

Art Katz:

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I have to say that the most positive benefit of my Seminary experience was the discipline of being required to remain within a text. It made me realize that up until that time, I had conducted myself with a certain kind of charismatic and prophetic liberty, finding a scripture here and there to make my point, but something of a very remarkable kind happens when you confine yourself within a text, and don't go unnecessarily outside of it to make your point, and let the Lord speak to us about that text. It's really amazing the riches that are to be found in a few verses. There is an episode at the conclusion of the Gospel of John (John 20:19-31) in which Jesus reveals Himself in His resurrected, but not yet ascended form, to the disciples who are yet full of fear, and have not yet sorted out the meaning of the death of the Lord. It is clear that the full implication of His resurrection had not yet struck them.

In the same breath, I would say, I don't think it's yet struck us in that there's no limit to the meaning and implication of the resurrection of Jesus. We've been knocking about on four cylinders rather than all eight for the lack of a deeper appropriation of the meaning of the resurrection of Jesus. So, maybe the Lord will open something to us here as we read:

Then the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews, came Jesus and stood in the midst, and saith unto them, "Peace be unto you." And when He had so said, He showed unto them His hands and His side. Then were the disciples glad, when they saw the Lord. Then said Jesus to them again, "Peace be unto you; as My Father hath sent Me, even so send I you." And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and saith unto them, "Receive ye the Holy Ghost: Whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whosoever sins ye retain, they are retained." But Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came. The other disciples therefore said unto him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said unto them, "Except I shall see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into His side, I will not believe." And after eight days again His disciples were within, and Thomas with them: then came Jesus, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, "Peace be unto you." Then saith He to Thomas, "Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into My side; and be not faithless, but believing." And Thomas answered and said unto Him, "My Lord and my God." Jesus saith unto him, "Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed."

Well, I'm just inviting you to leap in, and to intensively examine this text. And just to give you a little teaser, in verse 26: "And after eight days again his disciples were within, and Thomas with them: then came Jesus, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, 'Peace be unto you.'"

So just to raise a question, why do you think it is that eight days later—eight is a resurrection number—when Jesus is making a second appearance, having already revealed Himself in His resurrection body to His disciples, that the doors would still be shut? How do you account for a fear, seeing that the Lord has already appeared in His resurrection body, which is the testimony of the triumph of the Cross that "all authority has been given unto Him in heaven and in earth," and yet eight days later, they still need an affirmation or strengthening of their faith?

Well what do you think the phrase, "Peace be unto you" means? Do you think that that's just a polite rhetorical flourish? Or is Jesus speaking something to terrified disciples that we all need to understand? We also are going to experience terror and fright, and Last Days' extremity and persecution of a kindred kind. So, everything that we will be examining in these verses is not just merely historical. How did the disciples respond, and what were the issues that they faced? What's the application for us in the issues that we will face? And how secure of a grasp do we have of the things pertaining to the resurrection that will constitute our peace and our assurance?

Let's go back over this. Every time Jesus appears to them the first thing He says is "Peace be unto you." This is more than just a conventional Jewish greeting. We know that there is not a syllable in this text or any of the Scriptures that is in any way happenstance. There's nothing here that's conventional. Every single syllable is charged with enormous divine content and meaning, including what seems to be a gracious greeting—"Peace be unto you."

Why does Jesus repeat it twice? And why are they afraid? And why are they behind closed doors? And to what degree are we behind closed doors, in a spiritual sense; that is, not fully coming into the assurance and

confidence we ought to have? I always appreciate great questions more than I do correct answers. This is called theological reflection, which is to say, the raising of good questions over a text. And if we can raise the right questions, the answers will come. But this exercise and discipline of getting into a text—burrowing into it and getting from it its meaning and its present and future application—is really the choice work of godly students, and we will be enlarged thereby.

That word “shalom,” just like every other Hebrew word, is infinitely rich. After all, this is actually the first resurrection word that Jesus is speaking to His disciples. We have all been guilty of making the word “shalom” a kind of anemic casual expression—like we say “bless you brother.” Part of our function, those of us who are jealous for apostolic and prophetic foundations, is to restore the integrity of language itself. So it’s a good thing to ask what that word really means, and why did Jesus choose to employ it? And maybe we’ll not understand that until we spend a few minutes examining why it is that they are afraid? Why are they behind closed doors? If we don’t understand their terror and their fear, a lot of this will be lost to us. Though doubting Thomas was the first to articulate, “I will not believe,” to what degree and depth did the others believe, even in the seeing of the resurrected Christ, because there is another text that says, “They did not yet believe unto joy.” The fact that they were yet behind closed doors, eight days later, seems to suggest that their belief was not all what it should be. If they had a supreme confidence in the resurrected Lord, why are they yet cowering in fear? Fear is always the antithesis of faith.

