

He Has Risen!

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Text: Mark 16¹

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Series: The Passion of the Christ

Introduction: Open your Bible this morning to **Mark 16**. We come to the last message in our series “The Passion of the Christ”. The title of the message is “He is Risen”.²

Have you ever felt like you failed the Lord? Like you were a spiritual and personal failure before God? You might have thought that God could never use you. Well you thought wrong. We are going to see today, that the resurrection of Christ is for those who need forgiveness and restoration.

Let me take you to the empty tomb at the moment of Christ’s resurrection in Matthew 28. Turn there if you would.

In a brilliant moment on Sunday morning, says Matthew 28:2–4 (ESV) — “And behold, there was a great earthquake, for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled back the stone and sat on it. 3 His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. 4 And for fear of him the guards trembled and became like dead men”. Matthew here mentions one angel, Luke mentions two (Luke 24:4), but that is probably only those who decided to be seen. Many more, perhaps thousands more, watched. Jesus came right through his grave clothes, in his sacred human body, glorious and radiant, and the angels’ shouts rose to the stars!³

But none of the disciples were there! The only human witnesses to the resurrection at the moment Christ was raised from the dead, were the pagan Roman soldiers.

Where were the disciples? They were terrified somewhere in a corner in Jerusalem in fear for their lives. They had no hope and no idea that Jesus was raised from the dead. I think we are sometimes like those disciples, but Jesus sent a word to them through the angel. He actually gave them three words. Let’s find out what they were as we look at our text in **Mark 16:1-8**.

Mark 16 (ESV) — “When the Sabbath was past, **Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James and Salome** bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him. 2 And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb. 3 And they were saying to one another, “Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance of the tomb?” 4 And looking up, they saw that the stone had been rolled back—it was very large. 5 And entering the tomb, they saw a young man sitting on the right side, dressed in a white robe, and they were alarmed. 6 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. 7 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.**” 8 And they went out

¹ Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture is from the *English Standard Version* of the Bible.

² The outline and much of the material of this message are utilized from Timothy Keller. *King’s Cross* (Dutton: New York, 2011), 212ff, “The Beginning”.

³ Hughes, R. K. (1989). *Mark : Jesus, servant and savior*. Preaching the Word (216). Westchester, Ill.: Crossway Books.

and fled from the tomb, for trembling and astonishment had seized them, and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.”

I want to encourage you with three words of encouragement about the resurrection of Christ...

- A word from history for your *mind*.
- A word of grace for your *heart*.
- A word of mission for your *way of life*.

I. **A word from history for your mind** (15:40, 47; 16:1, 7).

Verse 7, the angel said to the women, “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”. *You see the place Jesus’ ought to be? He’s not there.*

Messianic Movements

Now this is a challenge for the mind. Think of this. In the decades before and after Jesus’ life and death there were *dozens* of messianic movements in Israel. In almost every case, the messianic leader was killed—in many cases he was executed—and in all messianic movements outside of Christianity, after the leader’s death, each of these movements invariably collapsed. Everybody went home, and that was it. But it was not so with this one.

Out of all those movements, only one did not collapse after the death of the leader, and not only did it not collapse, it actually exploded and within two hundred years it took over the Roman Empire. Today Christianity is by far the largest faith on the face of the earth. What makes Christianity so utterly different?

Christians say the reason it is different is because after the death of Jesus Christ, He came back from the dead and He appeared to His followers. He appeared to over 500 people and taught his disciples for forty days (**Acts 1:3-4**) before He ascended into heaven.

Most people here and in Chicago do not believe this. So they have to come up with an alternate explanation as to why this tiny little movement of eleven cowardly men has radically changed the world. Why did this religious faith explode and turn the world upside down in the first century alone and has exponentially exploded in every time period since.

- Our unbelieving friends and family say, “We don’t know”. We believe that the four Gospels are legends and not history. We just don’t know, but we know it can’t be true. Well, Mark challenges the whole world to put the intellectual effort into understanding that there is hard evidence that Jesus Christ was risen from the dead.

