

**Why Should Christians Expect To Make A Difference In This World?
John 20:19-23**

Last week, in supporting the premise that the disciples of Christ were credible witnesses of the resurrection, I briefly referenced John's account of Christ's first appearance to His disciples in **John 20:19-23**. This morning I would like to return to this account and to examine these verses in greater detail.

My purpose in doing this is not to once again support the premise that the disciples were credible witnesses of the resurrection but rather to focus on what Christ told His disciples after they were convinced of such a resurrection that should have alerted His disciples that they were about to become powerful agents of change in respect to this world.

So now with this in mind let me now read for you John's account of Christ's first appearance to His disciples in **John 20:19-23**. **"So when it was evening on that day, the first day of the week** [or in other words the first day of the week, after it had been reported to them by Mary Magdalene and by certain other women as well, that Jesus had risen from the dead, the verse goes on to say], **and when the doors were shut where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in their midst** [And was this something that the disciples were expecting? No, this was not something that the disciples were expecting for they had earlier rejected the reports that they had been given, both by Mary Magdalene and as well as by these certain other women. So not expecting Christ's appearance He immediately and very mercifully] **and said to them** [according to verse 19], **'Peace be to you.'**"

So how did Christ's disciples respond to this greeting by Christ? According to **Luke 24:37**, which is a parallel account of the same encounter, the disciples did not respond well. So, what does **Luke 24:37** tell us? **"But they were startled and frightened and thought that they were seeing a spirit."** Obviously Christ's greeting of **"Peace be to you"** in **John 20:19** had not yet brought about the desired effect.

So, what did Jesus do next in order to reassure them and to calm them. Let me now go back to **John 20:20**. **"And when He had said this** [Or in other

words after He had said, “Peace be to you”], **He showed them both His hands and His side.**”

And again why did He do this? Christ showed His disciples both His hands and His side in **John 20:20** in order to reassure them that He was not simply a spirit or in other words a ghost. In fact, in **Luke 24** it also adds in **verses 38-43** that Christ, after showing them not only His hands and side but also His feet, then asked for a piece of broiled fish, which He then proceeded to eat in front of them.

And what was the response of the disciples to all of this? John tells us at the end of **verse 20** that **“The disciples then rejoiced when they saw the Lord.”**

So after having been fully convinced that Jesus had in fact risen, then what happened? This brings us to **John 20:21-23** and to the heart of our message this morning. And what is the question that we will be seeking to answer?

After Christ’s disciples became convinced that He had risen in John 20:19-20, what did Christ tell His disciples in John 20:21-23 that should have alerted them that they, in respect to this world, were about to become powerful agents of change? This is the question that we will be seeking to answer.

And what is my hope for this message as we seek to answer this question? My hope is that we, as Christ’s present day disciples, might see very little or no difference between Christ’s earlier disciples and ourselves in respect to our potential impact on this world.

So, what was the first thing that Jesus told His disciples once they were fully convinced that He had risen, that should have alerted them that they, in respect to this world, were about to become powerful agents of change?

The first thing that Jesus told His disciples that should have alerted them that they were about to become powerful agents of change was that He was sending them into the world (John 20:21).

Let me now read for you **John 20:21** and see if this is not so. And what did Jesus say immediately after they had become convinced that He had risen?

“So Jesus said to them again, ‘Peace be with you; as the Father has sent Me, I also send you.’” So, what does this mean?

When Jesus told His disciples “as the Father has sent Me, I also send you,” He meant that just as the Father sent Him into the world He was also sending them into the world.

This last week I was watching a segment on “60 Minutes” about “Mount Athos.” Mount Athos is a mountainous peninsula in northern Greece. It is home to 20 Eastern Orthodox monasteries and forms an autonomous state under Greek sovereignty. Only monks are allowed to live on Athos and the current population numbers around 1400. And what is the purpose of these monasteries? It is to provide a place totally separated from the world where men, through undistracted prayer, can become closer to Christ. This sounds great doesn't it? But it has a major flaw. Christ has not called His disciples to isolate themselves from the world. Christ has sent His disciples into the world and if we want to get closer to Christ then this is something we must, as His disciples, be willing to do.

But what exactly does Christ want His disciples to do as we go into the world? He clarified this later at another post-resurrection appearance when He appeared to approximately 500 of His followers in Galilee. This post-resurrection appearance is recorded for us in **Matthew 28:18-20**.

So now let me read this passage for you. **“And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, ‘All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. (19) Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, (20) teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.’”** So based on **Matthew 28:18-20**, what did Christ send His disciples to do?

The main verb and central command in Matthew 28:18-20 is “make disciples” (MATHETUEO). So, what did Christ send His disciples into the world to do? He sent them into the world to make disciples.

And how is a disciple made? A disciple is made when an individual, in responding positively to the gospel, exercises faith in Christ thus transferring their trust from themselves and their good works to Jesus Christ alone for their salvation. This is how a disciple is made.

So if we have been sent into this world to make disciples and disciples are made through the proclamation of the gospel of Christ, then what must we do if we are serious about making disciples? We must be committed to the work of sharing Christ's gospel, for that is how disciples are made.

But even though sharing the gospel is the one necessary required action in making a disciple, Christ highlighted three other complementary actions in Matthew 28:19-20 that support the work of disciple making. And what were those three actions?

The first action was going. What did Jesus say in **Matthew 28:19? "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations."** We are not as Christ's disciples to wait for unbelievers to come to us so that we can share the gospel with them, rather we are to go to them even if that means that we have to go to the other side of the world, for what does the passage say? **"Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations."**

And what are we to do if unbelievers positively respond when we go to them with the gospel and they become disciples of Christ? This question leads us to the second action.

