

Where's the Proof? – John 20:19-31

Pastor Colin Rieke – April 23, 2017

¹⁹ On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" ²⁰ After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord. ²¹ Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." ²² And with that he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. ²³ If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven." ²⁴ Now Thomas (called Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. ²⁵ So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord!" But he said to them, "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe it." ²⁶ A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" ²⁷ Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe." ²⁸ Thomas said to him, "My Lord and my God!" ²⁹ Then Jesus told him, "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." ³⁰ Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. ³¹ But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

This is the day the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it,

One of the short stories I read in high school was about a young man who was caught stealing a bag full of oranges. The store manager locked him in a room with the oranges while he went to go get the police. While in the room, the young man had time to think about his situation and came up with a solution to avoid being charged with the crime of stealing oranges. He set out to eat the whole bag of oranges. But he couldn't just eat the inside of the oranges, he had to eat the peels as well. As tough as it was to eat that many oranges (and peels) he set out to do it. And by the time the store manager returned with the police there was no proof left of his crime. And so the store manager and the police were forced to let him go.

That short story illustrates the importance of proof when it comes to making a claim. It could be proof that someone is guilty or innocent of a crime. It could be proof that a particular event happened. It could be proof that a particular place exists. Proof is something very valuable, and not having it can be tough to overcome. When it came to the disciples of Jesus on Easter, many of them didn't believe Jesus rose from the dead, because they didn't have proof. All they had was an empty tomb, and the testimony of a couple of women saying the angels said he was alive. But they couldn't believe it without proof. So WHERE WAS THE PROOF?

That's an important question for us to consider also both for why we believe what we believe, but also so that we might have an answer for people who are looking for the proof. The proof of Christianity, the proof of God, the proof of heaven, the proof of the resurrection. WHERE'S THE PROOF?

1. Seeing is not believing
2. Believing is seeing

(1)

A statement that I've heard far too often is that a Christian just has to have "blind faith." It's almost as if we believe Jesus died for our sins and gets us to heaven without any evidence to support our faith. But that simply is not true. Just because we did not see Jesus die on the cross, just because we didn't see Jesus rise from the dead, just because we have not reached heaven, doesn't mean that we believe blindly. Let me ask you a few questions: Have any of you been to Antarctica? Were any of you around during the Civil War? Did any of you ever meet Napoleon? Then why is it that you believe that Antarctica exists, the Civil War happened, and Napoleon lived? It's because you believe the evidence that has been presented to you. The Bible is the same way. The Bible was not written in a vacuum, what took place in the Bible didn't take place in a vacuum. These are places, real events and real people that the Bible talks about, and we should begin to understand it as such.

So when we read in the gospel of John chapter 20 that **"the disciples were together with the doors locked for fear of the Jews,"** the disciples really were together with the door locked for fear of the Jews. Why were the disciples afraid? They were afraid of the Jewish leaders who had just coerced the Romans to crucify Jesus. They were afraid that now with the body gone, the Jewish leaders would come after them demanding to know what happened. They were afraid that their bodies might be the next hung on crosses. This fear the disciples had was real. The fact that Jesus' body disappeared made the matter even worse.

Because despite the women's exclamation to the contrary, with no proof, the disciples were skeptical to believe. And who could blame them? The disciples' experiences were the same as ours, they had never known or expected someone to come back from the dead. It just didn't happen, it just didn't make sense. But in God's almighty wisdom, he gave them the proof their eyes were demanding. **"Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you!'"** The disciples were overjoyed.

The disciples, who were looking for proof, had the proof right in front of their very eyes. The same Jesus who had been crucified a few days earlier was standing before them. How he was alive and how he passed through a locked door were not points they needed to worry about, because Jesus was alive. He was all the proof they needed. It was this eye-witness proof they were to use and share with the world. Here is perhaps the first time the disciples truly realized the extent of their mission. Jesus said, **"As the Father has sent me, I am sending you."** It would only be later that they realized how far Jesus was sending them, but for now, they knew they were being sent out by Jesus. But sent out to do what?

Jesus continues, **"If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven."** Jesus was sending them out to forgive sins (and at times to not forgive sins).

