

## Mark: Up From the Grave He Arose

Mark 16:1-8

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*Alternative title: Dead and Buried  
(Mark 15:42-47)*

Now I want you, as you open up your Bible or the pew Bible in front of you, as you open it up to Mark 16, I want you to do something for me. I want you to take your bulletin and cover over verses 9-20. Just for tonight! Many of the older manuscripts...you understand, we don't have a single copy of an original manuscript of any part of the Bible — not Mark's Gospel, not any part of the Bible. All we have are copies of copies of copies — thousands of them. Some go back to the second century, but we don't have an original copy of Mark's Gospel anywhere...not in the Vatican, not in the Museum in London, not in the National Museum in Washington. We don't have them. And truth is that in the largest of the manuscripts that we have, and in some of the earliest of the manuscripts that we have, they are given very fanciful names like *Vaticanus* and *Sinaiticus*, and they are two very important sources from which we glean what the Bible should be. The longer ending of Mark isn't there, and some of the earliest of the church fathers, Clement of Alexandria, Eusebius, Origen, Jerome in his Latin translation of the Bible, a very significant piece of work, seem to be wholly unaware of verses 9-20.

Now, I know - if you've got the King James Version of the Bible it's there, and it's part of the Bible and the cover says "Holy Bible" and it's part of Scripture. If you're not using the King James Version of the Bible, there's probably some indication in the text...there might be a line drawn, there might be something in parentheses in the New American Standard or the ESV...there's some explanation that says something like 'some of the manuscripts do not contain the following verses.'

Well, that's a very complex issue, and I don't have time to go into all of that tonight, just to say...just to say that as far as some of the earliest Christians are concerned, Mark's Gospel (or so we think) ended at verse 8. And for tonight I want us to take that as fact, so don't be peeking on ahead to see what Mark adds or what somebody else adds as an addition to the Gospel of Mark. Just for tonight go with me that Mark's Gospel ends at verse 8. And if it really did end with

verse 8...and you know, it's one of those fifty questions I want to ask when I get to heaven. Mark, did you really finish the Gospel at verse 8? Because it's a very odd way to finish a Gospel." But there may well be a reason for it.

Mark had mentioned that there were two women who had been there on the Friday evening as Jesus had been taken down from the cross and had been placed in the tomb (Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joses), there in verse 47 of chapter 15. In verse 1 of chapter 16, that *Mary mother of Joses* is now called mother of James. She was, in fact, the mother of James and Joses, and James was probably the better known in the church.

There are three particular women that emerge here. One is Mary Magdalene. This is the lady out of whom seven demons had been cast. She's not the woman taken in adultery. There are more legends about Mary Magdalene than you and I have had hot dinners. Gnostic documents, the *Gospel of Mary*, the *Gospel of Philip*, portray her as an adversary of Peter, who would become, of course, important to the Catholic Church. And, as we will be sick to our gills in a few weeks time, Dan Brown's *DaVinci Code*, of course, has Mary Magdalene married to Jesus and bearing children of Him. She is the beloved disciple of John's Gospel. Well, away with all of that! Mary Magdalene is a wonderful, wonderful disciple of Jesus.

And then Mary the mother of James and Joses...Matthew and Mark refer to her as "the other Mary." John says that there was a woman called "the wife of Clopas" there. And if the two are the same, Clopas is also identified with Alpheus the brother of Joseph, Jesus' mother's husband, and that makes this "other Mary" a sister-in-law of Joses' mother.

And then we'll see that there is another lady here by the name of Salome. And at the cross, according to Matthew, there is a lady called the mother of the sons of Zebedee, James and John. John tells us that she was Jesus' mother's sister, and Mark calls her Salome. So now at the tomb on this Sunday morning you have Mary (Jesus' mother), Mary's sister-in-law, Mary's sister, and Mary Magdalene, and possibly a few others.

Before we read the passage together, let's come before God in prayer.

