

## THE LEGACY OF THE RISEN LORD

*20<sup>19</sup>On the evening of that first [day] of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, Peace be with you. 20<sup>20</sup>After he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. The disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. 21<sup>21</sup>Again Jesus said to them, Peace be with you. Just as the Father has sent me, so [now] I am sending you. 22<sup>22</sup>When he had said this, he breathed on them and said, Receive the Holy Spirit. 23<sup>23</sup>If you forgive anyone's sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive their sins, they are not forgiven.*

*24<sup>24</sup>Now Thomas, called Didymus, one of the Twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. 25<sup>25</sup>The other disciples told him, We have seen the Lord. But he said to them, Unless I see the nail prints in his hands, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe.*

*26<sup>26</sup>Eight days later the disciples again were in [the upper room], and Thomas was with them. [Although] the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them, and said, Peace be with you. 27<sup>27</sup>Then he said to Thomas, Put your finger here and examine my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. No longer doubt, but believe. 28<sup>28</sup>Thomas responded by saying to him, My Lord and my God. 29<sup>29</sup>Jesus replied, Because you have seen me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen, but [still] have believed. 30<sup>30</sup>Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples that are not recorded in this book. 31<sup>31</sup>But these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and by believing you may have life in his name. (Jn. 20:19-31)*

### **Introduction**

When you speak of a legacy, you usually are speaking about a gift that is bestowed as part of a will; a gift left behind to a loved one by someone who has died and is no longer present. Sometimes that gift may take the form of personal property; it might be a house, a sum of money, or a precious heirloom. Sometimes, when we speak of a legacy, we have in mind a gift that is intangible and of greater value than any item of personal property. We speak of a person leaving behind as his legacy to his loved ones his personal character as an example for them to follow; his life of love, of integrity, of commitment to Christ. So when we speak about a legacy, we usually are speaking about a gift left behind by someone who has died and is no longer present—such a gift might be an item of personal property, or it might be his personal character to serve as a model and example for his heirs.

Here in the present passage of the Gospel of John we have something that may be described as a legacy, but it is a very unique legacy. It is unique in that, unlike the typical legacy, this legacy is personally bestowed by someone who is alive and present with us. Our Lord Jesus died, but rose again; He ascended into heaven, but by the person of the Holy Spirit He continues to be with us. It is unique in that, unlike a legacy that consists of personal property, this legacy is spiritual; it is a legacy of spiritual resources as opposed to material resources. It is unique in that, unlike a legacy of character, this legacy is dynamic; a legacy of personal character leaves us with a powerless example, this legacy has life-transforming power that Christ Himself ministers to us as we call upon Him.

As His legacy to His church, our Lord Jesus has provided us with the spiritual resources necessary to fulfill our calling to be His disciples. Because of His legacy to His church, we can look to our risen Lord Jesus for the spiritual resources we need to serve Him.

## **I. We Can Look to Christ for Godly Confidence**

On the evening of that first Easter Sunday, the disciples were all gathered together in one place; most likely it was the upper room where they had partaken of the Last Supper together with Jesus the previous Thursday evening. There they are found huddled together behind locked doors for fear of the Jews. Since the time of the crucifixion they have stayed in hiding, expecting the Jewish leaders to come after them just as they came for Jesus.

Now suddenly, on that first Easter Sunday evening, the risen Lord Himself came and stood in their midst, and He bestows upon His disciples the blessing of His peace: *“Jesus came and stood among them and said, ‘Peace be with you’”* (vs. 19b.)

Because He gives us His peace, the Lord Jesus can exhort us to be neither troubled in heart nor faint of heart, as He previously exhorted His disciples: *“Peace I leave with you; I give my peace to you. I do not give it to you as the world gives. Do not let your heart be troubled; neither let it be fearful”* (Jn. 14:27.)

Our Lord exhorts us, *“Do not let your heart be troubled.”* There are certain circumstances in life, the very anticipation of which, can cause our hearts to be stirred up into a turmoil like boiling water on a hot stove: a visit to the doctor, standing up for Christian principles in a hostile environment, contemplating the hour of our death. Our Lord further exhorts us, *“neither let [your heart] be fearful.”* When we anticipate such circumstances as just described, our natural inclination is to retreat in fear and avoid such encounters if at all possible—like the disciples now found hiding behind locked doors in the upper room. But it is precisely because He has given us the legacy of His peace that our Lord Jesus exhorts us to be neither troubled in heart nor faint of heart.