They were to forgive sins not on the basis of who they liked, they were to forgive sins not on the basis of who gave them the most money, they were to forgive sins based on a full and free forgiveness offered to them by Jesus' life, death and resurrection. The life, death and resurrection to which they were all witnesses. This was an incredible power that Jesus was passing on to them. And the proof that Jesus had this power was evident by him standing right there in front of them.

But just because the disciples had the proof standing right in front of them didn't cause a revival in Jerusalem. It didn't even cause a revival in one of their own's hearts. Thomas, one of the 12 disciples was not with them on that first Easter evening, and when the others told him about Jesus' appearance to them, Thomas still didn't believe. He was just as stubborn as they all were. And it was not until the next week that Thomas' doubts were put to rest. For it was a week later, the disciples met together again, and this time Thomas was with them, and he did see the risen Lord and he did believe with one of the strongest confessions in all of Scripture, **"My Lord, and my God."**

We might envy the disciples that they had the visible proof right there in front of them to believe, while we don't. But that's the thing about proof. Even with proof right before your eyes, you still might not believe it. Because faith isn't about proof. We may not have the proof of the resurrected Jesus in the form of a body we can touch, but our faith is all the proof we need.

(2)

We have proof that has lasted from the time of Jesus to us. It's in this book the Bible. A book like no other. It is a book that has more ancient evidence than any other writing in history. If we want proof, it's right here in the Bible. But it's not just that it's an old book, it's a book that has proven to be incredibly accurate about times and places and people that it talks about. And it's a book that is centered around the life of God's own Son Jesus.

With a book like this, you would think that we would pay more attention to it. But instead, we're quick to dismiss it in favor of what the latest best seller says about it. Instead, we're quick to disbelieve the promises contained in it in favor of our own doubts and worries. Instead, we're quick to disregard God's perfect plan for our lives in favor for our own selfish messed up plans. We turn to a best seller like "The Shack" and "Heaven is for real" to guide our interpretation of Scripture, instead of the other way around. God has promised to watch over us, he has promised that his Word will not return to him empty, but we doubt God's plans and worry what people will think if they find out we're a Christian. We disregard God's plan for marriage, his warnings against greed and selfishness, and think that he would make an exception in our case.

It's this book, the Bible that describes people just like us. It describes the disciples with their doubts, it describes King David with his adultery, it describes Paul, the killer of Christians. And the same thing that overcomes their doubts, overcomes our doubts as well. We do not have the risen Lord Jesus come and stand before us to make us believe, but we have the same Holy Spirit that Jesus breathed upon them. Because you see, believing isn't something that is up to us or is dependent on proof, or we would always have our doubts. Belief is something that the Holy Spirit creates in us. It is this belief that the Holy Spirit creates in us that not only causes us to believe, but by believing we see.

By believing we see things that we could never see with our eyes. We see things that we could never comprehend with our reason. We see things that would never believe on our own. We may not have seen Jesus die on the cross, or seen him after he rose from the dead, but we believe the words of the Bible to be true. We may not understand how exactly Jesus' body and blood are present in the Lord's Supper, but we believe that they are. And most astounding of all, it goes against every human instinct to believe that our actions don't play a role in going to heaven and that it has all be done for us. But this is what it means to live by faith and not by sight. When we live by faith, we walk in the peace of God, the peace of God given to us by Jesus, just as surely as he gave it to his disciples.

This is a peace which is foreign to the world. A peace that is not found in political correctness or safe spaces. A peace that is not found in a booming economy or low unemployment rate. A peace that is not found even if we could all agree on everything. This is a peace that is between us and God. A peace that we find alone in God's Word. A peace that is given when we let go of the sins that had separated us and walk with him. This is a peace that is forfeit by those who hold on to their grudges, who hold onto their ideas, who hold on to their selfishness whether they claim to be Christians or not.

It is this peace of God that not only gives our lives purpose now, but it gives our lives purpose in eternity. It is this peace of God that Easter brings, it is this peace of God that Christ wants for the world. It is this peace that we are called to share with the world. I hope and pray first of all you understand this peace and believe it in your own lives. And I hope by doing that you see how imperative it is that you share it with others. Amen.