



International Bible Study Commentary

Verse-by-Verse Bible Lessons Thru the Bible

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John 20:19-25 Commentary **New American Standard Bible**

Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further

follow the verse-by-verse [*International Bible Study Commentary*](#). **Study Hints for Discussion and Thinking Further** will help with class preparation and in conducting class discussion: these hints are available on the *International Bible Study Commentary* website along with the *International Bible Lesson* that you may want to read to your class as part of your Bible study. You can discuss each week's commentary and lesson at the [*International Bible Study Forum*](#).

(John 20:19) 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."

Early Sunday morning, the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene, Peter, and John were among those who saw the empty tomb of Jesus, but they did not understand the Scriptures that Jesus must rise from the dead. Without first looking in the tomb, Mary assumed that someone had removed Jesus' body. Later, two angels and Jesus spoke to

Mary, and she told the disciples what they said. That same evening, Jesus appeared to His disciples in a locked house and spoke to them; perhaps in the original “Upper Room” they had reserved for Passover where they celebrated the Lord’s Supper. The disciples were afraid of the Jewish police and the Roman soldiers who might come and arrest them too, so they had hidden behind locked doors.

Because they did not understand Jesus earlier, they had forgotten that He had foretold them that He had to return to His Father; therefore, Jesus told Mary to tell (or remind) them. In addition, despite what Jesus had told them earlier, they had no idea that going to His Father would only happen after His crucifixion, death, and resurrection. Remember, in John 20:17, Jesus had told Mary to tell them, “I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.” Jesus wanted to give them assurance in their time of trial. [We can understand, “to my God and your God,” as another way of Jesus having said earlier, “the Father is greater than I.”] Because He had died for their sins and had risen from the dead for Mary and all His disciples, Jesus wanted them to know assuredly that His Father was their Father, and His God was their God—they were all members of God’s Family (as well as all who would and will believe in Jesus in the future). Jesus had also promised that He would leave them with His peace after He was gone. Jesus foretold these truths in John 14:27-29, “Peace I leave with you; *my peace I give to you*. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid. You

heard me say to you, ‘I am going away, and I am coming to you.’ If you loved me, you would rejoice that I am going to the Father, because *the Father is greater than I*. And now I have told you this before it occurs, so that when it does occur, you may believe.” Jesus went away when He died, but He came back to them in the Upper Room as He promised. He would also go away again when He ascended into heaven. But they had forgotten all these truths until Jesus and the Holy Spirit within them reminded them.

On the first evening of a new week and a new life for His disciples, Jesus appeared and did what He had promised them, and they believed as He had foretold they would. So, as He had foretold them, when Jesus appeared to them in the house His first words were, “Peace be with you.” Jesus greeted them and gave them the same peace that quieted the storm when they were storm-tossed and feared they would die in a boat. In Mark 4:39, we read about the incident, “He woke up and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, ‘Peace! Be still!’ Then the wind ceased, and there was a dead calm.” We might prefer “perfect calm” or “great calm” as a better translation. When Jesus suddenly and unexpectedly appeared to them, they needed His peace once again to quiet all their fears. They also needed His peace because they feared the Jews who had used the Romans to crucify Him. Throughout the subsequent years, through the indwelling Holy Spirit, Jesus has given His followers, “perfect calm” or “perfect peace” in every type of situation.

(John 20:20) And when He had said this, He showed them both His hands and His side. The disciples then rejoiced when they saw the Lord.

Jesus did not rise from the dead as a ghost (as the disciples thought of ghosts: see Mark 6:49). Jesus rose in a glorified human body that still showed the marks of His crucifixion, but He was also able to pass through walls and appear and disappear as He willed. Just as the disciples rejoiced when they saw Jesus calm a storm, so they rejoiced when they saw Jesus their Lord again—as a real person. A law court requires that witnesses give “Empirical Evidence;” that is, information they experienced by their senses (seeing, hearing, tasting, smelling, or touching). Jesus gave them empirical evidence that He had risen from the dead as a real human being.