Consider the transforming power of Christ’s legacy to His church. Here in John 20:19 we find the disciples huddled together behind locked doors in the upper room. It is into this situation that the risen Lord comes and bestows upon them the legacy of His peace, and His Holy Spirit to impart that peace to them (and to us):

*Jesus came and stood among them and said, Peace be with you ... <sup>21</sup>Again Jesus said to them, Peace be with you. Just as the Father has sent me, so [now] I am sending you. <sup>22</sup>When he had said this, he breathed on them and said, Receive the Holy Spirit. (Jn. 20:19b, 21-22)*

Turning to the Book of Acts, consider the life-transforming effect of Christ's legacy upon these men:

*The priests and the captain of the temple guard and the Sadducees came up to Peter and John while they were speaking to the people. <sup>2</sup>They were greatly disturbed because the apostles were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection of the dead. <sup>3</sup>They seized Peter and John, and because it was evening, they put them in jail until the next day ... <sup>5</sup>The next day the rulers, elders and teachers of the law met in Jerusalem. <sup>6</sup>Annas the high priest was there, and so were Caiaphas, John, Alexander and the other men of the high priest's family. <sup>7</sup>They had Peter and John brought before them and began to question them: By what power or by what name did you do this? <sup>8</sup>Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, Rulers and elders of the people! <sup>9</sup>If we are being called to account today for an act of kindness shown to a cripple and are asked how he was healed, <sup>10</sup>then know this, you and all the people of Israel: It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed. <sup>11</sup>He is the stone you builders rejected, which has become the capstone. <sup>12</sup>Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved. (Acts 4:1-3,5-12)*

Our Lord Jesus calls upon us as His disciples to live out a bold and gracious Christian life before men (note Philippians 1:27-28a), as opposed to keeping our Christian convictions hidden behind closed doors:

*Live your life only in a way that is worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that if I come and see you—or if I remain absent what I will hear about you is that you are standing firm in one spirit, and with one soul are contending for the faith of the gospel, <sup>28</sup>and that you are in no way being intimidated by those who oppose you. (Phil. 1:27-28a)*

Because of His legacy to His church, we can and must look to Christ to supply us with the godly confidence we need to live a faithful Christian life. Jesus declared to His disciples, "*Peace be with you.*" Based upon Christ's legacy to His church, the Apostle Paul issues the following exhortation to young Timothy: "*God has not given us a spirit of fearfulness, but [the Spirit] of power and love and discipline*" (2 Tim. 1:7.)

A Pastor testifies to how he personally experienced Christ's legacy of peace in the midst of a trying situation: One day this particular pastor, together an elder were out visiting. They eventually found themselves in the home of an incredibly hostile man: for twenty minutes this man ranted and raged against these ambassadors of Christ. Through it all, the elder noted a remarkable calmness in the pastor's demeanor: the pastor exhibited neither fear nor anger. Later, the elder inquired about what he had observed. The pastor replied, "I found myself surrounded by the most profound sense of divine peace, it was an impenetrable

wall around me.” The pastor experienced the presence and the peace ministered by the Holy Spirit—the risen Lord's legacy to His church.

## II. We Can Look to Christ for Spiritual Authority

Having spoken His word of peace to them, the Lord Jesus now proceeds to give to His disciples a divine commission: *“Just as the Father has sent me, so [now] I am sending you”* (vs. 21b.)

The Father sent Christ to be the Light of the world—to reveal to men the life of God, as Jesus testified in John 14:9a, *“He who has seen me, has seen the Father.”* The Father sent His Son into the world in order to reveal to men the way back to God, as Jesus declares, *“I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, except by me”* (Jn. 14:6.) Now Christ has given the same commission to His church, (the original disciples were the nucleus of the church, which would expand to include all those who respond in faith to their gospel ministry,) as the Apostle Paul exhorts the Philippians:

*Do all things without grumbling and arguing, <sup>15</sup>so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without blemish, in the midst of a perverse and depraved generation, among whom you shine like stars in the universe, <sup>16</sup>firmly holding the word of life.* (Phil. 2:14-16a)

In order to fulfill this divine commission the risen Lord gives as His legacy to His church the gift of spiritual authority:

*Just as the Father has sent me, so [now] I am sending you. <sup>22</sup>When he had said this, he breathed on them and said, Receive the Holy Spirit. <sup>23</sup>If you forgive anyone's sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive their sins, they are not forgiven.* (Jn. 20:21b-23)

The church of Christ is anointed with the Holy Spirit. The divine authority conveyed to the church by the presence and anointing of the Holy Spirit pertains to the forgiveness and retention of sins (vs. 23.) This divine authority is exercised through the proclamation of the gospel:

*Simon Peter answered, You are the Christ, the Son of the living God. <sup>17</sup>Jesus replied, Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven. <sup>18</sup>And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it. <sup>19</sup>I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.* (Matt. 16:16-19)

Peter's confession (Matthew 16:16) is a declaration of the gospel, equivalent to the testimony the Apostle John presents at the conclusion of his gospel: *“Jesus did*

*many other signs in the presence of the disciples that are not recorded in this book. <sup>31</sup>But these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and by believing you may have life in his name” (Jn. 20:30-3.)*

Through the proclamation of the gospel, (by means of preaching and personal witness,) Christ will build His church, and it shall break open the gates of Hades (i.e.; the kingdom of darkness,) releasing precious souls from spiritual bondage and the sentence of final condemnation (Matt. 16:18,) bringing them to Jesus Christ, the only Source of forgiveness and reconciliation with God.

