

RESURRECTION REALITIES

JOHN 20:19-29

What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we beheld and our hands handled, concerning the Word of Life. (1 John 1:1).

As John penned those words, I am sure that he paused for a moment and remembered. He remembered the things that he had heard and the things that he had seen and the things that he had touched.

You see, the faith that John held was not in some esoteric philosophy. He did not hold to some mystic unknown which could neither be proven or described. It was not an idea or a teaching or a way of thinking that made John write those words.

To John, the Christian faith was something that had happened before his eyes. It was a series of facts as real as last week's newspaper and as hard-hitting as a traffic accident.

The central truth of Christianity is the resurrection of Jesus. The unifying belief that we hold is that a dead man got up from the grave and walked.

After Hurricane Andrew, someone wrote on the top of one of the remaining roofs in the Homestead area, "God, You've got our attention. Now what?" There is a "now what" to the resurrection. We believe that Jesus actually rose from the death - that is why we celebrate at Easter. But what I want to look at today is the difference which that fact makes during the other 364 days of the year.

What difference does the resurrection make? I want to share several. They are taken from John 20:19-29.

1. BECAUSE JESUS HAS RISEN, FEAR HAS BEEN REPLACED BY PEACE.

When therefore it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and when the doors were shut where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in their midst, and said to

them, "Peace be with you." (John 20:19).

Inside a dimly lit upper room in Jerusalem, a small band of disciples have gathered. They are afraid. They start at every clank or clatter that comes from the street below, expecting the footsteps of Roman soldiers come to arrest them. They fear that they are wanted men. Their leader has been taken and executed for treason against Rome.

Their faces are well-known in the Temple. They feel it is only a matter of time before Judas leads the forces of the Temple guard to their doorstep.

Earlier this day, the people had gathered in the Temple with their sheaves of grain to celebrate the Feast of Firstfruits. There, on the steps of the Temple, the priests had taken each sheaf and had waved it before the Lord, dedicating the crops which were to follow. There is a promise and a celebration of that life that is to come.

But the thoughts of the disciples in the Upper Room are not drawn to the events which had taken place within the Temple, but rather to an empty tomb outside the city.

They have heard Mary's report. And they aren't sure what to make of it. Speculation runs high. Could she have been mistaken? How did she know that it was Jesus? Perhaps it was an imposter. After all, the face of Jesus had been brutally beaten. How could anyone recognize Him?

And then there is the question of the empty tomb. Who could have rolled away the stone? What of the Roman soldiers who had been guarding the tomb? What has happened?

And then, suddenly, there is Jesus! The passage does not say how He managed to enter through the locked doors. We read only that they saw Him standing in their midst. The significant fact is not how he gained access to the room, but that He is alive at all.

This man had been crucified. He had been certified deceased by men whose business it was to make live people dead. He had no business standing here in the midst of the disciples. He ought to be in a tomb somewhere.

And so, He says to them, "PEACE BE WITH YOU." In their agitated state, it is amazing that He sees anything more than heels and elbows.

They are not expecting peace. They are expecting Jewish authorities and Roman

soldiers. They are expecting persecution and judgment and death. They think that they are in the midst of defeat. But instead, they are going to find PEACE and a HOLY BOLDNESS.

The message of the risen Christ always brings peace to the troubled heart. No matter what the outward circumstances, there can be an inner peace when you have come to know the Lord of the resurrection.

After all, what harm can man possibly do? Destroy this worldly body? It is of no consequence, for the Lord of the resurrection will replace it with a new body that can never be harmed.

2. BECAUSE JESUS HAS RISEN, WE HAVE EVIDENCE WHICH CANNOT BE REFUTED.

And when He had said this, He showed them both His hands and His side. The disciples therefore rejoiced when they heard the Lord. (John 20:20).

The disciples needed no evidence that Jesus was alive. He was talking and walking before them. It was very obvious that He was alive.

What He sets out to prove is that He is the same One who had been dead. He has the testimony of the nail-scarred hands and the wound in His side.

These marks on the body of Jesus also bear witness of His great love for us. They are the marks of sacrifice. They were put there for us.

It's a very old story. A young girl was embarrassed when her friends came to visit because of her mother's hands. Those hands were horribly twisted and disfigured. And the little girl was ashamed of them and didn't want anyone else to see them.

But then, she learned how her mother's hands had been disfigured. It had taken place when the young girl was a mere infant and her pajamas had caught fire. The devoted mother had smothered the fire with her own hands, burning them badly in the process.

When the girl heard this, her mother's disfigured hands took on a great beauty. They were no longer a cause of shame. They were a sign of her mother's love and sacrifice.

