

The Resurrection

Mark 16:1-8

Mark 16:1-8 – *“Now when the Sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, that they might come and anoint Him. ² Very early in the morning, on the first day of the week, they came to the tomb when the sun had risen. ³ And they said among themselves, “Who will roll away the stone from the door of the tomb for us?” ⁴ But when they looked up, they saw that the stone had been rolled away - for it was very large. ⁵ And entering the tomb, they saw a young man clothed in a long white robe sitting on the right side; and they were alarmed. ⁶ But he said to them, “Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He is risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid Him. ⁷ But go, tell His disciples—and Peter—that He is going before you into Galilee; there you will see Him, as He said to you.” ⁸ So they went out quickly and fled from the tomb, for they trembled and were amazed. And they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.”*

Background Notes

Very early on Sunday morning three women came to anoint the body of Christ. These women were at the crucifixion (Mark 15:40). Mark identified them as Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James the Less (also known as James the son of Alphaeus, one of the disciples), and Salome, the wife of Zebedee and mother of the disciples James and John.

These three women came to anoint the body of the Lord. This was an act of love and devotion. John 19 says that Nicodemus brought spices to anoint the Lord's body when He was buried, but in their devotion the women wanted to add more spices. The women wondered how they would get into the tomb, because the entrance had been sealed with a large stone.

The Lord's burial place was not a like a cemetery today. In the 1st century, the tomb of a rich man would have consisted of two chambers cut out of the rocky hillside. The outer chamber, sometimes called the “weeping chamber,” was entered from the outside, and adjoined the inner chamber, or vault, or burial chamber. The body was placed on a ledge in the inner chamber until decomposition took place. The skeletal bones were then gathered and placed in an “ossuary,” a stone burial box.

The entry to the tomb was sealed with a large round stone, resembling a wheel, that would be rolled into place by means of an inclined track. It would have weighed as much as a couple of tons, in view of this being the seal for a rich man's tomb. No wonder the women wondered how this stone could be moved!

1st century tombs can be seen in Israel today. In fact you can be shown the empty tomb of Christ in Jerusalem today - but I need to add an asterisk to that statement! You'll be shown two tombs that are thought to be the burial place of Christ. One of them is possibly the authentic tomb. Good reasons are given for the authenticity of both of these tombs, but we can't be sure which one (if either) is actually the Lord's tomb.

When the women entered the fore-chamber or weeping chamber of the tomb, they saw a young man clothed in white – he was the angel mentioned in the parallel account in Matthew 28. Matthew 28:5-6 - *“But the angel answered and said to the women, “Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for He is risen, as He said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay.”* In Luke and John two angels are mentioned. Is that a contradiction? No! That's not a problem - there were two angels! In line with the Law, God sent two angels, two witnesses. Matthew and Mark only mention one angel, but they didn't say that there was *only one* angel! They simply focused on the angel who spoke.

Incidentally, when you read all four Gospel accounts of the resurrection, you find some significant differences in the details. **Not contradictions** - just differences - and all of these different details can be harmonized. The fact that there are differences in the accounts is actually good evidence that confirms the resurrection as a definite historical event. If all four accounts said exactly the same thing (like a photocopy), then you might suspect that the writers colluded to make sure they told the same tale! The fact that there are four separate accounts with varying details (but no contradictions) shows that there were four independent witnesses of the same event - and that's good for confirmation.

Doctrinal Point

The empty tomb is compelling evidence for the Resurrection.

Notice what the angel said in verse 6, *“He is risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid Him.”* Look at the evidence - the tomb is empty! That's what the angel was encouraging the women to do. To this day, the empty tomb is compelling evidence for the resurrection. The empty tomb cannot be explained away. It's compelling evidence for the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The empty tomb can't be explained away by saying it was “just a legend,” because there's just too much evidence for an empty tomb. No scholar today doubts that the tomb was empty. Notice - I didn't say that no scholar doubts the resurrection – there are a lot of skeptics who doubt the resurrection. The skeptical scholars don't doubt the empty tomb, but they try to come up with another explanation for the reason why it's empty.

No scholar or thinking person who has examined the evidence says that the empty tomb was only a legend. The fact that there was a Jesus of Nazareth is well established; Jesus is a fact of history. The historical fact that Jesus of Nazareth was crucified on a Roman cross when Pontius Pilate was governor is well established – it is no legend. And the fact that

He was buried – but then the tomb was empty is well attested, too. It's not a legend - and no one who's looked through the evidence takes it as a legend.