This divine authority bestowed by the risen Lord upon His church is also employed through the exercise of Christian discipline. Matthew 16:19, the passage quoted above, makes reference to such discipline when Christ declares, *“I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven.”* Matthew 18:15-20 elaborates upon this spiritual authority more fully:

*If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over. <sup>16</sup>But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that “every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.” <sup>17</sup>If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector. <sup>18</sup>I tell you the truth, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. <sup>19</sup>Again, I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything for which you ask, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven—<sup>20</sup>for where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them.*  
(Matt. 18:15-20)

Matthew 18:15-17 outlines the procedure to be followed when dealing with a professing Christian who is engaged in sin and who refuses to repent. As Matthew 18:18-20 indicates, in the exercise of Christian discipline there is the exercise of genuine spiritual authority: what is done on earth in the name of Christ is ratified in heaven.

Consider the transforming power of Christ’s legacy to His church, as that spiritual authority is exhibited before the world: *“With many other words [Peter] warned them; and he pleaded with them, Save yourselves from this corrupt generation.<sup>41</sup>Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to [the church] that day”* (Acts 2:40-41.) Here is an example of what the Apostle Paul describing when he asserts to the Thessalonians, *“our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power, and by the Holy Spirit, and with much assurance”* (1 Thess. 1:5.)

Consider the transforming power of Christ’s legacy to His church, as that spiritual authority is exercised in the church. 2 Corinthians 2 records the

beneficial effects of a particular act of discipline: by the grace of God the offending person demonstrated himself to be a true Christian by repenting and returning to the fellowship of Christ's church. In response to the offender's repentance, the Apostle Paul exhorts the church to receive him back into Christian fellowship:

*The punishment inflicted on him by the majority is sufficient for him. <sup>7</sup>Now instead, you ought to forgive and comfort him, so that he will not be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow. <sup>8</sup>I urge you, therefore, to reaffirm your love for him. (2 Cor. 2:6-8)*

Our Lord Jesus Christ calls upon us as His disciples to carry on a bold and effective witness for Him, as opposed to yielding to the powers of darkness that operate in this present world and at times attempt to operate within the church itself. Because of His legacy to His church, we may and we must look to Christ to supply us with the spiritual authority we need to fulfill our calling to be His disciples.

### **III. We Can Look to Christ for Divine Assurance**

When the risen Lord Jesus came to His disciples that first Easter Sunday evening, He found them all present except one: Thomas. When Thomas does rejoin the group, the disciples excitedly relate to him the good news of Jesus' resurrection and His reunion with them. But Thomas refuses to accept the testimony of his fellow disciples, he insists upon personally meeting the risen Lord himself.

Eight days later, when all the disciples, including Thomas, are again gathered together in this same upper room, Jesus once again comes to them. He invites Thomas to examine Him and so be assured of His resurrection.

Consider the transforming power of Christ's legacy to His church. Thomas had insisted upon a personal encounter and inspection of the risen Lord Jesus. Jesus graciously granted Thomas just such an encounter with Him. As a result of that encounter Thomas now worships the Lord Jesus, acknowledging Him to be his Lord and his God.

Our Lord Jesus desires for us as His disciples to have the assurance of His resurrection life and presence with us in this world. Because of His legacy to His church, we may and we must look to Christ to supply us with the divine assurance we need to fulfill our calling to be His disciples. Just as our Lord Jesus personally ministered divine assurance to Thomas, so, too, He stands ready to minister such assurance to us in our times of weakness when our faith wavers and needs to be bolstered.

As we entrust ourselves to Christ and walk with Him, we gain an ever greater degree of divine assurance. Note the testimony of the Apostle Paul: *“I know him in whom I have believed and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him for that day”* (2 Tim. 1:12b.) Paul initially put his faith in Christ, and now he has become intimately acquainted with Christ, he has come to know Christ, this is the meaning of his statement, *“I know him in whom I have believed.”* What Paul has come to discover is that Christ is completely trustworthy; He is who He claims to be; He is able to do what He promises to do. Consequently, as a result of his personal experience with Christ, Paul’s confidence in Christ has been strengthened so that he can now testify, *“I am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him for that day.”* (*“That day”* is a reference the day of final judgment and the consummation of all things.)

## **Conclusion**

As His legacy to His church, our Lord Jesus Christ personally provides us with the spiritual resources we need to fulfill our calling to be His disciples. Because of His legacy to His church, we may and we must look to the Lord Jesus Christ for the spiritual resources of godly confidence, spiritual authority, and divine assurance.