

# John 20:19-23

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[ 0 : 00 ] Well, peace is something we all want, isn't it? Whether it's peace on a global scale as we watch the news and see the horrendous fighting in Syria and other places.

Or whether it's our own lives, our own anxieties, our own concerns, our own problems. We all want peace, don't we? Now what robs us of peace? What is it that prevents us enjoying peace?

I guess we all have many answers to that question, don't we? It can be fear about the future. It can be anxieties pressing in on us, whether caused by health concerns or family members in trouble or difficult neighbours or busyness, the stress of working life, things to do.

You know that feeling, you wake up in the middle of the night, you can't go back to sleep, you've got so many things in your head. Some of us are so busy striving to succeed something and achieve something, we never get any peace anyway.

We're always thinking about what's coming next, what we need to do next for the next promotion or the next holiday or whatever it is. So we often feel restless. Well, think about this group of men gathered in this room as we read this story. Think what they've just been through and the stresses they have experienced.

[ 1 : 17 ] For several months, well for several years they've been travelling with Jesus, for several months they've been advancing towards Jerusalem. They've gone through the bewildering experience of celebrating the Passover with them on the Thursday night, with him teaching them lots of things they did not understand.

John recalls that for us in chapters 13 through to 18. And all around them was this tension, people trying to get rid of Jesus. They'd seen Jesus betrayed by one of their own number.

And now they've feared for their own lives. Notice the doors are locked for fear of the Jews. They think they're the next ones in line. They're grief stricken, they're bewildered, they're broken hearted, fearful.

What could it take for people in that situation to experience peace? What will it take for you and me, in our experiences, in our lives today, to experience peace?

True peace. Well the answer's actually the same. It's what happened to them. And it can happen to us by faith. Look at verse 19. On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors were locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews.

[ 2 : 27 ] Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, peace be with you. Peace comes from meeting the risen Lord Jesus.

Notice he breaks through the barriers, the doors are locked, and yet that is no barrier to Jesus. He appears to them, comes to them in the midst of their fears, and shows them he is physically alive. And so he's able to offer them peace, he's able to offer peace to us as well. But I guess the first question, what is peace? Some of those might think that peace is the absence of troubles and conflict.

It's the peace we get on holiday, relaxing on the beach, we work well behind us. But that is not the peace Jesus is talking about. Back in chapter 16, just a few days earlier, he said to them, I've said these things to you, that in me you may have peace.

In the world you will have tribulation. And I have overcome the world. See, peace is not the absence of trouble, not the absence of problems around us.

[ 3 : 30 ] Neither is peace the absence of work to do. You know, that holiday feeling. I've got everything done, I can get away, I'm going to turn the mobile phone off, relax. Now Jesus' peace isn't about not having work to do, in fact he gives the disciples a job to do, as we'll see in a minute.

It's not about no work, it's not about no troubles, nor is peace an achievement. It's not the kind of Buddhist idea of peace, of meditation and everything else, achieving a kind of peace, achieving

some kind of enlightenment.

No, this peace is a gift. That's why Jesus pronounces it as he meets them. It's why he said back in chapter 14, peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you.

Not as the world gives do I give. Peace is a gift, and it comes from Jesus. It comes from meeting and knowing and receiving from the living Christ.

That's important, that's why in verse 20, we read that Jesus shows them his hands and shows them his side. It really is him. It really is the one they'd seen crucified on the Friday, now standing in front of them on the Sunday evening.

[ 4 : 34 ] And they were glad when they saw the Lord. They were glad when they saw the same man they'd seen crucified, the same man they'd followed for years. The same man whose teachers so often confuse them.

Yet here he stands before them, as one who has overcome the world, with the signs of his suffering still on him. As he shows them his hands and his side, it is, as one writer puts it, it's Jesus offering his credentials to a suffering world.

To show that he can bring peace. See, the risen Jesus can speak peace to us, not because he has come from some other land and not experienced suffering in this world. But precisely because he has suffered, has endured, has been rejected, has endured death, and has risen again.

When his wounds speak to our pain and our hurts, be they physical or emotional or mental. They say, I've suffered in your place.

I know what you've gone through. And suffering will not have the final word. In the words of one modern Easter hymn, death is dead. Love has won.

[ 5 : 44 ] Christ has conquered. So what is this peace? It's not an absence of troubles. It's not being removed from the world. It's not the end of work. But it's the truth that death has not won.

Suffering will not win. Pain will not have the final word. In the Old Testament, the Hebrew word for peace is a word called shalom. Shalom, which is not merely the absence of conflict, but the presence of wholeness.