Now when Jesus is saying, “Peace be unto you,” is He making a suggestion, or is He declaring an event? He’s not encouraging you to consider something in your mind; He is establishing your peace at His word. That’s what we need to recognize, because the day will come when we will need to establish things by our word, so that the whole faith and power of the word and the proclamation of the word needs to be ours. So, this is not just a little casual greeting; this is an event. This speaking is itself an event, because Jesus appreciates and understands the magnitude of their fear.

I want to read to you what I’ve written here from my paper about that fear. It is appropriate that we find the disciples behind locked doors of fear, not yet surmising the meaning of the empty tomb. That they were assembled for fear of the Jews in verse 19 is perhaps a deeper intimation beyond the levels of human consciousness of the ultimate earthly power expressed through religious and secular means that have just devastatingly brought to death their Master and their Lord.

Now I know that when we read something, we have to fight for the meaning of it. What brought Jesus to death was the operation of the powers of darkness, expressed through the ultimate religious form of Judaism at that time, in concert with the ultimate political form of Roman rule. I don’t think we appreciate this enough. Jesus was the victim of the powers of darkness in their ultimate configuration. These disciples witnessed this, His being apprehended, His suffering, and His death. They saw the fury of hell poured out on their Teacher, coming through the Jewish community principally. I hope I’m not encouraging anybody to anti-Semitism.

There is something about that configuration of things in Jewish religious mentality that was expressed by the High Priest—that it was necessary for one man to die for the nation, “lest we lose our place.” We need to get a sense of this—what the crucifixion and death of Jesus registered upon their souls—what they witnessed; it was terrifying. All of them had said, “though all the world deny You; yet, will we deny You never!” And when the night of terror came, when Jesus was apprehended, they all fled, and they all betrayed Him—and some, like Peter, shamefully. So, if we’re going to appreciate the statement, “Peace be unto you,” and the confidence that Jesus is wanting to impart to us in the demonstration of Himself as resurrected, we need to begin with a clearer sense of what their fear is. On the eighth day, they’re still behind closed doors.

Now what is the anatomy of that fear? It’s the enemy poured out, baring his fangs. It’s seeing how ruthless and how devastating he can be as he ventilated all that is intrinsic to his darkness upon Jesus, and left Him shredded and marred more than any man. None of us can imagine what Jesus looked like in His death. The only way that we can begin to sense it, is the two on the road to Emmaus, who were so disconsolate, so dejected, so broken, because they had seen Him hang in that pitiful condition, that every last hope they had was shredded.

How many of us have ever seen behind the facade of politeness and civility, and the moral and ethical value that the Jewish community endorses? Have we seen the antagonism against God that has opportunity there, and just how monumental a threat and how formidable a presence the Jewish thing is? They were behind closed doors for fear of the Jews.

One of my own experiences was speaking at Vassar College in upstate New York. I was spending the day there, and as I passed one of the Jewish students, this young fellow looked up at me and said, “You’ll get yours tonight!” I thought—what does that mean? Well, it wasn’t long before I found out! As I was preaching that night on Abraham and circumcision, the doors burst open and in came about a dozen bearded, orthodox Hasidim with their fedora hats. I’ll tell you that the mafia would look like boy scouts next to the terror that came into that room when those guys burst in. They placed themselves strategically around the room, standing the whole time, and I never watched a congregation of Christians go so berserk as I saw them that night. It was like lifting the lid off a garbage can, and you can’t imagine what came out: fear, anger,

resentment. But before that, if I had said, “How many of you here love the Jewish people?”—every hand would have gone up!

When the Jewish people came in, antagonistic to God and truth, everything changed; we were taken by surprise. And what we reveal, when we’re taken by surprise, is what we in fact are. And one of these guys stood about eight feet from me, and peered at me with burning eyes, like I was Hitler himself, and they began to take over. “How dare I come with a King James Bible. You don’t even know Hebrew...dut, dut, dut, dut...” It was just an evening never to be forgotten. In terms of stark terror, that night exceeded the occasion at a church in Los Angeles, when the doors burst open again, and a band of Jewish radicals, the JDL, came walking down each isle toward me. The guy that was walking down the center isle had a knit cap in his hand and something under it which I thought surely was a vial of acid to be thrown in my face. I was preaching on Acts 16 and “Apostolic Encounter”—and it was happening! Everyone stopped breathing. What saved the day was a brother that I had recently baptized, a new convert, a Hollywood writer, too young to know better—he’s about 6’4” or 6’5”—got out of his seat and he grabbed this guy by the scruff of the neck and by the seat of his pants and just hoisted him right out of there. And I didn’t object!!

