Mary's announcement (20:18) must have stunned the disciples. Later the news that the Lord was alive came from two travelers who had unknowingly spent the day walking to Emmaus with Jesus (Luke 24:15-16). Confused, elated, doubtful, and fearful, the disciples stayed close together, hoping to endure the waiting in one place. They were huddled behind locked doors when Jesus appeared to all of them.

There is no real safe place in the world without Jesus, but his presence makes the most dangerous places bearable. When Jesus appeared to his disciples on this occasion he left them five gifts: (1) his own presence; (2) his peace (20:19, 21); (3) a mission: "I am sending you"; (4) a companion—the Holy Spirit; and (5) a message of forgiveness.

**20:19** On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them. The disciples were still perplexed and apparently had gotten together that night behind bolted doors. They probably were discussing the women's reported sighting of angels, what Peter and John saw at the tomb, and Mary's astounding claim that she had seen Jesus. At some point during the day, Jesus had appeared to Peter (Luke 24:34), and the women had reported the angel's words that the disciples were to go to Galilee and meet Jesus there (Matthew 28:7). But for some reason, they did not go; instead they stayed in Jerusalem, hiding from the Jewish leaders. Before long, however, their confusion would be dispelled.

The first news arrived in the night with the sounds of excited knocking on the door. Two disciples were allowed in, breathlessly telling the rest of the group that they had met Jesus on the road to Emmaus and had talked with him most of the day (Luke 24:13-35). The variety of reports must have had an effect. Shock and disbelief began to be replaced with wild hope. Luke recounts that this was when Jesus made his first appearance to his gathered disciples (although we find out later that Thomas was missing from the group). This appearance is astounding because Jesus came and stood among them, somehow appearing to them in a locked room. Jesus could do this because his resurrection and subsequent glorification had altered his bodily form. In this new spiritual form, he was able to transcend all physical barriers.

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**LIFE APPLICATION**

DON'T HIDE . . . SEEK!

Though the Resurrection had occurred, the disciples were hiding out! The happy news had not driven their doubts away. But we are like them when we lock ourselves behind closed doors:

- Doors of isolation—If we never make friends with non-Christians or interact with the
world, we deny God's power to change lives. Hiding in church, or refusing to make contact with anyone suspected to be a nonbeliever, limits Christ's work. The truth does not have to hide or isolate itself.

- Doors of anonymity—If we relate to those around us but never tell them that we are Christians, we deprive them of discovering what God has done in our lives.
- Doors of superficiality—If we only talk of sports and weather and keep to safe subjects with people around us, we cooperate with the world's intention to ignore God and any subject that might lead someone to seriously consider God's perspective.

Christ can make his presence known behind closed doors, but he will not unlock them for us. Unless we step out of our hiding places, we will never see all that Christ can do through us.

"Peace be with you." NKJV This was a standard Hebrew greeting, but here it was filled with deeper meaning (see 14:27; 16:33). Jesus would repeat these words in verse 21.

20:20 He showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord. NIV Due to Jesus' sudden, miraculous appearance among them, the disciples "were startled and frightened, thinking they saw a ghost" (Luke 24:37 NIV). Jesus needed to convince them that he, including his touchable physical body, was present with them. When they realized who he was, they rejoiced. Jesus had said, "In a little while you will see me no more, and then after a little while you will see me. . . . You will grieve, but your grief will turn to joy" (16:16, 20, NIV). The "little while" was over, joy had replaced grief, and "no one will take away your joy" (16:22, NIV).

20:21-23 Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." NRSV Jesus gave his peace to them and then commissioned them to be his representatives, even as he had been the Father's (see 17:18). Jesus again identified himself with his Father. He told the disciples by whose authority he did his work. Then he gave the task to his disciples of spreading the gospel message around the world. They were sent with authority from God to preach, teach, and do miracles (see Matthew 28:16-20; Luke 24:47-49)—in essence, to continue across the world what Jesus had begun in Palestine. Whatever God has asked you to do, remember: (1) Your authority comes from God, and (2) Jesus has demonstrated by words and actions how to accomplish the job he has given you. As the Father sent his Son, Jesus sends his followers . . . and you. Your response is to determine from day to day those to whom the Father has sent you.
When He had said this, He breathed on them, and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit." Before the disciples could carry out this commission, however, they needed the power of the Holy Spirit. And Jesus gave them this power by breathing into them the Holy Spirit. It could be said that this verse consummates the Gospel of John because the Spirit who had been promised (7:37-39; 14:16-20, 26; 15:26; and 16:7-15) at last was given to the disciples.

This act reminds us of what God did to make the first man come alive—he breathed into him and he became a living soul (Genesis 2:7). There is life in the breath of God. Man was created but did not come alive until God had breathed into him the breath of life (Genesis 2:7). God's first breath made man different from all other forms of creation. Here, through the breath of Jesus, God imparted eternal, spiritual life. With this breathing came the power to do God's will on earth.

If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained Jesus gave the disciples their Spirit-powered and Spirit-guided mission—to preach the Good News about him so that people's sins might be forgiven. The disciples did not have the power to forgive sins (only God can forgive sins), but Jesus gave them the privilege of telling new believers that their sins have been forgiven because they have accepted Jesus' message. All believers have this same privilege. We can announce the forgiveness of sin with certainty when we ourselves repent and believe. Those who don't believe will not experience the forgiveness of sins; their sins will be retained (i.e., not forgiven).

