

The Unexpected Resurrection -- Mark 16:1-20

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Please bow your heads with me for prayer.

Father, without You we have no life and no hope. But with You we have eternal life and great joy. May every person here today connect with You the Giver of Life. In Jesus' name we pray, amen.

Former president Abraham Lincoln was assassinated in 1865. An article on Wikipedia ("Funeral and Burial of Abraham Lincoln") describes how his body was taken by train from Washington DC to Springfield, Illinois. On May 24, three weeks after the funeral train arrived in Springfield, a temporary resting place was finished for the placement of Lincoln's casket. Debate between Mrs. Lincoln and Springfield city officials continued for the next month over the location for the permanent tomb, which was finally completed in the Oak Ridge Cemetery in 1874. Over a period of 35 years Lincoln's casket was moved seventeen times and opened six times (1865-1901). In 1876 four men were involved in an attempted theft of Lincoln's body. As a result, the casket was secretly moved four times that year in an attempt to keep Lincoln's body safe. In 1878 after an anonymous threat Lincoln's casket was opened (to be sure he was still inside) and moved again. During the 1900-1901 reconstruction of Lincoln's tomb, his casket was moved five times and finally reopened once more to ensure that his body was still there. A second and final reconstruction of Lincoln's tomb took place in 1930-1931. Since that time Lincoln's body has finally been left in peace.

Today we will see why the followers of Jesus of Nazareth have not had to worry about someone stealing His body.

Let's consider now a summary of our story:

Sunday morning, after Jesus' death, several women were told by an angel that Jesus had risen from the dead. But in spite of several different reports, the disciples refused to believe the good news. Later, Jesus appeared to His disciples, rebuking them for their unbelief. He then commanded them to tell everyone the good news, promising them power to work miracles. After Jesus was taken up into heaven, His followers preached everywhere, the miracles confirming their words.

Mark records several witnesses to the resurrection of Jesus Christ in his gospel account. We will now consider the testimony of each witness and follow the sequence found in Mark 16:1-20. The first witness is the angel. The women who ministered to Jesus in Galilee and followed Him to Jerusalem set the stage in verses 1-4 of Mark 16. Friday afternoon the women had seen where Jesus was placed in Lazarus' tomb. The Sabbath had been the longest day of their lives. When the sun had finally gone down, they immediately went to the market to purchase spices. That night they prepared the spices for the anointing of Jesus' body. Before the sun came up Sunday morning, the women started for the tomb. On the way they realized a problem that they hadn't anticipated. Who would help them move that big stone that covered the entrance to the tomb? Here's a very important point: they were not expecting an opened tomb! They were not aware of a conspiracy to steal Jesus' body and make it look like He had risen from the dead. By the time they got to the tomb, the sun had come up. They saw immediately that the stone had already been rolled away! They hurried inside.

This leads us to the testimony of our first witness, the angel. Mark describes him as "a young man clothed in a long white robe". He was sitting on the right side of the tomb, likely where Jesus had been laid. Matthew 28:2-4 describes this "young man" (Mark 16:5) as an angel who had caused an earthquake and had himself rolled away the stone. Notice his testimony in Mark 16 verse 6 after trying to calm the women's fears: "You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He is risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid Him." His testimony is clear and concise. We know who he's talking about (Jesus of Nazareth who was crucified). We

know why Jesus was not in the tomb anymore (He had risen from the dead). The angel then told the women to look around the tomb for themselves.

It is quite significant that verse 7 of Mark 16 begins with the word, "But". In the Greek it is the strongest possible contrast between two statements. The angel had noticed the women's dismay and shock. He wanted them to know that the empty tomb was not bad news, but really good news. He wanted them to become witnesses themselves, because Jesus' closest disciples didn't yet know that He had risen (further evidence that this was not a conspiracy made up by them). And not only was He risen, but He was going to personally meet them in Galilee, just as He had said He would the night before He was crucified (Mark 14:28). It's also significant that the angel specifically told them to tell Peter. He needed to hear this more than anyone, as he had publically denied even knowing who Jesus was and probably felt like Jesus couldn't forgive him.