*Father, as we turn now to Your word, we pray, Holy Spirit, that You would come and write it upon our hearts. We would see Jesus. And we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Let's pick up the reading in chapter 15 and at verse 46:

Joseph bought a linen cloth, took Him down, wrapped Him in the linen cloth, and laid Him in a tomb which had been hewn out in the rock; and he rolled a stone against the entrance of the tomb. Mary Magdalene and

Mary the mother of Jesus were looking on to see where He was laid. When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome, bought spices, so that they might come and anoint Him. Very early in the first day of the week, they came to the tomb when the sun had risen. They were saying to one another, "Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance of the tomb?" Looking up, they saw that the stone had been rolled away, although it was extremely large. Entering the tomb, they saw a young man sitting at the right, wearing a white robe; and they were amazed. And he said to them, "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.'" They went out and fled from the tomb, for trembling and astonishment had gripped them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.

Amen. And may God bless to us the reading of His holy and inerrant word.

It is Sunday morning, early. The sun has risen...it may well have still been dark when they left their home in the city of Jerusalem. And they've gone through the quiet streets of Jerusalem — quiet now, in comparison to Friday morning and afternoon. They'd gone to the place where they had been, and seen and noticed, and taken note of — the place where the body of Jesus had been placed in a tomb. In Jewish reckoning, three days have elapsed — barely a day and a half, 36 hours or so by our reckoning. They had noted [verse 47 of chapter 15] precisely the place where Jesus had been laid, where the tomb was...a rock tomb, and over the mouth of it a channel on a slight incline in which a large circular stone was rolled down...probably a lot easier to roll it down than to roll it back...it was on an incline. There's a manuscript in the Cambridge library called *Codex Bezae*, which says 'a stone which twenty men could not roll away.' That may be a slight exaggeration.

Matthew tells us that the next day, Saturday, guards had been placed at the tomb and a Roman seal glued to the tomb itself to ensure that no one would come and steal away the body and claim a resurrection, as the Jews feared. And now it's early on Sunday morning, and the women have come to the tomb - Mary Magdalene and the other Mary, and Salome, and maybe, if we piece together all of the other Gospels, maybe some others — and their whole thought is consumed by 'Who is going to roll away the stone? How are we going to get into the tomb?' They had purchased some spices.

Now, Joseph of Arimathea had already anointed the body of Jesus very, very hastily on Friday afternoon. There wasn't much time; Sabbath was fast approaching. John tells us that. And now, or so it seems, these women are coming. In the cool of that tomb the body would not have decayed much. They come to finish off the anointing, to do it properly. And when they come to the

tomb, the stone is rolled away and Jesus isn't there.

Christianity rests on this doctrine and the resurrection. Without it, without the resurrection, we have no basis on which to be here. We have no basis for explaining anything at all about the cross. It simply becomes an extravagant gesture on the part of a first century Jew who did something to try and move others to do something on behalf of others. That's the best thing that we could say about the cross. And we are still in our sins. Without the resurrection, we have no basis for saying that we can come into the presence of a holy, righteous, God. No basis for justification, no basis for peace with God, no basis for entry into heaven, no basis for saying there's going to be an afterlife, no basis for saying we're going to play cellos. No basis whatsoever for a bodily resurrection. All we have are platitudes and hopeful moral epithets, and no more.

What happened? What happened on that Sunday morning? Well, three things happened.

**I. The first thing that happened was a surprise. It was a surprise. These women were not expecting the resurrection.**

They did not come from the city to this tomb expecting that Jesus wouldn't be there. They're bringing spices. They're worrying about who is going to move the stone away. Mark gives us a little detail. "Looking up," he says in verse 4, as though he wants us to see that they were actually looking down, as you tend to do when you're miserable and dejected, and without hope.

Their dear Lord had been taken from them. They had seen Him. These women...these women had been there at the cross. They had seen the gory, bloody figure of Jesus. Unimaginable, the sight that they had witnessed: the brutality of it; the enduring of the 39 lashes that had torn into His flesh. They'd seen Him on that cross. They'd heard the violence of the mob.

They weren't expecting a resurrection. What happened on that Sunday morning was to these women a surprise. A little later when they've entered (we have to piece together the Gospels here), Mary Magdalene didn't enter at this point. Obviously, she ran back, according to other Gospels, to tell the disciples. So it is the other women who now enter into the tomb. And what do they see? They see a young man sitting, dressed in white, speaking to them. And they run...and they run! You know, none of them, even when they see the stone rolled away, they don't sort of say 'so it was true after all.' You know — 'Blow me down, it was true after all!' All the words of Jesus, all the promises of Jesus, all the prophecies, they were actually true! They didn't say that.