A. **Consider the living eye-witnesses of Jesus death, burial and resurrection** (Mk 15:40, 47; 16:1).

Mark challenges all of our thinking. In Mark 15:40, 47, and Mark 16:1—three times in eight verses—Mark records the names of these women who witnessed the burial of Jesus: Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Joses, and Salome. So why the redundancy?

Richard Bauckham

Biblical scholar Richard Bauckham, goes to great lengths in his book “Jesus and the Eyewitnesses” to demonstrate that these three women were well known in the early church and could be interviewed as eye witnesses of the death and burial of Christ at the time of the writing of Mark.⁴ He says that this account has all the marks of how ancient historians verified historical accounts in those days. Ancient historians gave more credence to the oral testimony of living eye witnesses than written documents. Why? Because you could cross examine them and verify what they said. When you see these women’s names put down over and over and over again, you have the earmarks of well-documented history.

Paul uses the same method in **1 Corinthians 15:1–8**. Paul gives a litany of witnesses in this passage including 500 eyewitnesses that he says, “most of whom are still alive” to this day.

Verifiable Eye Witnesses

We know that these women were alive at the time of the writing because of the way Mark has emphasized the credibility of their testimony. In other words, what Mark was saying was, if you want to verify these accounts, talk to the two Marys. Talk to Salome. Paul says, talk to the 500 witnesses. You can find them and interview them and cross examine them and verify their testimony. This was the most trusted, verifiable, and unrelenting method of recording and authenticating history at the time. And the idea is that many had already done that. And the result was that the Gospel spread—rapidly.

These women must have been busy because the Gospel spreads ferociously in their lifetimes. In fact by the time we get to **Acts 17:6**—only about 16 years after this account of the resurrection, we read the testimony of the authorities of Thessalonica (AD 49). It says they could not find Paul and Silas, so “they dragged Jason and some of the brothers before the city authorities, shouting, “These men who have turned the world upside down have come here also””. Within 16 years, the Gospel was spreading in an unrelenting manner.

Greek Philosopher Celsus

The slam dunk proof that this is history is that the first witnesses to Jesus’ resurrection are *women*. Have you ever heard of Celsus? Celsus was a Greek philosopher who lived in the second century AD. He is known for writing the first comprehensive attack on Christianity in about 177 AD. He did not like Christianity. He was the Richard Dawkins of his time, and he listed all of his arguments against Christianity. But do you know what one of his strongest arguments was against the truth of Christianity? Here’s what he said. He said one of the reasons we know Christianity cannot be true is because the accounts of the resurrection in all four Gospels are based on the testimony of women. Of course women were marginalized in the ancient world. In fact in his documents Celsus said, “and we all know that women are hysterical”.⁵ And every one else in the ancient world said, “Yeah, that’s a problem—that’s a pretty big problem!” Why did Celsus know that was an incredibly strong argument? Because in ancient cultures women were marginalized and it

⁴ Richard Bauckham. *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2006), 50.

⁵ See Graham Stanton’s arguments in *Jesus and Gospel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 150-2.

was hard to believe in their testimony.

But don't you know what that means? It means that if all four Gospel writers were making this up, they would never have put the women in as the *only* eye witnesses to Jesus' empty tomb. The only way to account for them being depicted as eye witnesses of the empty tomb is that they were eye witnesses!

Mark is challenging us and telling us that this is a historical document. This is true history.

Here's something else for your mind.

B. Consider the radical change in the character of the disciples after the resurrection (Mk 16:7).

1. The **testimony** of secular historians.

Even secular historians acknowledge that if Mark was making up his account of Jesus' life, he would not have had Peter and the other disciples cowering in an undisclosed location after Jesus' death. No one is waiting at the tomb for Jesus resurrection. No one is expecting Jesus to be raised from the dead.

Mark was Peter's assistant before he died. In Mark's Gospel we are receiving the eye witness account of the apostle Peter. So we have Peter, the leader of the apostles, denying Jesus three times. If you were making this up, you might want to leave that out.

Not only that—notice: who are at the tomb on the third day? It's the *women*. The *women*! Where are the *men*? The *men* are hiding! The *men* are cowering. Listen to what the angel tells the women in **Mark 16:7**, "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".

