

“The Resurrection of Jesus” (An Exposition of Mark 16:1-8)¹

Introduction

Here in Mark chapter 16 we come to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. Christ’s resurrection from the dead is one of the most important events in history, and one of the most important truths in all of Scripture.

The Apostle Paul says that the fact that Jesus Christ **“was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures”** (1 Corinthians 15:4) was one of the things (along with Christ dying for our sins, and His burial) that he delivered to the church at Corinth that was **“of first importance”** (v.3).

Why is Christ's resurrection on the third day so important? Paul says that it was by Christ’s resurrection that He **“was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness”** (Romans 1:4). He also taught that Christ was **“raised for our justification”** (Romans 4:25).

As Paul says elsewhere in 1 Corinthians 15:14, **“if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain.”** Not only that, but **“if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins”** (v.17).

In other words, without the resurrection of Jesus Christ there is simply no gospel. A dead Savior saves no one. These are just some of the reasons why the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ is so important – even **“of first importance.”**

And so the truth of Christ's resurrection, and the implications of it must be preached and taught in the church, and these things *cannot* be emphasized too much or repeated too often. We need to hear of these things *much more often* than just once per year at Easter.

The Women at the Empty Tomb

The *first* thing that Mark tells us about here in our text is the women coming to Jesus's empty tomb. In v.1-2 Mark writes,

“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.”

Just as back in the previous passage in Mark 15:42 we are told that Joseph of Arimathea made haste to give the Lord Jesus a proper burial because it was **“the day before the Sabbath”** (i.e. Friday night), when such work was not to be done, even so now we find these women waiting for the Sabbath to be past, so they could **“go and anoint him”** (v.1). They wanted to properly anoint His body for burial.

And look how early they went to the tomb - **“very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen”** (v.2). They wasted no time. They did not sleep in that day, even when their grief was surely a valid excuse for doing so. Such was their love for Jesus that they started as early as was permissible.

¹ All Scripture quotations are from the English Standard Version (ESV) unless otherwise noted.

Now in some ways the actions of these women whom Mark tells us had observed from afar the *death* of Jesus on the cross (Mark 15:40), and even His *burial* (Mark 15:47), might strike us as a bit odd. For clearly they did not seem to be anticipating the resurrection! We might expect that they would instead show up as early as possible at the tomb in order to witness His triumphant resurrection or even to greet Him after He was raised from the dead! And where were the disciples? (At least the women showed up!)

But instead we find them coming to the tomb to anoint His body. In his book, *Knowing Christ*, Mark Jones writes,

“In the Gospel of Mark Christ makes three explicit predictions of his death and resurrection. These forecasts are so clear that they leave us wondering why the disciples were not waiting outside the tomb on Sunday morning to greet their triumphant Saviour. For example, he plainly told them: 'the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be killed, and after three days rise again' (Mark 8:31; see also 9:31; 10:34).”²

There would be no anointing of Jesus's body that day. And there did not really need to be, for not only was He already risen from the dead, as the young man dressed in white would tell them (v.6), but you may remember that a bit earlier in Mark's Gospel someone else had already anointed Jesus's body for burial ahead of time!

Mark 14:3 tells us that a woman came to Jesus while He was dining at the home of Simon the Leper, and she broke a very costly alabaster jar of perfumed ointment or nard, and poured its contents all over Jesus's head. Many who were there to witness it were indignant or angry about it, and viewed it as *wasteful* (v.4).

But in Mark 14:6-9 we read,

“But Jesus said, “Leave her alone. Why do you trouble her? She has done a beautiful thing to me. For you always have the poor with you, and whenever you want, you can do good for them. But you will not always have me. She has done what she could; *she has anointed my body beforehand for burial*. And truly, I say to you, wherever the gospel is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in memory of her.””

There would not be time to anoint His body for burial after He died on the cross, and so the Lord in His providence saw to it that this woman took care of that ahead of time!

The Angel at the Empty Tomb

That brings us to the *next* one who was at the tomb – the “**young man**” (v.5), who was an *angel* of the Lord. (This we know from the parallel account in Matthew 28:2.) Now when Mary Magdalene, the other Mary, and Salome got to the tomb, they were wondering who would “**roll away the stone**” from the entrance of the tomb for them (v.3). But when they got to the tomb the strangest thing happened – the stone had already been rolled back!

In v.4-5 Mark writes

“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.”

They looked up and then basically stopped and stared. They could hardly believe their own eyes! The stone, which Mark tells us **“was very large”** (v.4), was *not* just rolled *away*, but rather was **“rolled back”** (v.4).

Moving such a large, heavy stone out of the way enough for these women to go in and anoint the body of Jesus was one thing, but rolling the stone back into place (i.e. back into the place where it was before Jesus was entombed there), would have taken some real doing! It would have required rolling that massive stone back up the incline from which it had been rolled down to close and seal the tomb!