I'm not for one minute castigating these women at this point. The men are not there. The disciples have gone. If the resurrection claim was merely because of a

geographical mistake as to the location of where the tomb was, as though these women had forgotten where the tomb was... or, supposing in writing the Gospel of Mark, Mark had, in order to bring encouragement to the church ten, fifteen years later — how do you think he would go about doing that? Well, not this way. Not this way. It was a surprise. These women were taken completely by surprise. Mark is saying to us the sheer power of unbelief that still resides in the hearts of His closest and dearest and nearest...they're afraid. Afraid of what the men now might say about them, perhaps. You know, if you're trying to fabricate the story, this would be a silly thing to do. Unless, of course, it's true.

## **II. But in the second place, not only is this a surprise, it's supernatural.**

Who is this figure dressed in white? The response to this figure is that they are overwhelmed. They are [in verse 5] “amazed.” It's the word rendered *distressed* in chapter 14 and verse 33, of Jesus in Gethsemane: the kind of bodily, overwhelming, response to news that engulfs you and paralyzes you. It's an angel. It's one of God's ministering spirits. It's in the form of a young man.

Now, angels are sexless, but when they appear, they appear as male. When they take on human form, they have male names. We only know of two names: Gabriel and Michael. There's an apocryphal mention of Rafael. They can take on physical form. They are charged...these angels are charged with helping the people of God. They have a particular responsibility to bring encouragement, especially to His little ones in times of distress, and especially at death. Much of it is shrouded in mystery. God hasn't told us very much about angels, but it'll be one of those glorious discoveries in heaven.

Angels are always present in the Bible at significant moments of redemptive history: in Eden, with the patriarchs in the giving of the covenant, at Sinai in the giving of the Law, at the birth of Jesus, in the temptation of Jesus, in Gethsemane. You remember how Luke describes at the end of Gethsemane that an angel came and ministered to Him. Oh, who is that angel who comes and ministers relief and comfort in our Lord's most crucial hour?

You remember in the story of the Old Testament in II Kings 19, you remember one angel slew 185,000 Assyrians in one blow. No wonder these women are afraid. You see, God is saying here this is a significant moment in the history of redemption. It belongs with the birth of Jesus. It belongs with the death of Jesus. It belongs with the ascension of Jesus. It belongs with the Second Coming of Jesus, which also is surrounded by angels. It identifies who Jesus is with the story of the life of Jesus; that He had come in a supernatural way, and that He was engaged in a supernatural battle, and that there's more to Him than flesh and blood; that He truly is the Son of God; that He isn't just in some supreme way a great Jewish leader, but that He truly is the Lord of glory and the King of Kings.

What exactly did this angel say? He addressed their fear, and he said, “Do not be alarmed. You’re looking for Jesus of Nazareth.” Do you know, that’s exactly what they were looking for? They weren’t looking for the Son of God. They weren’t looking for a resurrected Lord. They were looking for Jesus of Nazareth, the man who died on the Friday afternoon and was buried in this tomb. They were looking for a body. He knows exactly what they’re doing, and he utters those beautiful words that have become so significant in the church: “He is not here; He has risen.”

In the Eastern church in particular this has become something of a liturgical form, especially at Easter, the so-called Paschal Greeting: *Christos anesti!; Alithos anesti!*. (“He is risen; truly He is risen.”)

Now think about it for a moment. This dead body has come to life. Could it possibly have been...could it possibly have been that they simply went to the wrong tomb? How in the world could that happen? It was Joseph of Arimathea's tomb. You know, even if they had gone to the wrong tomb, it would have been a simple thing for the authorities to go to the right tomb and produce the body. You know, even if they had had a lapse of memory — we all have lapses of memory — it would have been the simplest thing. They could have done it in an instant, and gone to the right tomb. And the Roman authorities (or the Jewish authorities, for that matter) could have pointed out to them, ‘Look, you silly people. You’ve gone to the wrong tomb!’