It's not just: "go tell the disciples" but the angel emphasizes the *terrified* leader of the apostles—you know the one who *denied Jesus*: the angels says, "go tell the disciples and Peter". Go tell Peter because he's denied the Lord in such a cowardly manner. Tell him to meet me in Galilee.

2. The **unbelief** of the disciples. One thing is clear: *not one of Jesus' followers is expecting the resurrection*. Now Jesus has made one thing clear throughout His ministry. He says it in Mark 8, 9, and 10. Mark is a writer of an economical style which means that when he repeats something it was likely that Jesus was saying it over and over again. Over and over he says "I will die, but I will rise on the third day"... I will rise on the third day, I will rise on the third day, I will rise on the third day...

- **Mr 8:31**, "And he began to teach them that 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."
- **Mr 9:31**, "for he was teaching his disciples, saying to them, "The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill him. And when he is killed, after three days he will rise.""

- **Mr 10:34**, “And they will mock him and spit on him, and flog him and kill him. And after three days he will rise.”

Do you notice something weird that is missing from all the Gospel accounts? It's the third day. There are no male disciples around. Remember they are cowering in an undisclosed location. They have truly given up all hope. They are now in survival mode trying to preserve their lives. So no male disciples around. And what about the female disciples? They're there at the tomb on the third day, but they are not looking for an empty tomb! They've brought spices, perfumes, and ointments to care for the dead body of Jesus—all very expensive. They are in expectation of Jesus' dead body.

Nobody at all was expecting this. It's a very strange story. If you are Mark, you are trying to write a credible story—and Jesus throughout His ministry (Jn. 2, Mk. 8-10, Mt. 12:40, etc.) says, “I'm going to rise on the third day”—but not one person, not one disciple is sitting around saying, “Huh, it's the third day...maybe we ought to go take a look—*what would it hurt?*” Wouldn't you think to do that? None of the disciples are expecting His resurrection AT ALL.

In fact, notice the very last line the angel says—he's poking at them—He is risen, “just as He told you” (vs. 7; cf. **Mt. 28:6**).

Here's the point—the resurrection was utterly inconceivable to the first disciples, so that when Jesus did rise from the dead, they were radically changed. It was inconceivable for the Greeks as well as for the Jews. The Greeks did not believe in a resurrection, and the Jews, though they believed in a general resurrection, they could not conceive of an individual rising from the dead.

That's why all the disciples were cowering and afraid. Absolutely none of the disciples believed that Jesus would rise from the dead.

3. The radical **change** in the disciples. What changed?

So what changed? What changed them from cowering to proclaiming Jesus with boldness? What changed them so that they were willing to go through every hardship and trial, even eleven out of the twelve dying through martyrdom, because they had witnessed the resurrection?

What changed them was Jesus. They met Jesus. And that's the only thing that will change you. People then were just as incredulous of resurrection as they are today. The only thing that will change them is meeting Jesus Christ who is alive from the dead.

Christ actually meets with the disciples on and off for 40 days and teaches them. And they are radically changed. The cowering Peter boldly stands up on Pentecost and amidst some of the crowds mocking preaches so convincingly that 3000 Jews are publically baptized!!

The sad thing is that a lot of modern people are being intellectually lazy. They say, “Our worldview doesn't allow us to believe in a resurrection”. The people of the ancient world also had a worldview that would not allow for a resurrection. So why

did hundreds of thousand believe? Because they had the intellectual integrity to follow where the evidence led them.

You have to come up for a historically plausible reason for this tiny group of disciples exploding across the world's landscape and changing the world when no other did.

- *You have to come up with a reason for why hundreds and hundreds of people said that they actually saw Jesus Christ risen from the dead, and why it changed their lives, and they spent the rest of their lives preaching it and then dying happily for it.*

II. **A word of grace for your heart** (vs. 7).

Verse 7, the angel 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." Do you see God's grace in these words?

A. **This is grace to the disciples.**

If you want to see how gracious and merciful these words are, consider what the angel didn't say. He didn't say, "*You tell those faithless, backstabbing cowards, that I might see them if the grovel, and they'd better grovel well if they have any hope of Me reinstating them back into My favor.*" That would have been perfectly warranted for what they did to Him! Peter cursed and insisted with all his might that not only did he not know Christ, he had never heard of Him!! And this was all while Christ was getting a gruesome beating by the high priest just feet away at the high priests home.

