

John 20:19-29

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[0 : 00] The disciples are clearly terrified. John chapter 20 verse 19! It's the evening, we're told, the first Lord's day, and they've gathered in a safe house.

! If the Jewish authorities find out where they are, they might end up on a cross the same way their Lord Jesus did. And so, they've decided to lie low. They've decided to gather behind locked doors. I can imagine if there's a knock at the door, somebody will go and look through the peephole. I imagine there's a peephole there. There'd have to be, wouldn't there, because the film wouldn't work otherwise. And they might say, who is it? Or maybe they put on a fake voice.

Who is it? That kind of thing. And then the person identifies themselves, and they open the door, and they do that thing. They look up and down the street, and then say, come on in. They need to check the coast clear. They fear for their lives. It is the great irony. On the greatest day in history, a day when God had defeated death itself, and brought in the new world that He had promised, that His closest followers weren't celebrating. They were hiding in fear. And then we're told Jesus appears to them. He'd promised to do that. Chapter 14, verse 18, that He would come to His disciples, and here He is. He's turned up.

But it is what He then says when He's in their presence that is so important. Just a few words. A few words that should transform the hearts and the minds of these fearful disciples.

Verse 19, peace be with you. And so that they didn't miss it, He says it again, verse 21, peace be with you. He then says it a third time in verse 26. It seems to be the thing that He needs the disciples to know when He comes into their presence, peace be with you. Now, peace to you is a traditional Jewish greeting. It would have been a common thing to say to wish someone well.

[2 : 28] But the way Jesus uses it here is more theological, more literal, and more significant. That's probably why He repeated it. It's probably a refrain almost in the way that He engaged with the disciples.

In the Old Testament, the word shalom referred to the fullness, the completeness of the blessings of the kingdom of God. That was the vision of the prophets, and it's what God's people had been looking forward to throughout the Old Testament. One day His peace would reign. And here we have Jesus coming to this fearful group, and He says that all of that, all that the Old Testament looked forward to, that promise has now been fulfilled in His redemptive work. Jesus is not merely greeting the disciples. It's not just that He's doing something that would have been normal in the course of life, peace be with you. No. He's saying, well, He's pronouncing a blessing over them, and He's saying that the peace of God, the end-time blessing that they have been waiting for, is now accessible to them through the One who is here in their midst. He's saying the cross has worked. His wounds have brought peace. God has kept His Word. Now, the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord, verse 20, we're told, but the reality of what He has just said, those words that He has just pronounced, they clearly haven't been as transformative as they should have been, because when we go to that next

Sunday, the subsequent Lord's Day, verse 26, they're still locking the doors. They're still fearful. They're still fearful of what might happen to them because they belong to Jesus. He declares that the peace, the shalom of God is in their midst. He breathes on them to enact the coming of the Holy Spirit who brings this peace, and He reminds them of their forgiveness. Verse 23, they should be delighted, but they're still caught in their fear. What's wrong with them? Well, what's wrong with them is the same thing that's wrong with you and me. Let's be honest. How often does being told something by Jesus immediately transform your life? We know that Jesus tells us things like, do not fear those who kill the body, Luke chapter 12, verse 4, but we're still controlled by the opinion of others. We know that He tells us, that our lives do not consist in the abundance of possessions, Luke 12, verse 15, but we still think that having money will constitute the good life. The disciples are

like us all. They're slow to believe, and I wonder if here it's because these words that He is pronouncing actually sound too good to be true.

You see, it's no exaggeration to say that if we grasp the implications of these words, peace be with you, they'll bring a freedom and a joy that I'm not sure that we even as Christians believe is real. So what I want to do this morning is take time to press this into the corners a bit more. We could say that this is one, the sermon is one long line of application. Six implications I want to point out of what it means for us to have peace with God. When you hear those words, peace be with you, they should transform your life right out into the corners. And here's why. Number one, peace be with you. Peace with God means that we are free from sin, free from sin. Here is really the theological heart of the matter. The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, John 1, 26.

[6 : 12] The perfect Lamb of God, chapter 19, 31. The one who sits between the angels, chapter 20, verse 12, as the atonement seat, the ark of the new covenant. He has completed His work. His sacrifice was sufficient for every sin. Therefore, all who believe in Him are forgiven and have peace with God.