The presence of life as it was always supposed to be. The presence of fruitfulness and happiness and deep delight and joy. And the resurrection of Jesus guarantees that that wholeness is going to come in its completeness one day.

And yet we can taste it now, through and in the risen Lord Jesus. So, our next question really is, do you know this peace?

Do you know in your own experience, your own heart and life, this peace that the risen Jesus comes to offer? In the midst of sorrow, do you know his forgiveness?

[ 6 : 50 ] In the midst of feeling that some things in your life are so broken, they can never be fixed? Do you know the peace of the Lord Jesus, who comes to make whole, who comes to make new?

In your striving to find peace and contentment and acceptance, do you find you actually lack peace more and more? What a great German tennis player, Boris Becker, once wrote, when he was on the brink of suicide.

He said, I'd won Wimbledon twice before, once as the youngest player. I was rich, I had all the material possessions I needed. It's the old song of movie stars and pop stars who commit suicide. They have everything, and yet they are so unhappy.

I had no inner peace. We can have so much in the world, can't we? Yet not have the peace that only Jesus can provide through his death and resurrection.

You see, peace, true peace, true wholeness, comes through meeting the risen Lord Jesus and trusting in him. But I want to explain something else.

[ 7 : 58 ] Yes, this peace is subjective to an extent. It's something we can feel within ourselves. But it's not purely subjective, and it doesn't end with us. Again, it's not the idea that some religions have, of peace being kind of in isolation, on your own, having a quiet moment in a transcendental way.

This is a peace that transforms our hearts and then sends us out. And you can see that if you look at verse 21. It's the connection between peace and purpose. We all want peace, and every human being needs a purpose, don't they?

And look at the connection here, verse 21. Jesus said to them again, peace be with you. There's the peace. Here comes the purpose. As the Father has sent me, even so, I am sending you.

And when he said this, he breathed on them and said to them, receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they have forgiven them. If you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld. See,

Jesus has a purpose.

This transforming peace that he offers is just that. It's transforming. And it sends people out. Sends his people out with a purpose. So Jesus commissions them.

[ 9 : 04 ] As the Father has sent me, even so, I am sending you. Now if we've read all the way through John's Gospel, we know that time and time again, at least 16 times in this Gospel, Jesus makes it clear that he was sent from the Father into this world for a job.

So for example, chapter 8, verse 42, Jesus said to the Jews, If God were your Father, you would love me, for I come from God and I am here.

I came not of my own accord, but he sent me. Jesus is a man on a mission. And he says to his believers, you are now men on a mission as well. I'm sending you.

Now, the question is, in what way is Jesus sending his followers like the Father sending him? Well, it's similar in a number of ways. First of all, it's similar in pattern.

As you read through John's Gospel, you find time and time again that Jesus is totally dependent on his Father who sent him. Totally obedient to the Father who sent him.

[ 10 : 06 ] And so in the same way, his followers are to be totally dependent on him, on the Lord Jesus. That's why he then breathes on them. Symbolically, we're showing the Holy Spirit upon them. We'll come to that more in a minute.

And they are, we, as his followers, are to be totally obedient as well. Just as Jesus was obedient to the Father. For example, chapter 10, verse 18. He says, he says of his own life, I lay down my life that I may take it up again.

No one takes it from me, but I lay it down on my own accord. I have authority to lay it down. I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from the Father. See, Jesus was totally obedient, even to the point of death.

Doing what his Father had commanded. In the same way, he says, I'm sending you into the world. A total dependence upon me, on my power.

And a total obedience to my command. And also, it's the same destination. As the Father sent the Son into the world, so Jesus sends his followers into the world. He doesn't send us to go and live on a monastery somewhere.

[ 11 : 09 ] He doesn't send us to live in little church communities that do not interact with the world around. Rather, he sends us into the world. As he entered our world. And lived among us.

And walked on our road. And felt our pain. So back in chapter 17, when praying for his disciples. Jesus said to the Father, as you sent me into the world, so I sent them into the world.

So there's a similar pattern. The way Jesus sends us. There's also a similar purpose. Why did Jesus come into the world? Well, not to condemn. Although as a holy God, in human form, he could have condemned us.

But he came to save the world. Chapter 3, verse 17. God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world. But in order that the world might be saved through him. We've just seen over the last few weeks, looking at the story.

How Jesus was the Lamb of God. He took away the sin of the world. He was the one sent not to condemn, but to save. He's the one who came to do what none of us could ever do.

[ 12 : 13 ] Carry our sin. Put us right with God. So we have a similar purpose. Jesus was sent to save. That only he can do that. Only he is perfect.

Only he was the perfect man who never sinned. Only he is fully God. And therefore capable of bearing the incredible weight of punishment. For everything you and I have ever done.