JESUS APPEARS TO THE DISCIPLES INCLUDING THOMAS / 20:24-31 / 245

Thomas was not with the other disciples for Jesus' first visit in 20:21-23. Consistent with his character elsewhere in the Gospel (see 14:5), Thomas was skeptical toward his friends' report about seeing Jesus. He epitomized hardheaded realism by insisting that seeing and touching Jesus for himself would be the only proof that would satisfy him. When Jesus did appear to him, Thomas realized the inappropriateness of his demand.

A week after the first appearance of Jesus, Thomas was with the other disciples, but they had no particular reason to believe that Jesus was coming to them again. But Jesus did visit and, it seems, specifically for Thomas's sake. His words to Thomas about believing without tangible proof also speak directly to us.

It is the office of faith to believe what we do not see, and it shall be the reward of faith to see what we do believe.

Thomas Adams

Jesus made it clear that our faith must be based on the testimony of those who were with him. Insisting on seeing and touching Christ ourselves would indicate a reluctance to
believe. We have no right to require God to prove himself; but he has every right as our Creator to expect our belief and obedience. The fact that God blesses those who believe is simply an added gift of his grace.

John concludes this section with a summary of his reason for writing. After quoting Jesus' words to Thomas about the importance of acting on the witness that has been given to us, John reminds his audience that the very words that they are reading are proof enough to believe in Jesus. Have you submitted in faith to the truth about Jesus that you have been told?

20:24 But Thomas . . . was not with them when Jesus came. NRSV When the disciples told Thomas that Jesus had appeared to them, he did not believe. Sometimes people overemphasize the doubtful part of Thomas's character. John 11:16 reveals Thomas as tough-minded and committed, even if he tended to be pessimistic. And Matthew points out (Matthew 28:17) that all the disciples shared Thomas's skepticism. It was part of his character to put the group's feeling into words. None of the other disciples believed until they saw Christ face-to-face.

20:25 "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." NIV Thomas insisted that he see the Jesus who had been crucified. He wanted bodily proof—to see and touch the nail scars in his hands and the scar of the lance thrust into his side.

20:26-28 After eight days NKJV Thomas got his chance. This time he was present when Jesus appeared. The disciples were still behind locked doors when Jesus appeared among them as he had before and gave the same greeting, "Peace be with you!" NIV But this time he spoke directly to Thomas, supernaturally knowing of Thomas's doubt and what he needed in order to be convinced.

Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe." NIV Jesus' resurrected body was unique. It was not the same kind of flesh and blood Lazarus had when he came back to life. Jesus' body was no longer subject to the same laws of nature as before his death. He could appear in a locked room; yet he was not a ghost or apparition because he could be touched and could eat. Jesus' resurrection was literal and physical—he was not a disembodied spirit.

When he saw Jesus, doubting Thomas became believing Thomas. His response rings through the ages as the response of many doubters who finally see the truth, "My Lord and my God!" This clear affirmation of Jesus' deity provides a good conclusion to John's Gospel, which continually I long to understand in some degree thy truth, which my heart believes and loves. For I do not seek to understand that I may believe, but I believe in order to understand. For this also I believe, that unless I believed, I should not understand.
affirms Jesus' deity (see 1:1, 18; 8:58; 10:30).

LIFE APPLICATION

YOU CAN TOUCH JESUS
Have you ever wished you could actually see Jesus, touch him, and hear his words? Are there times you want to sit down with him and get his advice? Thomas wanted Jesus' physical presence. But God's plan is wiser. He has not limited himself to one physical body; he wants to be present with you at all times. Even now he is with you in the form of the Holy Spirit. You can talk to him, and you can find his words to you in the pages of the Bible. He can be as real to you as he was to Thomas.

20:29-31 "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." Though Thomas proclaimed Jesus to be his Lord and God, Jesus reproved Thomas because he had to see before he could believe. The blessed ones are they who have not seen and yet have believed. Some people think they would believe in Jesus if they could see a definite sign or miracle. But Jesus says we are blessed if we can believe without seeing. We have all the proof we need in the words of the Bible and the testimony of believers.

LIFE APPLICATION

DOUBTING DOS AND DON'TS
Jesus wasn't hard on Thomas for his doubts. Despite his skepticism, Thomas was still loyal to the believers and to Jesus himself. Some people need to doubt before they believe. If doubt leads to questions, questions lead to answers, and the answers are accepted, then doubt has done good work. It is when doubt becomes stubbornness and stubbornness becomes a life-style that doubt harms faith. When you doubt, don't stop there. Let
your doubt deepen your faith as you continue to
search for the answer.

In the last two verses of the chapter, John explains why he wrote this Gospel: Jesus
did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this
book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of
God, and that believing you may have life in His name. John wrote this Gospel to
encourage belief in Jesus as the Christ and as the Son of God. All the signs in this Gospel
point to Jesus as being the Christ and God's Son, who came to give life to all those who
believe. Most likely, John wrote this Gospel to encourage those who already believed to
continue in their faith. We who believe are encouraged to read and reread John in order to
continue in our belief. And this Gospel has also been used far beyond that as a powerful
tool for evangelism, bringing people to faith in Christ.

To understand the life and mission of Jesus more fully, all we need to do is study the
Gospels. John tells us that his Gospel records only a few of the many events in Jesus' life
on earth. But the Gospels include everything we need to know to believe that Jesus is the
Christ, the Son of God, through whom we receive eternal life.

Life Application Bible Commentary - Life Application Bible Commentary – John.