By nature, that's not the case. By nature, we are at war with God. We deserve His wrath. But through the cross, through all that Jesus has accomplished in chapter 19 of John's gospel, those hostilities have ceased because the penalty for sin has been paid in full. The self-improvement industry that is so popular in our day, whether it's health or wellness or therapy. And just to say these things where they cut with the grain of creation, where they cut with the grain of the wisdom of God, there is plenty that's good there.

But the one thing that these things, the self-help industry, the one thing that they never mention is our need for forgiveness from the God who made us. And to the degree that this remains absent from any attempts to address the human condition, it is a case of deck chairs on the Titanic.

That is, any help that it offers is always superficial and short-term. Forgiveness for a life living our way in God's world is the human being's greatest need bar none.

Forgiveness for a life of living our way in God's world, living according to our own desires, living in sin against God in His world, forgiveness for that is our greatest need bar none.

[8 : 00] But when we put our faith in Christ, every sin is forgiven. Every single one. Every single one. He drained the cup of God's wrath as He hung there on the cross. He drained it, which means that cup is empty. The cup of God's wrath is empty. There is now no wrath left for you. Your record is wiped clean.

You are wiped clean. The cleansing effect of the cross of Christ runs so deep that the Apostle Paul can call us a new creation. This is the root of everything good because it goes to the very level of your identity. You are made new. You are now, whatever your name is, in Christ.

When you realize that you're in Christ, it changes how you view yourself, how you view the world. It changes how you view everything and how you think about the future. What are the things that cause us the most difficulty in life? There are things about we think about ourselves, things about how we view the world around us, and our fears about the future. When you are at peace with God, you are made new, and you are freed from sin. This means you are also, secondly, free from fear.

There are lots of things that we fear in life. It might be sickness, poverty, uncertainty about the future. You might fear the political situation. Of course, fear is a great political tool. If you can generate anxiety in the nation, the people are more amenable to your proposed solutions. A content polis, a content people is difficult to control. So, the news cycle is designed to keep us fearful.

If it's the politics of the left, we're told to fear climate change. If it's the politics on the right, they tell us to fear something else. Maybe the left and they're fear-mongering. But fear is something that our wider culture wants to cultivate. But if Jesus' promise of peace, peace with God, if that promise takes hold in your heart, you don't need to fear any of these things.

[10 : 18] The reason we fear something, usually when you peel it back, comes down to two things, discomfort or death. When the thing that you fear, when you drill down why it is that you fear that thing it will do with either of those two things, either discomfort or death. We fear things that make us uncomfortable, and then when that discomfort runs its course, we die, and none of us really wants to die. But if you know that God holds the whole world in His hands, if you know that everything that comes your way in life, even the hard bits, do so because God has allowed it, and you are at peace with this God, your relationship with Him is characterized by His love for you, well, you can trust Him. Your life might not be easy, but you don't have to fear. And then, when you know that being at peace with God means that death is no longer a threat, that death is now the doorway

to the fullness of life because the Jesus who comes and says, peace be with you, has just walked out of the tomb that very day. Well, because if you know then that death is the doorway to the fullness of life, you no longer fear it. It's just a bump in the road on the way to glory. So can you see how peace with God leads to an inner peace, the peace of God that Christ gives to all who know Him? He said that again earlier on. He's promised that. 14 verse 27, peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you.

And that peace, peace, the peace of God in Christ, it just keeps rippling out. Yes, you're free from fear, but thirdly, you're also free from guilt and shame. Point number three, you're free from guilt and shame.

But guilt and shame are big concepts in pop psychology, and the reason for that is that they are both very powerful and universal emotions. That is, we all feel them at some point, and they can exert significant control. Guilt and shame have led many people into anxiety and depression and even, especially among men, suicide. Very powerful, and they exert significant control.

Now, what our culture gets wrong when it talks about guilt and shame is that they are actually legitimate emotions where people are living their lives without regard for God. Our sin renders us all guilty before God, and we should feel shame about the lives that we have lived apart from Him. But there's an answer to both of those. Not denying them, but accepting that they are real and realizing that God Himself has provided an answer, a solution, and it is the cross of Christ.

The cross of Christ sets us free from both guilt and shame, and only the cross can do that. You can't actually think yourself out of this state. You can't remind yourself with however many tropes that you might use about how good a person you are in all kinds of different ways. Only forgiveness frees you from guilt and shame. Now, many Christians know this, and many Christians can explain how it works, and yet we still live like it's not true. If we're honest with ourselves, we still live like it's not true.

