



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of Dan Duncan

John 20: 19-31

Summer 2023

"Peace"

TRANSCRIPT

Thank you Mark, and good morning. We are coming to the end of our studies in the Gospel of John. We're at the end of chapter 20; I think we have two more lessons in this magnificent book. But we're looking this morning at a rather lengthy passage, verses nineteen through thirty-one, to conclude chapter 20.

We ended last week with Mary coming and announcing to the disciples that, 'She had seen the Lord.' So she's announced the resurrection to these disciples. And now we read in verse 19, "So when it was evening on that day, the first *day* of the week..."—Now, let me pause for a moment. Do you know why the church meets on Sunday? Well, this is the reason—because of the resurrection.

The Jewish people, the nation of Israel, meet on Saturday—on the last day of the week, on sabbath, because that is the sign of the Old Covenant. Exodus chapter 31, verses 16 and 17 make that clear, that *sabbath* is the sign, the symbol, to Israel of the covenant of Moses that God made with Israel.

We're not under the Old Covenant any longer. We're under the New Covenant, and so the church began meeting on Sunday. Now, you go to the Book of Acts, the second chapter, after the Day of Pentecost, and 3000 are saved that day, and then others are being saved. Many, many people are coming to faith there in Jerusalem. And you read that, 'The church met every day in the temple—and then they were meeting from

house to house; and breaking bread celebrating the Lord's Supper.' That's in the very first days of the church, which began on the Day of Pentecost. (Acts 2:43-47).

But you go later into the Book of Acts, in chapter 20, in verse 7, Paul visits the church at Troas in Asia Minor, and they met, "On the first day of the week." So, they had gone from every day to one day; and that one day was the first day of the week. And then Paul also mentions that in 1 Corinthians chapter 16, verse 2, about taking a collection for the poor saints in Jerusalem; and when they meet, 'on the first day of the week', they're to take up this collection.

So after a few years, they begin meeting on this one day; and the day they chose was the first day of the week—it's the day of the resurrection. So every Sunday we celebrate the resurrection. And really, every day we live in the light of, and in the power as Christians of, the resurrection. So we read here,

¹⁹ So when 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." ²⁰ And when He had said this, He showed them both His hands and His side. The disciples then rejoiced when they saw the Lord. ²¹ So Jesus said to them again, "Peace *be* with you; as the Father has sent Me, I also send you." 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, *their sins* have been forgiven them; if you retain the *sins* of any, they have been retained.

²⁴ But Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came. ²⁵ So the other disciples were saying to him, "We have seen the Lord!" But he said to them, "Unless I see in His hands the imprint of the nails, and put my finger into the place of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe."

²⁶ After eight days His disciples were again inside, and Thomas with them. Jesus came, the doors having been shut, and stood in their midst and said, "Peace *be* with you." ²⁷ Then He said to Thomas, "Reach here with your finger, and see My hands; and reach here your hand and put it into My side; and do not be unbelieving, but

believing.” ²⁸ Thomas answered and said to Him, “My Lord and my God!” ²⁹ Jesus said to him, “Because you have seen Me, have you believed? Blessed *are* they who did not see, and yet believed.”

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

John 20: 19-31

May the LORD bless this reading of His Word; and may He bless each of us as we study this great chapter and this great passage in the Gospel of John. Build us up in the faith, and give glory to Him. Let's pray.

Father, we do thank You for this glorious text that we can read, and then we can consider this morning. We pray You would bless us. Jesus breathed on them, and gave them the Holy Spirit. We have the Holy Spirit, He is the seal upon our hearts. And we are secure because of that; and that seal cannot be broken. We are Yours forever; and we not only have the protection of the Spirit, we have the instruction of the Spirit. He is the One that enlightens our minds—that gives us understanding of the things we've read and how they apply to us. And it all goes far beyond anything that can be said in this sermon.

