

Too Good to Be True?

Mark 16:1-8

By [Billy Dempsey](#)

It's always a pleasure to open God's Word; it's always a pleasure to open God's Word at times of the year like this. Every Lord's Day is the first day of the week. Every Lord's Day we gather to worship we celebrate the resurrection and we celebrate Jesus' resurrection in particular, and yet the calendar drives us to some degree. We pay particular attention to the Lord's resurrection at this time of the year. So I thought it would be good for us to look at a resurrection passage so that we have our minds and hearts somewhat lubricated, have our minds and hearts somewhat in gear, to give particular thought, particular attention, to the Lord's resurrection this coming Lord's Day. Before we look at Mark chapter 16 verses 1 through 8, let's go again to the Lord in prayer.

Father, this is Your Word and we are Your people. We ask You to make our hearts good soil and help us do our part right now to make our hearts good soil. The devil would throw so many distractions at us in these few minutes. Help us rivet our attention upon Your Word. Help us unstop our ears and open our eyes. Help us let life stop for a few moments as we listen to what the Spirit would say to the churches. Feed our souls. Teach our hearts. Make us like Christ. We pray in His name. Amen.

From Mark chapter 16 verses 1 through 8:

When the Sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him. And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb. And they were saying to one another, "Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance of the tomb?" And looking up, they saw that the stone had been rolled back — it was very large. And entering the tomb, they saw a young man sitting on the right side, dressed in a white robe, and they were alarmed. And he said to them, "Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has risen; he is not here. See the place where they laid him. But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going before you to Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you." And they went out and fled from the tomb, for trembling and astonishment had seized them, and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.

Is Jesus' resurrection one of those things that's really just too good to be true? Isn't there some kind of catch? Could something that ended so badly as His public ministry really turn out to be so good? That really is the goodness of God, isn't it? To take what looks like a complete defeat and let that defeat lead to final and complete victory. Who else but God can do such things? I want us to pay attention to a couple of things. I want us to think about the whole issue of repetition, and repetition in Mark's gospel. I want us to think about the message that we hear from the angel. And I want us to think about a resurrection impact for us here and now.

I. The Repetition of the Resurrection Account

Let's think about repetition first of all. Mark's gospel, as we have read it and are familiar with it, is known for what commentators would call an economy of style. Mark's accounts are short and to the point. His narratives are spare, not loaded with details, and they move quickly through the action. If Mark quotes Jesus three times saying something it's reasonable to expect that Jesus actually said something three times. That's true of all the gospel writers. We find it so with Mark as well. Three different times, Mark chapter 8, Mark chapter 9, Mark chapter 10, Jesus says something like, "I will suffer and die and be raised again on the third day." It was that clear, it was that concise, it was that pointed. Mark's not giving us literary flourishes or rhetorical devices. He is simply relating what Jesus was teaching repeatedly to His disciples. It begins in Mark 8 where Mark says, "And Jesus began teaching His disciples that He would suffer and die and be raised again on the third day." Mark 9, "Jesus again was teaching." Mark 10, "Jesus again was teaching." All that warning and all that repetition coming in the latter half of Jesus' public ministry, so when the events unfold and Jesus has suffered and died and they find themselves at the third day, where are the disciples? They are locked away in a room for fear of the Jews. A couple of them are walking to Emmaus and they are discussing how everything has turned out so badly and they had so hoped that Jesus was the one who was promised. What have the women come to do? They have not come to welcome a risen Savior; they have come to anoint a corpse. After Jesus' repeated teaching, "I will suffer and die. On the third day I will rise again" nobody's looking for a resurrection.

You know in Greek thought — and we recognize, we need to think a little bit about Greek thought because Greek thinking had saturated the world by this point of the first century. Everybody knew what the Greeks thought. Regardless of what they thought, everybody knew what the Greeks thought. The Greeks don't have a resurrection in their thinking about life after death. At death, the soul is finally free from the prison of the body and it will never be confined to a prison like that again. The Jews believed in a general resurrection of all humanity at the last day, but they had no concept of an individual man rising from the dead before the last day. Jesus has repeatedly told them what to look for, and as

events have unfolded exactly as He said they would they're not looking for what He said they would find. You know, they weren't inclined to expect a resurrection; we're not inclined to expect resurrections. When there's death, there's death, and we know how to deal with that. It may break our hearts but we know how to deal with that. We don't expect to go to the hospital room or the funeral home and find the guest of honor parading around. We don't expect that. We don't expect a resurrection. What really happened on this first day of the week was really too good to be true; it was too good to be true.