(John 20:21) So Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you; as the Father has sent Me, I also send you.”

Jesus’ gift of peace is not a one-time, once and for all gift that He never needs to give us again. For after they saw that Jesus was really “Jesus,” He gave them His peace once again. When we lack peace, we can go to Jesus again and again and ask Him for peace. In Philippians 4:6, Paul encourages believers with these words: “Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.” In Philippians 4:7, Paul described the peace that Jesus Christ

gives believers in answer to their prayers: “And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” For a second time, Jesus gave them His peace. Jesus can give us peace by quieting storms and ending troubles, and Jesus can give us peace by quieting our fears and giving us serenity in storms and troubles.

The Father sent Jesus into the world to save from sin and give eternal life to everyone who would believe in Him. After Jesus received the Holy Spirit, He began His saving work by calling His disciples. The first time Jesus saw His disciples after His resurrection, He told them that He would send them forth as He had been sent forth by His Father—to save from sin and give eternal life to everyone who would believe in Jesus. However, their effective ministry would only begin after they had received the Holy Spirit as the Power from on High. In Luke 24:48-49, Jesus told His disciples, “You are witnesses of these things. And see, I am sending upon you what my Father promised; so stay here in the city until you have been clothed with *power from on high*.” In the power of the Holy Spirit, their ministry would effectively proclaim the good news (the gospel)—the life, teachings, death, resurrection, and return of Jesus Christ to save His people from their sins and grant believers in Him eternal life. They would proclaim that believers in Jesus would be filled with the Holy Spirit, who would abide with them forever. After being with Jesus for three years, He had prepared them for their new mission. When He saw His disciples that night, Jesus gave His

disciples a new purpose in life, which would begin after He returned to the Father and they received the Power from on High through the Holy Spirit.

(John 20:22) And when He had said this, He breathed on them and *said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit.

That very night, the Holy Spirit came to dwell with and remain within Jesus’ disciples—He came from the Father through Jesus as He promised. As we learn in Genesis 2:7, God gave life to Adam in the garden when He breathed into him: “the LORD God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being.” By breathing on His disciples, by giving them the Holy Spirit, Jesus showed that He gives new life, a redeemed life, a holy life, eternal life, to all who trust in Him. That Sunday night was the first time the disciples received the Holy Spirit, because Jesus’ death and resurrection enabled them to be not only forgiven for their sins but also cleansed from all their sins. Jesus’ sacrificial death and resurrection made them morally and spiritually clean so they could receive the Holy Spirit without the defilement of the Holy Spirit. Having received the Holy Spirit, they would have Jesus with them personally, even though they might not see Him, and they would become more acquainted with the Holy Spirit day-by-day.

In Luke 24:49, Jesus told them, “And see, I am sending upon you what my Father promised; so stay here in the city until you have been clothed with *power from on high*.” Later, on the Day of Pentecost, they would receive the Holy Spirit as the Power from on High who would empower their ministry. In Acts 2:4, we learn what happened on the Day of Pentecost: “All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.” The Holy Spirit would fill them often and give them exceptional power for ministry and preaching. When Peter spoke for Jesus to the Jewish leaders, in Acts 4:8, we read, “Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, ‘Rulers of the people and elders.’” And in Acts 4:31, we read, “When they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God with boldness.”

Because Jesus’ disciples came to know the Holy Spirit’s indwelling from Jesus having breathed the Holy Spirit into them before His ascension into heaven, they recognized their filling with the Holy Spirit on Pentecost Sunday as a filling of the Holy Spirit from Jesus (and not a strange spirit)—He was the same Spirit that Jesus had given them earlier. In this way, they could test the spirits and recognize the Holy Spirit. In 1 John 4:1, John explained, “Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God; for many false prophets have gone out into the world.” What Jesus did for them on that first Sunday evening enabled them to know that the

filling of the Holy Spirit they received on Pentecost Sunday was the same Holy Spirit, who now came to them with Power from on High to help them courageously testify for Jesus effectively.