But we do pray, LORD, You'd bless us as we consider this text, and that You would teach Your people. Build us all up in the faith as we consider this great event in the life of the disciples and what it says to us, and teaches us. We thank You for the Spirit's ministry. We pray that it will go unhindered this morning and we would glorify You. So bless us, build us up on the faith, encourage us, strengthen us.

We pray for our material needs as well. We pray for those who are feeling poorly and that are not well today, we pray that You'd give them encouragement and we pray that You would strengthen them. We pray that You would bless our health. And we pray

that You would bless those that are on the retreat this week, that You would bless them as they come home today—and give them safe travel as well.

We thank You for all of the blessings You give us. We thank You for the material blessings we have; every breath of life is a gift from You. And we thank You for this time together now, and pray You would bless it—and pray these things in Christ's name. Amen.

(Message) In the United Nations garden in New York City is a large, bronze statue of a muscular man with a hammer in one hand, and a sword in the other. It is called, *Let Us Beat Swords into Plowshares*, a symbolic expression of the words that are found in Isaiah, chapter 2, verse 4. The donor was the Soviet Union, (there is obvious irony in that). Even if the intentions were good, neither the giver, nor the receiver, nor the statue did much for the dream of peace. But then mankind is helpless in bringing peace to a troubled world—and helpless in bringing peace to a restless soul.

That's what makes the first words our Lord spoke to His disciples after the resurrection so significant; "Peace *be* with you." Three times in John chapter 20, the Lord greets His disciples with these words. What the wise and the powerful of this world are not able to do, Christ did. And He came out of the grave to announce "Peace" to His disciples.

They were in hiding. Ten of the disciples, and some others, were behind locked doors somewhere in Jerusalem in fear for their lives—and no doubt about their futures. They were in despair. They knew the tomb was empty, but they didn't know what had happened to the body. They heard reports that Christ had appeared to some women. Mary Magdalene had come to them, and she had spoken about that.

But they were not believing them. They were a group of scared men, huddled in hiding, when Jesus came and stood in their midst, and greeted them with those words, "Peace *be* with you." (vs19).

He passed through the locked doors, just as His resurrection body passed through the graveclothes—with ease. He simply materialized in the room. His greeting of, "Peace *be* with you," is the conventional Hebrew greeting, "*Shalom aleichem*", that you hear today on the streets of Jerusalem. Traditional greetings, though, can lose their meaning after a while, but this greeting was full of meaning—and was a beautiful choice of words for a frightened group of men.

The Lord might have greeted them otherwise. He might have greeted them with, "Shame on you." They had all deserted Him and they fled the scene of His arrest. Peter had even denied Him three times. —But He didn't do that. He didn't come condemning or accusing, He came in grace. He came speaking of forgiveness and reconciliation. He came declaring "Peace".

The last statement He made to them in the upper room in John chapter 16, (verse 33), is "I have spoken to you, so that in Me you may have peace." His first words to them on His return are, "Peace *be* with you."

What a great word, "*Peace*", is. It means 'the war is over', 'hostility is at an end.' That's the message the Lord brought to His disciples. It is the Good News of the Gospel.

Ever since Adam sinned, man has been at war with God—and at war with himself. Man by nature, apart from grace; apart from the sovereign love and grace of God, man by nature is a rebel. Paul describes us as "hostile toward God", in Romans chapter 8, verse 7. He doesn't mean by that that people can't be civilized and well mannered: That they can't show kindness to others, love their children, be good neighbors, and law abiding citizens. Man to man, person to person, many people measure up well, according to our standards of human decency: They are patriots, philanthropists, models to the community.

But when measured by God's standard, which is perfection, we all fall short—and we all stand condemned. His truth exposes our failures before His absolute, pure righteousness. And men hate that—but that is reality, as the Bible reveals it.

But there's a further reality, and that is that, 'The war has ended.' That's the Good News: God's wrath has been turned away from all who believe in Christ because Christ died for them. He suffered for their sins; He paid for them all and established peace between God and man—between God and the believer.

