



JOHN 20:19-23 | JESUS' FIRST APPEARANCE BEFORE THE DISCIPLES

- Verses 19-20 – see session 74
- Verse 21 –
 - This is the closest version of the so-called “Great Commission” found in the Gospel of John.
 - Jesus greets them once again with **Peace be unto you** (as in verse 19). He then sends (commissions) the disciples to go, just as He Himself has been sent of the Father.
 - We cannot take this as the first time this has happened, for very similar words were spoken in John 17:18.
 - Recall that the context of John 17 was a prayer for the nation of Israel (see note on John 17:6).
 - Now Jesus was again sending Israel into all the world with the Kingdom Gospel, beginning with those disciples gathered.
 - Note that it was not the “twelve” alone that were in this room - Luke 24:33 says **and them that were with them**. Luke’s account has several interesting comparisons, and it would take a larger study to harmonize the two.
- Verse 22 –
 - Jesus **breathed on them**. The Greek is ἐμφυσάω [emphusao], which is only used here in the New Testament, and is the source of our English word *emphasize*. It recalls Genesis 2:7 in which the breath of life was given to man.
 - Jesus instructed them to **receive ye the Holy Ghost**. But if the Holy Ghost was given on the day of Pentecost, how was He also given here?
 - Bullinger in *The Companion Bible* makes a persuasive argument that when no definite articles are used for *holy* and *spirit* (as here, that the reference is to *the gift* rather than *the Giver*. That is, to the *power* rather than the *Person*.
 - Bullinger argues that, “the English reader can never tell which of the two very different Greek expressions he is reading.” (*The Companion Bible*, Appendix 101, II, 14).
 - If this persuasive argument is accurate, then Jesus breaths on them an enabling “holy spirit.”
- Verse 23 –
 - The words of this verse are as clear as they appear to be. There is no challenge with the grammar, or the translation, etc. This is a “what you see is what you get” verse.
 - The general approach of the verse has been twofold-
 - Catholics take it literally and believe the church (having inherited the rights of the disciples) has the sole power to forgive or retain sins.
 - Protestants and evangelicals have worked all manner of linguistic gymnastics to remove any meaningful force from the words, because they simply do not believe them to be true in any form, previously nor today.
 - Clearly, neither approach is acceptable. Only “right division” will solve the problem.

- Once again, Bullinger’s note is insightful. *“This authority bestowed upon the apostles and others continued in force with other “gifts” till Acts 28, which records the final rejection of the Kingdom. To suppose that the “Church” of Eph. 1 has any share in them is not rightly to divide the Word of Truth, but to introduce perplexity and confusion.”* (The Companion Bible, note on John 20:23).
- Note that while I reject Bullinger’s Acts 28 position, he is accurate in that the gifts were retained until sometime after Acts 28, with the destruction of the nation and the final abeyance of the Kingdom offer.
- One example of the evangelical mess: (from GotQuestions)
 - *“Only God can forgive sins, and Christ, being God, has the power to do so as well, but He never communicated any such power to His disciples, nor did they ever assume any such power to themselves. ...As they proclaimed the gospel, they could honestly tell people who believed in that message that their sins were forgiven, and they could honestly tell people that did not believe in the message that their sins were not forgiven and that they stand condemned in God’s eyes. ...So, our forgiveness of others is a major indicator of true fellowship with God. God looks at the heart and actions, not mere words. Jesus stated while on earth, “These people come near to me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me.” So, it’s important we have a living, genuine faith: “We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love our brothers” (1 John 3:14).“* (<https://www.gotquestions.org/John-20-23.html>)
 - This is a bunch of gibberish that simply changes the meaning of the words. Jesus said what He said and knew what He was saying. Once again, the *only* way to resolve the issue is to make this about the Kingdom message and the authority that those with “kingdom authority” actually possessed.
- Note that not only Catholics understand this to be literal. The following is from Martin Luther’s “Small Catechism.”

CONFESSION
First: What is Confession?
 Confession has two parts. The one is that we confess our sins; the other, that we receive absolution or forgiveness from the pastor as from God himself, not doubting but firmly believing that our sins are thus forgiven before God in heaven.
...Fourth: How will the pastor assure a penitent sinner of forgiveness?
 He will say, "By the authority of Christ, I forgive you your sins in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen." (<http://stpaul-wels.org/WhatWeBelieve/SmallCatechism.html>)

JOHN20:24-29 | THOMAS BELIEVES

- Verses 24-25 –
 - While Thomas has received the ignominious designation *doubting Thomas*, we should at least be fair in pointing out that *none of the disciples believed before they saw (and touched?) Jesus!*
 - There is every indication that the disciples *touched* Jesus: on the night He first appeared (vv. 19-23 above).
 - While this Gospel does not mention it, in the same event, Luke 24:39 records Jesus as telling them, **handle me, and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones**. He then went on to eat food with them (Lk. 24:40-43). It would be almost unconceivable that they did not touch Him. It was only at this point they believed.
 - So, Thomas may distinguish himself by his absenteeism, but not by his doubting.