

John 20:1-31 He Lives & He Gives

A sermon delivered at Calvary Chapel DC Metro
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When we pick things up this morning, Jesus is in the tomb. We have seen His arrest, His trials, and His crucifixion. We have seen that He intentionally gave up His perfect and innocent life in exchange for ours as a sacrificial lamb – that He was our Passover.

After the original Passover God led the Israelites out of Egypt and eventually into Israel-the Promised Land-where they were blessed beyond measure by all that God supplied. It should come as no great shock then that after Jesus fulfilled all the original symbolism of the Passover, He showered us with spiritual blessings. We'll see seven of them this morning.

20:1 Now the first *day* of the week Mary Magdalene went to the tomb early, while it was still dark, and saw *that* the stone had been taken away from the tomb. 2 Then she ran and came to Simon Peter, and to the other disciple, whom Jesus loved, and said to them, "They have taken away the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid Him." 3 Peter therefore went out, and the other disciple, and were going to the tomb. 4 So they both ran together, and the other disciple outran Peter and came to the tomb first.

Personally, I love that. It always makes me smile because there's nothing deeply spiritual about that at all. The Bible is full of real stories about real people, and they way they really lived. And now, for all of eternity, everyone knows Peter was slow. But, it turns out he was also the more courageous, or bold of the two:

5 And he, stooping down and looking in, saw the linen cloths lying *there*; yet he did not go in. 6 Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb; and he saw the linen cloths lying *there*, 7 and the handkerchief that had been around His head, not lying with the linen cloths, but folded together in a place by itself. 8 Then the other disciple, who came to the tomb first, went in also; and he saw and believed.

9 For as yet they did not know the Scripture, that He must rise again from the dead. 10 Then the disciples went away again to their own homes.

Now that's important – they didn't automatically understand what was happening. It didn't all click for them, they were confused. So, the guys take off back to where they were staying, but Mary sticks around, maybe hoping to figure out what happened.

11 But Mary stood outside by the tomb weeping, and as she wept she stooped down *and looked* into the tomb. 12 And she saw two angels in white sitting, one at the head and the other at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain. 13 Then they said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping?"

She said to them, "Because they have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid Him."

And as she's standing there at the door blown away by what she's seeing inside, suddenly there's a sound behind her so she spins around:

14 Now when she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing *there*, and did not know that it was Jesus. 15 Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?"

She, supposing Him to be the gardener, said to Him, "Sir, if You have carried Him away, tell me where You have laid Him, and I will take Him away."

16 Jesus said to her, "Mary!"

She turned and said to Him, "Rabboni!" (which is to say, Teacher).

Now, why didn't she recognize Him at first? We don't know – maybe it's because she's crying and her eyes are all watery, we don't know how far away He's standing, or if He has his head covered with a tunic, but there's something about the way He calls her name, and the fact that He knows her name, that makes everything clear. Do you remember how Jesus had once taught (John 10) that He was the Great Shepherd and His sheep know His voice?

She's ecstatic – like we would be if we thought someone we loved was going to die and they survived – if they walk away from a horrible car accident, they came out of a successful surgery, or they come home from deployment. You want to hold them tight and never let them go.

17 Jesus said to her, "Do not cling to Me, for I have not yet ascended to My Father; but go to My brethren and say to them, 'I am ascending to My Father and your Father, and to My God and your God.'"

18 Mary Magdalene came and told the disciples that she had seen the Lord, and *that* He had spoken these things to her.

And here is where we see the first of seven things I want to point out to you this morning – seven things that we receive as a result of Jesus' resurrection.

The first is a **place**, we could also say a part, a position, or an identity. Jesus includes Mary in everything that is happening, "*I am ascending to My Father and your Father, and to My God and your God.*"

At some point we all struggle to find our place to belong, our place to fit in. There used to be this really popular show on TV in the 80's called Cheers. It was set in a bar and everyone there was a regular – they all knew each other. And the theme song really drove that point home with the audience, it said:

Making your way in the world today takes everything you've got.
Taking a break from all your worries, sure would help a lot.
Wouldn't you like to get away?

Sometimes you want to go
Where everybody knows your name,

And that's why people would go to this bar – because it gave them what we all want - a place to belong – a place where everyone knows your name, and you're accepted.

Whenever you move, whenever you change schools or grades or start a new class, when you start a new job or are assigned to a new project, we have to search out our place, to see where we fit. And some environments seem down right hostile, as hard as we try to fit in, to find our place, there just doesn't seem to be one for us. Well, the first thing Jesus offers to you after His resurrection is a place to belong and you don't have to buy a beer to have a reason to stay.

