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3:15

### Dead End Solutions

John 20:19-23

What were they thinking?! Did the disciples really think that getting together in one location and simply locking the door would make them safe? The people they were afraid of had just successfully had Jesus put to death through their own manipulation. Would they now stop? Can an anger that drives one to want someone dead, easily and quickly subside? No.

Of course the disciples weren't thinking; they were reacting. They were in shock. There is something about human nature that seeks the company of others when things get tough. Who do you go to when things get difficult in your life? You turn to your family, and hopefully, you turn to the church. This is what the disciples did.

Did they have a longer term purpose in getting together? Maybe they were getting together to begin saying goodbye. After all they were in Jerusalem and that wasn't necessarily their home town. Many of them were from Galilee. The night before a young girl even noticed that Peter spoke with a Galilean accent (Matthew 26:73). Surely it would be better for them to go back home and get back to their jobs as fishermen, tax-collectors or whatever.

It was Jesus of course that brought them all together and now that He was gone why stay together? It would have been impractical. Maybe they needed to get together for another reason, one much more important. What if they were getting together to collectively talk through how they had gotten God wrong. That night, in that locked room what brought them together was no longer Jesus for He was not in their midst but what brought them together was that they were enemies of God, all of them.

Could any other conclusion be reached? If God was with them and if God was with Jesus how could things have gone so poorly? How much more hated by God could you be than to be abandoned, tortured and publicly humiliated all in front of your enemies. How much more wrong could their concept of Jesus been as Jesus from His own lips asked why God had forsaken Him?

Yes, the fact that the Jews would be out to kill them was actually NOT their greatest problem: God was. Ironically the words of Jesus could have been particularly poignant at this time. Jesus once said: **"Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul.**

**Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell."** (Matthew 10:28).

What would they have done? Would they each have become like Judas who in total despair taken their own lives? Would they have reconsidered the past three years of their lives with Jesus and simply realize they had been taken in? That maybe Jesus was well meaning but terribly deluded. What would this mean for the disciples who had their whole lives been Jewish and had faithfully sought God through their worship and their pilgrimages and offerings at the Temple? Would they be able to go back? What would the priests do? If they couldn't go back to the Temple where would they go? What would happen if they were to go to the priests and humble themselves and plead for mercy and curse the fact that they had followed Jesus who was critical of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law? Yes, the disciples did have options to choose from but they were all bad options.

Have you been there in your own life? You find yourself at a crossroads and a decision must be made but no good option is on the table. You see a loved one making a horrible life decision and it is going to burden them for the rest of their life yet, you know that if you confront them and try to counsel them to act wiser they will not only refuse to listen but they will push you out of their life. So you can either say something and alienate them or you say nothing and watch the train wreck in their life: bad options.

That evening the disciples needed to make a decision. Oh, yes, maybe not exactly that evening before they went to sleep but a decision would have to be made and soon, very soon. Which terrible option would they choose? Would they choose one together or would they each make their own decision: some leaving the faith they once knew, others going back to the Teachers and the Priests saying how wrong they had been to follow Jesus. The problem of living in a world of sin is that sometimes we are left only with bad choices.

The unexpected blessing of encountering Jesus is that He opens doors for us that the world cannot open. Only Jesus can enter into a completely locked room, a place in the world with no open doors. **"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 and said, "Peace be with you!" After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord."** (verses 19-20). Since Jesus is not in the habit of simply repeating Himself we can only conclude that the disciples

who were already in shock were now astonished. **"Again Jesus said 'Peace be with you!' (verse 21).**

This alone would have been alone and much more than the disciples could have dreamed of or wished for. Jesus was alive! They were not wrong. Jesus was not wrong! And what is the message of Jesus the very one they abandoned and ran away from? Peace.

When Jesus came into that room He forever opened the door of everlasting life that changed every person in that room immediately and forever. This gift of the gospel is the solution to everything wrong in life that the world gives no options to fix. The gospel is freely and boldly given. The gospel can do what nothing else can: it can instantly restore the soul and give life even to the most destitute and alienated.

Jesus says not a single word of judgment or reprimand. Jesus does not begin with a lecture or harsh words for telling the disciples again and again that what did happen was exactly what needed to have happened. This is how God works. **"A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out."** (Isaiah 42:3). God's love is such that His gift never comes with strings attached otherwise it wouldn't be free, comforting or the gospel. This was true in that upper room and it is true here in this room this morning. We are also going to see that it is a gift for the whole world.

Jesus opens doors--really He opens THE door, the door to everlasting life and a full relationship with God. What is so beautiful about how Jesus opens this door is that often He opens it when we need it the most and when only bad options are calling for our decision.

The problem with the world spiritually is that it only has bad options from which to choose. Everywhere we see around us the world offering messages of how to deal with the meaning of life and one's eternal destiny. It is not pretty to look at.

The worldly door most people are seeming to choose today is that one that says that your immediate life here and now is most likely all that there is. There is nothing beyond death, period. What is the point of all of this? There is none so go have fun and don't think about it. This is the option or the door of hopelessness. On the one hand it is certainly lifeless and depressing: after all this option is assuring you that you will lose everything and everyone you have ever known in your life and your life itself was without meaning, goal or purpose. Why do so many people choose a lifeless option like this? Because it gives them the freedom to make life into whatever they want it to be and it gives them the appearance of a "free-pass" to do whatever feels good. This does bring

freedom and carnal pleasure--for a while. But it doesn't last--it never last because that is not the world we actually live in.

The other door the world offers seems more hopeful in that it does say there is an afterlife and that there is something beyond all this that we see. It even acknowledges that there is something fundamentally wrong with the world but how is it fixed? What is one's end? There really is no clear cut answer other than trying to be "good" as one sees it, or to be at least better than most other people.

True this recognizes sin but does it deal with it? The answer is no it cannot. The problem with thinking that one can get right with God and become a person guaranteed heaven is that the requirements for entry have to be all so low. I cannot help but remember Groucho Marx who once sent a letter to withdraw from the Friar's Club in Hollywood because he didn't want to belong to a club that would allow someone like himself to be a member.

What is the answer? The world doesn't have one, it only has dead ends. But Jesus does have the answer, He is the answer! Jesus is the door to new and everlasting life; He is the option the world is not. The disciples received this answer that night and Jesus didn't stop there He gave them something else.

**"And with that he breathed on them and said, 'Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.'" (John 20:22-23).**

When Jesus opens the door of life to you your life of salvation and freedom in God becomes a door of entry for others too. Jesus doesn't want His followers locked up in fear because that is not where they belong in eternity or in this world. Jesus wants His followers out in the world giving the world a new option, a new door: the door of everlasting life.

Do you realize how powerful you are today. Today you can go into this world with hope that all of this has a purpose a meaning and a good conclusion. But you can do something else too. Instead of downplaying or ignoring sin and evil in this world you can look at it head on and you can look into someone's eyes and tell them that God has handled their problem, their sin has been paid for by Jesus on the cross!

The power to live fully in a dead world is the power of Easter. The power to open doors in a dead end world is the power of Easter. The power to look sin head on and to confront it is the power of Easter. In Jesus this power is yours--yours to give to the world. Amen.