[13 : 58] We think about how much of what motivates what we say and do in life, what motivates how we carry ourselves in the world, how that flows from a desire to cover up what we're really like.

We've said and done things in our lives that haunt us, and we just want to make sure that they stay covered up. We do things from time to time that we're ashamed of, and we want to cover them up. If you don't believe me, think honestly about how you would feel if the thoughts that you entertained over the last 48 hours were broadcast up there. Just the thoughts, never mind the things that you've done, the words that you've said, your thoughts alone. You'd be ashamed, because you don't want people to know those things about you. We try to protect a good reputation.

You have an angry outburst at home, and you say, calm down, and you say, look, I'm sorry, mom was tired. She didn't mean it, and don't mention this to anybody. You say you don't care what people think about you. You say, people take me as they find me. I am who I am. But then, when you get one of those spam emails that claims that they've hacked your search history and footage from your computer camera, and they demand that you give them five thousand pounds, or they'll send it to your contacts list, well, you pay them, or you leave the country. Why does that happen? Because on the one hand, we want to project an image of respectability whilst there is a reality inside us that we don't want people to know. This even happens when people say things about us that aren't true. Things that we, when we know people are lying about us, there's something in what they say that gets traction in our heart with things that are true because we're sinners, and we feel guilty, and we panic because if it gets out, our reputation could be trashed.

The words, peace be with you from the lips of the Lord Jesus Christ, have power to set you free from all of that. The God who accepts you in His Son, the God whose opinion of you is the only one that matters in the end, and that that opinion is love and delight. He knows every thought. He knows every word. He knows every deed, the secret and the hidden, and He loves you anyway.

[16 : 26] Do you know that? Guilt gets no traction. Shame has no purchase. That is freedom.

If even what is true about you, the worst of you, is known to God and He loves you, you can walk in the world with a lightness. It might be painful that others know it, and you bear their reproach. But when the last day comes, you will receive a welcome from God.

Can I say, if you're enslaved in a particular sin and you feel terribly guilty, but you also feel stuck, you feel like to confess that sin is going to have implications that are going to reach beyond what is comfortable for you, well, here's your way out. Confess it to the Lord, and probably a good idea to confess it to an elder as well so that there's accountability and so that you can hear them remind you of this forgiveness that is yours in Christ. I want to encourage you, plead with you, if that's the

case. Get it into the light because God will forgive you, and you can be set free. And there's no other escape, by the way, so don't wait about to do it. Peace be with you. Peace be with you. Free from sin. Free from fear. Free from guilt and shame. Peace with God also sets us, number four, free from striving. Free from striving. And what do I mean? Well, when God loves you and accepts you, you don't need to prove yourself. If your identity rests on the approval and the acceptance of others, if you're a people pleaser, well, you better perform. You better be good enough. You better meet those people's standards, and you better keep meeting their standards.

[18 : 23] We all care about different things, so it affects us in different areas. Needing to be regarded as clever will involve different behavior to someone who needs to be accepted in the world of fitness, fashion, whatever it looks, whatever it might be. No one at the gym cares about your grip of Tolstoy, and vice versa. The way you're striving is expressed depends on who it is you want to impress. But if you have peace with God, if you are in Christ the Beloved through faith, if you therefore exist within the unshakable love of God, with all your faults and all your failures, all your shortcomings and quirks, all your ordinariness, weakness, and plainness, you're free to be yourself.

It's incredibly liberating. Imagine not having to fuss over your appearance and retake a photograph six times so that it's acceptable for Instagram. Imagine not needing Instagram. Imagine not feeling the pressure to post on social media because you're locked in the relentless vortex of the approval feedback loop. When the truth that you have peace with God hits your heart, that is, when it travels, that news, when it travels the furthest distance in the world, which is the distance from our head to our heart, we can know these things, and yet our hearts remain unchanged. But when the truth, that in Christ, you have peace with the God of all the earth, when that hits your heart, you can truly live without filters. And I don't mean that, by the way, in the equally performative way that some people use the hashtag on social media. In Christ, you are free from the opinion of others. You're actually free from the opinion of others. So you're free from striving. You're free from the need to perform to the standards that those people's opinions set for you.

And number five, these all overlap a little bit, don't they? Of course they do. But number five, that means you're also free from what I'll call the tyranny of self, the tyranny of self.

