

This is our second to last small group for the season and our goal is to finish John's gospel in these next two meetings. So, for tonight, we're going to consider two post-resurrection appearances of Christ in one sitting.

### **Appearance #1: John 20:19-25**

This first appearance takes place on the very same day as the resurrection. In the morning, the ladies visited the tomb and found it empty. Now, we read about what took place that evening.

This scene is packed with emotion. The disciples are initially gathered together with the doors shut because they are afraid of the Jews. Then, suddenly, Jesus appears in their midst. Luke tells us they were terrified and frightened when they first saw Jesus (Luke 24:37). John tells us they eventually experienced great gladness after their initial shock. Walking with Christ is an awesome ride!

Notice how Jesus commissions the disciples in verses 21-23. He sends these men out in the same way that His Father sent Him. He's giving them a divine mission and authority to act on His behalf. The message these men are going to take to the world contains the very word and power of Christ Himself. These apostles are ambassadors and heralds for the King of kings.

To this end, Jesus breathes on them and gives them the Holy Spirit. The parallel passage in Luke helps us understand what this means. Luke 24:44-45, ***"Then He said to them, 'These are the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me.' And He opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures."***

Up to this point, the disciples had not understood many things Jesus taught them. In this moment, Jesus gives them the ability, through the Holy Spirit, to comprehend the Scriptures and to see, in many ways for the first time, how they are fulfilled in His death and resurrection. The Spirit opens the eyes of their hearts to behold the risen Lord of glory, standing right there in front of them, as the One in whom Scripture finds its fulfillment.

Verse 23 is a bit difficult at first glance, ***"If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."*** We believe this statement is closely connected to the preaching and teaching ministry of the apostles. These men are going to proclaim the forgiveness of sin in Christ's name. Their ministries are going to be animated by the power of the Holy Spirit as they act with the very authority of Christ Himself. These apostles fulfill a very unique role in redemptive history.

As for the "retaining" of some peoples' sins - again - we believe this is connected to the power of apostolic preaching. All of these men are going to carry Christ's name to the world. Some of these men are going to write Scripture! Anyone who opposed their doctrine stood in opposition to Christ Himself. They had authority to denounce false teachers and false

gospels. If an apostle taught that a movement was heretical - then those who adhered to it could know that their sins were still unforgiven.

A good example is Paul's opening words in his letter to the Galatians where he pronounces a curse on anyone who preaches a different gospel. He then goes on throughout the rest of the letter to say that the Judaizers "gospel" was no gospel at all - and that those who believed it were not forgiven and free in Christ. In short, "If you believe and practice what these Judaizers teach - then your sins are retained!"

### **Appearance #2: John 20:26-29**

This is the famous scene where Christ appears and challenges Thomas' doubt. It's really unfortunate that he bears the label, "Doubting Thomas" because, although he did doubt the resurrection, we also see him proclaiming some of the purist and highest expressions of worship in all of John's gospel.

First, notice how Jesus quotes Thomas when He stands before him. Verse 27 is essentially a repetition of what Thomas said in verse 25. This is a good reminder that Jesus hears everything we say, knows everything we think, and thankfully, He's patient with our weaknesses!

**Discussion Question:** What significance do you think there is in the fact that Christ retains His scars in His resurrected body?

***Thoughts:** Jesus rose from the dead with the very same body that was crucified. This says a lot about our resurrection hope. If Christ is the pattern for our own resurrection, then we can look forward to our weak and corruptible flesh being risen and transformed - even after it's been destroyed in the grave (see Job 19:23-27). There is also an amazing picture here of a risen and glorified Savior who decided to retain the marks of His crucifixion - a kind of eternal symbol of His love and sacrifice for His people. What love is this!*

In verse 28 Thomas proclaims, "**My Lord and my God!**" This is an apostle worshipping Jesus and calling him God! And Jesus receives this worship! Whoever says that Jesus never claimed to be God has not read the Bible carefully!

This is a great note to end our study on. All throughout John's gospel we have tracked the parallel courses of belief and unbelief. We have seen the disciples go from new followers of Christ - to men who began to understand the message of the Messiah - and now we see them clearly and loudly exclaiming the praise of Christ as God enfleshed. John's gospel began by telling us that the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us. Now, as his gospel account comes towards a close, we see Thomas echoing that same truth. Amen!