What are the marks of your love for Jesus? Where are the signs of your affection and devotion toward Him? In what way has your life changed? What persecution have you suffered for speaking the name of Jesus? This brings us to our next point.

3. BECAUSE JESUS HAS RISEN, WE HAVE AUTHORITY FROM ON HIGH.

Jesus therefore said to them again, "Peace be with you, as the Father has sent Me, I also send you."

And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, their sins have been forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they have been retained." (John 20:21-23).

The authority that was given to these disciples was given on the basis of receiving the Spirit. As a sign of the imparting of the Spirit, Jesus breathed on the disciples. This is an appropriate sign because the Greek and Hebrew words for "spirit" can also refer to "wind" or "that which is blown."

Some have been puzzled over the fact that Jesus breathes on them now, yet the Spirit is not given until the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2. But a careful reading of the passage does not reinforce any difficulties. The passage does not say that they received the Spirit at the time, but only that Jesus told them at this time to receive the Spirit. He did not say when they would receive it. The actions of Jesus are promisory and look with anticipation to the eventual coming of the Spirit. With the coming of the Spirit would also come authority. It would be the authority to declare the forgiveness of sins.

Notice the careful distinction that is made in the use of the tenses. As obvious as this is in our English translation, it is even more obvious in the Greek text. There are three different tenses that are used in this verse. The first is the aorist tense. It refers to puntiliar action; action that is viewed as a single point in time. The second is the perfect tense, viewing action that took place in a point in time, but stressing the fact of continuing results. The third is the present tense which focuses upon the continuing nature of that action.

"If you forgive (aorist) the sins of any, their sins have been forgiven them in the past with the result that they are forgiven (perfect); if you are retaining (present) the sins of any, they have

been retained in the past with the result that they are still retained (perfect).”

Thus, it is not the disciples who initiate the forgiveness of sins, but rather, their announcement of that forgiveness is preceded by the actual fact of forgiveness. These men will not have the power to actually initiate the forgiveness of sins. Only God can do that.

If that is the case, then what is the point of the words of Jesus? It is that there is now to be a harmony between the announcement by the disciples concerning men's sins and the actual forgiveness of those sins in heaven.

The authority that they are granted is to give men assurance that their sins have been forgiven by announcing the terms of that forgiveness.

When they make an announcement that a man's sins have been forgiven because he has come in faith to Jesus Christ, it will already have taken place in heaven.

This is the ministry of binding and loosing that Jesus describes in Matthew 16:19 and 18:18. Peter and the other disciples were given the keys to the kingdom - the message which gives entrance into the Kingdom of God.

I have often been challenged by unbelievers who asked, “What gives you the right to say that someone who doesn't believe the way you do is not going to heaven? That is pretty closed-minded, isn't it?”

The truth is that Jesus has given us the authority to make such judgments. We can look at a man who has come to Christ in faith and who has repented of his sins and we can say to that man that he is forgiven.

On the other hand, we can look at a man who has turned away from the message of the gospel and we can say that he is still in his sins.

4. BECAUSE JESUS HAS RISEN, WE HAVE THE HOLY SPIRIT.

And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit.” (John 20:22).

Jesus does not merely give a commission to the disciples and leave it at that. He

also gives them the MEANS and the POWER by which to fulfill that commission. This comes through an outside agency. It comes through the Holy Spirit.

Notice how this took place. He “*breathed on them.*” Literally, He “BLEW on them.” The Greek word used here is the aorist of *emphusao*. It is used only here in the New Testament. It is also used in the Greek Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible, in Genesis 2:7 where God was creating the first man.

Then the Lord God formed man of dust from the ground, and BREATHED into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being. (Genesis 2:7).

Just as God once blew into Adam to bring life to a lifeless body, so also Jesus blows His Spirit into those who were once dead in their sins. Do you recall how the book of John opened? It was with the same words that opened the book of Genesis: “In the beginning.” Now we find that there is coming a new creation.

This same Greek word is also used by the prophet Ezekiel in his vision of the dry bones. In this vision, Ezekiel sees a great valley filled with the dried bones of those who have died.

Then He said to me, “Prophecy to the breath, prophesy, son of man, and say to the breath, ‘Thus says the Lord God, “Come to the four winds, O breath, and BREATHE on these slain that they may come to life.”””

So I prophesied as He commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they came to life, and stood on their feet, an exceeding great army. (Ezekiel 37:9-10).

In this vision, it is the breath of God upon the bones that causes them to come to life. Now perhaps we can begin to understand the significance of what Jesus does as He appears in the Upper Room with His disciples.

He had once spoken to Nicodemus about the life-giving and life-changing work of the Spirit.

The wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going; so is everyone who is born of the Spirit. (John 3:8).

These disciples are going to be different. They will be transformed into a

quivering collection of frightened rabbits into a group of embolden men who shall turn the world upside down.

But the work of the Spirit does not end there. The gift of the Holy Spirit was not limited to that small handful of disciples. It is a gift that is given to all of God's people. If you are a Christian, then you are not alone. God's Spirit is with you. And He has not retired from the world-changing business.

5. BECAUSE JESUS HAS RISEN, DOUBT HAS BEEN DISPELLED BY CERTAINTY.

The initial doubt of Thomas is seen in verses 24-25. It came when Thomas heard the report of the resurrection of Jesus.

But Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came.

The other disciples therefore were saying to him, "We have seen the Lord!" But he said to them, "Unless I shall see in His hands the imprint of the nails, and put my fingers into the place of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe." (John 20:24-25).

I can identify with Thomas. It is my middle name. I can identify with him because he loved Jesus a whole lot. He had left family and friends to follow Jesus.

Thomas had a nickname. It is given in this passage. It was Didymus. It is also mentioned in John 11:16 and 21:2. It is a Greek nickname and means "twin." Actually, the word Thomas itself also means "twin" but in the Hebrew language (a bit like the way that both Cephas and Peter mean the same thing in Aramaic and Greek). Why did Thomas have this nickname? I would assume that it was because he had a twin brother. Twins are often very close, but Thomas had left his twin brother to go and to follow Jesus. He had made a life commitment.

When the disciples had resisted the plan of Jesus to go to Bethany and from there to Jerusalem, it had been Thomas who was ready to go and die with Jesus (John 11:16).

He had been present at Gethsemane at the arrest of Jesus. He had fled in the night with the rest of the disciples and he had heard the news that Jesus had been crucified. He knew that the Lord's body had been taken by Joseph and Nicodemus

and lain in an empty tomb. Now as Thomas returns to the Upper Room, he finds the disciples raging with excitement. They say that they have seen Jesus.

But Thomas knows better. There must be some other explanation. Perhaps they have suffered a hallucination. Maybe they have been drinking too much wine. He resolves to demand proof. Visual testimony will not be enough. He wants the kind of evidence that you can measure in a laboratory.

The doubt of Thomas was different than the unbelief of Judas. His was the doubt of one who wished that he had reason to believe but had intellectual problems.

This serves as a reminder that sometimes real believers struggle with real doubt.

And so, he says that unless he is given that kind of evidence, he WILL NOT believe. He uses a double negative in the Greek. Instead of negating the statement, this makes it even stronger. He says, "Until I see some evidence, I will not under any circumstances believe."

Before we judge Thomas too harshly, we ought to remember that we also have our times of unbelief. We also want to put God in a box, to treat Him like a genie in a magic lamp that is to be taken out once in a while for a quick answer to prayer and then quickly returned to His bottle before He causes too much trouble. Here is the principle. Never doubt in the darkness what you have been taught in the light.

Thomas learned this lesson a week later. The scene was the same. Once again, the disciples were gathered together. Once again, the doors were secured. The only difference is that this time Thomas was present.

And suddenly, Jesus was there! The words of Jesus are an echo of the demands that Thomas had made a week earlier.

The Demands of Thomas	The Offer of Jesus
Unless I shall see in His hands the imprint of the nails...	See My hands...
And put my finger into the place of the nails...	Reach here your finger...
And put my hand into His side...	Reach your hand, and put it into My side.
I will not believe.	Be not unbelieving, but believing.

Doubt gave way to certainty. We have no reason to doubt - not just about the past,

but about the future as well.

Two men were watching a football game on television. The home team was down by three points and they were on their own 5 yard line and there was only 10 seconds on the clock. The first man turned to the second man and said, "I will bet you ten dollars that the home team wins." The second man said, "You're on."

When the ball was snapped, the quarterback ran back into his own end zone and then, as he was about to be sacked, he threw the ball wildly away. A crow happened to be flying over the stadium and minding his own business and did not see the ball coming. The ball bounced off the crow and was deflected into the hands of the receiver, although not the one that the quarterback had intended. The receiver caught the ball and found himself wide open and ran 80 yards for a touchdown. The crowd in the stadium went wild. Back in the house the second man reached into his wallet to pay ten dollars to the first man.

The first man stopped him and said, "I can't take your money. To tell you the truth, this was a prerecorded game and I saw the play on the evening news." The second man said, "That's okay. I saw the news too, but I didn't think he could do it again."

The resurrection was an incredible event. A dead man got up out of the grave and walked around. But what is even more incredible is that God is going to do it again. And you had better believe it!