This could be the control that a negative view of yourself has over you. Maybe because of how other people have treated you or because of bad decisions that you've made. But when the Lord Jesus says to you, peace be with you, peace be with you, peace be with you, when he says that to the person whose operating view of themselves is, I'm bad, I'm unlovely, I'm worthless, those words release those shackles.

[21 : 12] Because what you realize is when you hear those words, when peace be with you hits your heart, I'm bad, I'm worthless, I'm unlovable or unlovely, they're not true. They're just not true.

In Christ, remember, you're a new creation. You've been forgiven your badness. Your dignity and value are restored. You're loved by the King of the universe. In Jesus, we are free from every version of negative self-image. But the truth is we're also free from the need to create a positive identity for ourselves as well. When we have to present a self that we want people to see, it's a whole tyranny of its own. There isn't just the tyranny of negative view of yourself, but the tyranny of always having to appear to be impressive or good or whatever way other people's opinions control how we feel.

To always be promoting or always protecting your image. It's exhausting. Think about self-promotion. We do it in all kinds of ways. We're always thinking, what'll make me look good here?

What'll make me look good? What can I say that'll make me look good here? It might be the humble brag. That's a thing, isn't it? Say to people, oh, I'm exhausted. I've just been so busy being a great bloke. Or it might be the straight flex. You say, look, when you operate at my level around the centers of excellence that I operate in, I mean, I don't mean to talk, you know, but we do that kind of thing as well. Those are the more noticeable, but fake humility. Fake humility is just as self-centered. I can't think of the number of people. Well, one person in particular I think of who keeps referring to himself when we talk as being a bear of little brain. He got a double first at Oxford. When you're talking to someone, listen to how often and in what ways you refer to yourself. And I bet some of it is just making sure that that person knows that you're competent or you're

impressive, or at least you're not a loser, or you're doing it because it means that you're just in the conversation. We do the same thing in the way we dress, the car we drive, the way we speak, and we do it in both directions. We do it so that people will think we're impressive, and we do it so people think we're humble. We choose a kind of reverse snobbery about those things, but it's just to project ourselves in a particular light so that people will think of us in a particular way. If you really get that your life is lived in the love and acceptance of God, you have peace with God, you don't need to curate your image. You can actually get yourself completely out of the way so that your conversations are genuine and your relationships aren't fake.

That's self-promotion, but we do it with self-protection as well. See, this is how it works. If we have created our identity, that is, the image that we portray to people, if we have created that, we know in our heart that that's fragile, and fragile things need to be protected.

[24 : 35] This is what we're doing in so much of our interaction with others. Why are you defensive when you get criticized? Why do you take it so personally? Why are you happy to make jokes at other people's expense, but when it comes back at you, well, you have a sense of humor failure? Why do you lie to cover your mistakes? Why can't you lose at board games in your family?

Oh, I'm just competitive. No, you're fragile. Because you think something of who you are, something of who you are will be lost if you lose. It's a crushing weight to carry through life.

Well, listen, peace be with you. That is what Jesus says to you. And these words can set you free from the tyranny of self. You can let people think what they like about you, because in the end, their opinion doesn't define your identity, and it doesn't change your eternity. You can even be wronged and not worry about it, just like the Lord Jesus Himself.

You can trust yourself to the God who has allowed you to be treated in this way and is working at all in order to bring you to glory. Peace be with you. These are words that really set you free, words that transform how you think about everything. And so, finally, point number six, they are words that set you free to live to the glory of God. Free to live to the glory of God.

These disciples were given this blessing as they were sent out into the world, and they were given the Spirit to enable them in their mission. That's the important thing. He says, peace be with you. You have peace with God, and you can go and live in this freedom in the power of the Spirit that He gives. So, the church of God in every age is equipped in the same way. You are truly free in Christ. You are empowered by the Holy Spirit to go and bear the fruit of life in Him. So, go and live the life that He has called you to live without fear. Share the gospel of this glorious salvation with anybody without fear. Raise your children in a counter-cultural Christian way without fear. Wasn't it wonderful as we witnessed Victor's baptism this morning, a great reminder of God's promises for our children? Raise them to live for Christ without fear. And children, you can live in this counter-cultural way without fear as well. His promises are for you. He says, peace be with you as well. Be faithful in whatever God has given you to do. Do it to His glory.

[27 : 27] Do it without fear. Peace be with you. Let's pray.