So we don't save the world. But what we do get to do is announce this news to others. To announce the news that there is a way to be put right again. There is a way to be forgiven. There is a way to be made new.

There is a way to become a child of God. As John put it back in chapter 3, verse 18. Whoever believes in him. Whoever believes in Jesus. Is not condemned. But whoever does not believe is condemned already.

Because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God. So that's the message Jesus is sending his followers to the world with. They're not starting a new work.

[ 13 : 15 ] They're continuing the work that Jesus has already done. He's done the hard part. He's done the hard yards. He's atoned for the sins of the world. His disciples.

We his followers today. We merely have to preach that message to others. So there's a similar purpose. Similar pattern. Jesus goes on also to talk about the power for the work and the promise. So he gives them the power for the work. Look at verse 22. When he said this. When he gave them this commission. He breathed on them and said to them. Receive the Holy Spirit. Now they didn't actually receive the Holy Spirit at that minute.

If you read through the pages of the New Testament. You find a few weeks later. At Pentecost. They received the Holy Spirit. So Jesus is, if you like, doing a dramatic parable here.

Of what is going to happen to them. He'd already told them in John's Gospel. They wouldn't receive the Spirit until he'd gone back to the Father. But the point is the power for this work. Comes from him.

[14:13] Doesn't depend on their strategy. Or our strategies. Or our strength. But on God's power. So that's where the power for the work comes from.

Look at the promise about this work. Verse 23. If you forgive the sins of any. They are forgiven them. If you withhold forgiveness from any. It is withheld. That is if you like.

Jesus cast iron guarantee. That their mission is important. And genuine. We have some new windows put in last week. And as my surveyor neighbor pointed out to me.

Up in the corner of one of the windows. You see the little kite mark. British standard kite mark. Which says yeah. These windows are good and approved. And all that kind of thing. Apologies to visitors from other countries. But that's what we do in this country.

It was a guarantee that these windows. Well they really are windows. You can see through them. They're not going to fall apart in the next 10 years. God willing. As Jesus says this in verse 23. This is his kite mark. His standard of approval.

[15:09] He's authorizing this mission. He's saying it is genuine. It is true. This is my promise to you. Now this is a verse that is often hugely understood.

Hugely misunderstood I should say. So what does it actually mean? What is this promise? What is this guarantee Jesus is giving them? Well let me say first of all what it doesn't mean. It does not mean.

That a pope. Or a priest. Or a vicar. Or a minister. Or an elder. That somehow has a special authority. To forgive other people's sins. Does not mean people have to go to confession.

Jesus hasn't conferred that power upon anyone. Why do I say that? Well look closely. At the words there. He doesn't say you've forgiven their sins. And you will have forgiven them.

Rather he says. If you forgive someone their sins. They are forgiven. They are forgiven. If you're into grammar. Which I'm not.

[16:09] You'll notice that is the passive voice. Not the active voice. So it's something that is done by somebody else. Not by them. Or to go back to my windows for a moment. I could rightly say to you.

I had new windows put in last week. Because somebody else did it. Jim and Mick were their names. I could not say. I put in new windows. Because that would be a lie.

I had nothing to do with it. I just sat there and made them tea. In the same way as Jesus says. If you forgive their sins. They are forgiven. Someone else is doing the forgiving.

And that is God. That is God. That is God. So what they are doing. Is announcing God's promise. And they have Jesus guarantee.

That God will back up. Will do what he has promised to do. We also see that from the context here. The context here. Is there to announce the good news of forgiveness. Remember that verse I read.

[17:06] John chapter 3 verse 18. Whoever believes in Jesus. Is not condemned. But whoever does not believe. Is condemned already. That is the announcement. As the disciples go and proclaim this message.

Of life only in Jesus name. Jesus is saying. I give you my guarantee. That as you announce this message. If you tell someone. You have not believed in Jesus. Therefore you are condemned.

Then you can know. He is not forgiven in heaven. Equally if someone says. I believe in Jesus. I turn from my sin. And will live with Jesus as my Lord. Then you can say to him.

Your sins are forgiven. Because they will be forgiven. In heaven. By my father. So do you see what is at stake here. Do you see what is at stake.

This message. Is important. It is a fundamental need. Of every human being. Isn't it. To have our sins forgiven. And if you think.

[18:04] That is an optional extra. If you think. Well that is just. A kind of little religious thing. That you Christians are into. Then can I. Can I say to you. As humbly. And gently.

But firmly. As I can. You do not understand. What sin is. If that is what you think. Now I guess. Many of us. In this room. Like myself.

Have been Christians. For many years. And the danger. Isn't there. As I find this way in life. There is a danger. We get very complacent. About this. We can think. We are actually. Pretty decent people. Yeah we know.

