

Three Women Testify About the Resurrection

Mark 16:1–8
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August 16, 1977. How many of you remember what happened that day? I remember it very well because my parents had just bought a new house and that was the day we moved into it. Everyone was talking about Elvis Presley's death as we packed boxes and moved furniture.

The next day, someone claimed to have seen Elvis alive at the Memphis airport, checking in under the name 'Jon Burrows,' a name Elvis often used when booking hotels. Others later alleged to have seen him in Michigan and California. It's even said that he had a small part in the 1990 film, *Home Alone*. Of course, whenever anyone actually followed up on these so-called Elvis sightings, they turned out to be Elvis impersonators or cases of mistaken identity.

The truth is that Elvis died and is still dead today. He'll remain under the power of death until Jesus comes back.

Easter isn't a story of someone who supposedly faked his own death or was mistakenly presumed dead by others or anything of the kind. Like Elvis, Jesus died. But unlike Elvis, Jesus died for our sins and rose again from the dead on the third day to give us everlasting life. By his resurrection, he defeated sin, Satan, death and hell once and for all for everyone who believes in him.

So, let's see what today's text teaches us about Jesus' resurrection from the dead and how it affects our Christian faith.

The Women

Our text begins with three women gathering spices to anoint Jesus. They didn't do it to preserve his body but to show respect and devotion by washing and perfuming his broken face. Having witnessed Jesus' crucifixion and burial, they wanted to do something for him, just like the woman who earlier had brought a flask of spikenard and anointed his head to prepare for his burial (Mark 14:3–9).

According to the first verse of our text, the activity of the women began Saturday evening. The Jews counted each day from sunset to sunset. Thus, their sabbaths began each Friday evening at sunset and lasted until Saturday evening at about the same time. So, when the sabbath ended the

day after Jesus was crucified, which would have been approximately 6 PM, the women went out to buy spices in fulfillment of their mission.

But who were these women? Mark named three of them: *Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome*. But they may not have been the only ones. According to Luke, there were *certain others with them* (Luke 24:1). But what do we know about those whose names we have?

Mary Magdalene appears first on the list. She's an interesting and somewhat enigmatic character in Mark's gospel. Her name first appeared in the previous chapter as a witness of Jesus' crucifixion (Mark 15:40). She was also present at his burial (v. 47). We learn how Jesus helped her only after the resurrection. The verse following today's text says, *Now when Jesus was risen early the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom he had cast seven devils* (v. 9; cf. Luke 8:2).

The second woman who went to the tomb was Mary the mother of James and Joses. This is how Mark described her when she, along with Mary Magdalene, stood near the cross (Mark 15:40). But he called her *Mary the mother of Joses* at Jesus' grave (v. 47) and *Mary the mother of James* in our text. It's also possible she was the same woman identified elsewhere as the wife of Clopas (John 19:25) and possibly one of the two Jesus spoke with on the way to Emmaus (Luke 24:18). Other than this, we know nothing about her.

The third woman's name was Salome. She was probably the mother of James and John (cf. Matt. 27:56) and a sister to Mary the mother of Jesus (cf. John 19:25). These family connections would also explain why she felt free to approach Jesus on behalf of her sons, asking that one be seated on his right hand and the other on his left (Matt. 20:20-23).

The women bought and prepared the spices to anoint Jesus. They got up earlier on Sunday morning to do so. But they had forgotten one thing: Jewish graves were caves in which shelves were cut into the rock to hold the bodies of loved ones, and they were sealed with a large stone covering the cave's opening. Most graves were sealed with square stones, but the graves of the rich (like Joseph of Arimathaea) used round stones that were rolled in a rut cut in front of the tomb. Round stones were easier to move than square ones but still too much for the women. According to verse 3, as they made their way to the tomb, *they said among themselves, Who shall roll us away the stone from the door of the sepulchre?* But they didn't have to look far because when they arrived they saw the stone had already been rolled away.

Who had moved this massive stone? Matthew wrote, *And, behold, there was a great earthquake: for the angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from*

the door, and sat upon it (Matt. 28:2). It was a special work of God, who alone has the power to open graves and call out the dead!

The Angel

The women then went into the tomb. Instead of the one they had come to see, they found *a young man sitting on the right side, clothed in a long white garment*. This was, doubtless, an angel — the one who had rolled back the stone. Matthew wrote that *his countenance was like lightning, and his raiment white as snow* (Matt. 28:3). The whiteness of his garments announced the special character of those who wore them and symbolized the festivity they brought. Joyous things had happened. Nonetheless, the angel's presence terrified the women, who didn't know what to think of all the strange things they had seen.

Unbelievers believe that this occurrence proves the Bible cannot be trusted. Why? Because Matthew and Mark mention only one angel (cf. Matt. 28:2–7), but Luke and John record the presence of two angels (Luke 24:4–7; John 20:12–13). This sort of thing occurs frequently in the gospels. Did Jesus greet one or two blind beggars when he arrived in Jericho? Cf. Mark 10:46 and Luke 18:35 with Matthew 20:30. Was there one demoniac in the country of the Gadarenes or two? Cf. Mark 5:2 and Luke 8:27 with Matthew 8:28. In each case, we can say a lot more than this, but one thing is certainly true: if there were two angels, beggars and demoniacs, then there had to be one of each. Perhaps Mark mentioned only one angel in our text because it was he who talked with the women.

