

## ***A New Peace***

John 20: 19 – 31

April 11, 2010

### I. Introduction

- A. It was evening on the very first Easter day, the New Year's day of the soul
  - 1. New voices have spoken, a new message of hope has been proclaimed
    - a. And yet, those closest disciples of Jesus were gathered behind locked doors
- A. For fear of the Jews, as John's account tells us, or rather the Jewish religious leaders
  - 1. Who had rejected Jesus, called him a dangerous heretic, and had him put to death
- A. Would those leaders be on the watch for his disciples, too
  - 1. Especially now that Jesus' body has disappeared from the tomb where it was laid
- A. What did it all mean? If Jesus was alive, where was he?
  - 1. Why was he not coming to find them?
- A. Was it because they had all deserted him when he was arrested in the garden
  - 1. Or because they had not been there to speak up for him at his trial
- A. They had been so sure that Jesus was the Messiah
  - 1. They had already been dreaming of the choice positions in his kingdom
    - a. Now it appears that Pilate's kingdom is even stronger than before
  - 2. But what if Jesus is really alive; what does that mean about who he is
- A. With all the turbulence and turmoil of the past three days
  - 1. It's hard to imagine that those disciples could be thinking very clearly about anything
    - a. But I **can** imagine the questions that must have been swirling in their minds
      - (1) And I can imagine the fear that they surely must have been feeling
      - b. That twisted "knot in the stomach" feeling of uncertainty and insecurity
        - (1) Probably all of us have felt at some point in our lives
    - 2. It was into the midst of that kind of fear and confusion
      - a. That Jesus suddenly appeared, even though the doors were shut and locked
  - A. When Jesus came into the room where his disciples were meeting that evening
    - 1. He did not come to give them answers to all their questions
      - a. Perhaps some of them would be answered in the days that followed
    - 2. And some of those questions would be answered as the disciples remembered
      - a. What Jesus had said to them in the years before his death and resurrection
        - (1) Perhaps some of them remain unanswered, even for us today

- A. When Jesus entered that room through doors that were locked tight
  - 1. He didn't come to assure them of a free pass into heaven
    - a. In fact, what he gave them was an assignment to be carried out in this life
- A. He didn't come to the disciples that evening to offer them wealth or power or fame
  - 1. But he brought them something of an immensely greater value
- A. "Peace be with you," he said. "As the Father has sent me, so I send you."
  - 1. And he breathed on them the breath of the Holy Spirit of God
- A. The room didn't change, the danger from the religious and political leaders didn't change
  - 1. Many of the questions were still there, but one thing was new
    - a. Jesus was with them, Jesus still cared about them, and he had a plan for them
  - 2. Their relationship with Jesus could never be the same
    - a. But Jesus, in his great love, offered them a new relationship
      - (1) One that was based, not on their worthiness, but on mercy and grace
  - 3. And with Jesus' presence, and the assurance of that relationship, came a new peace
- A. William Culbertson spoke about that peace when he said - I find that discipleship means, first, truly living. It does not mean a joy ride to heaven; it does not mean that there are no trials and no burdens. But it does mean peace in your soul and joy in your heart, and a sense that the smile of the Lord upon you.
  - 1. Isn't that a neat way to think about it?
- A. I would love to have been there in that room when Jesus appeared
  - 1. To have seen the looks of shock and surprise on the disciple's faces
- A. But what I would really like to have seen is the look that was on Jesus' face
  - 1. Having just experienced the most inhumane suffering and death we can imagine
    - a. And then the thrill and joy of being raised to new life again
  - 2. Would his face have been sober and grave (no pun intended)
- A. Or, as the disciples might have been expecting, was Jesus' face stern and disapproving
  - 1. Or, as his words would seem to indicate, was there a smile on Jesus' face
    - a. As he turned and looked at his disciples one by one
  - 2. "Peace be with you" – it was a common enough greeting among friends
    - a. But what an enormous amount of meaning was packed into those few words
- A. Their lives might be in danger, their world turned upside- down
  - 1. Nothing was going the way they had expected
    - a. They didn't have a clue what was going to happen next

2. But, it didn't really matter any more, because Jesus was with them again
    - a. And his smile, and the words he spoke, told them all they needed to know
      - (1) If things were good between them and Jesus
        - (a) Then everything else would work out okay
- A. We may not actually see Jesus in the flesh smiling at us today
1. But I think there can be no greater image of God's love for us
    - a. Than to sense that Jesus is looking at us...and there is a smile on his face
  2. That's an image of God that I believe was not seen very much before Jesus came
    - a. And I believe it speaks to the nature of the peace that Jesus gave
      - (1) To his disciples on that first Easter day
    - b. As well as the peace that is offered to followers of Jesus today
- A. But what is that peace really like?
1. Author J. Oswald Sanders puts it this way –
    - a. Peace is not the absence of trouble, but the presence of God.
  2. However, the presence of God only brings peace if we are assured
    - a. That we are forgiven and in a right relationship with him
- A. There would be more reassurances of that for those early disciples
1. In the days and weeks to come – for “doubting Thomas”
    - a. Who had to see and touch the wounds of the crucifixion for himself
  2. But was transformed, it seems, more by Jesus' presence and forgiving spirit
    - a. Than by actually touching the scars that were left by the nails and the spear
- A. Later on, it would be Peter, who made the most fervent declaration of loyalty
1. On the night of Jesus' betrayal and arrest
    - a. And the most vehement denial of Jesus just a short time later
  2. Jesus, before he left to go back to heaven
    - a. Would ask Peter to affirm their loving relationship three times
  3. Each time, calling Peter to show that love by ministering to the needs of others
- A. You see, the peace of knowing God's smile, is not just for our personal benefit
1. At the same time that Jesus was offering the gift of peace to his disciples
    - a. He was calling them to go, and share that peace with others
  2. As the Father has sent me, so I send you
    - a. To express the forgiveness that you have received
      - (1) To be the smile of God to those who will never have the opportunity

