

FOLLOW: LESSON SIX (Leaders Guide)

Worshipping God Authentically

BIBLE CONVERSATION

Read John 20:19-24

- 1) **Set the Stage: What events occurred just before this passage? When is this event taking place? Who specifically is in this room?**

This passage is taking place immediately following the first reports of Jesus' resurrection. It is still Easter Sunday, but the apostles themselves have not actually seen Jesus for themselves. All they have available to them are the reports of the women (specifically Mary Magdalene). Peter and John got to see the empty tomb, but only the women have had a face to face encounter with the risen Christ.

The passage is not 100% specific about who is present in this room, but it seems to imply that (at the very least) the ten apostles are there. Thomas is not present (as we find out later), but the others are all in attendance.

- 2) **Given the context of the event, why were the disciples "in fear of the Jews"? What emotions were they likely experiencing at this time? Have you ever found yourself in a time of fear and trial? What might it look like to partake of fellowship in moments of need as the disciples did?**

The apostles are huddled together, wondering what is going to happen next. Try to put yourself in their position, after all they experienced that Passover week. They've come together, probably looking for answers, for direction on what to do next. It is likely that confusion, fear, and a sense of hopelessness are hovering over them. They've watched the Pharisees and other Jewish leaders crucify the Messiah. They've suffered the loss of their Master. They have no idea whether they too will be killed as a result of their association with Jesus. Everything in their world seems to have come apart in the span of just a few short days. The shock of it all is probably enough to leave them numb and paralyzed.

Evidently the best thing the disciples could think of in that moment was to gather together for protection – to hide away from the circumstances they feared, to take some measure of comfort from being together. Likewise, we sometimes just want to have friends nearby in a crisis- just to know that we are not alone. We too can be paralyzed by fear or confusion, unsure of what to do next, desperate for answers.

- 3) **Why would Jesus' opening words to the disciples be "Peace be with you?" How did that meet the need that the disciples had in that moment? Similarly, what would it look like for us to come before God in an honest fashion, full of needs, and worship Him with our vulnerability (rather than trying to wear a mask)? Why would God want us to share our weaknesses and needs with Him if He already knows them?**

Peace is the opposite of anxiety. As Paul says in Philippians, when we pray our anxieties back to God, He supplies us with the peace that passes all understanding to guard our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. The apostles are obviously anxious and fearful at this point in time, hiding away from those who would seek to persecute them. The greatest need that they have in the middle of that circumstance is peace. And that is precisely what Jesus offers to them. This is just one example of how Jesus meets us in worship – if we bring our honest condition and needs before Him, He can meet those needs in ways that only He can.

As believers, we sometimes have a habit of coming into prayer or worship times pretending that we have everything all together- that we are not (to use a modern term) a “hot mess.” God, of course, can see right through this mask. Man may look at our outward appearance, but the Lord looks at our hearts. Thus, being honest about our condition when we come to God in worship is not for His benefit, but rather for ours. When we are willing to fess up to our weakness, He delights to pour grace into our lives – to meet our needs. On the other hand, if we want to act prideful and self-sufficient, He will (according to Scripture) oppose us, because we were made to be dependent upon Him, and He will do what is necessary to discipline us into that dependence.

- 4) **In verse 20, why would Jesus show the disciples His hands and side? What is the reaction of the disciples when they recognize Jesus for who He truly is? How is this a demonstration of worship in spirit and truth? At a more personal level, what are some ways in which we have the opportunity to see the truth of who Christ is, and what Spirit-filled emotions result from such encounters?**

At this moment in the Gospel narrative, the last time the apostles saw Jesus was at (or even a little prior to) His crucifixion. The last piece of information they had was that He had died and was buried. Showing them the scars in His hands and side was the fastest way to prove His identity – both as the sacrifice of atonement and the risen King. No one could deny that He had died and that He was now alive again. And John writes that they rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Not Jesus, the man. Jesus, the LORD. They recognized Him for exactly who He was, and that led them to great joy. Seeing even a glimpse of who Christ really is automatically stirs up emotions within our spirits. We should not just seek for “emotional” experiences, but rather seek to know Jesus at a deeper level, which will stir our emotions of worship in response. This is a great model of what it looks like to worship in spirit and in truth – the reality of who Jesus is (truth) leads us to a deep, emotional response in our spirit.

- 5) **In verse 21, Jesus sends the disciples out “just as the Father sent Me.” How was Jesus sent? What was His mission or purpose? How is that purpose now transferred to the lives of His disciples (including us)? How is a weekly corporate gathering a catapult for the mission that lies ahead in our everyday lives?**

Jesus was sent to the earth not to judge or condemn, but to save – to heal the sick, give sight to the blind and hearing to the deaf, and declare that the kingdom of God was at hand. In short, His mission was to spread the gospel – first and foremost by living it out. While the apostles (and we) cannot live the perfect sacrificial life that Christ did, they (and we) are sent out with that same message of hope – the message that what we cannot do for ourselves, God has done for us in His Son who died, was buried, and rose from the dead.

A corporate gathering on a Sunday morning is an opportunity to dig into the Word of God together and be reminded of the core truths that drive us in our mission. Living in the world can wear us down and cause us to lose focus. While a Sunday morning is not sufficient to sustain us in our spiritual walk, it is a time for refreshment and refocus – a time to gather to recall the very message of good news that we proclaim. After all, we gather on Sunday because that is the day of resurrection. We must be reminded of the Truth over and over again so that it may inspire us afresh to proclaim the good news as we walk throughout the rest of our lives.

- 6) **Why is it important that Jesus offers a promise of the Holy Spirit's coming in verse 23? What role does He play in our mission to make disciples?**

Apart from the Holy Spirit, all of our efforts would be worthless, for it is He who actually brings individuals to spiritual life and allows them to receive the message of the gospel. He can lead us to those whom He has prepared to receive the message, and provide us with the words to share that truth. We are totally dependent upon His work in the process. So it is a sweet promise indeed when Jesus assures the apostles of His (the Spirit's) upcoming arrival at Pentecost. It is an assurance that He will equip us to do the work to which He has called us.