These are little, pre-Last Days’ foreshadowing of the kinds of abrupt confrontations that are going to take place, particularly in God’s Last Days’ dealings with the Jewish people, who, in their insecurity, are already so hyper-sensitive and defensive of their Jewishness. Anything mediated toward them, however well-meaning, will be misunderstood and be misconstrued by them as a threat. We need to know that. It’s not going to be apparent to them that we have hearts full of love, and desire their redemptive recognition of the Lord. To them, we represent a threat that is contrary to the thing they want most to preserve, namely, their sense of Jewishness.

This is not your ordinary resistance to the Gospel. There’s something here of an additional kind, that is at the heart of the powers of darkness of this present world, who have employed my Jewish kinsmen throughout their whole apostasy, to be the agents, even unwittingly, of these powers, to bring about schemes and devices, contrary to God’s intention, like Marxism, etc.

Have you noticed that the Lord commands us to begin at Jerusalem—where He was crucified, where the prophets were stoned; then you can go to Samaria and the uttermost corners of the earth. Don’t begin where it’s easiest; begin where it’s hardest—right from the beginning, head-on, meet the issue. Don’t delay, face it—in the authority that is His by virtue of His obedience to the Father unto death and resurrection.

“All authority is given unto Me.” Now that’s what He says; but He’s not visibly present, can you still believe that? And face the outraged Jewish community that has just crucified Him—and will crucify others who continue in the same truth that He exemplified.

I think that what we are missing is a sense of the scandal of the Gospel—the terrible offense of the Gospel, as it is most revealed, when it comes into confrontation with everything that men celebrate as wisdom, as righteousness, as religion, as morality, as ethics, as culture—which we Jews have developed and propounded to the farthestmost nation. The point of greatest antagonism and conflict is where the foolishness and the scandal of the Gospel meet the wisdom of the world head-on. And that’s represented by the Jewish community that has just crucified that wisdom. And now these disciples, who were the observers of that terror, the ferocity of it—the unveiled bestiality—are now going to have to go into the same place and continue the work that He began.

“As the Father hath sent Me, so send I you.” I can just hear them saying, “Great! You pick up where I left off; you continue in the thing which eventuated in My crucifixion!” Not one of the disciples survived, with the exception of John, to die a natural death. Every single one of them suffered a violent death. And if this is the commencement of the Gospel dispensation, the beginning of it, the sending by the resurrected One, what will be its conclusion in the Last Days? And don’t we again need, therefore, to fully appropriate, the assurance and the peace that Jesus gave? Maybe part of the reason we don’t have this assurance is because our gospel is not the full Gospel. It’s not the Gospel of the Kingdom. It does not threaten the status quo. When the Gospel becomes this Gospel again, radically upturning everything to which a person has given himself, then we’re going to know the reaction of violence against us. Let me read my statement:

“It is appropriate, then, to find the disciples behind locked doors in fear, not yet surmising the meaning of the empty tomb. That they were assembled “for fear of the Jews” is perhaps a deeper intimation beyond the levels of human consciousness of the ultimate earthly power expressed through religious and secular means that had just devastatingly brought to death their master and their Lord. All that stands for authority and power of the present age, politically and religiously, had triumphed. Its visibility and impressiveness continues. It is indeed something to be feared, for the powers of hell are resident in it. And the Church that fails still to see this, cannot itself, appropriate, in full, the resurrection mandate or power, and must, as time itself, I think, has corroborated, turn Easter into a chocolate bunnies Spring event.”

Let me go over that last statement. If we don’t understand the reason for their fear, we’ll not be able to appropriate the reason for their confidence and their peace. And we will turn the resurrection event into a kind of cultural celebration—which it has already become. The Resurrection has only become a doctrine to which we subscribe as being correct. The world has equally denigrated it, and made of it only a kind of Easter

Sunday, chocolate bunny, egg-rolling thing. That's why we need to go back to the first. We need to go back to the beginning and dig out this event here that's being described.

And Jesus breathed the Spirit upon them. "Receive ye the Holy Ghost." What would you rather receive? The continuing visible and physical presence of the Lord, or the Spirit who was to be given? Will that breathing of the Spirit upon us be sufficient to establish us in the shalom of God? Shalom is not a Shabbat Night greeting, but shalom in the moment when the doors burst open and the Hasidim come in. That's when you test whether you're in the shalom of God. Anybody can have it when the candles are burning at the Shabbat meal, and you are having a nice evening. But the issue of our peace is in the midst of the threat, in the midst of terror. Will we then be at peace because the Lord has spoken and He has breathed His Spirit into us? This is the way the whole Gospel dispensation begins, and this is the way, therefore, it is going to end. That's why we need to get this beginning into our own spirits, even to the place where it becomes for us a place of true beginning, so that wherever we are spiritually behind closed doors, fearful, threatened, intimidated, subscribing to correct doctrines about resurrection and even speaking the word "shalom"—yet failing for the reality of it. We need to come through into something on the basis of this text:

These things are written that you might believe... that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you might have life through His name.