Jesus does not work the way you and I work. We hold grudges. We say to those who hurt us, "you backstabbing person, if you repent, I might love and forgive you".

Jesus isn't like that. He tells his disciples, essentially, I'm going ahead of you, and I have plans for you. I love you and forgive you. Remember when this was said the disciples haven't repented yet. Yet Jesus grace and His open arms are what help us to repent. It is the "goodness of God" that leads us to repentance! But there's an even more amazing word of grace.

B. **There is grace to Peter.**

Verse 7, the angel says, "But go, tell his disciples and Peter...". Why does the angel single out Peter? You know why. We know the story.

That little addition is

- pastorally practical and
- theologically profound.

1. It's ***pastorally practical***. What if the message had just been, "Go tell the disciples to meet Me in Galilee"? Imagine the disciples are cowering in their corner in Jerusalem, and the women come in and excitedly tell these men, "*Jesus wants to see you in Galilee*". Peter would have looked to the other men and said, "*You guys go...that can't mean me...not after what I did.*" You remember what Peter did, don't you? It was a

lot worse than the others, especially after pledging to die for Jesus before he would ever deny Him.

But you see, the Lord gives His message not only to the disciples, but also to that wayward disciple Peter. He's saying, "*I have plans for you even though you abandoned me—and that means you too Peter.*"

2. Consider the deep ***theological implications***. Peter becomes the chief leader among the apostles. The first 8 chapters of Acts are all about Peter's ministry. It's not until Acts 9 that the focus moves on to Paul. That means Peter is used of God as a foundation stone of the church! He's the biggest leader, but he's also the biggest mess up. He's the most notorious sinner. He denied the Lord on the night before His crucifixion. There's only one who was worse than Peter, and that's Judas.

But here's the theological depth of the Gospel. Because Peter's mess up is the biggest, his repentance will be the deepest, and his grasp of the Gospel of grace will be the greatest, and that will make him the most qualified person to be a leader in Jesus' church.

Now that is not what every other religion in the world teaches. Every single one teaches: *I'm saved if I'm good; I'm saved if I'm spiritually strong, and I'm saved to the degree that I'm strong and live up to standards.*

In this view, failure and repentance disrupts the flow of God's power into your life. But the Gospel says, that view of God is all wrong. Salvation is by God's grace, not by works. Salvation by Jesus is received when you admit you're weak, and when you admit your inability and you admit you need a Savior.

And if that's the case, failure and repentance enhances the flow of God's power into your life. Why, and how? ***We hate admitting that we failed.*** We do everything we possible can to avoid it. We say, "well if you had my situation, or if you had my mother or my background." We are willing to blame people. We do everything that we can other than repent—other than to say "I'm a moral and spiritual failure." We don't want to do that because it feels like a death. But if you let your failure drive you deeper into the Gospel, it becomes a ***resurrection***. If you dive into the Gospel after failure, you will sing the truth of the deep love of God: that you are saved not by your work and your effort, but by Christ's work and Christ's effort.

You know why failure and repentance can be a resurrection? Because if you let your moral and spiritual failures drive you to the cross, then you will come to see more than ever the costliness of His love, the radicalness of His grace, and the endlessness of God's compassion for you. And what that does, it makes you more humble and more bold at the same time. And when you have this view of God's grace, you will grow and grow and grow because the biggest repenters are the biggest lovers of God.

And the best leaders, and the best counselors and the best parents and the best everything are those who know the forgiving grace of God.

And it all comes at the resurrection. Why? Because the resurrection means your sins

are forgiven.

The Cry of Triumph

Remember back in Mark 15:37, that before Jesus died, He uttered a loud cry. We read in **Mark 15:37** (ESV) — “And Jesus uttered a loud cry and breathed his last”.

According to John, Jesus’ final cry was articulated with the words: ‘It is finished’ (**Jn. 19:30**).

PAID IN FULL

After a criminal does his time in jail and fully satisfies the sentence, the law has no more claim on him, and he walks out *free*. Jesus Christ came to pay the penalty for our sins. That was an infinite sentence, but He cried out “It is finished”. And He must have satisfied it fully, because on Resurrection Sunday, He walked out free for our justification.

