

**International Sunday School Lesson**  
**Study Notes**  
**March 22, 2015**

**Lesson Text: John 20:19-23**  
**Lesson Title: Receive the Holy Spirit**

**Introduction**

The night before Jesus was crucified, He repeatedly told His disciples that the Holy Spirit would come (John 14:2-4, 19, 25, 28; 16:5-7, 16, 28). Although the disciples believed what Jesus promised them, their understanding of the promise was clouded by the dramatic events of His betrayal, arrest, trials, beatings, and crucifixion. Those events distracted them from the hope of the promise of the Spirit's coming. They would need a word and a witness from the risen Lord to renew their belief in the promises He had given. That word and witness came on the evening of resurrection Sunday.

Before Jesus came into the upper room to His disciples, He appeared to Mary Magdalene in John 20:1-18. She was the first person to find the Lord's tomb empty while it was still dark on the first Easter Sunday. Now, it is evening and Jesus appears to the ten disciples in John 20:19-23. He comes to meet with them in an atmosphere of fear and uncertainty. He came where they were and calmed them by *speaking* words of peace and *showing* them His wounds. His use of words and wounds were designed to assure them that He was alive. He then breathed on them, thus reassuring them that the Holy Spirit would come and empower them and give them courage to take the gospel to the world.

**The Peace (John 20:19-21)**

Verse 19

“Then the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews, came Jesus and stood in the midst, and saith unto them, Peace be unto you.”

“Then the same day...being the first day of the week” is the same “*first day of the week*” mentioned in John 20:1. It was the first Easter Sunday. This day would be one of the most important days in the history of the world, in the life of the ten disciples hidden away in Jerusalem, and in the life of all believers. It was the day Jesus Christ arose from the grave. It eventually became known as we know it today, the Lord's Day (Revelation 1:10).

“At evening” would be about twelve hours after our Lord's resurrection. The first Easter Sunday is coming to a close and although this has been the greatest day in history, the disciples needed help from the resurrected Lord.

Judas is gone forever and Thomas is temporarily missing. Only the ten disciples remain. But the risen Lord knows where they are and what they need. The same is true of you.

“When the doors were shut” tells us the disciples were assembled behind closed doors. The word “shut” means “locked.” These ten disciples along with others were in isolation and seclusion “for fear of the Jews.” It’s only been about seventy-two hours since Jesus had been crucified on the cross. They feared the Jewish rulers who had sent Jesus to His death. They thought they might be waiting to deal with them in similar fashion. Not a very encouraging bunch is it? This group of believers who held the future of Christianity in their hands are locked away in seclusion and fear.

It is at that moment that the Apostle John tells us “Jesus came and stood in the midst, and saith unto them, Peace be unto you.” “Came Jesus and stood in the midst” is amazing. Remember, they are in a room where “the doors were shut.” Literally, the doors were locked. No one in and no one out. Jesus, in His resurrected body walked through the locked doors or through the walls without a sound. One second, no Jesus. The next second, Jesus! We learn from this that the glorified body is not subject to the laws of the material universe. That will be true of every believer when the Rapture occurs and our physical bodies are changed. It will be no problem for believers to meet the Lord in the air (1 Thessalonians 4:17).

“Peace be unto you” were the first words the disciples heard from the resurrected Lord. Some interpret these words to be nothing more than a conventional greeting. But there is more being spoken here than a conventional greeting. He had promised them “peace” in John 14:27. And now He is giving them “peace.” Deity is speaking to humanity and the word is “peace.” This word “peace” is the peace that comes from being justified by faith through our Lord Jesus Christ, which gives us peace with God. That is why Jesus showed them His hands and his side. The “peace” He is speaking to them is based on His sacrifice on the cross (Colossians 1:20).

*Question: What do you think ran through the minds of these disciples when they saw Jesus standing in the room with them? Jesus whom they had denied and abandoned in His hour of arrest, trial, and death. If they were afraid of the Jews you can only imagine the fear that swelled in their hearts when they saw the risen Lord. And then He said, “Peace!”*

*Question: Do you need peace today? If you do, Jesus Christ can speak peace to your soul.*

Verse 20

“And when he had so said, he shewed unto them his hands and his side. Then were the disciples glad, when they saw the Lord.”

After speaking “peace” to them, Jesus “shewed unto them his hands and his side.” Luke tells us Jesus said, “*Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself: handle me, and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have*” (Luke 24:39). Jesus “shewed” Himself first, to assure His disciples that it was really their Savior who stood before them and not some ghost or spirit. He wanted them to see that He was the same person they knew before His death, only now in a resurrected body.