What is implied in life? Life is what you exhibit when the Hasidim are eight feet from your face, and calling you every name in the book, and your mind goes blank, and you can't think of a clever thing to say to rebuke them. What comes forth then has got to be the life of the Lord. It's the eternal issue of the salvation of those who have come to harass, to mock and to destroy. Nevertheless, they're coming face to face with the peace of the resurrected Christ in us, and what He will say and exhibit in the power of that life, may have a depth of penetration that only eternity will reveal.

"But that you might have life by believing in His name. Let me just take a moment's breath right here. Do you realize that every single thing that we have been considering so far stands perilously in danger of becoming religion? His name can become a formula. Resurrection can become a mindless doctrine to which we give assent. "Shalom" could become a mere greeting in the foyer. Everything is charged here with such deep meaning as end-time provision for us, but if we miss it by ever so little, it will become transmuted into religion. We have got to contend for the faith "once and for all given to the saints." And that's what we are presently doing. We need to realize that the world, the flesh, and the devil have a remarkable facility to transmute the holy things of God and turn them into religious nonsense. So we have got to fight, and go back in, and get the original meaning and make it our own; or we will collapse when the doors burst open and the unexpected thing comes, for which we are not fitted. We have not believed in the name of God, and have not appropriated the things that have been made available through His resurrection.

Nothing is more viciously opposed to the faith than religion, and that is what terrified the disciples. It's one of the greatest ironies and paradoxes: that which purports to be about God is most opposed to God—and opposed violently and ruthlessly. You need to understand that, and to recognize what religion is. Whether it comes from Jews, or whomsoever, all the intrusive elements that made up the Judaism that crucified Christ are also to be found in all normative and conventional religious bodies today. And that though we are presently in a quiescent mood, where they are not expressing an antagonism to the apostolic faith, it will not long remain that way. When the faith that is true begins to confront them, you can expect to see the same hostility again revealed.

Why is religion so antagonistic to God, to the point of crucifying Him with devastating brutality? The God Whom it presumes to celebrate? Unless you understand this, the whole Last Days will be a mystery to you, and you'll be unfitted, not only to serve in the Last Days, but to stand. If we had time and ability to begin to describe the horrendous assault on the sons and daughters of God through history, the blood would rise to the ceilings. The roll-call of martyrs—it's not just people being put to death, but put to death with spite, with maliciousness, and with delight in seeing them suffer. The spirit of religion was demonstrated to these disciples, when they saw it visited upon Jesus. We need to understand their fear. So let's look into this text: "As My Father hath sent Me, even so send I you." Why didn't He just say, "I'm sending you"? Why does He even have to refer to "as My Father has sent Me"? What purpose does that word serve?

So the sending is not a kind of technical ministerial thing, but something that comes out of relationship. And if the relationship is not there, you're not being sent as He was sent. Nor will you have a comparable result. So the sending comes out of a relationship with the Father, with a knowledge of God, or that sending is vain. And if that is true, then what can we say about the preponderance of religious things that the Church has been doing historically since that time and even today? How much of our religious activity is out of a sending derived from relationship with the Father? And how many of us would not presume to go, until that relationship is sure? And don't think that by these few questions, we are exhausting what is implied by: "As My Father hath sent Me, so send I you." It's in the same character; it's in keeping within the same purpose. It will be in the same power. It comes out of the same relationship. The disciples were going to be in a continuum with what Jesus had expressed up till then, which was no small thing to men who are terrified and sitting behind locked doors. And the whole future and destiny of the Gospel endeavor rests on their ability to do it—or

there's no continuation and no future.

God is taking some really crude material, and charging them with the same commission that He Himself had. Talk about the faith of God! Has anything changed since that time? Has the Lord revised His strategy? Is there any work that could be considered God's work today that is significant that can be preformed outside this context?

We need to take a moment to talk about how ministerially-minded we are, particularly as westerners and as Americans. There is very little thought about relationship, but everything about "having a ministry" and what are you "doing" and what are you performing? It's not the emphasis of the Lord at all. We need to be restored to something, namely, that relationship precedes service; and relationship of a very particular kind, of the kind that the Son had with the Father. We should call a halt to all present Church activity for a considerable time till that relationship be established. And in fact, what has most threatened that kind of relationship is the activity itself, whereby the activity probably stands as a substitute for the relationship because it's tougher to be than to do. God's doing always comes out of being. "Be not afraid." "Peace be unto you." The emphasis is on being.