The second action is **"to baptize."** So let us continue to read **Matthew 28:19** and see if this is not so. **"Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit."**

Those who become disciples are to be baptized as soon as possible. This is not optional. This is what Christ has asked us to do.

Therefore if you are here this morning and consider yourself to be a disciple of Christ but have not yet publicly identified yourself as such through the act of baptism, then I would encourage you to take a Valley Bible Information Card from the back of the chair in front of you and indicate on that card that you would like to be baptized then take the card at the end of this service and place it into one of our offering boxes on either side of the glass doors as you exit the foyer. So please do not forget to do that.

But there is still another action that Christ emphasized in the context of making disciples. And what is that?

The third action is **“to teach.”** So let us once again go back and continue to read **Matthew 28** but this time we will, in addition to reading **verse 19**, will also read **verse 20**.

“Go therefore and make disciples all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, (20) teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”

Disciples need to know what God expects of them once they become disciples therefore we have a mutual responsibility to teach one another. But we can only teach what we ourselves have learned and applied to our own lives. So hopefully, all of us in this room, who are committed to learning and applying God’s truths to our lives, are also actively seeking to help other disciples to follow in our footsteps, or in other words in the footsteps of Christ as we follow Him.

So, what was the first thing that Jesus told His disciples once they were fully convinced that He had risen that should have alerted them that they, in respect to this world, were about to become powerful agents of change?

The first thing that Jesus told His disciples that should have alerted them that they were about to become powerful agents of change was that He was sending them into the world, or even more specifically that He was sending them into the world to make disciples.

Clearly having been given this mission they should have understood that that they were about to become powerful agents of change if they would simply persevere in faithfully carrying out that mission. But this raises a very question doesn’t it?

How could these disciples, when we consider how weak they were, faithfully persevere in carrying out the mission that they had been given in light of all that they would most certainly suffer? Now isn’t this a very practical question?

And this brings us to the second thing that Jesus told His disciples in **John 20:21-23** that should have alerted them that they in respect to this world, were about to become powerful agents of change? And what was this second thing?

The second thing that Jesus told His disciples that should have alerted them that they were about to become powerful agents of change was when He breathed on them and said to them “receive the Holy Spirit” (John 20:22).

So now let us once again return to **John 20** but this time let us not focus on the mission but rather let us now focus on what Jesus did and then immediately said after having informed them of their mission.

So now let me read for you **John 20:22**. **“And when He had said this [or in other words after He said, “As the Father has sent Me, I also send you”], He breathed on them and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit.’”**

What was the significance of all this? When Christ breathed on the disciples and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit,” He was clearly connecting the success of their mission with the reception of the Holy Spirit.

So, what are we to make of this? Did they at that moment in time actually receive the Spirit? No! When Christ breathed on them and said, “receive the Spirit,” He was speaking prophetically of an event that would soon occur but that would not take place until after His ascension on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4).

So now let me read for you Luke’s account of that day in **Acts 2:1-4**. **“When the day of Pentecost had come [or in other words 10 days after Christ had ascended], they [or in other words Christ’s disciples] were all together in one place. (2) And suddenly there came from heaven a noise like a violent rushing wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. (3) And there appeared to them tongues as of fire distributing themselves, and they rested on each one of them. (4) And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues [in other words they miraculously began to speak in known languages that they had never learned, and this is all made very clear to us by Luke in verses 5-11].”** So when did the disciples actually receive the Spirit that Christ prophetically indicated they would receive John 20:22? They received the Spirit that Jesus prophetically indicated they would receive on the Day of Pentecost.

And were the disciples, after having received the Spirit, able to persevere in the work of making disciples? Absolutely! The disciples, after having

received the Spirit and in spite of their personal weaknesses and all that they suffered in the cause of Christ, continued to persevere in the work of disciple making, and they bore so much fruit that they were referred to by their persecutors in Thessalonica as men who had upset the world in **Acts 17:6**.

So clearly there is a connection between us being a successful disciple maker and the reception of the Spirit. So now let me ask you this question. Have you received the Spirit of God? If you are disciple of Christ then I can categorically tell you that you have received His Spirit.

Let me read for you **Romans 8:9**. **“However, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him.”** So do you have the Spirit? If you are a Christian you have the Spirit, and if you have the Spirit then you are in a great position to be a great agent of change in this world as we go into this world in response to Christ’s commission to make disciples.

And only thing that would keep us from being that great agent of change would be what? Sin, which would invariably cause the Spirit of God to be grieved or quenched, but if this is not the case and if we are in fact filled with the Spirit, or in other words under the Spirit’s control then we are in a position as we go into the world, not to mince words, but to speak with authority.

And this brings us to the third thing that Jesus told His disciples in **John 20:21-23** that should have alerted them that they in respect to this world, were about to become powerful agents of change? And what was this third thing?

The third thing that Jesus told His disciples that should have alerted them that they were about to become powerful agents of change was when Jesus spoke to them about them “forgiving” and “retaining” sins (John 20:23).

So now let us now read John 20:23 and see if this is not so. In other words, let us read **verse 23** and see if Jesus did not in fact speaks to His disciples about them “forgiving” and “retaining” sins.

“If you forgive the sins of any, their sins have been forgiven them; if you

have retained the sins of any, they have been retained.” So did Jesus speak to the disciples about forgiving and retaining sins? Absolutely! But what did He mean by this?

When Jesus spoke to His disciples about forgiving and retaining sins in John 20:23, He was speaking about their authority to declare a person saved or unsaved based on whether they received the gospel or rejected the gospel. This is what He meant.

May we by the grace of God see clearly the great impact that we can have on this world if we in the power of the Spirit go into the world with the gospel of Christ.