That's Paul's declaration in Romans chapter 5, verse 1, "Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."; through His death for us. And every person for whom that is true, not only has peace *with* God, but also has the peace *of* God. Our Creator is now our Father; our judge is now our Father, who cares for us as a father should care for his children. All of His mighty power is directed to help and bless us. After all, if He gave His Son for us, He will not withhold anything from us that is good for us. God is for us!—What does it matter who is against us! Well that's the reason for peace—peace with God, and the peace of God.

Well, that's what Christ came declaring to His frightened and ashamed disciples, "*Peace*". He even signaled peace in the manner in which He approached them. He didn't come in a display of power; He didn't blow the door off its hinges—didn't enter with thunder and lightning. He came quietly, like the LORD came to Elijah at Mt. Horeb—not in the great wind that broke rocks, or the earthquake and fire that shook the mountain; He spoke to the discouraged prophet in a 'gentle breeze'. (1Ki 19:12). The Lord is gentle with His people, with His disciples. He is gentle; He speaks peace.

Then we read that He showed them His hands and side, to prove that the One speaking to them was actually Him—now risen from the dead. Luke's account states that they were frightened by His appearance, thinking He was a spirit. But when He showed them His wounds, they knew they were seeing a real body. 'Then', John said, "the disciples rejoiced." (vs20). The reports were true. Christ was alive from the dead and they were having fellowship with Him, with the *living* Christ.

Now this tells us something about the experience of *peace* and *joy*: It is the result of having fellowship with Him. He is more than a memory—He's a living person; and we

can enjoy His presence every day. That's what we should seek. The disciples did that, and they "rejoiced". We have a living Savior, not a dead martyr. And because He is alive, we have peace in life; we have joy in life; we have meaning in life. Our lives have purpose: We have a great work to do in this world.

And in verse 21, the Lord gave the disciples their mission. He said, "...as the Father has sent Me, I also send you." But He prefaced their commission with the words, "Peace *be* with you;..." Why did He repeat His assurance of peace? I think it was to encourage them to accept this mission that He gave to them. It would not be easy. When He concluded the upper room discourse at end of chapter 16 He said, "In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world." (vs33).

Now, as He sent them out into a hostile world where they would face tribulation, He comforted them with the assurance of *peace*. It was the assurance that all would be well for them—through the trials and tribulations, all would be well. And it was not an empty promise, because the One who spoke these words is the One who conquered death. He is alive, and He is ruling.

The One standing before them was not a phantom or a figment of their collective imaginations. He was real. He presented them tangible evidence, the wounds of His hands and side. Christ is risen! —And that means He is alive for us in every situation of life; there to give guidance; there to give protection and help.

But that's not all. He has equipped us with the Holy Spirit. He gave Him to the disciples in verse 22: After speaking, "He breathed on them and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit.'... " This was a pre-Pentecost provision of the Holy Spirit for blessing and help in the days leading up to that event when the Spirit was given permanently to the church. But it is a proof of the power that accompanies us to enable us to live well; to have peace; to live the life of Christ and to do the work of God. We have the power of heaven within us.

And the work of the apostles and church, our work, is given in verse 23. —It's the work of forgiveness, " 'If you forgive the sins of any, *their sins* have been forgiven them; if you retain the *sins* of any, they have been retained.' "

Now this is not some special power given to priests or ministers to absolve sin or withhold forgiveness. There is no example of an apostle doing that in the New Testament. But there are many examples of them proclaiming 'the Gospel of forgiveness', and warning of the consequences of unbelief. —That's what is meant here. Christians have the authority to proclaim the Gospel and assure those who believe in Jesus Christ that their sins are forgiven—and for those who don't believe, that their sins are retained.

Men do not have the power to create forgiveness of sins and reconcile us to God. That is the Lord's work alone; and that is indicated in the grammar of the statement. The verbs are passive. It's not that '*They* have achieved their forgiveness', or '*They* have obtained their forgiveness', but, '*Their sins* have been forgiven'. It's *happened* to them—which implies divine agency in it.

