

CHRIST IS RISEN, THIS I KNOW, FOR THE BIBLE TELLS ME SO!

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Mark 16:1-13
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INTRODUCTION

As we read through the Gospel of Mark, we are amazed at the life of Jesus. Every single day of His life was special. A great number of people were healed, others were miraculously fed, many heard the teaching of Jesus. The disciples had had the privilege of spending time alone with Him. He was even brave enough to rebuke the religious leaders. Jesus changed people just by being around them. It must have been something to observe Him! He made the best of His time. His life shows that doing the work of God is not boring or unfulfilling. On the contrary, a life dedicated to serving the Lord is the most exciting and rewarding life one can have. It is not necessarily an easy life without suffering and trials, but it is a life of fellowship with the Creator, a life of peace and joy even amid difficulties. It is living with the promise of eternal life.

The evangelists wrote a biography of Jesus. Usually biographies end with the death of the character they describe. Not so in the biography of Jesus Christ. Our text in Mark 16 recounts the life of Jesus the third day after His death on the cross.

Today we are proclaiming the most powerful message ever – namely, that Jesus Christ has risen from the dead. We believe that Jesus lives today. This message of His resurrection has been a stumbling block for many along the whole course of church history. Mark 16 tells us that even the disciples did not believe when they heard about the resurrection of the Lord. For many it is not conceivable that a man can come back to life after death. Yet the message of the resurrection of Christ is the historical fact on which our faith and hope are founded. ***“But if there is no resurrection of the dead, not even Christ has been raised; and if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is vain, your faith also is vain”*** (1 Corinthians 15: 13-14).

In Exodus 12, we are told the story of the first Passover. The Israelites sacrificed the Passover lamb the night before they fled from Egypt. They had to apply some of the blood of the lamb to the lintel and the doorposts of their houses, so that they would not be judged when the angel of the Lord stroke all the firstborn of Egypt. ***“The blood shall be a sign for you on the houses where you live; and when I see the blood I will pass over you, and no plague will befall you to destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt”*** (Exodus 12:13). The Lord had seen the affliction and persecution of His people during their time of slavery in Egypt. He sent them Moses and Aaron to lead them out of Egypt and make them free from slavery. He had prepared for them the beautiful country of Canaan which He had already promised to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. The first two generations who had left Egypt had seen the great miracles God had performed to bring the people out of Egypt. They had seen how God had opened the Red Sea to enable them to cross it. They had seen how the Lord had provided the manna from heaven. God's Word was attested by great wonders. The next generations had not seen all these miracles and had to rely on the report of eye-witnesses before them. We no longer live in the first century. We were not there to see Jesus and His miracles. We were not there when Jesus rose from the dead. Yet we have the inspired writings, who report to us what the disciples of Jesus saw. By God's grace His Word was preserved over the centuries, so that we may know what happened to Jesus and who He was.

Many centuries after the first Passover, John the Baptist proclaimed that Jesus was the lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world. He had come to offer the Kingdom if they would repen and believe in Him. Yet they rejected Him and handed Him over to the Romans to be crucified like a criminal. They crucified the king of kings. They crucified the Messiah, the Son of the living God. Before we judge them too hastily, let us remember that He died for us also. He took on Himself our judgment also. Like the apostle Paul in 1 Timothy 1:15, we can say, ***“It is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am foremost of all.”*** Let us remember this morning that He came and died to save us. He became the sacrifice for our sins. His blood was shed to cleanse us from all iniquity. He died once for all. His sacrifice was perfect and complete. In 1 Corinthians 5:7b, Paul wrote, ***“For Christ our Passover also has been sacrificed.”*** Those who trust in Him are free from sin, free from the law and receive eternal life. Paul described the state of those who have been redeemed by Christ in Romans 6:22-23, ***“But now***

having been freed from sin and enslaved to God, you derive your benefit, resulting in sanctification, and the outcome, eternal life. For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Today, we celebrate His victory! Today we do not only remember that He came to die for us, but we also rejoice because He did not stay in the tomb. God raised Him from the dead. Because He lives, we can live without fear. Because He lives we can face our future. Mark did not include all the details of what happened that morning. To have a greater picture, we should also read Matthew, Luke and John. However, Mark presented this day with a powerful progression. First, we learn that the stone was rolled away, then we hear the glorious message declared by an angel and finally Jesus reveals Himself to some of His disciples.