We are not perfect. But we can quite easily. Pray for forgiveness. And we just. Take a lot of this. For granted. Just like we take. Running water. For granted. In this country. So perhaps.

Some of us. Need to think for a moment. What would it mean. For me. If the holy. Powerful God. Did not. And would not. Forgive my sin.

[18:58] Have you ever thought. About that. What would it mean. For me. If God would not. Forgive my sin. Just think for a moment. If someone carried.

A tape recorder. Around next to you. And recorded for a week. Every time. You said. Of somebody. You ought to be doing this. Or you ought to be doing that. Or you ought not to do this. At the end of the week.

They played back to you. All those. You ought to. You ought not to. And imagine. They could record your thoughts. As well. Because often. We don't say that stuff. We just think it. I think it a lot. On my bike. Of people driving past me.

You ought to have indicated. You ought not to have cut in on me. Bus driver. Anyway. Imagine they played that tape back here. And imagine they also had a video camera. And they showed you.

Every time. You had not even lived to your own standard.

Every time. You hadn't done what you said. That someone else ought to do. It could be humiliating. Could it be? Now. I ramped that up a hundred times. A thousand times.

[19:57] We don't even live to our own standards. Let alone to God's standard. Now. What if God kept that record? What if every time we wanted to pray.

God shut his ears. And said. No. You're a sinner. I'm not going to listen to you. What if. On judgment day. That great and terrible day of the Lord. As the Bible puts it.

We stand in front of the Lord Jesus. And he says. As he says. He will say to some people. Depart from me. You evil doer. I never knew you. Go to the lake of fire. Prepare by my father.

For Satan and his angels. See. Sometimes those of us who are Christians. And have been for a long time. Need to think more deeply.

About the judgment of God. I know I do. We need to think. How seriously God takes sin. That he'd send his own son. Into the world.

[20:55] To live a perfect life. And to die on a cross. So he could freely offer forgiveness. To people like me. And you. See. Sin is serious.

The message Jesus gives. With his stamp of authority. In verse 23. Is an important message. It is something to celebrate. It is something to celebrate.

That we have our sins forgiven. And also it's something to communicate. That's why Jesus is sending us. Into the world. With this message. Which brings me to another question.

For those of us who are believers. What are we doing with this message? When was the last time we sought. Earnestly. To tell somebody. About what Jesus has done for them.

Over Easter. Were we so busy buying chocolate eggs. In the supermarket. That somehow chocolate took over from Christ. Have we been praying.

[21:56] For friends. Or colleagues. Or family members. It's easy to get complacent about this. Isn't it? Especially in a society. Which tells us that. There's no such thing as truth.

And all truth is relative. And all that kind of thing. And yet. And yet. We've got this great promise. In verse 23. Haven't we? That Jesus sends us into the world.

As his ambassadors. You know what ambassador does. Don't you? An ambassador represents a nation. When an ambassador. Comes to speak to a government. He or she. Speaks in the name of.

With the authority of. The powers who sent them. So Jesus says. In verse 23. If you forgive someone their sins. They are forgiven. If you do not. Forgive their sins. They are not forgiven.

You speak. With heaven's authority. As you preach this message. And you have the Holy Spirit. To empower you. To enable you. If you've believed in me.

[ 22 : 51 ] But let me say by the way. That is true for every believer. Anyone who's trusted in Jesus Christ. Has the Holy Spirit. We don't need some other. Second experience. The Holy Spirit isn't just for some elite. He is a gift for all.

Who will trust in Christ as Lord. But maybe you're here. Because you're not yet a believer. You're still trying to work out. What Christianity is about. Well I hope you see. This is the heart of the Christian message.

It is about forgiveness of sins. It is about being made right with God. Being made into a new person. It is about having sins forgiven. So you can enjoy the real life you were made for.

Knowing the God who made us. So I need to ask you. Will you believe? What will hold you back? Why not trust in this Jesus?

And I want to urge you. Not just to walk away. Not to say that was a nice message. Or that was a bit of a waste of a lunch time. However you feel. But take this seriously. Look at what's at stake.

[ 23 : 52 ] What do you make of this Jesus? See what you make of Jesus. How you respond to him. Will determine not only your path in this life. But your destination for all eternity.

So please don't just shrug your shoulders and go off shopping and buy my sandwich. Isn't this too important? The risen Lord Jesus comes to us in the midst of the brokenness and pain of this world. And says peace be with you. Wholeness shall own be with you. And he gives us a new purpose. To continue his work. Of making this forgiveness known.

Peace and purpose. Aren't they things every human wants? Where do you get them if you don't go to Jesus? Let me pray for us.