But also, the verbs are in what is known in Greek as '*the perfect tense*', which is a past tense but implies a state of, or condition, that preceded the proclamation. In other words, 'Forgiveness had already been determined in heaven', and is not merely *proclaimed* on the earth. Forgiveness of sin has already been obtained for all who believe, whoever they may be, however great their sins may be, because Christ secured forgiveness on the cross. That is where it was achieved, that's where it was obtained. That's the message of our mission: 'Peace.' 'Forgiveness of sin.' 'Reconciliation with God and eternal life for all who believe in Christ.'

It was a great moment for the disciples. Christ had come to them; He had revealed Himself as alive from the dead, given them a mission, and equipped them for that mission with the Holy Spirit, the third Person of the Trinity.

But something was missing; a person was absent. "Thomas, one of the 12, called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came." (vs24). He'd not recovered from the

shock of Christ's arrest and crucifixion. When Christ died on the cross, Thomas' faith seemed to die; and he had withdrawn from the group. When the others found him and told him about the Lord's appearance to them, that they had actually "seen" Him, Thomas was incredulous. He rejected it all as rubbish.

'Seeing', for him, 'was not enough'. He demanded incontrovertible evidence. "Unless I see in His hands the imprint of the nails, and put my finger into the place of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe." (vs25). That's a gruesome demand—extreme, putting his hand in the wound; but it was intended to express his obstinate skepticism. There was no way he could, or would, believe that the dead rise.

Thomas was a very modern man: A *naturalist*, a *materialist* at heart. And so he has come down to us as "Doubting Thomas." You can sympathize with him, can't you? I can, because the dead don't rise...normally, naturally. This was in an age in which strange things like that happened, and people believed in those kind of things; yet the first century was a very skeptical age—just like we are today. They didn't *see* those things happening. They didn't expect those kind of things to happen. And so, he's incredulous; he doesn't believe. And the Scriptures give some support to that. Hebrews chapter 9, verse 27, "...it is appointed for men to die once and after this *comes* judgment."

But this wasn't normal; this wasn't natural. And that's really the very point. — This was a *supernatural event*, to confound human reason and rationale. This was the greatest event of history: A man rose from the dead.

And it was a fulfillment of prophecy that vindicated all that Christ said about His person and work. On numerous occasions the Lord told the disciples that He would be put to death, and rise from the dead on the third day. Thomas heard all of those prophecies. He had witnessed the Lord's many miracles, which included raising the dead. Now this is different from that. This is, '*a resurrection to a glorified body*'. Raising the dead is not a resurrection. But he had seen that miracle; he had seen Christ bring people back from the dead: The son of the widow of Nain, and Lazarus.

Jesus is the Son of God. How could death hold Him? It could not. —So Thomas was without excuse. And eight days later, the Lord dashed his doubts when He again came to the disciples, who were gathered once again in a room behind closed doors. He came in the same way: He simply appeared "...in their midst and said, 'Peace *be* with you.' " (vs26).

This was the third time that He gave that greeting. But it was not vain repetition: "It was to show that the Lord is full of peace, and He has an abundance of it to give to His followers.", at least that's Matthew Henry's explanation for this third statement about peace.

But it was also necessary, a necessary greeting for the sake of Thomas, whose expressions of doubt were really angry statements of unbelief. He defied God in what he was saying, (you can almost hear the anger in his voice from those words).

So, what did Christ do? Revile him for his slowness and lack of faith? Denounce him for testing Him and trying His patience? —No, He came to His fallen disciple without the scolding tone often heard in preachers. Again, He came like that *gentle* wind at Horeb; He came with mercy and healing, speaking "*Peace*"—all for Thomas' benefit.

We sometimes sing the hymn of the medieval theologian, Bernard of Clairvaux, *Jesus, The Very Thought of Thee*. It has the line,

O hope of every contrite heart,
O joy of all the meek,
To those who fall, how kind Thou art!
How good to those who seek!

He is kind to us when we fall. He patiently attends to our weakness and our doubts, to strengthen our faith. And He came to Thomas to strengthen him.