The angel in shining garments comforted the women in three ways:

First, he told them not to be afraid. There was no reason for fear. The stone had been moved and an angel was in the tomb instead of Jesus. These were good things. They just had to believe them.

Second, the angel explained why the women shouldn't be afraid. He said, *Ye seek Jesus of Nazareth, which was crucified: he is risen; he is not here: behold the place where they laid him*. Jesus wasn't there anymore. His grave clothes were there, but his body wasn't. What could account for this, except that he had risen from the dead? He defeated *the king of terrors* (Job 18:14) and man's *last enemy* (1 Cor. 15:26). He's alive!

R. Kent Hughes wrote,

Even the most extreme skeptics do not deny that the grave was empty, including the early Jewish polemicists. Where was the body? The Jews did not have it, for they would have produced it post-haste. The disciples did not have it, for if they did, it would have been

psychologically and spiritually impossible for them to live the dedicated martyrs' lives and deaths they did.... That the disciples were totally convinced that Jesus had risen is beyond doubt! When someone says, "I don't believe in your Resurrection," ask them, "What happened to the body of Jesus?"

And finally, the angel told the women where they and others could find the Lord. He said, *But go your way, tell his disciples and Peter that he goeth before you into Galilee: there shall ye see him, as he said unto you.* Jesus had to be alive if they were to see him there. They would reunite with him again. Even Peter, who had denied the Lord three times on the night of his arrest, wasn't excluded. If his sin could be forgiven, there's hope for us all. Jesus really had separated his people from their sins.

On the other hand, the angel's assurance that Jesus would meet his disciples in Galilee seems out of place. According to verse 14, Jesus appeared to eleven of his disciples in the upper room in Jerusalem on the day he rose from the dead. The other gospels report that he showed himself alive to several others that day and the following Sunday. These earlier appearances took place in or near Jerusalem. So, why did the angel say that Jesus would meet his disciples in Galilee?

The angel was right: Jesus had promised to meet his disciples in Galilee. Mark 14:28 says, *But after that I am risen, I will go before you into Galilee.* Meeting his disciples was a sign to them that he had completed his work. And it was fitting, too, since all the disciples came from Galilee, except Judas the traitor, and Jesus spent most of his ministry there. He met them there after his resurrection to comfort them and assure them he would be with them as they served him.

But this is only a part of the answer. Jesus took the apostles to Galilee to teach them what they were to do. There he spoke to them plainly. The closing verses of Matthew's gospel put it like this: *Then the eleven disciples went away into Galilee, into a mountain where Jesus had appointed them. And when they saw him, they worshipped him: but some doubted. And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world (Matt. 28:16–20).* Their mission was to tell the world that the Savior of men was alive, that he continues to govern the entire universe, and that men must be united to him by faith to be saved.

As you read the sermons of the apostles in the book of Acts and their explanations of the Christian faith in their epistles, you'll find that they did exactly as they were told. Make much of Jesus' blood, but never forget his resurrection and present reign in glory. His death has no power unless he rose victoriously from its grasp!

In the last two sermons, we've noted the prominent role women had in connection with Jesus' crucifixion and burial. They remained at the cross when the men fled, and they watched Joseph and Nicodemus bury his body so they could come back and anoint his face because of their great love for him.

We know from John's gospel, that both Peter and John saw the empty tomb themselves. Mark chose not to say anything about this. Instead, he restricted himself to the women, who took the initiative to go out to the tomb by themselves. In fact, they wanted to do it so badly that they didn't even stop to think about how they would move the stone. They were the first ones to hear that Jesus had actually risen from the dead, just as he said he would do. Peter didn't tell them; they told him. They instructed the chief spokesman of the apostles. The angel also told them to remind the apostles to meet Jesus in Galilee.

All of this hit the women pretty fast. They still didn't know quite what to think of it. Verse 8 says, *And they went out quickly, and fled from the sepulchre; for they trembled and were amazed: neither said they any thing to any man [along the way]; for they were afraid.* Matthew wrote, *And they departed quickly from the sepulchre with fear and great joy (Matt. 28:8).*

The first witness of Jesus' finished work came from women. This is pretty amazing considering the Jews thought the testimony of women was unreliable. They put it on the same level as the testimony of slaves and criminals. But the Lord used them. He used their faith, their fear and their joy as they reported the news of Jesus' triumph to the apostles.

Mark gives us an inspired record of the women's experiences and testimony. Their faith and joy have now become ours, if we believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as our only hope. Nothing should give us greater joy than the certain knowledge that our Lord's grave is empty. And nothing should move us to greater service than the conviction that our Savior defeated sin, death and hell for us.

Easter isn't about the power of our imaginations to see dead people who aren't really there. It's the news of what God did for us through his Son by raising him from the dead. Amen.