



## Sermon

### ***We are witness!***

**John 20:19-31; 1 John 1:1-2:2**

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Let us fly back in time to April 33A.D. A group of frightened men have retreated to a hiding place for fear of the authorities. Why are they afraid?

It is the evening of the Sunday after the crucifixion. There has been some wild tale that Jesus' body has gone from the tomb. Some of the women have told the men that angels had spoken to them saying Jesus was not there anymore. Mary Magdalene even said she had spoken to him. Peter and John have found the body gone with the wrapping left behind like a discarded chrysalis.

It is dangerous— it is very likely the authorities will come looking for the men Jesus led and get rid of them too. So they have locked the door for some safety, and then - on this most surprising of days –Jesus comes and stands in the midst of them. Somehow he has entered or appeared – they don't know how - yet that is not the chief surprise: he should be dead and here he is solid and so very alive.

He greets them with the normal Jewish greeting, "*Shalom* – peace be with you." Who is this? It looks like Jesus but it can't be. He shows them his hands and his side with the marks of the crucified and the spear thrust which proved he had been dead.

It was He – somehow – alive again. How they rejoiced – their worst nightmare had been turned to something altogether glorious.

John was there; he recorded what he saw because it is vitally important. He was an eyewitness and he had evidence to share. In the reading from Acts, we hear that the Apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. In Acts 1:8, Jesus had said to them, "... you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." The point of a witness is to tell what they have experience. This was no metaphor dreamed up to ease the pain of a brutal execution. John wrote that he was with Jesus alive, solid, talking and eating.

When we were in Carlisle, we came to know a man called Bob who was exploring Christianity. One day I visited him at his flat. As he went to make a cup of tea, my eye fell on the fabric of his sofa. It was upholstered in a fabric which had writing in the design. You know that was quite fashionable then. Usually the words are either trivial or incomprehensible. But as I looked I realised it was Latin. So summoning what little school boy Latin I could muster I struggled to make out the writing and then to make sense of the words. It took a while for him to make the tea and I worked out *audivimus* is we heard, *vidimus* we saw, *oculis eyes*, *nostris* that's our. And then it dawned on me: "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched, this we proclaim concerning the Word of life." It was the first verse of the Epistle! I was amazed indeed a little

overwhelmed by it. I felt there was a point there for Bob. He was sitting on scripture. He was sitting on a text about Jesus being God. And that was what he needed to know; it was what he needed to build on. That truth is the major foundation stone for our spiritual life and he was unwittingly sitting on each day!

Listen to what John says in this first section. "The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it. ... The eternal life which was with the Father ... has appeared to us. <sup>1</sup>It was from the beginning, we have heard it, we have seen it with our eyes, we have touched it with our hands – this we proclaim concerning the Word of Life."

John is saying in effect, "How solid do you want your evidence?" I tell you about what I have heard, what I seen with my eyes, what I have touched with my hands – eyewitness evidence does not get better than that!

John is writing of Jesus and he identifies him as Eternal Life. Eternal Life is a person not a thing. And John speaking as a witness can say he heard him, saw him, gazed upon him (yes physically with his eyes) and touched him with his hands.

We are given the testimony of the eye witnesses of the time. When we put our trust in Jesus it is not just an intellectual position like: I believe the chemical formula of water is H<sub>2</sub>O. It is more like jumping into the swimming pool believing that the water will break your fall and support you.

When we put our trust in Jesus as Son of God, Saviour, risen from the dead it changes everything. We come into relationship with God. Our past is washed clean; our future is assured with life that reaches beyond the grave and our present is lived with Jesus available to us.

In the gathering that resurrection night, Jesus commissioned his disciples.

"Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." And with that he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven." <sup>1</sup>

He sent the apostles and through them their followers in the same way the Father had sent him: in peace, empowered by the Spirit of God and with authority to forgive sins.

There are two important things here: Being filled with the Holy Spirit and the forgiveness of sins.

For the disciples we see that they become remarkably bold. Instead of locking themselves in a room to hide, they are preaching in the city.

Peter says an interesting thing in Acts 5:32::

Acts 5:32 "We are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him."

The Holy Spirit is a witness to these things that is the resurrection and exaltation of Jesus. This is the Spirit given to those who obey him. Surely Peter is saying that for us to have a strong faith in these things we need the presence of the Holy Spirit. He comes to dwell in us and it is **his** witness to the truth of the resurrection which empowers our trust in these things.

On the Alpha course, it is usually at the time of prayer for filling with the Holy Spirit, that people come alive in faith, delight and relationship with Jesus. Why? Because it is the Spirit of God who writes these things on our hearts.

So we need to seek seriously a true faith in Jesus, we need to seek the filling of the Holy Spirit, we need to feed our spirits with the Bible.

The second part of the Jesus' commission is to forgive sins. In the epistle, as John continues, he discusses relationship with God in the vertical dimension and with each other in the horizontal. Life in God will affect live human relationships. Jesus invites us into the fellowship he has with the Father. This is being in the vine - staying connected, letting the life of God flow in and through us.

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<sup>1</sup> John 20:21-23

The gnostics against whose beliefs John was arguing, separated the spiritual from the physical. Get the spiritual right and it doesn't matter about what you do in your body. But that is totally wrong. If we don't walk in the light we are not in good fellowship with God.

But sin fractures this connection this flow of relationship. It is a barrier between us and God. And that barrier can only be dealt with by repentance and forgiveness.

Others in John's day, denied that they had sinned at all. They believed they were perfect. I have heard someone say something like that. Just couldn't accept she'd done anything wrong in her life. Well, John says that is self-deception and it shows God's truth is not in us. On the contrary, the way to be clear of sin, is not to pretend it does not exist but to confess and ask forgiveness.

We need to have confidence that our God is serious about forgiving sin. It is a very important part of the Bible message. The next verse is key and worth memorising:

**1 John 9: If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.**

Will you repeat that after me?

It is an important promise we need to have ready to help ourselves and others when we struggle with knowing we are forgiven.

What is the condition for the promise? If we confess our sins... That is what we are asked to do. Don't hide them from God but acknowledge them before him.

Do you notice two actions God will take?

1. Because he is faithful, he will forgive our sins. He is faithful to his promises to forgive us.
2. Because he is just, he will cleanse us from all unrighteousness. Jesus has already paid the penalty on the cross. If we fulfill the condition, it would be unjust of God to punish us as well as bearing the penalty himself on the cross.

How can we be confident in this? Well if the straight word is not enough for you we are told more about Jesus.

1. In John 2:1 we read: "... if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defence--Jesus Christ, the Righteous One." Do you realise that Jesus is your lawyer? He is your advocate. He speaks for you not against you. He presents the only legal defence – this one has trusted in me Father. He or she is washed from all his/her sins by my blood.
2. Jesus himself is the righteous one and the atoning sacrifice for our sins. His offering of himself deals with the wrath of God against sin.

It is important that you realise when you become a Christian putting your faith in Jesus, trusting him to be your saviour and asking for forgiveness, you become an adopted child of God.

When you subsequently sin, you don't cease to be a child of God, it is that the relationship is marred. There is a blockage between us and God. When we come again to ask forgiveness, it is not a fresh salvation event, it is a restoration of relationship.

When you are guilty for some sin you have committed don't hesitate to confess your sin to God and ask for his forgiveness. And know that because he is faithful and just, he forgives your sin and cleanses you from all unrighteousness. Know that Jesus is praying for you and pleading your case with the Father. Know that he has already made the sacrifice that atones for your sin.