Then He invited him to apply his tests; to use 'the scientific method' on Him. Verse 27, "Then He said to Thomas, 'Reach here with your finger, and see My hands; and reach here your hand and put it into My side; and do not be unbelieving, but believing.'"

We're not told whether or not he actually touched the marks in the Lord's hand and side. He didn't need to; he saw the irrefutable evidence before him, and he heard the Lord's command to believe. And he did. All doubts were removed; and Thomas gave expression to perhaps the greatest confession of faith in the Bible, when he said, "My Lord, and my God!"

'Lord' sometimes has the lesser meaning of '*sir*'. We saw that back in chapter 4, verse 11 and 49—'the woman at the well'. But here it must be given the full meaning of 'Master', of 'Yahweh', 'Jehovah' —God's name in the Old Testament. Jesus had been addressed as 'Lord' before—but never as *God*. But here, for the first time, Thomas addressed Him in that way, ascribing full deity to Christ. Thomas realized that He is God, because only God could conquer death as Christ had.

And so he made this confession—similar to Peter's in Matthew chapter 16, verse 16, when he said of Jesus, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." And He is. But Thomas declared Him to be 'Lord and God'. In fact, in the Greek text it is even stronger. It's difficult to translate it literally, but literally he states that, 'Christ is the Lord and the God.' In other words, "My The Lord and my The God." —(both words have the definite article).

It is the clear confirmation of John's opening statement of the Gospel in John chapter 1, verse 1, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." And so, with Thomas' confession, it's as though we come full circle: "The Word", the Lord Jesus Christ, is distinct from the Father in Person, but one with the Father in essence, and equal with the Father and the Holy Spirit in power and glory: The Triune God.

And Thomas made a great confession, and a very personal confession, of faith. Notice he said, "My Lord and my God," expressing his personal trust in Christ as his God and Savior. That's an example of saving faith; of *knowledge*, *ascent*, and *trust*. He not only gave intellectual *ascent* to the Lord's resurrection, he *appropriated* that truth. —He *believed* in it. And the change in Thomas was immediate and complete: From being the

most skeptical, the most unbelieving of the eleven, he came to believe more than any of them had confessed, (at least in their confessions). Thomas confessed 'Jesus to be God'.

And Jesus accepted it. Would He have done that if it were not true? If He were just a man, or an angel, or something less than God, would He have accepted this confession of faith? When Paul and Barnabas were in Lystra on their first missionary journey and the people, 'proclaimed them gods', they tore their clothes and they denied it. They said, "We are also men of the same nature as you." (Acts 14:15).

But Jesus didn't do that. He accepted Thomas' worship without hesitation—because it is true. In fact, in verse 29 He promised a blessing on those who believe as Thomas did, (with perhaps a gentle rebuke of Thomas), "Jesus said to him, 'Because you have seen Me, have you believed? Blessed *are* they who did not see, and *yet* believe.' "

Believe what? Believe that He is the Lord and the God; the very God of very God; very man of very man, or very man of woman; sent by God, born of a woman under the Law; the Son of God; the God-man. That is who we confess. That's who Christ is: The God-man and the Savior of all who trust in Him.

And down through the ages multitudes have believed in just that way. Not with their eyes, but with their minds; by hearing or by reading the witness of these men in the Scriptures. Not with some gratuitous leap of faith—that's not Christian faith.

Christian faith is not as Bertrand Russell defined it: "A firm belief in something for which there is no evidence." Genuine faith is reasonable. It is grounded on sound, solid evidence and reliable testimony. And numerous skeptics, like Thomas, have become believers upon studying the facts.

One well-known example, (probably well-known to many or most of you), is Frank Morrison, a British lawyer who set out to write a book refuting the resurrection of Christ. He wrote a book, but not that one. In his research he was so overwhelmed by the evidence that he became a believer and he wrote the book, *Who Moved the Stone?*, which brings forth evidence supporting the resurrection.