1. THE STONE WAS ROLLED AWAY

Jesus had died on the cross the day before the Sabbath. Joseph of Arimathea was courageous enough to go see Pilate and ask for the body of Jesus. After Pilate made sure that Jesus was already dead, he granted the body to Joseph who buried Him in his tomb. Some women followed him to see where He was laid. After the Sabbath, very early the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and Mary, the mother of James and Salome decided to go to the tomb to anoint the body of Jesus with spices. Spices were poured out over a dead body to counteract the strong odor of decay. It was also an expression of loving devotion. Joseph and Nicodemus had already anointed the body of Jesus when they buried Him. However, these women wanted to honor Him also in this way. They knew that a large stone had been rolled in front of the tomb. They probably were not aware that the Jewish authorities had the tomb sealed and that they had placed guards to watch it. They had not been aware either of the earthquake that took place earlier and the arrival of the angel who rolled away the stone. They did not know that the guards had run away. That's why on the way to the tomb they were wondering who was going to roll away the stone for them. The very fact that they came to anoint the dead body of Jesus reveals that they did not expect Him to be alive. Despite the fact that He had informed His disciples about His resurrection, none of them really anticipated that. This was far beyond anything they could imagine. Of course, they had seen Him bring His friend Lazarus and others back to life, but now He himself was dead. We can easily imagine the confusion, sadness and even fear of these women. Jesus had cast out seven demons from Mary Magdalene. The other Mary was probably the mother of an apostle. Salome was probably the mother of John and James. She was the one who asked Jesus to have her sons sit one on His right and one on His left in His kingdom. But now, where was the healer? Where was the Master? Where was the king? They were on their way to anoint His dead body!

Many today do not believe in the resurrection. Most will not doubt that a man called Jesus really existed, that He was a great teacher. Yet they certainly do not believe that He lives today. The disciples and probably even the women had heard what Jesus had taught about His death and resurrection. Yet they were unable to realize what He was saying. It was far beyond everything they had ever heard before. They needed the Lord to open their eyes and their understanding to be able to grasp what had happened. By His grace the Lord had sent an angel to roll the stone away. The stone was not rolled away to allow Jesus to walk out of the tomb. We know that the resurrected body of Jesus did not have the limitations our bodies have today. He had received an incorruptible and heavenly body. The stone was rolled away for the disciples, the women and others to be able to walk in the tomb and see that it was empty. When the women arrived, they saw that stone had been removed, although it was extremely large. The women were looking for Jesus and could not find His body because He was raised from the dead.

Today it would be ridiculous to take sceptics with us to Jerusalem to find the empty tomb of Jesus. We need the help and grace of the Lord to remove the veil before the eyes of our hearts to be able to believe that the tomb is empty. The Lord uses His people today by their testimonies and their preaching to reveal His glory. Let us read in 1 Corinthians 3:12 - 4:6, ***“Therefore having such a hope, we use great boldness in our speech, and are not like Moses, who used to put a veil over his face so that the sons of Israel would not look intently at the end of what was fading away. But their minds were hardened; for until this very day at the reading of the old covenant the same veil remains unlifted, because it is removed in Christ. But to this day whenever Moses is read, a veil lies over their heart; but whenever a person turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit. Therefore, since we have this ministry, as we received mercy, we do not lose heart, but we have renounced the things hidden because of shame, not walking in craftiness or adulterating the word of God, but by the manifestation of truth commanding ourselves to every man’s conscience in the sight of God. And even if our gospel is veiled, it is***

veiled to those who are perishing, in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. For we do not preach ourselves but Christ Jesus as Lord, and ourselves as your bond-servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who said, 'Light shall shine out of darkness,' is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ." The Lord used an angel to remove the stone. Now He uses His children for people to see in our lives the glory of His resurrection. Our lives as Christians should reflect the glory of Christ. Others should see in us the transformation the Lord does when we understand that the stone was rolled away. They should hear us speak boldly of the Risen One. They should see us renounce the shameful deeds we did before knowing Him. They should know we go to a Sunday service to proclaim the resurrection of Christ. They should wonder why we no longer cheat at our exams or in our taxes. They should ask us why we pray before eating a meal. They should find us reading and studying the Bible rather than staying glued to the television. They should see a change in our vocabulary. They should see that we are interested in others. When they observe us in times of distress, they should wonder why we remain peaceful and even joyful. As they seek Jesus, we know that He will take away the veil when they turn to Him. He is powerful enough to let His light shine even in the greatest of darkness.

2. THE GLORIOUS MESSAGE OF THE ANGEL

The women did not stop at the entrance after noticing that the stone had been rolled away. They entered the tomb, but instead of finding the body of Jesus, they saw a young man wearing a white robe and sitting at the right. The context and parallel passages in the other gospels make it clear that they saw an angel. The women were terrified. They had had a first shock when they saw the stone had been rolled away. We know that Mary Magdalene's first reaction was to think that someone had stolen His body. To go to a cemetery early in the morning is unusual. To find that the tomb is open is even more unusual. But then to meet an angel in the tomb, that was terrifying. Here is the message of the angel, ***"Do not be amazed; you are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who has been crucified. He has risen; He is not here; behold, here is the place where they laid Him. But go, tell His disciples and Peter, 'He is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see Him, just as He told you'"*** (Mark 16: 6-7). The angel was very reassuring. First, he calmed them, then he stated clearly that he knew why they had come and only then he announced the message of the resurrection. Jesus was not there because He had risen. To help them realize what had happened, he showed them the place where Jesus had laid.