How did the women respond to the angel's testimony? They obeyed the angel's instructions to "go". Mark 16:8, though, describes it as a hasty escape ("fled"). Three emotion words are used to describe the women's feelings and they all speak of utter terror: (1) "trembled", (2) "amazed", and (3) "afraid". The angel's testimony was not what they had expected to hear. And we'll see in a moment that none of Jesus' followers had been expecting this.

Let's now consider the testimony of our second witness, Mary Magdalene. Mark 16:9 states that Jesus appeared first to Mary Magdalene. John's gospel gives a more detailed account of this. John 20:1 says that Mary Magdalene actually arrived at the tomb while it was still dark. Mark 16:2 states that the women arrived at the tomb after the sun had risen. So, it seems likely that the plan was for Mary Magdalene to meet the other women at the tomb, since she was coming from a different direction (Bethany). So Mary Magdalene arrived at the tomb before the other women. When she saw that the stone had been rolled away, instead of going inside the tomb (maybe because it was still dark), she ran to Jerusalem and told the eleven disciples what she had seen (John 20:2). Peter and John then ran back with her to the tomb and went inside. After looking around, Peter and John left, but Mary Magdalene stayed. She lingered. And she got to be the first one to see Jesus (John 20:14-18).

Back in Mark 16:10 we find that Mary Magdalene went to the disciples a second time. This time she was a witness, not just of an empty tomb, but of the risen Lord. Mark 16:11 says that while Mary talked with Jesus, the disciples "mourned and wept". And even when Mary told them the good news, they did not believe her. This is another significant point in the authenticity of the resurrection story: Jesus' closest followers did not spend their time fabricating a false report of Jesus' resurrection. They were grieving! They were so depressed that even when Mary told them He was risen, they didn't believe it.

Mark 16:12, 13 reveal two more witnesses. A more detailed account of their experience is found in Luke 24:13-35. Mark simply says that Jesus appeared to them "in another form". But in Luke we find that this means Jesus came to them in the appearance of a stranger who happened to be walking the same trail that Sunday. To them He didn't look like a resurrected Lord. You can read more of the story in Luke 24. Mark's point is that they saw Jesus alive that day. They were eyewitnesses of His resurrection. Like Mary, they went and told the disciples. But Mark 16:13 states that "they did not believe them either". Jesus' death was heartbreaking and seemed so final.

Our fourth witness is Jesus Himself. In Mark 16:14 He appeared to the eleven disciples and rebuked them for not believing the other witnesses. Jesus' witness, though, changed everything for these men. They became convinced and were ready to be sent out as witnesses themselves. In fact, Jesus then sent them to preach the good news to everyone God had made. There is not a person on earth who is left out. Jesus assured the disciples that whoever believed because of their testimony would be saved. Miracles would follow them as they preached. Miraculous power would attend their message, such as healing the sick, casting out demons, and speaking in new languages. The disciples would also be supernaturally protected by God from those who would try to silence them.

Last of all, Mark highlights the testimony of the believers. Verse 19 of Mark 16 pictures Jesus being taken back to heaven. Luke 24:50-53 and Acts 1:9-12 fill in some more details of this event. We learn that Jesus' place of departure was near Bethany on the eastern slope of the Mount of Olives. He was standing there with His hands lifted up, praying a blessing on the believers when He started to rise up into the sky. Instead of being depressed once again, the believers responded with great joy (Luke 24:52). Mark 16:20 says that they did exactly what Jesus had told them to do: "They went out and preached everywhere." And the Lord kept His promise and confirmed their words with miracles.

Our faith in the living Jesus of Nazareth is based upon the testimony of many eyewitnesses. Before we consider our own testimony, I invite you to turn with me to 1 Corinthians 15:3-8. (Read) So, you see, there were hundreds of eye witnesses. According to Acts 1:3 Jesus stayed here on earth for 40 days before He was taken up into heaven. Notice how Ellen White describes the significance of this extended period of time in her book, Desire of Ages page 829:

After His resurrection He tarried on earth for a season, that His disciples might become familiar with Him in His risen and glorified body. Now He was ready for the leave-taking. He had authenticated the fact that He was a living Saviour. His disciples need no longer associate Him with the tomb. They could think of Him as glorified before the heavenly universe.

