

Holy Week 2013

“Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!

*¹⁰Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David! Hosanna in the highest!”
(Mark 11:9-10. ESV)*

*¹⁷And he was teaching them and saying to them, “Is it not written, ‘My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations’? But you have made it a den of robbers.”
(Mark 11:17. ESV)*

*³⁷And Jesus uttered a loud cry and breathed his last. ³⁸And the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. ³⁹And when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that in this way he breathed his last, he said, “Truly this man was the Son of God!”
(Mark 15:37-39. ESV)*

*⁶And 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. ⁷But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going before you to Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.”
(Mark 16:6-7. ESV)*

The Resurrection
Easter Sunday, 2013
Mark 16:1-8
Rev. Paul Carter

Introduction:

Open your Bibles this morning to Mark 16:1-8. There has been a lot of emphasis on joy, excitement, shouting, dancing and singing this morning and there is more yet to come. All of that is good and entirely appropriate. My job is to tell you why we are so excited. My job is to ensure that we are not mindlessly exuberant or unthinkingly sentimental – Easter is about more than feeling hopeful, Easter is about understanding why the empty tomb changed the world forever. So let me read to you from Mark’s Gospel, chapter 16:1-8 and we will use that text to prepare us for a conversation about the meaning, the significance and the centrality of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Hear now the Word of the Lord:

¹When the Sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him. ²And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb. ³And they were saying to one another, “Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance of the tomb?” ⁴And looking up, they saw that the stone had been rolled back—it was very large. ⁵And entering the tomb, they saw a young man sitting on the right side, dressed in a white robe, and they were alarmed. ⁶And 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. ⁷But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going before you to Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told

you.”⁸ 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. (Mark 16:1-8. ESV)

This is the Word of Lord, thanks be to God.

Whenever you preach on the resurrection from Mark 16 you are obligated to spend a few minutes dispelling the confusion many people have about the ending of Mark’s Gospel. It is generally acknowledged that we do not have the original ending of chapter 16. We seem to be missing the last 5-10 verses. This is not a new discovery, this is something that the early church fathers discussed as well. There are all kinds of suggestions as to how this happened. It is sometimes suggested that because The Gospel of Matthew was based on the Gospel of Mark – it is essentially just a slightly expanded version of Mark – Mark’s Gospel which we believe was written first – may have fallen into a season of disuse in the early church. There may have been a generation that said: “Now that we have Matthew’s larger version of Mark, we needn’t spend the money to keep reproducing the shorter version” and this may account for the loss of the original ending of chapter 16. Some have suggested that by the time the church decided that they did want to keep it the last bit of the scroll had been accidentally ripped off and lost. That may be exactly what happened but obviously we can’t know for sure. One thing we know, the endings that we have were later additions that were largely summarized from the other Gospels. Churches simply added a few verses to provide a normal ending for the Gospel. There is very little new content in these added endings so they are generally considered harmless and helpful to the reader. The only original detail in the added ending is the bit in verse 17 about the snakes and signs that accompany those going out and Bible teachers have generally cautioned folks about making any doctrine out of verses that were not originally in the Bible. Scholars generally are not too concerned about not having the original ending for Mark simply because we do have Matthew. If Matthew is a beefed up version of Mark then we can safely assume that Mark’s ending was the original basis for Matthew’s ending and they are probably more or less the same. Matthew likely added a few details – as was his habit – while following the basic flow of the story so, take those details out and you probably have the lost ending of Mark.

I share all of that with you only so that you are not distracted by the little notes in the margin of your Bible while I finish this sermon. My concern this morning is not to parse the details of the narrative anyway. It is the FACT of the empty tomb we want to wrestle with and that FACT is

clearly presented in the 8 verses we have from Mark 16 so we have all that we need for our Easter Sunday message. The question I want to wrestle with this morning is the why question. Why does this matter?

Many of the Easter Sunday sermons I have heard over the years have dealt more with the apologetic issues – how can we PROVE that the resurrection happened? That is an important question and it has been answered many times – if you want help with that I recommend Lee Strobel’s great book *The Case For Easter*¹. I want to focus less on the apologetics and more on the theological significance. Why does the empty tomb matter? Most of us understand the significance of the cross – if I asked you why Jesus had to die I would imagine you could give me an impressive list of answers but if I asked you why he had to rise again from the dead, what would you say? To what extent is the resurrection absolutely CRITICAL to our faith as Christians?