Who can figure out why verse 23 is included in this text at all? "Whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whosoever sins ye retain, they are retained." How did that get in there? What has that got to do with what we are talking about? Or does it seem to be like a detour? Why would sin come into the discussion now? That these to whom He is speaking and breathing His Spirit would have an authority to remit or to retain sins. Whose sin do you think is being referred to here? Is it the unbelieving world? Is it the hostile Jews of whom they're afraid? In my opinion, it has more to do with their own sins than it has to do with sins outside of them. And why would that be expressed now? Right after: "As My Father hath sent Me, so send I you." Can you have a relationship with the Father that would qualify for a sending, and have inadequate relationship with your brothers? No way! So, if they are going to take this formula for sending seriously—of a relationship with the Father—what is the implication of the relationship with themselves, who are jealous, divisive, and competitive? The key to the Father's sending implies a relationship with the brothers. Sin is going to surface amongst the brothers, and will have to be dealt with.

The first apostolic sending is clearly an expression of a fellowship that had come to a place beyond its sins against itself. They had come to a place of authentic relationship, and then the Lord said, "Separate unto Me...." (Acts 13):

When they were found ministering unto the Lord together, the Holy Ghost said, "Separate unto Me, Barnabas and Saul, for the work whereunto I have called them."

When the Lord saw that the truth of their relationship was reflected in the truth of their worship, then the sending was made possible. Why is this thing about sin preceded by: "Receive ye the Holy Ghost"? Your answer to that, or your inability to answer that, is the statement of your own inadequate relationship in a fellowship. Your lack of the knowledge of church as community will be reflected right now in your inability to understand the connection between "Receive ye the Holy Ghost," and "those whose sins you remit are remitted and those you retain are retained." Is this Holy Ghost a power for serving, do you think? Or is it a power for something else? There's nothing more grueling and more demanding and more exhausting than relationships—true relationship in the body of Christ. That's the way I would express it. And there's no way that you're going to perform that out of your own well-meaning intention and "nice-guyism" and strength. You'll be exhausted in the first week. We need a power just to be to each other what we must before we can be it in the world.

That's the conjunction that I see between Jesus breathing His Spirit upon them and then saying, "Now, remit sins." Anyone who has ever had to deal with sin in the fellowship, knows how exhausting and draining those questions are. And the reason we don't know them is that we are not in that kind of context. Our Sunday Christianity does not provide an occasion for dealing with sin, with judging, with retaining or remanding. We're passive, we're sitting in pews, we're listening to a Biblical sermon, we're singing choruses, we're taking the collection, and we leave. That's why there's no apostolic sending! And the Lord is wanting to draw our attention to the foundation.

We've been so ministerially-minded, wanting to do it in our cheap, immature condition. But the Lord wants us to know that before we go anywhere, before we think to do anything for Him, if our sending is going to be like His sending, and be as fruitful as His was, we need first to attend to this. And we will not be able to do it except by the power that He will give us." It's interesting that the denominations that have most refused the necessity of this power of the Spirit are also those whose religious formulas are the most predictable, where there's no requirement made on the passive congregation at all. Everything is off the elevated platform from men who have been credentialed, and who perform and exercise all the needful things.

It has not always been that way, and we need to come back to the things as they were in the beginning. How was it originally? Jesus as crucified, now resurrected, and making His first presentation of Himself to His own terrified and fearful disciples, who have yet a mandate and a calling for which their three-year walk with the Lord is not yet sufficient preparation. Even this breathing of the Holy Spirit is not the full and final provision; there's still a Pentecost ahead, of which this is the intimation. In fact, I would think that this breathing of the

Spirit is more for us than it was for them; namely, to show us the conjunction between the power necessary for true relationship that precedes sending than what they, in fact, actually received. If they received all that they needed in that breathing, then Pentecost would not have been necessary for them. So the Lord just gave an intimation—a faith installment—to show the order.

There's a divine logic, set one upon the other, if we could but see the unfolding of it—of why these verses are inserted as they are, and in that order. We need to have our minds restored—our mindset of what our approach to the scripture is. We have been much too casual about the Word of God, much too facile, and much too quick. We have not brooded over the text, over the verses. What does this mean? Why is He saying that? Of all the things that could be said, why does He say that? Why are they in that situation behind locked doors? Why does He have to come again? Why this reference to sin? Why the breathing? Let this be a first day's beginning in how we are to rightly examine the Scriptures as serious students of the Word, who will not allow a single syllable to slip. And I think the Bible is going to become another kind of book for us.

How explicitly does sin affect relationship adversely? What does "loving the brother" have to do with sin, as if the failure to love a brother is the statement of sin? Who can explain that? God's love is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit; and what grieves and makes the Spirit to recoil—the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Holiness—but sin. So sin requiring the Spirit to recoil takes with Him the love that He would otherwise shed abroad in the heart, and so one of the things that we see in a loveless saint toward the brethren is really the statement of his sin. So that's an answer to my question: how does sin affect relationship?