There is sound evidence for the resurrection. But a person doesn't need to be a trained theologian or lawyer, with access to all of the evidence in order to believe in the resurrection. The witness of Scripture is God's testimony, the revelation of God Almighty. It has about it 'the ring of truth'. The Scriptures are self-authenticating so that faith doesn't depend on external evidence. Our faith is a completely reasonable faith—but it is also, and fundamentally, a supernatural faith.

We don't reason our way to the truth. We are *born again* and understand the truth. The truth of God's Word is understood by those have been given spiritual eyes to see. God opens our eyes to the truth so that as we read the facts of Scripture we perceive them with assurance, and the Holy Spirit testifies to our spirit that what we read, what we study, the Gospel, is true. He confirms it in our heart. It's supernatural.

The Christ of the Bible is the Christ of history. And He comes to us in the Scriptures with all of the reality and all of the conviction that He came to Thomas and the other disciples in His physical appearance.

The apostle John wrote the record of His life, death, and resurrection in this Fourth Gospel in order to present the truth to us, so that we would believe it and be saved. That's what he wrote here at the end of the chapter, in verses 30 and 31; "Therefore many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name."

There's the Gospel. —That's the Good News. Through faith in Christ, we have peace *with* God; we have the peace *of* God. We have life in His name by His person and His work. Christ is alive. We have a living Savior. And so He can be the life giver who reveals Himself to us and brings us to faith in Him.

And He is still doing signs today. Not the signs that we read of in this Gospel: He's not changing water to wine; He's not raising the dead—but He is changing lives.

He delivers from deadly habits, and raises up dead marriages—that is the power of God's Word working in a changed heart and the power of the Holy Spirit, who lives within a changed heart, a regenerated heart.

The Holy Spirit supernaturally produces in us what Paul calls in Galatians chapter 5, verse 22, "The fruit of the Spirit." First *love*: Love is a supernatural gift. 'How can I love that person?', you may say. Well, in and of yourself, you can't—but by the power of God you can. He changes us. He produces great works within us.

Love, then *joy*; that's a gift of God. Then *peace*. Those are the first three of the fruit of the Spirit, and he lists six other virtues following that. That's what the Lord has done for us now: He has given us a life of stability; He has given us a sound mind; a life of certainty in a world of uncertainty; a life of calm in world of chaos—a world at war.

That's what we should have; that's what we can have in Christ and by His grace. We have that, as I said, in this world at war. But He will change all of that: Some day He will bring peace to this planet as only He can. He's coming again: And then men, 'will hammer their swords into plowshares...and never again learn war.' (Isa 2:4).

That's the kingdom to come. And as we were reminded in Sunday School today, that's what to be praying for, "Thy kingdom come." (Mat 6:10). It's our hope, the hope of all who have put their trust in Christ and know Him as their Lord and their Savior.

Have you done that? If not, Christ invites you to come to Him, to believe in Him, as the Son of God who died for sinners, and through faith and faith alone ,receive forgiveness and everlasting life, a life of peace.

If you've not believed, may God help you to do that. Come to Him.

And all of us who have, may God increase love, and joy, and peace in our lives. And may we go out with that and serve Him, and give the Gospel to a lost world.

(Closing prayer) Father, we know what the God of love can do. Its miraculous things: Give life to those who are dead in their transgressions and sins, and give faith to unbelieving hearts. It's not something that we produce in ourselves, LORD; You do it all, and You continue rebuilding the lives that sin has wrecked.

And You will someday complete that work, and we will be glorified—and we'll be with You in a new world. That's our hope; and it's a certain hope. So we give You the praise and we give You the thanks. We are debtors to mercy alone: And You are full of mercy, and full of peace which You give to us through Your Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. Thank You for Him, and for all that He's done for us.

Thank You for what the Triune God has done: Choosing us from eternity past, coming to redeem us at Calvary, and then the Spirit drawing us, miraculously, powerfully, to a saving knowledge of the Savior. We thank You for that.

Now the LORD bless you and keep you. The LORD make His face shine on you and be gracious to you. The LORD lift up His countenance on you and give you peace. In Christ's name, Amen.

(End of Audio)