The picture Jesus left in the minds of the disciples was not of Him hanging on a cross or lying lifeless in a tomb. They were convinced beyond a shadow of a doubt that Jesus was their living Savior.

We have looked at the experiences of those who were eyewitnesses to Jesus' resurrection. Let's now consider our experience. Turn with me to Rev. 22:17. (Read) Do you see the relay in this verse? The Holy Spirit has been inviting people to take a drink of eternal life. The bride, God's church, has been making the same invitation. When someone accepts the invitation, they begin to invite others as well. This is how Christ's message and His miraculous power have been handed down to us. Now notice how Ellen White applies this. This is once again from the book Desire of Ages page 822 in the chapter "Go Teach All Nations":

"Whatever one's calling in life, his first interest should be to win souls for Christ. He may not be able to speak to congregations, but he can work for individuals."

Your calling in life is your particular job or career. As important as that is, inviting others to take a drink of eternal life through Jesus Christ is even more important. You might not be gifted in preaching. Teaching Sabbath School might not be God's plan for you. But you can be a part of the relay. You can tell people you know who are thirsty for something more in life.

The message that the apostles shared with people in their day was good news. That's what the word, "gospel", means. They told the good news of Jesus' life, death and resurrection. This is the same message that we are to pass on. Wonderful blessings have been given to us because Jesus walked this earth, died on a cross, and rose again! I love how Isaiah 40:9-11 describes this. Turn there with me. (Read) As God's people we have such good news to share, that we should not be ashamed. We should be excitedly telling people of a loving Creator and Savior with language that awakens a desire and touches their hearts. Notice how Ellen White puts it in Desire of Ages page 826:

He presents [His blessings] in the most attractive way, to excite a desire to possess them. So His servants are to present the riches of the glory of the unspeakable Gift. The wonderful love of Christ will melt and subdue hearts, when the mere reiteration of doctrines would accomplish nothing.

The gospel is not a day or a certain type of lifestyle. It's more than a doctrine. The good news is a message about Jesus Christ. Sharing the gospel is telling people about Someone. It's sharing with them what you know and love about God and His Son Jesus Christ.

We have not only been given a message to share, but a promise that God will work miracles to confirm the message. Mark 16:17 states that miracles will follow those who believe and share the gospel. Verse 20 repeats that same thought, declaring that as the believers went out preaching, the Lord worked with them by working miraculous signs.

Our world is just as much in need of healing from sickness and disease today as it was in the days of the early church. Back then the common diseases and afflictions were demon-possession, leprosy, blindness, high fever, and an inability to walk or talk. God gave His church power to deliver people from all of those. Our diseases might be different, but God's power over them has not changed. Many are suffering today from poverty, depression, guilt, stress, and physical sickness. Notice this quote from the book Desire of Ages page 822:

Ministry does not consist alone in preaching. Those minister who relieve the sick and suffering, helping the needy, speaking words of comfort to the desponding and those of little faith. Nigh and afar off are souls weighed down by a sense of guilt.

How many physically sick people would get better if they responded to the good news of a God who does not condemn them. Jesus' invitation in Matthew 11:28-30 is a perfect prescription for our society:

Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.

Often in the Bible God used natural means to accomplish supernatural results. In 2 Kings 5 God's instructions to Elisha regarding Naaman's leprosy were for him to wash in the Jordan River seven times. The result of Naaman implementing this "natural remedy" was a supernatural healing. When Daniel and his three friends chose a diet of vegetables and water instead of the king's food and wine, the result was supernatural. After only ten days they were noticeably healthier than all the other young interns in Babylon. Later after being tested by King Nebuchadnezzar, they were found to be ten times wiser than all the other wise men in the entire kingdom (Daniel 1). God used a natural diet to bring about supernatural results. Jesus Himself, whose ministry was in many ways similar to the ministry of Elisha, used natural means to bring about supernatural results. When He and His disciples were at the wedding in Cana, the supply of wine ran out (John 2:1-10). Jesus could have said, "Let there be wine." But instead, He told the servants to fill up the jugs with water. With this water Jesus performed a miracle. When the servants dipped out the water to take it to the man in charge of the reception, it miraculously turned into "good wine" (fresh grape juice).