II. The Resurrection Message of the Angel

Think about the women who encounter the angel. In Mark's account they leave not in praise and not in wonder and not in wrapped excitement; they leave in trembling and astonishment. They're too afraid to talk to anybody because what the angel is telling them is too good to be true. Mary Magdalene in John 20 goes to the disciples and says, "Somebody stole His body!" She can't imagine that there's been a resurrection. That's too good to be true. Listen to the angel's message. There's something that's too good to be true here in what the angel says, particularly in verse 7 when the angel is delivering this message. Now let's think a little bit about angels. Let's remember that angels are given tasks to do by God the Father Almighty. They've given tasks to accomplish and when they deliver messages they're not delivering their message; they're delivering the message of the One who sent them. I think it's reasonable to expect that what the angel relates here in Mark chapter 16 is exactly what Jesus told the angel to relate. And he says, "Don't be alarmed. You seek Jesus who was crucified. He is risen. He's not here. See the place where they laid Him." Verse 7, "Go, tell His disciples and Peter that He is going before you to Galilee. There you will see Him just as He told you." That message is too good to be true. Think of the last time those disciples saw Jesus. Think of their response to the circumstances that were taking place around them in the Garden of Gethsemane as Jesus is betrayed and arrested.

Jesus might justifiably left a message like this with the angel. "You tell those faithless, backstabbing, disloyal and disappointing cowards that Jesus might be willing to see them in Galilee if they grovel but they'd better make it good! And oh by the way, I've got something special waiting for Peter." He might. He might have justifiably. Who could blame Him? Who could blame Him? Deserted to the hands of His captors. John was the only one of those disciples that He saw at the place of His dying. Peter saying, "I'll stand with You no matter what these other clowns do," denies three times that he knows Him. Jesus sent a message that was too good to be true. He's saying, "I'll see you. I'm going ahead of you. I'll be waiting for you. I want you to be with Me." That's what He's saying. "I'll see you. I'm going ahead of you. I'll be waiting for you. I want you to be with Me." What's His attitude? His attitude is forgiveness and reconciliation. The reference to Peter, that's forgiveness and reconciliation on steroids because He knows

Peter's shame. Think of John chapter 21 and that probing reinstatement in the presence of the rest of those disciples. "Peter, do you love Me? Feed My sheep. Peter, do you love Me? Feed My lambs. Peter, do you love Me?" That was a marvelous exchange that brought Peter back into the fellowship with his brothers but especially brought him back into fellowship with Jesus Himself. Too good to be true.

III. The Resurrection's Impact: Here and Now

Something else too good to be true — that the resurrection, the events played out for us here in the gospel narrative, has impact here and now. The resurrection sends reverberations through history and sends reverberation into our lives right here, right now. We believe that the resurrection happened as recorded in the Scripture. You believe that Jesus died to save you. If you've come to faith in Christ you believe that, that Jesus died to save you. You believe that God accepts you because of what Jesus has done in your behalf with an obedient life and a substitutionary death and those benefits that are ours guaranteed in the Gospel are sealed by His resurrection again from the dead. Now you and I belong to Him if our trust is in Him and we expect to go to heaven when we die. That's our expectation; that's our confidence. That's our sure and certain hope.

Resurrection Impact foretold in Isaiah

Does the resurrection mean anything for us right now ahead of that day that we die? Let me get you to turn back with me to Isaiah chapter 11. Isaiah sees a vision of the stump of Jesse that sends forth a shoot, and beginning with verse 1 he talks about that. I want to pay a little bit of attention to verses 1 and 2. "The spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him; the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord. His delight shall be in the fear of the Lord. He shall not judge by what his eyes see or decide disputes by what his ears hear, but with righteousness he shall judge the poor and decide with equity for the meek of the earth." He's describing the work of Christ. He's describing how Jesus will govern. And look at the impact. What I really want us to pay attention to is the impact that he describes in the wider world, beginning with verse 6. Isaiah says, "The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the young goat, the calf and the lion and the fattened calf together and the little child shall lead them. The cow and the bear shall graze; their young shall lie down together. The lion shall eat straw like the ox; the nursing child shall play over the hole of the cobra and the weaned child shall put his hand on the adder's den. They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain, for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea."

Resurrection Impact foretold in Matthew

Hear Isaiah's words for just a second as you go with me ahead to Matthew chapter 11. Matthew chapter 11 describing the scene that takes place when John the Baptist's disciples come to Jesus and say, "Our Master wants to know, 'Are you the one who was to come or should we look for another?'" And Jesus gives the disciples of John a report to take back to him. And he says specifically in verse 5, he says at the end of verse 4, "Go and tell John what you hear and see." Verse 5, "The blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear and the dead are raised up and the poor have the good news preached to them."

What do those two passages tell us that we need to think about in terms of the resurrection's impact right now? They tell us this. Isaiah figuratively, Jesus in relating the report the disciples make to John literally Jesus is telling us that the effect and the impact of sin is rolled back. Sin no longer has dominion. As Jesus has conquered and has brought to bear the kingdom of God in this world, He rolls back the effects of sin. He rolls back the dominion of sin. He rolls back the effects of the Fall. Everything that Jesus was saying that He's doing is a direct response to the misery that sin brought into the world. Everything that Jesus said He was doing was a direct response to the decay that sin brought into the world and He's rolling back the effects of sin. The impact of sin gives way before the resurrected Christ and the kingdom of God He brings in.

