

Resurrection Rewards, 2

John 20:10-23

Last week, we learned about the Jewish children celebrating the Passover with their families. At the appropriate time in the meal, the host will signal that it is time for the children to hunt for a broken piece of unleavened bread, called the *aphikomen*, which had been wrapped in a white linen napkin and hidden earlier. There is much excitement and festivity as the children scurry about looking for the unleavened bread, because the one who finds it receives a reward!

That broken, hidden piece of unleavened bread for modern Jewish believers in Christ represents the Lord Jesus Christ. His death on the cross is symbolized by the breaking of the bread. His burial is represented by the hiding of the bread, and His resurrection is typified by the children finding the bread and bringing it to the host of the meal for a reward.

Last week, we compared this reward to the rewards that all believers can have when once we have a real, fresh encounter with Jesus. Mary Magdalene was the first to actually see the Risen Christ, and when she did, she fell at His feet and held on to Him. Perhaps she was afraid that if she let go, Jesus would disappear. After a few moments, Jesus told her, “Stop holding on to me. Go instead to my brothers and tell them I am alive!”

So the reward Mary received—and it is a reward given to every born-again child of God—is a new purpose for life! Our new purpose is no longer to live for ourselves, but to make sure that everyone has the opportunity to hear about Christ: “Go tell them I am alive!”

But when we discover the Resurrected Christ in our lives today, we learn that there are other rewards which follow:

2 The Resurrection of Jesus gives us a new position, v. 17b

What Jesus said to Mary was radically different from anything He had ever said before. As their relationship had deepened, Jesus had used different terms to describe the disciples. For instance, immediately after washing the disciples’ feet the night before His crucifixion, Jesus had referred to the twelve as “*servants*” (John 13:16). Then, before the evening had expired, He told them, “*I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master’s business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you*” (John 15:15).

But now, when Jesus told Mary to stop holding on to Him, He used some unusual terminology. He didn't say, "Go tell those so-called "disciples" of Mine that I am alive again—no thanks to them!" He didn't say that Mary should go find His servants, though He had called them "servants" earlier. He didn't even call them "friends," though He would again in John 21. What He did say was "*Go instead to my **brothers** and tell them, 'I am returning to **my** Father and **your** Father, to **my** God and **your** God.'*"

With the exception of the time He taught them the Model Prayer, Jesus had never referred to God as "Our Father." He always spoke of "My Father." Now He seems to be including the disciples in the Family. He was telling them that because of His death and resurrection, it was now possible for those who believe in His Name to have a new position in the Kingdom of God—not merely as servants, not merely as friends, but as **children of God**.

Years later, when John wrote his Gospel, he remembered what Jesus had said. So one of the first things John said about Jesus was, "*...to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become **children of God***" (John 1:12). We are members of the Family of God! That's a truth we find throughout the New Testament from this point forward.

Paul told the Romans, "*...those who are led by the Spirit of God are **sons of God***" (Romans 8:14). In his first letter, John was overwhelmed by the truth of our new position before God. He wrote, "*How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called **children of God! And that is what we are!***" (1 John 3:1). Then the writer of the letter to the Hebrews reasoned, "*Both the one who makes men holy and those who are made holy are of the **same family**. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them **brothers***" (Hebrews 2:11).

Being a member of God's family has its own rewards. Paul told the Galatians, "*So you are no longer a slave, but a **son**; and since you are a **son**, God has made you also an **heir***" (Galatians 4:7). That is a truth we read in the Scriptures, but because of our own inherent tendency to sin, we find it difficult to claim this inheritance as our own. I believe the Ephesian Christians were having the same trouble.

So when Paul wrote to them, he said, "*I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious **inheritance** in the saints*" (Ephesians 1:18). This inheritance

is totally different from the kind of inheritance we might receive here on the earth. We don't receive this inheritance because someone has *died*, but because Someone has *conquered death!*

Paul captured that truth when he wrote a little later in his letter to the Ephesians: “*But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus*” (Ephesians 2:4-7). Later, in the same chapter, Paul reemphasized our new position in Christ: “*Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God’s people and **members of God’s household***” (Ephesians 2:19).

The resurrection of Jesus has made this possible for all who believe in His Name. It is not something we earn or purchase. We learn in Colossians 1:12 that the Father—*our Father*—has qualified us to “*share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light.*”

3 The Resurrection of Jesus gives us a new peace, vv. 19, 21a

The very evening of Jesus’ resurrection, His disciples were still cowering in fear. Verse 19 reads that the disciples “*were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jews.*” Their fear was natural, and probably any of us would have been just as afraid as they. Mark 14:50 tells us that they all had deserted Him and fled from the garden of Gethsemane when Jesus was arrested.