Do you want to be a part of the great relay? Do you want God to use you to save and heal the lost? Jesus has called us to share a message – what we know of the goodness and love of God. He has also promised to work miraculous signs that will validate the message. If this is a new experience for you and you don't know where to start, I would like to share with you a few ideas in closing.

First, using the language of Revelation 22:17, drink daily of the water of life. Search continually for a fuller experience of God's love and goodness. Immerse yourself in God's Word. Meditate on it. When your heart is full of admiration for your Creator and Savior, sharing the gospel will come naturally. This series through the book of Mark has been life changing for me. I have discovered such a depth and beauty to God's Word. And Jesus has become so much more real and personal to me. How I want to experience what He experienced.

Second, pray for the Holy Spirit to open up opportunities for you to minister to someone. Acts 8 is a great example of this. The Spirit told Philip to walk down this certain road where a eunuch from Ethiopia was traveling. As the eunuch's chariot passed by, Philip overheard him reading the book of Isaiah. Philip, realizing this was an appointment set up by God, asked the eunuch a simple question, "Do you understand what you are reading?" From there, one thing led to the next until Philip actually got to baptize the eunuch. God can do that for us if we are daily praying for those opportunities. As a chaplain at the hospital, I offer support to families going through hard times. Once has a patient asked me to help her come to Christ. It has been a highlight of my chaplaincy experience. God has impressed me, though, that I should pray for those type of experiences every time I go into the hospital. God is able to orchestrate those if we are placing ourselves in His hands, saying, "Use me, Lord, to lead someone to You."

Third, spend time with those who are more experienced in leading people to Christ. In John 1:35 we find John the Baptist with two of his disciples. One was Andrew and the other was most likely John, one of the sons of Zebedee. Seeing Jesus walk by, John the Baptist pointed to Him and told them, "Behold, the Lamb of God!"

Andrew and John were impressed. They decided to follow Jesus. When Jesus saw them following Him, He turned around and asked them, "What are you looking for?" And their response was, "Teacher, where are You staying?" What a great answer! They wanted to spend time with Him. They saw in Jesus who they wanted to become. Each one of us can learn from Jesus, too. He is willing to teach us how to seek and save the lost. There are also people in the church you can learn from. A pastor or Bible worker has a wealth of experience that can be a blessing for you to learn from. When I was reading the chapter, "Go Teach All Nations", in the Desire of Ages, my uncle John came to my mind. My heart was moved by what I read and I thought, "Wow, I need to learn how to do this stuff!" I admire and appreciate the work that my uncle does as a physician. He and my aunt often use natural remedies to bring healing. I have heard my uncle cite some of the great quotes from this chapter, "Go Teach All Nations". He seems to be ahead of me in some of these things, so I'm like John and Andrew, who asked, "Where are you staying?" Fortunately, I know where my uncle is staying. Sometimes it's just hard to keep up with him.

So, as we close this journey through the book of Mark, I pray that you have been inspired to action. Take the torch. Continue the relay. The next generation is depending on you to say to them, "Come. Come to Jesus." It's like Babbie Mason says in her song, "Each One Reach One":

*The message is unchanging, "Go ye into all the world",
And share the love of Jesus far away or door to door.
You see, just like somebody told you that Jesus loves you so,
You must tell someone, who will tell someone,
Until the whole world knows.*

That's how it works. That's how the gospel will go to every person on earth who has been created by God. And when this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world, the end will come (Matthew 24:14). Let us say with John, "Come, Lord Jesus" (Revelation 22:20).