The Lord is laying the foundations for the Church in a very few words. He's showing that there's no relationship with the Father except we are also equally and rightly related—the horizontal bar of the Cross with the vertical. And there will be no horizontal relationships except it be in truth and in righteousness, which sin will adversely affect. And if you are going to face the issue of sin, judgment and discipline, and chastening of brothers, of judging sin, of assessing it, you're going to need God's power. All of this is implied in being sent as He has been sent.

How can this, in fact, be actually fulfilled in the Last Days except that we again be back into a context of relationship where we would know each other so well, and be in an atmosphere of conducive love and righteousness that we can address the issues of sin and character that there might be a sending? Doesn't this require not just an adjustment of our minds, but the adjustment of our whole church structure? If indeed there's going to be a sending "as I send you." And if there is no such sending, what is the consequence for the nations? What ministry in fact, are they receiving? What eternal things are really being propounded and affected? Because those whom God sends turn the world upside down. Those whom He sends bear His word, and to them He gives the Spirit without measure.

So we need to have a revival of apostolic desires, willing for the sacrifice that will make it again a possibility and a reality. This is going to cost something to forsake conventional church structures in which we have been enabled to live safely without being "found out" because we're not in the intensity of relationship by which it would be. And it's not required of us so long as we're physically present for services. See what I mean? If we're going to be earnest about this, there's going to be a cost. But until it comes, what can we hope for in the Last Days? We are going to face intimidation through the factors that are coming in these Last Days that will be visible and external.

Faith is confidence resting on that which is invisible in the face of something threatening and visible. And Jesus, standing in the midst of them in that situation said: "Peace be unto you." Will your being receive and reflect the creative word of God, sufficient to nullify fear and being incapacitated, when you see the things that are visible? That's how extraordinarily important that statement of Jesus was to them when He stood in the midst of them. And everything is not only for them but for us also, upon whom the ends of the age have come. In a word, can we live by the word of God? That no matter what we see, no matter what faces us, the Lord has said, "Peace be with you."

What is "shalom"? Is it a kind of psychological smooth thing where something is glossed over and a little waving of a little magical wand that you feel better? Is peace so shallow a thing with God? Peace means the very antithesis for which the world is dying. It's not a superficial brushing over, but something deep coming into a man in the vital places where he lives, where fear is—the existential place.

No matter how formidable we ourselves are, or whatever our experience or strength, in the depths of us there's a fluttery, weak, piece of humanity; and that's where God speaks this word. Here's what I wrote: Jesus came and stood in front of them in the way that we've read. We are to see no man, not to be intimidated by the visible and external factors, but to see Jesus only—to see Him, in the authority conferred by the word that actually creates our peace, no matter how formidable and challenging our circumstances; to have a faith that receives from Him, the creative word that establishes our peace. The Last Days are charged with great uncertainty. We don't know what form it will take, how it will express itself, what things will break upon us with suddenness; but in view of all that, God has spoken: "Peace be unto you.... My peace I give unto you."

Let's look at John 16:33. Maybe we'll catch some of that: "These things I have spoken unto you, that in Me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world."

So, everything rests on the spoken word. And if we cannot receive the value of the spoken word that constitutes for us an event, how shall we ourselves speak a word that will constitute for others an event?

“For as your faith is, so be it unto you.” And any one here who has heard my Ezekiel 37 message knows that everything in the last analysis is predicated on the ability of a Last Days’ Church to speak a word to Israel, then in its grave, that will raise it from its death. An ultimate prophetic word that comes, not just as suggestion, but as event: “Come forth!” And our ability to speak it is the reflection of our ability first to receive it. Because if we cannot believe that word from God for us, how shall we believe that word for others through us?

So, there needs to be an elevation or escalation of our whole appreciation of the word of God—not for instruction, however precious that is, or even inspiration, but as event. Before you heard, you were something else, now that you’ve heard, you can’t go back anymore, for the word itself has become the creative event.

And that’s the first activity of the resurrected Christ to His disciples. And it has got to be for us again at the last, because we’re going to face things that will terrify; but, may that word resound in our hearing—echo in our spirits. The Lord has said: “Peace be unto you.” I’m not going to be deflected by what I’m seeing. I don’t care for the uncertainty of the things I can’t know for the future. I don’t care how terrifying the present confrontation is. The Lord has said, “Peace!” And therefore in the “shalom” of God, I will now believe in everything that His name confers as life and answer that situation, because if we act in fear, we are no longer in faith, and what issues from us, therefore, is valueless. We just need to be reminded that the economy of God, the way of God, is so contrary to the flesh.