But when Jesus stood among them for the first time after His bodily resurrection, His first words to them were not, “I told you I’d come back, you no-good cowards!” He didn’t scold or criticize them for having deserted Him. Instead, His first words when He suddenly appeared before them in that locked room were “*Peace be with you!*” in verse 19. Then after the initial shock began to wear off, Jesus repeated His words in verse 21: “*Peace be with you!*”

To say “Peace be with you” was the normal way to greet another person in that part of the world. It is similar to our saying “Hello.” There are several examples of this in the Old Testament. But remember that this is the first time Jesus has appeared to His disciples, so He is doing more than merely saying “hello.” The kind of peace Jesus offers is not merely the absence of noise. One author once wrote, “For peace of mind, resign as general manager of the universe.” (Larry Eisenberg)

That's good advice, but not the kind of peace Jesus offers. It is not the kind of peace we need when we say "peace and quiet!" This peace Jesus referred to is radically different. Earlier in this same Gospel, Jesus had told His disciples, "***Peace I leave with you; My peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid***" (John 14:27). Then a few verses later, He had said to them, "***I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world***" (John 16:33).

So what did Jesus mean when He used the word "peace" as He appeared to His disciples? He had told them they could have peace because He had overcome the world. He overcame the world by dying on the cross and then conquering death through His bodily resurrection. You will remember that peace was part of God's plan in sending Jesus to be born in the first place. The angels had said in announcing the birth of the Christ Child, "***Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests***" (Luke 2:14). This peace is the essence of a new relationship with God made possible through the death of Jesus on the cross. When we approach God through the blood of Christ, we are no longer considered enemies of God. We are at peace with the Almighty.

This kind of peace is a major theme of the New Testament beginning with the resurrection of Jesus. The Apostle Paul knew first-hand what it was like to be at odds with God's purpose, so when he discovered the peace of Christ, he wrote about it often. "***For He Himself is our peace...***" he told the Ephesians (2:14). To the Roman Christians, Paul said, "***Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ***" (Romans 5:1). When Paul came to the end of his letter to the Romans, his benediction upon them was "***May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in Him...***" (Romans 15:13).

He promised the Philippian Christians that "***the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus***" (Philippians 4:7). And he challenged the Christians at Colosse "***Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace***" (Colossians 3:15a). It is a peace anyone can have when they trust in Christ for personal salvation.

An American preacher by the name of Bob Mumford has written, "Peace with God brings the peace of God. It is a peace that settles our nerves, fills our minds, floods our spirits, and in the midst of the uproar around us, gives us the assurance that

everything is all right.” (Quoted by Wayne A. Detzler, *New Testament Words in Today’s Language*, (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1986), p. 303.) That is the kind of peace you can have today if you relinquish control of your life to Christ.

4 The Resurrection of Jesus gives us a new power, v. 22

In verse 22, we read that Jesus “*breathed on them and said, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit.’*” We find that in both in Hebrew and Greek the same words are translated as “breath” or “spirit.” The word is used in Genesis 2:7 to refer to the giving of life to Adam’s body when it had been created. So Jesus breathed on His disciples as a visible symbol of a fresh giving of His own life to His disciples. God’s Spirit would come upon them and give them a new power they had never had before.

What kind of power was Jesus giving them? In verse 23, it appears that He was giving them the power to forgive sins! He said to them, “*If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.*” But we echo the words of the Jewish teachers of the law, when they asked, “*Who can forgive sins but God alone?*” (Mark 2:7b) No, Jesus was not giving His disciples—nor was He giving us—the power to forgive the sins of others. The power He was giving them—and giving us—was the power to declare with absolute authority that, based upon what God had done in Christ, those who place their faith in Him should be forgiven.

We can see this when we translate Jesus’ words literally: Whosoever sins you forgive shall have already been forgiven them, and whosoever sins you do not forgive shall have already not been forgiven them. (Translation by Dr. Julius Mantey.) That sounds awkward in English, but what it means is that the disciples did not **provide** forgiveness; they **proclaimed** forgiveness as the basis of the Gospel. And there is absolutely no indication that this power was confined to the people there in the room at the time. Thomas was not even there, and there undoubtedly were others present in the room who were not apostles. The power to proclaim the forgiveness of sins through Christ was given to the entire church, to every child of God!

They would need a new power! They were facing things which would severely test their faithfulness and trust in God. They, too, were given a new purpose when Jesus said in verse 21, “*As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.*” They would need the power of the Holy Spirit in order to fulfill their new purpose, and they were reminded of this as Jesus was about to leave them to return to the Father.

In Acts 1:8, we read, “***But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.***”

And the disciples drew from this power in fulfilling their new purpose. We read, for example, in Acts 4:33 that “*with great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and much grace was upon them all.*”

When we discover the Risen Christ in our lives today on a personal basis, we receive several rewards. First, we are given a new purpose, a purpose which involves simply telling the Gospel story. We are given a new position, one which qualifies us to be called children of God, for that is what we are!

We are given a new peace, which transcends understanding. And through the Resurrection of Christ we are also given a new power, a power to appropriate all these promises into our day-to-day lives. Have you searched for the Risen Christ?

All these things—and more—can be yours when you find Him today as your personal Lord and Savior.