

STOP DOUBTING AND BELIEVE

John 20:19-31

Key Verse: 27

“Then he said to Thomas, ‘Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe.’”

Yesterday through Sh. Jeremy’s message we learned about the crucifixion of Jesus on the cross. How sad an event it was that Jesus suffered so much for our sins. The vivid image of Jesus’ tortured body on the cross shows us that our sins are indeed terrible, and that God has dealt with them in accordance with the most extreme measure - even giving his own Son to take them away. After his crucifixion Jesus’ body was laid to rest in a tomb. We thank God that Jesus stood in our place, and that through him we are forgiven. Amen. But this bittersweet story of redemption does not end there – in fact it had just begun. This beautiful story takes on an even more dramatic and victorious turn unparalleled by any non-fiction or fictional movie ever made. More so than the movie ET, when we thought that an innocent and likable extra terrestrial would succumb to toxic earth gases and die, but eventually he was rescued at the last minute and was saved. I know we all shed at least one tear in that movie. It is more victorious than the movie Rocky IV, when Rocky was badly bruised and bloodied by an overpowering Russian giant, but then overcame at the very end and knocked out his adversary cold. This story is the most beautiful and amazing story because Jesus rose from the dead! And it is a true story! Amen. The resurrection of Jesus opens up a new life of new possibilities of victory over our problems, of peace and joy, and even eternal life.

In this passage we see the disciples’ spiritual and emotional condition after Jesus’ crucifixion. Verse 19a says “On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jews...” They were not happy people at all. They stayed all together behind locked doors, restricting their own freedom. They were afraid that the Pharisees would arrest them next and put them on trial. With the way the disciples were acting they did not need to be arrested because they had practically imprisoned themselves already. We see that the power of death was upon them and they did not know what Jesus’ death on the cross was for. Moreover, they did not remember that Jesus was preparing them in advance. He had told them that when this all happened, he would rise from the dead. So they remained as ordinary secular people responding to the situation without faith and only practical measures. The power of death made them live in fear.

But Jesus helped them in the best way. He appeared to them by going through the locked doors and showing them he had risen from the dead. He said to them “Peace be with you.” Jesus was a good shepherd to them – he helped them overcome their fear and doubt. At that moment they really needed peace. After his resurrection the first thing he said to his troubled disciples was “Peace be with you.” Verse 20 says, “they were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.” That moment was a life changing moment for them, they became joyful when they saw Jesus. As we know from the book of Acts the

disciples were remarkably different, even when they lived with Jesus during his ministry on earth. They were not afraid of any one who might threaten to arrest them or stone them. They preached boldly in public areas and in front of hundreds and even thousands of people. The resurrection of Jesus' resurrection makes people overcome their fear and despair. Many people live in fear and become paralyzed by it like the disciples once were. This is not how we should live. We should live with a sense of possibility and be adventurous for Jesus. Like Paul who sailed around the world preaching the gospel. While doing so he was shipwrecked and was bitten by a deadly snake. He was also thrown in jail and beaten and left for dead, and still kept on preaching! It is apparent he had experienced the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. We could not argue that there was not an ounce of fear in this man. Many people think that Christians are nice and polite and maybe even a little bit weak. But I dare to say that in history there was probably not much more of a masculine and tough individual than the apostle Paul ever.

I thank God that he rose Jesus from the dead! Since I have Jesus in my life, I have a shepherd and savior and protector with me at all times. I do not need to be afraid of my enemies, or afraid of adversity. I do not need to be cowardly, worrying about the future. I am inspired by the life of King David in the Old Testament. He believed in God and in the resurrection, and foresaw that God would one day bring salvation into the world. He said in Psalm 23 "And I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever." It seemed radical by many to believe in a resurrection at that time but King David did. He also had God's peace with him at all times. As we know from the Bible he had many enemies, some wanted to have him thrown in jail and some even wanted him dead. But he wrote, "though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil." It is amazing that in his situation he had no fear. I recently had been through a time when I had many enemies. I had never imagined I would ever have so many enemies. I was falsely accused of something that had not the slightest element of truth to it whatsoever. I was surrounded by evil and lies. Not only was I worried that serious harm and trouble would be brought upon me, but that the stress would even bring about premature death. I had several people warn me that I should start to manage my stress or I might die. It was truly like being in the shadow of death. But God gave me victory over this situation in many ways. Suppose I did not have Jesus with me, would the outcome have been different? I have thought about this very much and I believe that it would have. I know that Jesus was with me in the valley of the shadow of death and protected me. He protected my mind, and my spirit, and my job. I also wonder what reason God would have me suffer so much. Perhaps it was so that he could show me that he was with me. I can say there are things I used to be afraid of that I am not afraid of any more. Perhaps as Christians we must get used to living among those who wish to harm us, as this seems to be the reality that even Jesus experienced. The important thing is to remember that Jesus rose from the dead and he reveals himself to us - like he did to his disciples at a time when they needed him most. Then we can have peace in our hearts and a sense of victory even in a difficult situation.

The resurrection of Jesus opens up a realm of new possibilities for our lives. We too will be one day resurrected. We are no longer bound by our sins and by the power of death. Sin and death work together as a lethal tag team in order to make a person's life

miserable and to ultimately destroy their physical body and send their soul into condemnation. But in Jesus death is but a mere shadow or phantom figure, and we can look at it without fear knowing it is not even a reality. Jesus' resurrection is a reality, and he is with us at this very moment. Jesus has been raised from the dead. Amen.

One Word, Jesus gives us peace and eternal life.