That would have taken some real power! No wonder the women were so **“alarmed”** (v.5) or *astonished* beyond measure!

The Message of the Angel

The next thing that Mark tells us of is the message of the angel. In v.6-7 Mark writes,

“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.””

The *first* thing that he tells them is *not to be alarmed or astonished*. The word that Mark uses here really indicates more of a sense of complete shock or *astonishment* than it does fear. (Of course their shock was probably mixed with some fear as well.)

They should not have been astonished because they should have expected that Jesus was going to be raised from the dead! The angel tells them, **“You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified”** (v.6). They had the right idea in *seeking Jesus*, the One **“who was crucified.”** But they were looking for Jesus in the wrong place! They were *seeking the living among the dead* (Luke 24:5).

The next words of the angel are some of the greatest words to ever be uttered in all of history: **“He has risen; he is not here.”** And as if to emphasize for them the truth of what he was saying, he tells them, **“See the place where they laid him”** (v.6). *He is risen!* And as we say every Easter Sunday, “He is risen indeed!” Amen!

The angel, this angelic messenger from God then gives these women the honor of passing along to the disciples the message of Christ's resurrection. He says, **“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”** (v.7).

And notice that he singles out Peter. He not only includes Peter, but makes sure that they know that Peter was to be included in this message of great joy. Jesus was risen, and was going on ahead of them to Galilee. And they would see Him there! What a great kindness and Mercy to Peter this was! How great must his joy have been at hearing this news!

And notice also that the angels said that all of this was **“just as he told you”** (v.7). Again, *the disciples should have been expecting the resurrection of Jesus*. Back when Jesus predicted that the disciples would all fall away and abandon Him when He went to the cross, Jesus also foretold of His coming resurrection, and that they would see Him again in Galilee! In Mark 14:27-28 the Lord Jesus said,

“You will all fall away, for it is written, ‘I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered.’ But after I am raised up, I will go before you to Galilee.”

He prophesied to them beforehand of His death and resurrection, and even promised them that although they would abandon Him in His darkest hour (which He would undergo for their salvation and ours), He would not abandon them! *They would see Him again!*

And so what did the women do? How did they respond to this commission to *go and tell* the disciples? In v.8 Mark writes,

“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.”

The reaction of the women in our text is surely one of those little details that demonstrates the truth and trustworthiness of Mark's account. It has that strange ring of truth to it, as no one would make it up this way. (The rest of the chapter has that very same strange ring of truth to it, with the disciples refusing to believe what they heard about the resurrection of their Lord – v.11, 13.)

They could barely contain themselves. They didn't just *run*, they **“fled.”** And they said nothing to anyone. (Mark may just mean that they didn't stop to tell anyone on the way.) They were shaking with shock, fear, astonishment, all of it!

Conclusion

What are we to take from all of this? The first thing for us is to be assured of the truth of Scripture, and the good news of the gospel that our Lord Jesus Christ lives – He has risen from the dead! That may sound strange to the world's ears, but it is music to a believer's ear!

The Heidelberg Catechism offers us a helpful snapshot of the importance of the resurrection of Christ, as well as the benefits of it to all believers in Jesus:

“Q.45. What does the “resurrection” of Christ profit us?

Answer: First, by his resurrection he has overcome death, that he might make us partakers of that righteousness which he had purchased for us by his death; secondly, we are also by his power raised up to a new life; and lastly, the resurrection of Christ is a sure pledge of our blessed resurrection.”

The *first* benefit of Christ's resurrection is that because He overcame death, He now makes us partakers of all that He purchased for us by His death – even righteousness and justification!

The *second* benefit of Christ's resurrection is that we are now raised with Him in the power of His resurrection “to a new life.” This is *the new birth and sanctification*, whereby the reign of sin over us is now broken, and we are enabled more and more to die unto sin and live unto righteousness (WSC.35).

The *third* benefit of Christ's resurrection that the *Heidelberg Catechism* mentions is that “lastly, the resurrection of Christ is a sure pledge of our blessed resurrection.” Because He lives, we not only have new spiritual life, but we also then have in Him a “sure pledge” or guarantee of our own “blessed resurrection.”

Death no longer has the last word over a believer in Christ. In fact, Christ Jesus has removed the sting of death for all who are united to Him by faith.

And because of all of this, the Apostle Paul closes out that great chapter on the resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15 with these words:

“Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.” (1 Corinthians 15:58)

Because of the resurrection of Christ, and the sure hope of our own future resurrection in glory with Him, our labor is not in vain if we are serving the Lord. Our work in His name is not wasted. And neither death nor the passage of time can un-do it!

And so we who are believers in Christ have every reason to (as Paul says there) **“be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord.” - Amen**