

# **LIFE BEYOND THE CLOTH**

## ***John 20***

**Sermon for Peace Church**

**April 12, 2009 – Easter Sunday**

**PURPOSE** – To prepare people to meet the living Jesus in spirit & truth, beyond the artifacts of His resurrection!

**MAIN IDEA** – Beyond the testimonies of his resurrection, we meet the living Jesus in the ministry of His gospel and His mission to the world.

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### **I. INTRODUCTION**

Let's open our Bibles to John 20.

1. Did you hear that the Shroud of Turin was back in the news? (Screen)

The Vatican revealed last week that the Knights of the Templar secretly hid the shroud for more than 100 years in the Middle Ages, after the Crusades. They were protecting it from damage or theft.

(i) For those of you who don't know, the Shroud is the purported BURIAL CLOTH of Jesus.

It is probably the most intriguing article of discovered history.

Along with blood stains, it has on it, in reverse image (like the old negatives of camera film), a man bearing all the marks of one crucified. At one time it was alleged that this image was painted on – but research has shown that it wasn't. The image is on the cloth via a chemical reaction yet scientifically unexplained.

In the 1980's a piece of this cloth was taken to be carbon dated. That testing indicated that it was only from the 14<sup>th</sup> century. However, since then, it's been discovered that the particular piece of the cloth cut from the Shroud to be carbon dated was taken from an area of the cloth that had been mended at that time. It wasn't of the Shroud itself and there are historical documents from those Middle Ages which indicated that the Shroud was indeed so mended from the damage.

Therefore the verdict remains – is this the authentic burial cloth of Jesus Christ? (The Vatican has indicated that in 8 years it will again allow the cloth to be scientifically studied!)

A. But whether this is or isn't an historical TESTIMONY of the death & resurrection of Jesus, I think what we'd want to say this Easter morning, along with Alfred Ackley, is:

- Don't worship the cloth, worship the Risen One

- Don't fix on meeting & knowing the cloth, FIX ON MEETING & KNOWING the Living One – Jesus!

(ii) The angels at the tomb that first Easter morning said to the women who went there to anoint the dead body of Jesus – but noticed only the burial cloths lying about ... those angels said to the women:

*WHY DO YOU LOOK FOR THE LIVING AMONG THE DEAD? He is not here, he is Risen!*

2. “Why do you look for the living among the dead?” - That statement & those cloths got me thinking:

There are a lot of TESTIMONIES to the death & resurrection of Jesus ALL AROUND US yet that we can get FIXED on at the expense of meeting the living Jesus:

(i) The Shroud may or may not be, but certainly THIS DAY ITSELF is.

The fact that Christians have gathered for 2000 years on Easter Sunday – and each Sunday – to celebrate Jesus' resurrection is a TESTIMONY to that resurrection – like the burial cloth.

But some people think, if I just VENERATE / HONOR the DAY – i.e. show up to church on Easter / Christmas / maybe even every Sunday – that's what matters ... And they never meet the Living Jesus!

(ii) The Church itself is a testimony to the death & resurrection of Jesus. Peace Church, like every church, exists because Jesus died & rose again. The Church is a WITNESS to that event in history – like the burial cloths.

And there are plenty who get FIXED on the Church – very involved – which may or may not be a good thing. It's not a good thing when it gets substituted for meeting the Living Jesus. The living Jesus is beyond religion, just as those angels wanted the women to move beyond the cloth!

(iii) Get this, our Christian theology – even the Bible itself – is a testimony to the death & resurrection of Jesus Christ.

- These holy, God-inspired pages bear witness to that death & resurrection of Jesus in various ways , from beginning to end.

And it is important to know this book & our theology VERY WELL!

A. But the book is a testimony, a WITNESS. Itself, it's not LIFE – the Living Jesus is LIFE – as He speaks through the Word!

I.e. – You may know people who know this Book & their theology very well, but you also sense that they don't seem to know the Risen Jesus. They're ungracious, wobbly, self-centered people ... who can recite all 66 books of the Bible in order!

B. About theology & the Bible, C.S. Lewis said, "It's a MAP! Maps are important & necessary. If you wish to visit the beach & sea from Central England, he states, you need a map to get there. You're lost without a map. You need a map that's recorded, drawn by those who've gotten there, that's authoritative!

But once you have that map – that testimony – what matters is that you GET to the beach & the sea – and experience the breezes / the beauty / the sun / the life!

The MAP is not the BEACH! It's the way there!

WHAT THE ANGELS / the CLOTH / the CHURCH / SCRIPTURE / all the testimony of THIS DAY itself tell us is:

DON'T LOOK FOR THE LIVING AMONG THE DEAD ... These are WITNESSES. Don't get fixed on them - Beyond them/ through them meet THE LIVING JESUS. He IS LIFE!