The marks in Jesus’ “hands and his side” and as Luke recorded, “*his feet,*” were shown to the disciples as marks of victory. As previously stated, these were the basis of the “peace” they now had with God. These marks are still upon His body (Revelation 5:6) and will one day in the future help to bring repentance to the nation of Israel (Zechariah 12:10).

Commenting on the “hands and side” of our Lord, Doctor Harry A. Ironside writes, “That is the most lovely thing about Jesus, for those wounds tell what He thought of us. He might have gone out free when He finished those wonderful years of service here, He might have gone back to the glory from which He came.” But He went to that cross of shame and there he received those wounds which tell of a love that was stronger than death. And He will bear the scars for all eternity.” (*H.A. Ironside Expository Commentary - H. A. Ironside Commentary, Gospel of John.*)

“Then were the disciples glad, when they saw the Lord” means His *words* and His *wounds* brought assurance and renewed hope. In his book, “The Secret of Christian Joy,” Doctor Vance Havner writes, “The disciples would not have been glad to have seen the Jewish rulers and they were not glad when they saw each other or their circumstances. But they sure were glad to see the Lord!”

It is the great need of the hour that we look away from ourselves and our circumstances and see the Lord. The disciples were “glad” when they did. And you will be also. In fact, John 20:20 is “perfect spiritual vision.” 20/20 spiritual vision is when you “see the Lord!”

### Verse 21

“Then said Jesus to them again, Peace be unto you: as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you.”

For the second time Jesus said to them, “Peace be unto you.” Why did He say that twice? The first “peace” had to do with their *position* before God through the saving work of Christ on the cross. This second “peace” was given for their

*commission* in the world that He was about to give them. It was the “peace” that came from knowing that Jesus would be with them (Philippians 4:7). Jesus knew they were going to be ministering in a world full of rejection and persecution.

“As my Father hath sent me, even so send I you” means Jesus is sending His disciples into the world to proclaim the gospel and call men and women to repent of unbelief and believe on Jesus’ name. In the same way God sent Jesus into the world, He is sending His disciples. They are now the “sent” ones. They are the continuation of the saving work of God the Father and God the Son upon the earth. And there is no way possible for them to carry out this new commission without the presence and power of the Holy Spirit.

### **The Promise (John 20:22-23)**

#### Verse 22-23

“And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost: Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained.”

After Jesus told the disciples they were now the “sent” ones, “he breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost.” The word “breathed” means “to blow upon.” The word “breathed” is used in the same manner here as it is in Genesis 2:7, “*And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul.*” Just as God the Father “breathed” into Adam and he became a living soul, Jesus in the person of the Holy Spirit is going to “breathe” upon the church on the Day of Pentecost and she will be alive.

What Jesus is doing here is symbolic of what actually happened on Pentecost (Acts 2). The disciples did not receive the Holy Ghost here in John 20:22. And since the disciples did not actually receive the Holy Spirit until the day of Pentecost, some 40 days in the future (Acts 1:8; 2:1-3), this statement must be understood as a pledge on Christ's part that the Holy Spirit would be coming.

“Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained” is a strange but interesting statement by our Lord. In order to properly interpret what Jesus is saying, let’s look first at what Jesus is not saying, and then look at what Jesus is saying.

First, Jesus is not saying Christians have the authority to forgive sin. How do we know that is not what Jesus is saying? Because Mark 2:7 says, “*Who can forgive sins but God only?*” And that is right. No one but God can forgive sin. No Apostle, no priest, no Pope, and no individual Christian or collective body of

Christians can forgive sin. Furthermore, the New Testament has no record of any apostle or anyone else forgiving sin.

Second, Jesus is saying that these disciple or any Christian can declare that those who genuinely repent and believe the gospel as God's Word requires will have their sins forgiven by God. That's the meaning of "Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them." On the other hand, "whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained means these disciples or any other Christian can warn those who reject Jesus Christ that they are unforgiven and will die in their sins (John 8:24; Hebrews 10:26-27).

### **Conclusion**

What a wondrous and glorious privilege to represent our Lord here in this world, as Jesus represented the Father when He was here. Knowing that truth should cause every believer to rest in the peace of the cross and the assurance that Jesus will never leave us and that the Holy Spirit is always with us to empower us and to emboldened us as His witnesses.

Although there are no apostles living today, we who are saved by God's grace, can, under Christ's authority, assure those who believe the gospel message that they are truly forgiven. As we minister in Jesus' peace, and in Jesus' power through Jesus' person, the Holy Spirit, we can victoriously proclaim the message of the gospel and fulfill the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20).

Into the upper room and behind locked doors the disciples huddled. Into the upper room Jesus came. From the upper the room the disciples went with a promise of power. Unto the whole world through them and us the gospel is sent. And whosoever will may come!

Amen.