesus Christ. And your relationship with church is actually central to your renovation.

[ 20 : 57 ] To be transformed. To enjoy Jesus' resurrection power. Being in the new creation. Means to share with his people.

We read the accounts of Jesus' resurrection and we just want to get involved, don't we? I hope you do. To know it in ourselves. To know that power.

And John is laying out here that you can, you can know it. But it's maybe in the last place you'd expect. It is with these Christian people where his peace is given.

And where his new creational spirit is at work. And his authority is known. And so, Jesus is saying, if you want these things, come in.

Come into the embassy of the new creation on earth. Let's pray. Let's pray.