He gives you an identity, for all those who have trusted in Christ, you may say, with confidence, "I am a child of the one true God, He is MY Father. He is MY God." You have a place in His Kingdom; you have a place in His family. Even if your own family is messed up, and there are a LOT of messed up families out there, God says, "that's OK – you can be part of Mine." And wherever you go, whatever you do, you have a place because God is always there. If you are thousands of miles from home, God is there. If you are hiding in the bathroom, God is there. If you're feeling completely and utterly alone even while standing in a crowd of faces, God is there, and you are not alone.

Jesus offers you the chance to be His – He offers you a place to belong. And He offers you more than that.

19 Then, the same day at evening, being the first *day* of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in the midst, and said to them, "Peace *be* with you." 20 When He had said this, He showed them *His* hands and His side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord.

There was a time when all the crowds loved Jesus and being so close to Him seemed like a good thing, it elevated your own social status-you were on tour with Jesus and you had the back-stage pass. But now, that notoriety was feeling like a liability and the disciples are hiding, worried that they might be arrested next.

Even if they escaped with their own lives, no doubt they were wondering-were they wrong about everything they had believed? Had they made fools of themselves? Would they be able to go back to their old jobs, their old friends?

And then, suddenly Jesus showed up. And He wasn't there to condemn anyone. He wasn't there to go off on them, "What's going on in here? Are you ashamed of Me? Didn't you believe Me? I tried for three years, THREE YEARS, to explain it all to you, and you couldn't understand!?"

No, He doesn't do anything like that. His first word, His FIRST word, to this group of people who are hiding and afraid is "Peace." Peace is with you. Calm down, don't worry, settle your thoughts and relax. Peace is *with* you. And not only that -

21 So Jesus said to them again, "Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you."

Now think about that. Remember once again everything that was going on and what they were afraid of. Remember how real the possibility of being arrested and crucified was for these disciples. Feel the stress because their very lives were on the line. And Jesus says, "Peace to you."

Nothing has changed on the outside – for all they know the temple police are out looking for them at this very moment – but something has changed on the inside, not only inside the room, but inside their souls. Jesus is offering them peace.

And He offers the same **peace** to you – it's the second thing we receive after the resurrection. Peace to stop worrying about how everything is going to turn out.

It's not a peace that comes from having all the answers, or from having all your problems solved, or being delivered out of all your circumstances, but it's a peace that comes from perspective; a peace that comes from knowing He is God and there is something more than this world. This peace comes from knowing that your greatest problem-the fact that you were separated from God, that you were enemies with Him-has been solved by Christ, and now, for Christians, you can know that though the whole world may be against you, God is still very much for you. He is watching over you, and He offers you peace. If you need some, why not ask Him for it? When was the last time you prayed, "Oh God, please give me peace?" Try it.

The third thing we see is that He gives us **a purpose**. So, we have a place, we have peace, and we have a purpose. Jesus tells them, "As the Father has sent Me, I also send you." You have a mission in life – it's to love God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength, and to love others as yourself. That's the bottom line-to know God and to make Him known. Wherever you go, whatever you do, can you do it in such a way that you are able to do it as an expression of love towards God and love toward others?

But remember, Jesus is saying this only days after being crucified. It's not always going to be easy to love people. In fact, done right, love will be uncomfortable at times. It will involve sacrifice and suffering. "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." Jesus was sent to express God's love by laying down His life. And now, "As the Father has sent Me, I also send you." Following Jesus is going to be hard at times. It's going to seem frustrating, but remember, you are not alone. You have a place in God's family and you have access to all His resources. God isn't just sending you off to complete this mission by yourself.

22 And when He had said this, He breathed on *them*, and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. 23 If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the *sins* of any, they are retained.”

Here’s the fourth thing: **presence**, the presence of God in you. When you receive Christ as your savior, the Holy Spirit immediately, and permanently indwells you. God Himself enters into your life in a way you’ve never experienced before. For some people that is a dramatic event, for others it’s so subtle they wonder if they did it right, or if it really ‘took’ when they prayed for salvation. But regardless of the way it plays out, for everyone who receives salvation through Christ, the Holy Spirit moves into your life and seals this new relationship.