- (a) To see that smile on the earthly face of Jesus
- A. I can recall, the night when I went downstairs to my parents bedroom
  - 1. And kneeling by their bed, confessed my sins and asked for forgiveness
    - a. How I felt as if a heavy load had been lifted from my heart
  - 2. Thinking about God no longer gave me that uneasy feeling
    - a. Of knowing that I wasn't ready to meet him face-to-face
  - 3. The struggles with sin, the doubts and fears, would come back sometimes
    - a. But I hold on the promise from God's word, and the assurance
      - (1) That as long as I am open to God's grace and forgiveness
        - (a) God is pleased with me – God is smiling at me
  - 4. Even in those times when I know that he is not pleased by what I do
    - a. Even when my words or actions cause Jesus additional hurt and pain
      - (1) Just as Jesus came to those disciples in their fear and doubt
        - (a) He comes to me and says – Peace be with you
      - b. Now go, and do what I have called you to do; live as I have lived
        - (1) Let me live out my life, through the presence of the Holy Spirit, in you
  - 5. That's a peace that we cannot find in any other place, or any other way
    - a. A new peace that the world cannot give, and knows nothing about
- A. Author Vance Havner tells about a time when he and his wife were taking a bus trip through the mountains, and the bus broke down right in front of a hillbilly grocery store.
- A. (His words, not mine) The woman there had never been anywhere else much. My wife said, "I don't believe she knows what's going on in the world outside." I said, "Well, don't tell her. I wouldn't want the poor soul to know. Let her die in peace."
  - 1. There can be a certain amount of peace, or at least less reason for unrest
    - a. In being ignorant of the troubles that plague our world
- A. But a better understanding of God's peace is found in the image of the little bird
  - 1. Clinging to a small branch in the midst of a fierce windstorm
    - a. Thrown about in all directions, but still unafraid
  - 2. As if to say to the wind – Shake me off, it doesn't matter
    - a. I have wings, and I can still fly away
- A. Peace like that is contagious, and it is a large part of what I believe John was writing about when he says – Jesus did many other things **in the presence of his disciples**
  - 1. But these I have written, so that you may come to believe

- a. First of all, that Jesus is the Messiah, the one sent from God
      - (1) To be the Savior of the world
    - 2. And then, by believing in him, you may have life in his name
      - a. A new life; a new peace
  - A. We human beings, by nature, have a strong desire to feel safe
    - 1. Whether it is conscious or not, we all need and want security in our lives
      - a. From the time we are born, we have a tendency to hold on to something
    - 2. And that's okay, but we've got to be clinging to the right thing.
      - a. When we are holding onto Jesus, that's when we are holding on to real hope.
- II. Thomas a Kempis, in his book The Imitation of Christ wrote these words –
- A. First put yourself at peace, and then you may the better make others be at peace.
    - 1. I agree, but I would add that God's peace is not something we can achieve by ourselves, it is a gift that is given to those who believe
  - A. Before I close, let me make this one more comment
    - 1. Peacemaking has taken something of a bad rap the last number of years
      - a. Especially since 9/11, when Americans came to a new understanding
        - (1) Of what it feels like to live under the constant danger of attack
    - 2. Peace has come to be seen as a thing of the past, or an unattainable goal
      - a. And peacemaking is often seen as a wimpy form of escape from the "real world"
  - A. It may be helpful for us to remember that the peace Jesus offers
    - 1. Was achieved through pain and suffering, not by avoiding trouble
      - a. We can receive that peace as a free gift, but to live it out in our lives
        - (1) And to follow Jesus' ways as a peacemaker in our world
          - (a) Is not an escape from reality, nor is it for those lacking courage
    - 2. It takes a lot of nerve to go to our neighbor and say "Peace be with you"
      - a. When things have not always been peaceable between us
    - 3. It is even harder to show the forgiving, smiling face of God to an enemy
      - a. But it's the only way to bring about true reconciliation and peace
  - A. It's what Jesus has done for us, and his words to his disciples, and to us are –
    - 1. As the Father has sent me, so I send you
  - A. God grant us the gift of a new peace today
    - 1. And the courage to share that peace with everyone we meet