How is that empty tomb to be explained? The Bible says that the Lord Jesus was resurrected from the dead. As Christians, we believe the miracle of the resurrection. The non-Christian accepts the evidence of the empty tomb, but he doesn't accept the resurrection. He tries to explain the empty tomb a different way - but he has a very hard time doing it. C.S. Lewis tried to explain it away, but because of the overwhelming evidence, he ended up becoming a Christian!

Skeptics present many theories to try to explain the empty tomb. There's the "swoon theory" - it says that Jesus wasn't really dead; He was only unconscious, and He revived in the cool tomb and walked out. There's the "stolen body theory" - it says the disciples stole the Lord's body. There's the "they went to the wrong tomb" theory. And there are other theories, but none of them makes sense.

There are too many details associated with the fact of the empty tomb that cannot be explained away. The only answer that does justice to all these details is ***the resurrection!***

Take the "swoon theory," for example. You mean to say that the Roman soldiers and a centurion didn't know when a crucified man was really dead? That's just one detail that skeptics have to explain.

Take the "wrong tomb" theory. Did ***everybody*** go to the wrong tomb? And no one ever noticed that they were at the wrong tomb? And Joseph of Arimathea didn't recognize his own new tomb?

What about the "stolen body" theory? Suppose you were a guard, and the body really was stolen while you were on guard. Somehow you and the other guards fell asleep and the disciples were able to sneak up, break the seal, roll the stone back, steal the body, and now you wake up and the body's gone.

So as one of the guards, what would your action be? I can think of two possible reactions. The first would be, "Let's go find those disciples and get the body, because our necks are at risk, having lost the body that we were to guard." Their other reaction might have been to just roll the stone back and pretend that "The body wasn't taken on my shift!"

But let's say that there indeed was a resurrection – then how would the guards react? They'd probably say, "There's only one way to save our necks. We have to go to the Jewish authorities for protection." And that's exactly what they did. And the Jewish authorities bribed the guards to say that the disciples stole the body (Matthew 28:11-15).

The truth of the resurrection of Jesus Christ explains all the details in the biblical accounts of the empty tomb! None of the proposed theories do justice to the details – the theories just don't fit the details. **Only the resurrection makes sense!** The empty tomb is compelling evidence for the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Practical Applications

1. We can see obstacles removed as we move forward in our devotion to Christ.

Verses 3-4: *“And they said among themselves, ‘Who will roll away the stone from the door of the tomb for us?’ But when they looked up, they saw that the stone had been rolled away.”* The women came to the tomb out of devotion to Christ, and God moved the large stone away for them. The stone was not rolled away so the Lord Jesus could get out of the tomb! No! The stone was moved so that the women and others could see that the tomb was empty and Jesus was resurrected. The obstacle was removed.

We, too, can experience obstacles being removed as we move forward in our devotion to Christ. Obstacles about evidence for the faith, obstacles to ongoing service for Christ - it doesn't matter what the obstacles may be. God can remove any obstacle as we move forward in our devotion to Christ. Certainly that practical application comes out of the lesson of the women coming to the tomb and seeing the stone rolled away. God rolled it away as they came in their devotion for Christ.

In the Talks for Growing Christians radio ministry, we've been faced with a number of obstacles - but we've seen God remove them as we have moved forward in devotion and service to Christ. It's as you move forward that God removes the obstacles. We can see obstacles removed as we move forward in our devotion to Christ.

2. Remember that our feelings are important to God.

The lesson that our feelings are important to God can be seen twice in this passage.

The women were alarmed - amazed - dumbfounded (v5)! Strong emotion is involved in this word – a mixture of great fear and awe and distress. But the angel, carrying out the message of God, said to them, “Don't be afraid! Don't be distressed!” Our feelings are important to God.

This lesson is also seen in the angel's message for Peter. Once again the angel was carrying out the command of God when he said, *“But go, tell His disciples—and Peter”* (v7). Peter was specifically mentioned. Can you imagine how low Peter was feeling? After years of close fellowship with the Lord, Peter had denied even knowing the Lord – *three times!* Well, God knew about that, and God cared about Peter's feelings. God made sure that the angel specifically mentioned Peter by name.

God knows about our feelings, our fears, our distress, our feelings of failure. He knows - and He cares! And He can bring comfort and peace to us, if we'll let Him. Turn your feelings over to the Lord. Remember - our feelings are important to God!