God is predicating everything on the word he speaks. We’re not accustomed to giving credence to words to that degree. If you notice the text when he showed them His wounds, it says: “Then were the disciples glad when they saw the Lord” (John 20:20). It doesn’t say they were glad when they heard the Lord; they were glad when they saw the Lord. They were more comforted by a physical and visible reassurance than the word that was spoken.

And that’s how the world attenuates us. We’re comforted by the things we can touch, feel, see and secure because I got this bank account or this real estate. But, to predicate everything upon a word! See how radical a thing is required of us? A real revolution, and our whole perception of what reality is needs to be altered.

This is reality, the Word of God: “Heaven and earth will pass away but My word will endure forever.”

God has spoken but we have cast the word away. We’ve not taken it as a creative word—maybe a suggestion—and isn’t that the way we speak also? We speak by suggestion, and not by conviction. We don’t expect others to receive our word as the absolute. It’s tentative; it’s a plain-old kind of a suggestion, and therefore we project upon God the same low value that we ascribe to our own speaking and to that of others. In fact, I have said many times, what you do with this message, having spoken to a congregation, is critical, not only for your future, but for your eternal future—whether you will see it and receive it as a message, or as “the word of God as event.” How do you choose to hear it? Do you want to receive it as a suggestion, or will you receive it as commandment—and as a creative word? And I think that, of course, it’s obvious, people don’t want to be required of. When God speaks, something’s required, or He’s not speaking. God does not speak for effect.

So, we’d much rather have the word as suggestion, the word as homily, the word as devotion, the word as inspiration—not the word as event that requires. This event requires us not to be afraid. So, the peace that is now being creatively expressed through the word has first been obtained through suffering at the Cross. The Lord is not conferring some light amenity. He’s conferring a substantial event that was won and obtained by His own suffering and death on the Cross. Therefore, He alone is authorized to speak it: “My peace—it’s not anybody’s—it’s My peace that I have so painfully obtained through suffering. Now I confer it to you.” We avoid situations where the peace of God would be required. That is to say, we want to regulate our life where we can handle it and conduct it on the basis of our own ability and need, not the creative word of God. We’re unwilling to pull out the stops, and put ourselves in a place of extremity that requires God’s peace.

Now, how does doubting Thomas come into all this? Is it just a historical accident that he was not there when Jesus appeared to the disciples? Or was God staging something, an event through the unbelieving disciple to communicate something? Let’s look at that. Verse 24: “But Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came.” Well, what a remarkable “coincidence”! The other disciples therefore said to him, “We have seen the Lord.” Notice, not that “we have also heard from the Lord.” But he said into them, “Except I shall see....” Notice, everything is predicated on seeing, seeing, seeing, seeing. We want that visible assurance. “Except I shall see in His hands, the print of the nails and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into His side, I will not believe.” Well, what do you think of a statement of that kind? This is a man who was going to mark himself with that statement as doubting Thomas throughout history. “I will not, except I shall see.”

Why do you think it is that though they told him that they had seen the Lord, he did not yet believe them? We need to burrow in to get a portrait of Thomas because he’s a quintessential disciple. There’s a Thomas in all of us, and, “I will not, except I shall see,” and refusing to believe his brethren. What kind of portrait is being given here? Is this a man in relationship in the body? To me, he is a self-willed individualist, who doesn’t

trust the community. He's got to establish it himself, or it's not valid. No wonder they needed the power of the Spirit in dealing with Thomas and in reckoning over the issue of sin, because "that which is not of faith is sin." So, though we don't know what Thomas's sins were, it's evident that they existed, or he would not be unbelieving; and probably the sin was a self-willed individualism of a guy who does his own thing and has all his confidence in himself—and will not receive from his brethren. I will not believe.

Now, not only does Jesus allow Thomas to put his fingers in His wounds, but He even speaks something in that power. Do you see that in the text? Not only does He not reprimand him, but He has a personal creative word for Thomas himself. Maybe the depth of his disappointment was greater than all the rest; maybe it sank in more deeply. His picture of Jesus was utterly spoiled at the Cross—utterly rank, gangrenous. If you have seen Gruenwald's masterpiece of a painting of Jesus on the Cross, you know what Thomas must have seen—no hope and utterly devoid of life. And therefore, because of a greater apprehension of the death, the Lord is graciously giving him a greater revelation of the life. And it is precisely here that we are lacking in resurrection faith, because we are lacking in the appropriation of death. We have been superficial about the Cross, and have therefore condemned ourselves to a superficiality about the resurrection. We ourselves need to go back to the place of beginning and recognize the magnitude of that death; and our death, if we are going to appropriate the life. So, these are great conjunctions, great events.

