

Weekly Scripture and Sermon Study: History & Context Guide  
John 20:19-23

History, Culture, & Context

In this section of the Book of John, the resurrected Jesus goes to visit the disciples after He appeared to Mary Magdalene at the site of His tomb.

The disciples were gathered in a house with the doors locked, out of fear of punishment by the Jewish leaders. Suddenly, Jesus came to them and said, "Peace be with you", and then showed them His hands and side from the crucifixion. They were thrilled to see the risen Lord! According to the



Cultural Backgrounds Study Bible, "As God breathed into humanity the breath of life (Genesis 2:7), so Jesus here imparts the Spirit. In the Old Testament, God alone could bestow the Holy Spirit, i.e., God's Spirit. Jewish sources, including the Old Testament, often associate the Spirit with prophetic empowerment (relevant for v. 21)."

In verse 21, Jesus again says "Peace be with you!" and then says to the disciples, "As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." After He said this, Jesus breathed on the disciples and commended that they receive the Holy Spirit. Jesus then tells the disciples that if they forgive anyone else's sins, they would be forgiven. If they do not forgive anyone's sins, then they would not be forgiven. The Book of John Shepherd's Notes tells us, "At first glance this is a remarkable statement that seems out of step with the role and authority of the disciples. It was not the disciples who could forgive sins but Jesus. The literal reading from the Greek text is more clear, stating, 'Those whose sins you forgive have *already* been forgiven; those whose sins you do not forgive have not been forgiven.'"

Questions to Consider

1. What can we learn from Jesus' encounter with the disciples? How does this impact apply to us today?
2. What does verse 23 teach us about God's forgiveness for sins?
3. Why do you think Jesus repeated the greeting "Peace be with you!" twice during His encounter with the disciples?
4. If you were there with the disciples, how do you think you would have reacted when Jesus appeared?