3. WHERE? HOW? WHAT'S the evidence that I've met Him?

"Yes, He lives; He lives ... He lives within my heart – BUT there are a lot of things that live within this heart! – What TRUTH, what SPIRIT indicates that I've met the Living Jesus!

Let's read & listen to this chapter of Holy Scripture: ***Read John 20***

4. Mary / Peter / John / Thomas / the Disciples did not meet the Living Jesus in the Empty Tomb, with its burial cloth. Those testimonies of the resurrection were NEAR to where they met Him, but what the focus of this Scripture teaches is that they He met them in their GRIEF, their FEAR & their DOUBT – those places of the heart.

- That's the WHERE

(i) The WHAT & HOW – is that they met Him was in the GOOD NEWS of WHO HE IS – THE GOSPEL OF His AUTHORITY ... PLUS ... a COMMISSSION / Sending from Him.

DO YOU SEE THAT?

Mary's in grief. He meets her ... then sends her to His brothers.

The disciples are in fear. He meets them ... then SENDS them, as the Father has sent Him.

Thomas is in doubt. He meets him, then immediately speaks of those who are YET to believe in him.

= MINISTRY RECEIVED / MISSION GIVEN

(ii) BOTH indicate a genuine encounter with the Risen Jesus – one we experience today in Spirit & Truth.

BOTH – Jesus is not just about ministering to your needs. If that were the case, you'd start to live a very self-centered relationship with God. (I.e. – As if Jesus is just about making my life better.) No! - He sends you to build His Kingdom, a God-centered life!

NOR is Jesus just about giving you MISSION in this world. The gospel of WHO HE IS first ministers to you PERSONALLY – so that you go out in Kingdom service with JOY & STRENGTH!

A. Beyond the cloth and all the testimonies of this day, resurrection life is MINISTRY RECEIVED / MISSION GIVEN.

Let me UNPACK this a bit – so that you might meet Jesus today – and “believe that He is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name”.

## II. MARY

1. Mary's in grief. Her friend, Jesus, has been crucified. He's the one who delivered her of demons – set her free of powers that had bound & were ruining her life.

Then she met God through Jesus and received deliverance / freedom / wholeness / love. Now He's dead – and she doesn't even know where his body is to be found!

(i) Life is FULL OF GRIEF!

Grief is simply how we emotionally respond to loss – and life in this age is loss after loss after loss.

A. Yes, we lose loved ones. Sometimes “before their time” – My uncle died this week, cancer – 69 years old – sad, deep grief.

B. More broadly, we lose health; we lose dreams; we lose pension monies; we lose jobs; we lose friends who move away.

C. Change itself is loss – and it brings grief – Church changes, communities change, families change – kids move out. (= a lot of sadness)

(ii) The reason we grieve is because we're looking for SOMETHING STABLE in the context of all these changes ... something we can hold on to! (Is there anything that can stay the same?!)

A. Jesus says to Mary, *"Why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?"*

BROADLY, that means – Who is the STABILITY, the changeless One that you're looking for in your grief?

MARY ... IT'S ME!

## 2. THIS IS THE GOSPEL!

In conquering death, Jesus has established HIMSELF as the One Changeless Reality in an ever changing world!

Jesus Christ - the same yesterday, today & forever (Heb. 13:8).

His reality, truth & love never change.

(i) Churches change – Jesus doesn't; Families change – Jesus doesn't; Communities change – Jesus doesn't; Bank accounts change, jobs change – Jesus doesn't!

*"Earths joys grow dim, its glories pass away, change & decay in all around I see ... O Lord, who changest not, ABIDE WITH ME."*

## 3. Mary's reaction is one we can FULLY UNDERSTAND!

She grabs on to Jesus (He's no ghost).

She wants to hold on to that One Thing that's now changeless in our ever changing world.

(i) And we SHOULD grab on to Jesus in our grief.

This is where the Risen Jesus meets us – not so much in venerating the testimonies of his resurrection – the Shroud / the Day / the Church & its programs - in the place of grief. The Changeless One lives in my heart!

That's why we want to develop a church where people open lives to one another, not just where people attend programs – but where hearts & known & ministered to the name of the One Who Has Conquered decay & death!

... SO JESUS meets us in our grief & WE HOLD ON.

4. But once there, notice what He says: “Don’t just hold on to me ... go now to my brothers”.

Mary is sent on a MISSION. This faith is not for personal indulgence.

The Risen Jesus sends you to His brothers & sisters – to their hearts ... to tell his followers that “His Father is now our Father; His God OUR GOD!”

(i) EASTER – that first day of the week – is a Commissioning Sunday.

Look around – you know you’re meeting the Risen Jesus when He sends you to one another here.

### III. THE DISCIPLES

On the EVENING of that first day of the week, Jesus comes to His team of disciples IN THEIR FEAR. That too is another heart-condition where He meets us.