In verse 29, Jesus said: "Because thou hast seen Me, thou hast believed. Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed." Those who believe because the Lord confers a faith are blessed. They are blessed to believe something that, except He confers it, they cannot believe it. Resurrection is calculated to be the ultimate offense to human intellect. And if you believe it, it's only because He has given you the faith to believe it. It puts the entire premium on God. In a word, God has set up a situation that except He reveals it, no man can obtain it.

That means that there are unnumbered tens of thousands of "Christians" sitting in churches who are subscribing to the doctrine of resurrection as being true, who are not blessed. They have never really believed an ultimately impossible thing, because it has not been given them by God. The reason is that they're satisfied with shallow credal acceptance, and don't want the blessing of believing for the resurrection life, lest they be required to exhibit themselves! Are you getting the picture of what religion is? Until only recently, the Lord broke upon my heart that you can just as easily become deceived, sitting in an orthodox Christian church, whose tenets and doctrines are valid, as you can by being a Mormon or Jehovah's Witness, or any other sect. You can be deceived, even subscribing to the truth, because you're not holding the truth in righteousness by just being satisfied with the superficial credal statement of it and about it.

The final contest between what is apostate and what is apostolic will be between those who hold the resurrection as doctrine, as against those who eminently walk in the power of it. That's the final picture of the final clash of the persecutors and the persecuted. Not the world and the Church, but those who purport to be church, because they subscribe to the orthodox views of it, but refuse to walk in the power of it, as against those who do.

There is nothing more offensive still than the exhibition of the reality of resurrection life. They are the blessed ones, and wherever the blessed are, there will be those who want to quench their light. And we need to ask ourselves, "Lord, have I been dangerously flirting with just mere acceptance of the resurrection as doctrine without any serious intent to live in the power of that life," because he who is blessed, blesses others, and except that we bless others in the power of the resurrection, we bring no blessing. We have to do for the doubting Thomases of our generation what Jesus did for him—by speaking a word in resurrection power.

"Be not faithless but be believing." Be—it's more than a head trip.

I wonder if there is such a thing as apostolic faith that is not the result of something creatively imparted in resurrection power by the Risen Lord, Himself? False apostles are those who traffic in the language of apostolicity, but who have never had this blessing conferred. We are touching something very significant here. How can there be apostolic works except out of an apostolic faith that is given, even by Him Who sends?

"As My Father sent Me, so send I you." By speaking this word into you as the foundation of your faith—not your mental deduction of a logical summing up of the truths of the faith—but an actual impartation in resurrection power, you will not be afraid; and therefore you'll be a blessing.

What would you say is offensive about what we are now saying? Especially to charismatic and evangelical Christians, of what we are now saying about what constitutes true blessedness? If you can see, you are getting to the heart of the matter. What is that offense? Remember when God sent Moses out of the burning bush? Could there have been a more remarkable man, who had the best of both worlds? Hebrew of the Hebrews, I mean, he had a lineage that was so distinguished, and also a Prince of Egypt. He had the advantage of the greatest erudition and learning available in his generation. But when God sent him—not when he sent himself and only slew an Egyptian, burying him in the sand—when God sent him, Moses said: "Who am I that I should go for You?"

"No man can come to me except the Father draw him." Many turned away from Him in that day and followed Him no longer because everything that had to do with man and what man could perform, or man's ability, or man's convictions, or man's principles, or man's religion, was completely removed.

“...except the Father draw you.” We need to recognize this. It’s the heart of all offense and, more than we realize, it may even affect us if there’s anything lurking, yet lingering, that wants to express itself as our accomplishment for God. I’m not talking about carnality. I’m talking about spirituality—wanting to do significant things for God—but out of ourselves. Then this cuts us off at the pass, and maybe it’s for this reason that this episode is set in.

Are we on that ground? This is apostolic ground. It is almost worth first being a doubting Thomas before coming onto that ground. It’s worth finding yourself in opposition to God, though you are not aware of it, until He’ll bring us through to this place of where the issue of blessedness really lies.

Paul said that, “except you pray for me that I might have grace for utterance, how shall I speak these things that I ought?” It’s got to be given and only on that basis can we go and be sent ones. Fearful! What if God fails to provide? And there you are, with the doors bursting open, and in come the Hasidim, foaming at the mouth, with their black fedora hats, beards, and black eyes, ventilating all of their hatred and fury. Except God say or do something in that moment, then what?

“...and as the Father has sent Me, so send I you.” How did the Father send Jesus? Did He give Him everything in advance? I rather suspect that Jesus lived as a man by the Spirit, utterly dependant on the Father, moment by moment, from what was given. It’s the most humiliating dependency, and who wants it, especially when we have grown up in this world, and gone to college, and have been taught how to be self-sufficient? And God says, “That’s the world. Here’s the way of My Kingdom—total dependence on Me, to whom all authority has been given. Now, go ye into all the world and preach this gospel to every creature.” Amen.