

A summary of John 20:19-31

- 1. Jesus is our peace (John 20:19,21; Luke 24:36).** The first words that Jesus spoke to the eleven disciples after His resurrection, and after speaking to Mary Magdalene, were “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you” (John 20:19). The disciples were gathered together in the evening of Jesus’ resurrection, with the doors locked, for fear of the Jews and possible reprisals that might occur to them for having followed Jesus. Jesus appeared to them with reassuring words. It is the same with us today. We may have many fears. We worry about our health and the health of our loved ones. Indeed, we are the weak ones, weak in body, soul and spirit. If we are students, we worry about our grades, the school we will go to, the courses we will take. If we are graduating, we worry about the right kind of job we will apply for, we worry about the interview, and we worry about our income. We worry about marriage, raising a family, and as we grow older, we worry about retirement, health care, and eventually death and burial! In the world, we encounter injustice and chaos. Everything seems to conspire to rob us of peace. Jesus is the only One who can give us peace. In fact, He does not only give us peace, but He is our peace. These words are the fulfillment of the promise He made to His disciples in John 14:27. After His resurrection, Jesus breathed into His disciples and said “Receive the Holy Spirit” (20:22). Such a peace is the very Jesus Christ Himself living in all those who believe in Him. He is the One, as our peace, who is able to be our peace in the midst of all of the world’s chaos and sin and sickness. However, in 20:21, Jesus says a second time “Peace be with you.” This peace, as we will see in the next point, is not just for our own comfort and living, but for the purpose of preaching the gospel.
- 2. Jesus sends us to preach the gospel, and even goes with us, as our peace (John 20:19,23; Mark 16:15; Matthew 28:18-20).** In John 20:21, Jesus said that as the Father had sent Him, even so He would send us. The first Greek word for “send” in this verse has the meaning of setting apart, of sending out as on a mission. The second Greek word for “send” in the same verse also has the meaning of being sent or dispatched, but with the added denotation of accompanying, or transmitting or bestowing. In other words, when Jesus sent out His disciples, He would transmit to them or bestow on them Himself as their peace, to carry out His commission. He would accompany them. What is the purpose of Jesus being our peace? Not just that we would be peaceful and joyful in this world, and live a worry-free life in this world, but that we would announce Him as the Savior, as eternal life. Why can we preach the gospel? Because Jesus is with us as our peace. Whenever we preach the gospel, He is with us. Peace is with us, therefore He is with us. But do we really live in this way? Yes, we may know that Jesus is our peace, if we believe in Him, and that He is always with us whenever we preach the gospel. If that is the case, why do we not preach the gospel? Perhaps because we do not really believe that the main reason He sends us is to preach the gospel. Or perhaps we are afraid that people will reject us if we preach the gospel. Regardless of the reason, this is an indication that we may not really believe and live out Jesus’ words. Interestingly, Jesus continues His speaking in v.23 by saying, “If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld.” This seems to be an incentive to the disciples, and us, to preach the gospel. If we preach the gospel, and people believe, their sins will be forgiven by God (not by us). If, however, they do not believe, the forgiveness of their sins will be withheld, again by God (and not by us). But what an encouragement for us! If we preach the gospel, and people believe, we have the assurance that their sins are forgiven. This word should cause us to exercise to preach the gospel, believing that Jesus is with us as our peace, and that not only does He send us out, but He also accompanies us as we go out.

3. **Do we live a life of believing, exercising to have faith? (John 20:29; Mark 16:14; Matthew 28:17).** Some of us may know John 20:29 very well: “Jesus said to him, “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.” This verse was spoken in response to Thomas’ famous recognition of Jesus as “My Lord and my God” (v.28), after doubting Jesus’ resurrection from the dead (vv.24-27). We should not unduly criticize Thomas. Most of the time, we are just the same, actually worse! Thomas was one of the twelve apostles, and His name will be one of the twelve foundations of the New Jerusalem (Revelation 21:14). In addition, he reputedly went to India, in response to Jesus’ commandment in Matthew 28:19 and Acts 1:8). He is much better than us! Nevertheless, the fact remains that the disciples did not believe, even though they had been with Jesus for three and a half years, and they had heard His words and seen the miracles He performed. How much more us. We do not believe. That is why we may not join the corporate prayer gathering, that is why we may not read and pursue the Bible, that is why we may not come to the Lord’s day gathering, that is why we may not preach the gospel with the church Sunday afternoon. We do not believe, or we do not live a life of believing. Then how can we live such a life? We need to read and hear the words of God in the Bible and the words of brothers and sisters. The word needs to become *rhema* to us, that is, it must speak to us. Even if we do not understand or even experience the word, we can still exercise. As we saw last week, Mary Magdalene exercised to seek the Lord desperately and find Him, even though she did not know that much. On the other hand, the eleven disciples were shut in a room with the doors locked, afraid. Yet Jesus appeared to them, in His mercy. In our case, the Lord may also have mercy on us and appear to us. However, if we do not exercise to have faith, we will not believe. For example, if we preach the gospel, our faith will increase. If we contact people, our faith will increase. If we preach the gospel, people will believe, and faith will be imparted to us. According to our data, for every 1000 gospel tracts that we distribute, one person is attracted (that is, visibly comes to the Sunday morning gathering). Such a ration may not seem much. Yet, other gospel doors are open, and we do see people getting saved. This is a process that we need to go through in order to exercise to have faith.
4. **If we believe, there must also be operation (Mark 16:14).** Mark 16:14 says, “Afterward he appeared to the eleven themselves as they were reclining at table, and he rebuked them for their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they had not believed those who saw him after he had risen.” We do not like to be rebuked, and not many are keen to rebuke others in the church life. Yet Jesus rebuked His disciples for not believing the testimonies of those who saw Him after His resurrection, such as Mary Magdalene, and the two walking to Emmaus (Mark 16:13). If we listen to testimonies, but there is no response on our part to take the next step, our believing will be empty, merely objective. First, we need to listen to the servants of God. We also need to listen to the brothers and sisters’ testimonies, not least the young ones. We should never despise the young saints’ speaking. Then there needs to be “the next step.” Why did Jesus appear to His disciples in resurrection? That they might take the next step. Mary Magdalene took several steps. First, she sought the Lord, then she sought Peter and John, then she remained at the tomb to seek Jesus, then she testified to all the eleven. Peter and John, on the other hand, after seeing the empty tomb, returned to their respective homes. Thomas physically missed the first Lord’s day gathering (John 20:24), and so missed the grace of seeing the Lord in resurrection. All this shows that without the next step, or without an operation, our believing will remain unsubstantiated, and shaky at best. It also shows that to grow in our faith is very challenging. For example, if we preach the gospel, the Lord will be with us (as our peace). If we preach the gospel, some will believe and their sins will be forgiven. If we attend the Lord’s day gathering and praise the Lord, our faith may grow. However, this is not a guarantee of the Lord’s presence. We must do everything in spirit and with joyfulness, not just physically going through the motions. We need to check: a. Has our life grown? b. Is our operation more this year than last year? c. Do we believe more than we believed last year?