The Significance Of The Resurrection:

Obviously we cannot answer that question in an exhaustive way this morning, but let me suggest three that are prominently discussed in the remainder of the New Testament; I want to show you how the resurrection is absolutely critical to our salvation, to our consolation and to our motivation. Let’s look first of all at how the resurrection is critical to our salvation.

1. To Our Salvation

Flip forward in your Bibles to Romans 4:23-25.

²³But the words “it was counted to him” were not written for his sake alone, ²⁴but for ours also. It will be counted to us who believe in him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord, ²⁵who was delivered up for our trespasses and **raised for our justification.** (Romans 4:23-25. ESV)

Obviously we enter this passage mid-argument. The Apostle Paul has been talking about how we are saved in the same way that Abraham was saved. Abraham believed God and it was credited to him – or imputed to him – as righteousness. These words apply as much to us as to Abraham,

¹ To buy go to http://www.christianbook.com/the-case-for-easter/lee-strobel/9780310254751/pd/54758?item_code=WW&netp_id=381249&event=ESRCG&view=details

Paul argues; all people – Old and New Testament are saved or FORGIVEN and JUSTIFIED on the basis of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Earlier in Romans Paul has attributed salvation solely to Christ's death, as per Romans 3:24-25:

²³for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, ²⁵whom God put forward as **a propitiation by his blood**, to be received by faith. (Romans 3:23-25. ESV)

There Paul seems to be saying that salvation for us is accomplished by the blood – i.e. the sacrificial death – of Jesus Christ upon the cross; so what does he mean by pairing that with the resurrection in chapter 4? What role does the resurrection play in our actual salvation? William Hendriksen puts it this way:

“... he was raised in order to assure us that in the sight of God we are indeed without sin. In other words Christ's resurrection had as its purpose to bring to light the fact that all those who acknowledge Jesus as their Lord and Savior have entered into a state of righteousness in the eyes of God. The Father, by raising Jesus from the dead, assures us that the atoning sacrifice has been accepted; hence, our sins are forgiven.” (Hendriksen, Romans; p.161.)

The resurrection then, is given as vindication that the sacrifice of the cross was effective and that Jesus was in fact exactly who he said he was. He was indeed the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. The empty tomb is the proof in the pudding. You can see that in the way Mark presents this piece of information. Look again at Mark 16:6:

⁶And he said to them, “Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. **He has risen**; he is not here. (Mark 16:6. ESV)

That little phrase “he has risen” is actually just one word in Greek. It is the word *eg-i'-ro* and it is in the aorist passive indicative meaning that it is a completed action that was done to the object. Jesus HAS BEEN raised. The only one who could do that is God. If God DID that then Jesus was who he said he was and his death accomplished what he said it would. It is God's signature on the covenant of grace written in the blood of the cross.

Many scholars remark on the fact that none of the Gospels contain an actual account of the resurrection. Meaning no one tells us how exactly it happened. No one narrates the actual moment when the Spirit of Jesus re-animates the body of Jesus inside the tomb. Why is that? Because none of them were interested in the HOW of the resurrection, they were interested in the simple FACT of the resurrection. THAT it happened – THAT God raised Jesus from the dead is

the life changing detail. It is the moment when all the questions are answered about Jesus. In that fact there is the approval of God, the vindication of Christ and the certain hope of our own eternity. If they ever find a tomb with the body of Jesus in it then you are going to hell. Jesus was not who he said he was, his death was nothing more than a tragedy and can be to us nothing more than an object lesson. But there is no such tomb; the opponents of Jesus have never been able to present such a tomb despite all their efforts because HE IS NOT HERE, the angel said. He has been raised. That truth is the reason for your hope and is the Father's signature upon every promise Jesus ever made.

Secondly let's look at how the resurrection is critical to our consolation.

2. To Our Consolation

Open your Bibles now to Acts 17:31. The Apostle Paul has been evangelizing in the city of Athens. As a sidenote it is useful to observe that his presentation of the Gospel climaxed in a reminder that God is Sovereign and he will judge the world and hold all people accountable for their sins. We could use a little more of that nowadays in our evangelism, but that isn't the point I want to make this morning. After saying that Paul says this:

³¹because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this **he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead.**" (Acts 17:31. ESV)

The Apostle Paul argues that the resurrection of Jesus is proof of God's commitment to justice; that is the basis for our consolation in the face of so much SEEMING injustice and unfairness here in life. The simple fact is that there are many things in the world that are not as they should be. The Proverbs in the Bible function both as a reminder of moral and natural law and also as a prophesy of the restored order. We've been reading them in the RMM plan these last two weeks and I have been struck by this again and again. Proverbs says for example:

⁴ A slack hand causes poverty,
but the hand of the diligent makes rich. (Proverbs 10:4. ESV)

That Proverb is saying that God designed the world to reward diligence and effort. Generally speaking, all things being equal, the world working the way it was made to work, hard workers will become rich and lazy people will be rebuked with poverty. Ok BUT. Proverbs also says:

²³ The fallow ground of the poor would yield much food,
but it is swept away through injustice. (Proverbs 13:23. ESV)

What's it saying there? Its saying that sometimes things don't work the way they should because of sin and injustice. It isn't always true in a broken world like ours that poor people are lazy. Sometimes they are held back by injustice, sometimes they are sick by no fault of their own – there are 100 reasons someone might be poor in our broken world that do not relate to laziness or lack of effort! The world doesn't always work the way it should – there is INJUSTICE! So what do we do? Do we sit down and cry? Do we not even bother getting out of bed in the morning knowing that maybe things won't work out the way they should? No! We do what's right and we trust that should we experience injustice in this world – AND WE WILL – God is still in charge. God sees it all and he will sort it all out at the final judgment. The proof that there is life beyond death, the proof that there is justice beyond the grave is the FACT that Jesus HAS BEEN RAISED; the angel said “HE HAS BEEN RAISED – HE IS NOT HERE.” God can raise the dead, God doesn't let evil triumph, God does set things to right – he did it for Jesus and he will do it for you.

Make no mistake my friends, life is fair. There is a reckoning. Not always in this life, but in this life or the next JUSTICE WILL BE DONE. Many are they who were first IN LIFE who will be LAST in death. The empty tomb is a promise that justice will be done. Murderers and rapists and pornographers and slave owners and kidnappers will all stand before the throne of God and receive JUSTICE! What do we say when our unsaved friends and neighbours tell us that if a loving God really existed he would do something about the sex trade or child abuse or genocide? We tell them about the empty tomb, we tell them that God has spoken in space time in a miraculous way declaring that there is life after death when every wrong will be made right for all eternity. You tell them that if there is a tomb somewhere with the body of Jesus in it then yes, God doesn't exist or if he does then he is not good or not powerful but if there is no such tomb than just wait. You wait and you will see that God is good, God is powerful and God is JUST.

The empty tomb is our consolation with respect to unresolved injustice. The Bible also says that it is our consolation with respect to unremitting sorrow and grief. Look at 1 Thessalonians 4:13-14. Here Paul is counselling a group of Christians who are dealing with the death of loved ones. He says:

¹³But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. ¹⁴For **since we believe that Jesus died and rose again**, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. (1 Thessalonians 4:13-14. ESV)

Paul is saying that if we truly understand the significance of the empty tomb we will not grieve as the pagans do as those who have no hope. We will not despair or become irrational in our grief because we know that for true believers, death is little more than sleep and we will see our loved ones again shortly. Now, this is not a prohibition of weeping or legitimate emotion. We are humans and we love and when we are parted from loved ones we feel that deeply. Jesus was fully human and he also felt the pain of parting from friends. When his friend Lazarus died, Jesus wept. If Jesus wept, then we are permitted to weep. We are permitted to miss. We are permitted to feel deeply the absence of our friends, our parents, or our children should they pass before we do. That is human and that is appropriate and good. But; in our grieving it must be clear that we have not lost hope, we are not in despair. We will see them again. They are in a better place, if in fact, they are in Christ.

There is an unthinking, illogical optimism that one runs into at pagan funerals in Canada that I am not advocating for. I go to funerals for people who knew nothing of Jesus in life and who never darkened the door of a church until they were brought into one inside a box and yet everyone comforts each other with mindless sentiments like: “We know old Joe is looking down on us from above while riding his snowmobile through the clouds in glory.” That sort of mindless optimism is definitely not in view here. Paul is not changing everything he’s ever said about salvation, he is just saying that the consequence of actually believing in Christ in a saving way is that we do not need to fear death or mourn death as others do. Death is hard, its unfair and often too soon but in Christ, it is never the end and never cause for despair. Absent from the body is present with the Lord and it is far better to be with the Lord. The same God who raised Christ from the dead will raise you from the dead. Comfort one another with these words.

Lastly let’s take a look at how the resurrection is critical to our motivation.

3. To Our Motivation

Open your Bibles to Romans 7:4.