(John 20:23) “If you forgive the sins of any, their sins have been forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they have been retained.”

On the one hand, Jesus gave this command to His original disciples, who would lead the Church and be responsible for Church government and discipline in New Testament times. The way they governed the Church was to become an example or model for all the Church leaders who followed them, for all who had the responsibility of governing a church. The good news of Jesus included the conditions that sincere repentance for sin and a turning to or returning to faithful obedience to Jesus Christ as Lord according to the Scriptures were conditions that sinners must fulfill to be forgiven. If people repented and placed their faith in Jesus Christ for salvation, they fulfilled the conditions set forth in the gospel to be forgiven and receive eternal life. If people persisted in disobedience and rebellion against God, they retained their sins and Church leaders would acknowledge that fact for the sake of the Church and all concerned. On the other hand, Christians need to forgive personal sins or wrongs against them for their own spiritual well-being; however, unrepentant sinners retain true moral guilt for having wronged another and they need to repent and ask forgiveness from those

they have wronged when this can be wisely done. Christians recognize that those who have sinned against them and have not repented or asked forgiveness from God are retaining their sin and guilt by their own choice to not repent. Consider also, Matthew 18:15-35.

(John 20:24) But Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came.

As we have seen, Jesus gave empirical evidence that He had risen from the dead whenever He appeared to the disciples and others who saw Him raised from the dead. John described empirical evidence about Jesus' resurrection suitable for a courtroom when he began his first letter. In 1 John 1:1-4, John wrote, "We declare to you what was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life—this life was revealed, and we have seen it and testify to it, and declare to you the eternal life that was with the Father and was revealed to us—we declare to you what we have seen and heard so that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. We are writing these things so that our joy may be complete." Notice: as in John 20:20, rejoicing or joy always accompanies true belief in and fellowship with the Lord Jesus Christ. Thomas was not present when Jesus appeared to His disciples on that first Sunday evening after He rose from the dead. Jesus did not wait for

Thomas to be present before appearing. Perhaps Thomas was not there because he had completely given up on Jesus' mission. Thomas was convinced that Jesus had died, and all their hopes and dreams had died along with Jesus. Jesus knew that Thomas needed empirical evidence that He had risen from the dead and was alive.

(John 20:25) 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.”

Thomas refused to believe the testimony of the other ten disciples. Thomas demanded empirical evidence. He wanted eyewitness proof, but he demanded that his eyewitness proof be with his own eyes, ears, and hands and not the eyewitness proof of others. This demand is the definition of skepticism. Thomas not only demanded that he see the mark of the nails; he also demanded that he be able to feel the mark of the nails with his own finger.

Thomas knew that a spear had pierced Jesus' side, and he demanded that he not only see where the spear had entered Jesus' body but be able to put his hand where the spear had entered Jesus' body and feel His flesh. Thomas demanded the kind of proof that John wrote about in his first letter; proof that Jesus gave to all His disciples.

Thomas was skeptical of everything he heard from eyewitnesses, not just one eyewitness but from all the remaining disciples. Jesus had showed the other disciples

His hands and side, and Thomas demanded that Jesus show him His hands and side and prove to him that He was not a ghost by allowing him to see and touch the marks on Jesus' resurrected human body. For this reason, Thomas was given the nickname "Doubting Thomas." Sceptics are sometimes called a "Doubting Thomas." Some skeptics will not believe anything that they have not personally experienced, and they often extend their skepticism to doubting almost everything they hear if they have not or cannot also see, hear, feel, touch, or taste for themselves what they have been told about.

Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further

1. How many disciples saw Jesus on Resurrection Sunday?
2. How did Jesus get into the locked house?
3. What did Jesus show His disciples?
4. What blessings did Jesus give His disciples?
5. How did Jesus give His most important gift to His disciples?

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