1. They’re afraid because they’re facing a HOSTILE WORLD.

Their Leader was crucified – are they next?

That world out there can be hostile in many ways. It hurts us. It belittles our faith. In some places of our city, it’s dangerous, random, even kids get shot.

That world out there can hurt us when friends betray us, fathers abuse us, lovers leave us, schoolmates make fun of us, co-workers mistreat us, church members ignore us.

(i) So we climb in self-protective shells, lock the doors, choose FEAR over LOVE.

We hide from people. We distance ourselves. Our lives get smaller ...

... UNTIL ... Jesus comes into the place of fear & self-protection.

2. HERE’S THE GOSPEL of Jesus’ authority – HE IS GOD’S FORGIVENESS ON EARTH!

(i) To those disciples who had denied Him, left Him, mistreated Him, He says, “*Peace be with you!*” - Jesus is God’s forgiveness on earth for all of us.

He shows them His hands & side. It reminds them of the cost of own denial. Yet Jesus speaks PEACE.

(ii) Here’s the meaning of the GOSPEL:

Sin is real. It affects us & others. We hide. That hiding hurts others. It stops love. Sometimes we even live in anger and hurt others.

So Jesus meets us in those places of hurt, fear & self-protection.

- He meets us there to stop the cycle of sin & start the cycle of love
- His wounds reveal that He bore the pain of sin – God’s judgment – to break that cycle & speak peace to you.

Whenever we sin – even in attitude & thought – it will continue to affect others negatively – until we receive God’s forgiveness.

3. Jesus is that forgiveness. Meeting Him in our place of self-protection & fear, He then COMMISSIONS us to go out treat others as He has treated us.

*“As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.”*

(i) You know you’ve met the Living Jesus when you are COMPELLED to reach out to those estranged from you.

WHO MAY THAT BE?

- That may be a personal estrangement – maybe there are people you’ve been protecting yourself from because of the way they’ve treated you.
- That may be societal estrangement – divides of age, gender, race.

A. “As the Father has sent Me” – to bring forgiveness & peace, coming through WALLS ... “So send I you” – to bring forgiveness & peace to those you’re divided from.

B. He goes on, *“If you forgive their sins, they’re forgiven”*. They’re no longer a WALL between you. *“If you do not forgive them, they’re not forgiven.”* The divide in your heart is still there!

4. On Easter Sunday the Risen Jesus COMMISSIONS you: In the forgiveness of God that He has brought on earth, forgive those divided from you – personally, societally.

GO - MINISTRY RECEIVED / MISSION GIVEN

#### IV. THOMAS

WHAT DOES THOMAS LEARN ABOUT THE GOSPEL in our chapter?

He learns that JESUS is the answer to his questions & doubt. JESUS is GOD'S TRUTH on earth.

1. The Risen Jesus meets Thomas in his doubts. (That's helpful – for we have questions doubts too!).

*“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!”*

= IS there a living God who knows the pain of life ... yet is Triumphant?

= Is there a living God who can show us the way, the truth, the life?

(i) Jesus meets Thomas, you & I in that question, showing him His wounds, saying: *“Stop doubting & believe.”*

JESUS IS TRIUMPHANT TRUTH.

But he remains in the company of the believers. Thomas is with them 1 week later when Jesus manifests Himself again - this time specifically inviting Thomas to touch the marks of His wounds ... *STOP DOUBTING & BELIEVE!*

2. Stop doubting & believe.

- that's HOW we meet Jesus – through the channel of faith.

V. 31 – these things are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, and that by believing YOU may have LIFE in His name.

3. Then for the 3<sup>rd</sup> time in this chapter, after a response of faith to the gospel ministry received, JESUS COMMISSIONS:

Thomas professes: My Lord & My God

Jesus draws his attention to those YET TO BELIEVE: *Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”*

(i) Thomas pursued those “blessed ones”. History tells us he went to India as a missionary:

These words are written of him in the early church documents:

***“It was to a land of dark people he was sent, to clothe them by Baptism in white robes. His grateful dawn dispelled India's painful darkness. It was his mission to espouse India to the One-Begotten. Thus Edessa – the city where he is buried - became the blessed city by possessing the greatest pearl India could yield. - Hymns of St. Ephraem***

## V. CONCLUSION

The Risen Jesus meets us in MINISTRY RECEIVED & MISSION GIVEN

ALL AUTHORITY in heaven & earth is His:

- He is the CHANGELESS ONE – to minister to you in your grief
- He is God's forgiveness – to break into your fear & self-protection
- He is God's Triumphant Truth – to lead the Way

SO GO ... to His Brothers / the Estranged / those yet to believe ...

Go ... make disciples – baptizing others into the name of this Son, His Father, the Spirit  
... teaching them to obey everything He has commanded us.

And surely HE IS WITH US always – to the very end of the age!

He lives / He lives!