Do you think it's possible (as Hugh Schonfield in his *Passover Plot* brought to life again the dreaded corpse of the “swoon theory”) that this brutalized body of Jesus, into whose side had been thrust a Roman spear, in the cool of the tomb on the Saturday afternoon had come to again? And somehow or other managed to roll away the stone from inside, and walked out past the guards? It doesn't even bear thinking about.

Or what about the “stolen body theory”? Who stole this body? ‘The Jewish authorities stole the body.’ Why would the Jewish authorities steal the body of Jesus and provide for Christians the very proof that they were looking for? And if they had stolen the body, or for that matter, if the Roman authorities had stolen the body, as soon as the first person said “He is risen”, they would have produced the body of Jesus. And they could disprove it in an instant.

What takes place here, this angel says, is a supernatural feat on the part of Almighty God. God has stepped in here. The power of God is at work here. It breaks asunder all of the constraints of post-Enlightenment thinking, and says to us that dead bodies do rise again by the supernatural power of Almighty God.

**III. But what happened here was not only a surprise, and was not only an act of supernatural power, but it was also, in the third place, something that**

**resulted in several negative responses.**

Yes. Look at verse 8: They went out, they fled, for trembling and astonishment had gripped them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid. And that's the end of the Gospel. (Now, I know! You're hiding verses 9-20!) That's the way the Gospel ended. They fled. It's the same word in the same tense of what the disciples did in chapter 14 when they abandoned Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane when He was arrested. The very same word.

What a way to end the Gospel. No appearance of Jesus. The women do not do what the angel asks them to do, namely, go and tell the disciples and go and tell Peter. (Remember, Peter is probably the one dictating this Gospel to Mark; very significant that Peter should be mentioned here.) You know, there's a contrast here, because right at the beginning of Mark's Gospel you have the story of the way in which a leper is healed, and he is commanded, you remember, not to go and tell anyone...and he goes and tells everyone! And here the women are told to go and tell, and they're silent. They tell no one.

Now, Matthew tells us they did go and tell the disciples later, and the disciples didn't believe them. You see, Mark is answering the question, not 'How do you know that Jesus is risen?' — (answer: The tomb is empty); but Mark is answering a different question: 'How come all Jerusalem didn't hear about the resurrection immediately?' Surely a bunch of hysterical women rushing through the streets of Jerusalem early in the morning, screaming about a resurrection...everyone would have known about it in an instant. And the answer: Because they were afraid...because they were afraid.

Now, why would Mark end the Gospel that way? Think about it for a minute. When did Mark write his Gospel? Probably A.D. 65, just at the onset of Roman persecution of Christianity. And do you see what Mark is saying? That the Christian church began not in a great bang of human power, but it began by the power of Almighty God.

You know, the church began out of nothing, out of a small little group of women who, when they saw the empty tomb, ran because they were afraid. Imagine, twenty, fifteen years later, you're trying to write this down and to give some credence to a movement that is now under attack from the authorities. Would you want to give the church an account of the resurrection which was the catalyst of the church and say nobody believed it at first?

And you know what? The first person who said "He is not here, but He is risen" - no one ever saw him except these women. No one was ever able to interrogate him. He disappeared. And why is Mark saying that? Because Mark wants us to focus not on the faith of the disciples, because they didn't have any; not on the faith of these women, because they didn't have much, either. But it wants us to focus entirely on the power of God that is manifested in that empty tomb. You

can imagine it, can't you? The camera focusing on that empty tomb and panning out...and there's the start of it. There's the genesis of it. The putting forth of the sovereign, supernatural, power of God in raising His Son from the dead, and in so doing demonstrates the validity of Jesus' deity, underscores the validity of everything that Jesus ever said and did, assures us of the forgiveness of our sins by faith alone in Jesus Christ alone, promises to us a bodily resurrection in the life to come, and says to us with absolute certainty — not because it's based on the faith of some women or the faith of the disciples, but because it's based upon the power of God — that all of this...all of this...is true. May God write it upon our hearts, for His name's sake.

Let's pray together.

*Our Father in heaven, as we come this evening to the end of another Lord's Day, we thank You from the very bottom of our hearts for the empty tomb. We thank You for those beautiful words, "He is not here, but He is risen." And that He was risen not because of some warm glow within our hearts, but because He truly was risen....*

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