⁴Likewise, my brothers, you also have died to the law through the body of Christ, so that you may belong to another, to him who has been raised from the dead, in order that we may bear fruit for God. (Romans 7:4. ESV)

Paul is moving from FACT to CONSEQUENCE or from THEOLOGY to ETHICS or even better from GRACE to GRATITUDE. The fact is that through the body of Christ we have died to the law. That's the fact or the datum of grace that Paul is going to apply. Let's make sure we understand this fact. What does Paul mean that we have died to the law through the body of Christ? He means that it was through the body of Christ CRUCIFIED that our debt to the law was paid off – the law's BILL has been paid in full in the body of Jesus on the cross – by his stripes we are healed. Therefore, if the point of human life is to obtain salvation and we have that salvation now in Christ – we know we have it because Christ has been raised from the dead – the empty tomb is the signature of God upon the covenant of grace written in the blood of the cross – it is DONE! It is FINISHED, it is ACCOMPLISHED. How then should we spend the remainder of our days? The main issue having been settled for us, what do we do now? Should we have a nap until the Lord comes? Should we drive our cars over a cliff because to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord? What should we do? We should SERVE ONE ANOTHER and bear fruit unto God.

Paul moves from the FACT of the resurrection to the CONSEQUENCE of mutual service. As he does again in Romans 12:1, as he does in Ephesians 4:1 he says that the grace of our salvation should result in a life of gratitude expressing itself in service unto one another bearing fruit unto God. He makes that same move in 1 Corinthians 15. 1 Corinthians 15 is THE resurrection chapter in the New Testament – I preached on that last Easter. There after giving a chapter length explanation of the resurrection, Paul concludes by saying:

⁵⁸Therefore, 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. ESV)

If you are in Christ then your salvation is fully accomplished – you can neither add to it or subtract from it. It is DONE. The empty tomb is the stamp and seal of God the Father on all the promises made by Jesus Christ. All the promises of God are YES and AMEN to us in Christ. They are done and they are applied. End of story. Rather than having a nap brothers and sisters, the Apostle Paul counsels sacrificial service unto God by loving and serving one another. Use your remaining days to serve the Lord. You don't need to earn salvation – Jesus did that for you – so use your strength to serve one another. This labour is an appropriate act of gratitude and it is by no means in vain. It is not wasted or pointless. It accumulates reward. Jesus promised that – he said to store up treasure in heaven, he told stories and parables about eternal rewards and the Apostle Paul has taught on it. There is nothing sinful about seeking reward. It is one of the ways we delight in the design of God – God designed the universe to reward effort and diligence by his creatures. We show our delight in that design by working hard as NEW CREATURES, saved by grace, full of gratitude, serving one another and bearing fruit unto God. The resurrection is our motivation for all Christian service and mission. This is right there in Mark 16. The angel says:

He has risen; he is not here. See the place where they laid him. ⁷But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going before you to Galilee. (Mark 16:6-7. ESV)

You know of course that the verse markings were added centuries later; in the Greek the transition from verse 6 to verse 7 is seamless. The angel says: “He has been raised. He is not here. See the place where they laid him AND GO!” The Greek word translated “but” can just as easily be translated as “and” it is simply a connective meaning “and more yet”, it serves to connect two thoughts. The angel is connecting the fact of the empty tomb with the need for the ladies to GO and tell. The empty tomb is the reason we do missions, it is the reason we serve, it is the reason we give, it is the reason we volunteer. It is the reason the church goes forward on the back of unpaid labour. Sometimes we need to be reminded of that. Sometimes people will ask me: “How come so and so gets paid to babysit for a small group but I don't get paid when I volunteer in the nursery on Sunday?” That's not a stupid question its just a question that reflects the need to revisit the empty tomb. We can pay you \$5/hr and sometimes when we don't have enough volunteers to maintain our legally required ratio we will, we have to, but the reason its better if we don't is because far better than our \$5 is the reward that is promised by the empty tomb. Because the empty tomb means what it means – it means that your salvation is accomplished – therefore your serving in the nursery is not SO THAT you can be saved – you are

not accumulating salvific merit – you don't require salvific merit because of the cross – therefore when you serve in the nursery you are just BANKING eternal reward. If we give you \$5 you can buy a coffee and drink it or you can tell us to stuff the \$5 and enjoy your reward for all eternity. That, if you understand the empty tomb, is a far better deal. Take it. The Apostle says, TAKE IT. Such labours are not in vain.

Conclusion:

The empty tomb is absolutely central to our salvation, our consolation and our motivation. It changes everything. Jesus has been raised. He is not here, the angel said. Now go and tell the world. This is the word of the Lord, thanks be to God.