The resurrection is God’s way of stamping PAID IN FULL right across history for all those who believe that He died for them and He rose triumphantly as a testimony that He will bring us to God in the same way.

And one day each of us will die and our bodies will be put in the grave. Since I’ve been here we’ve already lowered some beloved members’ earthly tabernacles into the dust of the ground. But one day, if you and I have put our trust in Jesus Christ, we will rise again from the dead because He has risen from the dead.

III. A word of mission for your life (vs. 6-7).

Verse 6-7, the angel says, “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. 7 But go, tell...”.

Two words of mission.

A. Don’t be alarmed.

Do you see our mission? Do not fear. No longer do you have to be alarmed. You see Jesus is alive. The brokenness of this life is not final. Because of the resurrection, death is not final. All the brokenness is not final. Your sin is not final. Christ not only removes your sin, but He also renews you and promises to renew you in resurrection. You will rise one day because He has risen. You may be trampled on in this world because of Christ, but it doesn’t matter. Bring it on. Why? Because one day I will rise with Him!

Only the Gospel of Jesus Christ promises me a new body. No other faith promises that. I will be renewed and this entire creation will be renewed and we will be God’s people, and He will be our God.

Why? Because of the resurrection. Because Christ arose, I know that “All things work together for good...” (**Romans 8:28**). You see, “don’t be alarmed!!” There is no condemnation because of the resurrection. Every promise of God is true to you because of the resurrection.

B. Go and tell...

These women were to tell the disciples that Jesus was alive. We are to tell the world that Jesus is alive. We are to do as Jesus said in **Mark 16:15** (ESV) — “Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation.” That means to every person you see!

1. **Go and tell people that because of the resurrection, there’s no fear in death!**

- In one of his poems, George Herbert says this, speaking to death: *Death used to be an executioner, but now he’s nothing more than a gardener. Spare not. Do thy worst. All you can do is make me better than I was before.*
- Come on death! The lower you lay me, the higher you’ll raise me!
- It is finished! And the proof that God accepted payment is the resurrection!

2. **Go and tell people that because of the resurrection, God will bring heaven to earth.**

Every other religion offers an escape from this earth. God promises to bring heaven to earth. I’m not going to live on a cloud for all of eternity. Jesus did not purchase my freedom so that I could walk on water vapors. He’s bringing heaven to this earth in a paradise, and I’m going to worship Him and serve Him here on this earth. He will rule and reign and we will reign with Him. He’s made us kings and priests unto God.

Conclusion: Let me close and bring this all down to earth with a story from the life of Joni Erickson Tada. You remember who she is? When she was seventeen, she became a quadriplegic and is paralyzed from the neck down. While she was still coming to terms with her accident, she would go to church in her wheelchair. The problem with being in a wheelchair is that many Sundays during the service, the pastor would have everyone kneel and pray. It drove home the fact that she was crippled and broken. Once during a convention the speaker asked everyone to get down on their knees and pray. Everyone in the entire convention center did... except for Joni. She said, *“with everyone kneeling, I certainly stood out. I couldn’t stop the tears.”* But it wasn’t self-pity. It was joyful anticipation. She was the only one that could see the amazing scene. Everyone was on their knees, and to her, it was so beautiful, because it was a picture of heaven.

And then she continued weeping at another thought:

“Sitting there, I was reminded that in heaven I will be free to jump up, dance, kick, and do aerobics, and... sometime before the guests are called to the banquet table at the Wedding Feast of the Lamb, the first thing I plan to do on resurrected legs is to drop on grateful, glorified knees. I will quietly kneel at the feet of Jesus.”⁶

You see, that’s what the resurrection brings us. It’s not just a renewed body and a new heaven and earth. It is that we will have the fullness of strength to be undistracted by pain and brokenness, and we will with all our strength and with fully renewed mind, PRAISE and adore the Lamb of

⁶ Joni Eareckson Tada. *Heaven: Your Real Home* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 51.

God who takes away the sin of the world. And forever, God will be satisfied with Christ's suffering.

Celebrate Lord's Table