Resurrection Impact in Life's Priorities

That's true of our relationships. We can love one another self-forgetfully because of the impact of the resurrection of Christ and the coming of His Spirit to make us new people. We can love like Jesus loves in the power of His Spirit working in us. Think about our priorities. We can recognize what's really important and respond to what's really important as God gives us insight through His Word. That's a resurrection impact. We can recognize what's really good and what's really bad. We can recognize what is the Solid Rock on which to build and not build our houses on the sand. That's the resurrection impact in the here and now. Our whole focus of living goes beyond now how much we can make, how high we can climb, all the things we can acquire, because the power of the risen Christ is at work, alive in us. What does Paul say in Galatians chapter 2? "I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live; yet not I, Christ lives in me." Christ living in us. That's the impact and power of His resurrection reverberating right now in the here and now and changing everything for us — everything about how we deal with one another, how we live life, what we value, what we pursue, what we exalt. Everything changes because Jesus strode out of that tomb the first day of the week the Victor, the Victor.

Resurrection Impact in Life's Sufferings

You know we still suffer, we still deal with disappointment, our dreams are still

crushed — how do we face failing bodies? How do we face and deal with wracking disease? How do we face letting go of someone we love so much as they slip away from us? How do we deal with the loss of jobs and the loss of income? Those things hurt. Those things are deep wounds for us. Those things spell a loss for us that we can't just blink our eyes and pretend they don't exist. That pain is real. But something that helps us to remember, sometimes that pain is worse for us because we think that this broken world is the only world we're ever going to have. Because we think this breaking body is the only body we're ever going to have. Because we think these relationships are the only relationships we're ever going to have, these love relationships is the only love we'll ever know. That the wealth we desire to acquire and use well is the only wealth we'll ever have. But Jesus is risen. The tomb is empty. Our future is brighter and richer and fairer by far than our present, more so than we would ever ask or think. Only the resurrection of Jesus makes the promise of new bodies as well as new minds and new hearts, a new heaven, a new earth. In fact, in Revelation 21 the resurrected Jesus stands there and shouts, "Behold, I am making all things new!" That's where the resurrection hits us here and now. It's telling us this is not all there is and this is not all the story for us. And so we can live with heartache and heartbreak here. We can live with loss here, as much as it hurts. We can live with deep hurt here in light of there because that's the world that's waiting for us, that's the world that the resurrection shouts to us is coming.

Let me read something from Tim Keller's, *Reason For God*. He's talking about the miracles of Jesus and I think what he's saying applies to this idea of what the resurrection says to us. "We modern people think of miracles," he says, "as the suspension of the natural order, but Jesus meant them to be the restoration of the natural order. The Bible tells us that God did not make the world to have disease, hunger, and death. Jesus has come to redeem the world from its wrong and to heal the world where its broken. His miracles are not just proofs that He has power but also wonderful foretastes of what He's going to do with that power. Jesus' miracles, including the miracle of the resurrection, are not just a challenge to our minds but a promise to our hearts that the world we all want is coming." Not just a challenge to our minds but a promise to our hearts that the world we all want is coming. That's the beauty, the glory, the reverberation of the resurrection of Christ on the first day of the week. It screams at us, shouts at us.

Resurrection Impact in Awaiting a Future Glory

One more thing. Notice in all the, especially the account of Jesus meeting Thomas, the glorified body of Christ still had those scars, still had the evidence of the wounds — the wounds that for those disciples spelled the end of their dreams. But think about what Paul says in Romans chapter 8 verse 18 — "I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us." It happened with Jesus; the same will happen with us. On the great day of the Lord, we'll find that the worst things that have ever happened to us will only enhance our delight in heaven. The joy of our glory in Christ will be

inestimably greater than any scar we bear from this world. Think of the glory that Jesus anticipates as He is making the places, He said, for us, so that we might be where He is — the joy, the fullness of joy that He will have as He welcomes His blood-bought people; the fullness of joy that you and I will have when we think about this world's scars as we stand in that world's glory, glory-bought by the blood of Christ for us. What do we do? Well, we've said it already. "Come and worship. Come and worship. Worship Christ, the risen King!" Let's pray.

Father, help us think about these things the way You do, help us value these things the way You value them, help us value this world and the world to come the way You do. Thank You, Lord Jesus, for striding as a victor from the hold and the grip of death. Thank You for conquering hell. Thank You that we are delivered and our victory is sure as our trust and hope are in You and You alone because Your victory is complete. Thank You. We make our prayer in Your name. Amen.

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