We have gathered this morning to proclaim this same truth: Christ is risen! The resurrection proves that He is stronger than death. It means that His Word is trustworthy. It means that His sacrifice was accepted. Therefore, it means that we are justified before God. It means that we have an eternal hope. It means that the message of the Gospel is true. It means that believers have a high priest in Heaven, who intercedes for them. It shows, that those who have trusted in Him will also one day be raised from the dead. It means that God will ultimately prevail. It also means that God has the power to make us new creatures. It means that we have nothing to fear, for our God is righteous and almighty!

The message of the angel was also a message of mercy and grace. The angel sent the women to the disciples and Peter to share the good news. He mentioned Peter separately probably to let him know that despite his denial of Christ, Jesus had not rejected him. They had had seen the empty tomb, heard the message, now it was time for them to bring this message to others. Once we know the truth, we should not be quiet anymore. At first, the women did not say a word. They were so shocked that all they could do was to run away. They probably ran from the cemetery to the disciples without saying anything to anyone. Luke reports that the disciples did not believe them. However, Peter also ran to see the empty tomb. It took the disciples some time to believe, but once they had seen Him, they were ready to die for Him. The fact of the resurrection transformed them mightily. They were not shy anymore. We read in the book of Acts how they courageously announced the Gospel. They confronted the leaders and persevered despite great opposition. Here is what Peter and John replied after they had been commanded not to talk about Jesus, ***"But Peter and John answered and said to them, 'Whether it is right in the sight of God to give heed to you rather than to God, you be the judge; for we cannot stop speaking about what we have seen and heard"*** (Acts 4. 19-20).

I remember a time in my life when I had decided to become serious in my walk with the Lord. I was very enthusiastic about sharing the Gospel. I talked about it whenever possible. I made sure, for example, to pick up hitchhikers. Once in the car, they had to hear the Gospel. Whenever I had a discussion with someone, I tried very hard to bring Jesus into the conversation. I needed to share who He was and what He had done in my life. I felt like Peter. Like him I had betrayed

the Lord. For many years before that time, I had claimed to know Him, but my life was not in order. I wanted to live my life like all the young people around me. I smoked a lot, went out as often as possible. I got myself into a lot of trouble. By God's grace at some point, I realized that I had betrayed Christ. I claimed to know Him, but I was never ready to take a public stand for Him. I was not willing either to obey His Word. I did not want to deny myself, take up my cross and follow Him. I wanted to live for me! But when I bitterly wept on my sins and returned to Him, He did not reject me. He forgave me. I could no longer be quiet. I had to proclaim what he had done for me. I wanted everyone to know that He had forgiven me and restored me. Most of us have gone through a similar experience. Once we have believed, we cannot be quiet. Yet as time passes, we get used to being saved and we forget the price Jesus had to pay for our salvation. We take it for granted, and sometimes act as if we had deserved it. This period of the year is a great reminder that Jesus died for our sins and that He rose again. It's this time of the year when we are reminded that many right around us have not yet heard the message. It's this time of the year, when we must repent for betraying Him so often and commit to serving Him again.

The angel had a glorious message for the women. We have this same glorious message for our lost world. We must not be quiet. We must not live as if we did not know!

3. JESUS REVEALED HIMSELF

Not only did some see the empty tomb, or hear the message of the angel, but some had even a greater privilege that same day. Jesus revealed Himself to them. Mary Magdalene was the first to see Jesus. He also appeared to two disciples who were walking to Emmaus. Mark tells us that Mary and the two men reported to the apostles what had happened to them, but they did not believe. When Jesus revealed Himself to all the disciples, He rebuked them for their unbelief and hardness of heart. The testimony of an eye-witness should have been enough. They should have believed because their testimony was in conformity with what Jesus had told them beforehand.

We should not expect Jesus to appear to us in this way to prove to us that He has indeed risen and that He is alive. He wants us to trust the testimony of His eye-witnesses revealed in the inspired Scriptures. He has given enough evidence of His resurrection. Let me read to you what Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 15:1-8, "*Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. After that He appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom remain until now, but some have fallen asleep; then He appeared to James, then to all the apostles; and last of all, as to one untimely born, He appeared to me also.*" God has provided His special revelation for us. We have all we need to know Him better and to serve Him. When Jesus met the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, He helped them understand the Scriptures. As we want to learn more about Him and His work, we must go to the Bible. Are we ready to believe or are we going to harden our hearts? The author of the book of Hebrews warned his readers in Hebrew 2:1-4, "*For this reason we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away from it. For if the word spoken through angels proved unalterable, and every transgression and disobedience received a just penalty, how will we escape if we neglect so great a salvation? After it was at the first spoken through the Lord, it was confirmed to us by those who heard, God also testifying with them, both by signs and wonders and by various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit according to His own will.*" The revelation is complete. We should not expect any more signs to prove the claims of Christ.

CONCLUSION

Since Jesus said the truth about His resurrection, we also believe what the Bible has to say about our own resurrection. As we close, I would like to read to you what the next great event for the church will look like in 1 Thessalonians 4:14-18, "*For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus. For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words.*"