As we have said so many times lately as we move through John’s gospel: Christian, you are never truly alone. And you’re never left to handle life on your own. Life is different now; you have access to a source of power, strength, counsel, and comfort that you never had before. So, you have a place to belong, a family to be a part of, you have the promise of peace with God. He gives you a purpose for your life – you can know what it’s all about, and He gives you the power to accomplish it through the presence of the Holy Spirit. That doesn’t make everything easy, He’s not going to insulate you from every problem, He’s not going to do all the heavy lifting while you sit by, but He’s there to be with you and strengthen you as you make your way through the life He has given you.

And once again, He gives you the glorious privilege of being able to share this news with others. The things you have received are open to them as well – if you let them know about the possibility of forgiveness in Christ, they can be forgiven too. But if you don’t say anything, their sins are retained. What are they supposed to do with them? That’s what Jesus is saying here. As a pastor I don’t have the ability to forgive anyone’s sins, but I can tell them HOW and WHERE to find forgiveness. As Paul writes in Romans 10:

14 How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?
15 And how shall they preach unless they are sent? As it is written:

*“How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace,
Who bring glad tidings of good things!”*

So share the good news. Tell others what you have experienced and invite them in as well. There’s no shortage of these gifts God is giving and telling others about them doesn’t diminish your share at all.

24 Now Thomas, called the Twin, one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came.

25 The other disciples therefore said to him, “We have seen the Lord.”

So he said to them, “Unless I see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe.”

26 And after eight days His disciples were again inside, and Thomas with them. Jesus came, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, “Peace to you!” 27 Then He said to

Thomas, "Reach your finger here, and look at My hands; and reach your hand *here*, and put *it* into My side. Do not be unbelieving, but believing."

28 And Thomas answered and said to Him, "My Lord and my God!"

29 Jesus said to him, "Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed *are* those who have not seen and *yet* have believed."

So, here are two more things we receive after the resurrection, **answers** and **blessings**.

Jesus gave answers to the early disciples. Remember the first time He showed up, when Thomas wasn't there, verse 20 says, "**He showed them *His* hands and *His* side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord.**" Thomas wasn't the only one with questions – they all had them, and they got an answer.

There are answers to the questions you have about God and about Jesus, there are answers to the questions that you have about Christianity and faith. I'd be happy to point you toward them. But I'll also tell you this – there will always be some things that you're just going to have to take on faith. Things you will have to believe without seeing. But that's true no matter what you believe – everyone lives by faith to some degree. Whether you believe the Bible is true and that God made the universe and everything in it, or you believe that it all just "banged" out of nothing, what you believe involves faith. No one was there to document it and we can't recreate it to see it happen again. Everyone runs on faith to some degree, the question is, is it reasonable faith? And I absolutely believe Christianity is.

Which brings us to the sixth thing we receive after the resurrection – **blessing**. Jesus gave Thomas the answers He was looking for, in a way that none of us in this room can experience, but He also told Thomas, "Blessed *are* those who have not seen and *yet* have believed." That's you and me. We are blessed for putting faith in Christ, for believing things that we cannot see at times, for walking by faith. Sometimes God just wants us to trust Him, not with blind faith, but with a faith that says, in light of everything else I have seen and heard, everything I have experienced and know, this is a reasonable step of faith.

Which brings us to the concluding verses:

30 And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; 31 but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name.

John says he specifically sat down and wrote about these things SO THAT you can have what you need in order to believe. And if you do, the seventh thing you receive after the resurrection is really a summary of all the others, you receive "**life** in His name."

The meaning of life, the reason you are here, is to know God and once you know Him to grow and flourish by developing into all that He intends for you to be. To be in constant relationship with Him receiving a place in this world, peace, a purpose for your life, power for all He gives you to do, answers for the questions you have, and blessing as you trust. It's the life He wants you to have. Do you have it?

Have you ever entered into a trusting relationship with God? Do you believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name? Can you say it with confidence? If you have any question, or any doubt, why not fix that right now? We're about to receive communion – a reminder of who Jesus is and what He has done for us. The Bible is very clear – its something only Christians should do, so don't just take some because it's passing by – only take it if you can say, without a doubt, "I believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that I have received life in His name."

If you've never received that life before, and you want to receive it now, simply pray, right where you are something like this: "Heavenly Father, I want to receive this new life that You promise. I confess that I have been living life my way and not Your way. I understand that I have broken Your rules, but I also understand that you sent Jesus to forgive me. I want to receive that forgiveness, and the place, the peace, the purpose, and all the other things You offer. I want to be Your child. Help me to love You with all that I am, and help me to love others as I love myself. In Jesus's name, amen."