

# He Is Not Here

Mark 16:1-8

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If you're like me, you wake up each day with kind of a plan in your head of what the day should look like. You have a to-do list, you know what's on your calendar, and so you kind of have an idea of how the day should go. But sometimes all it takes is one phone call, one unexpected event, or one conversation to change the course of your day.

That can be a positive thing or not. You (or someone you love) may hit a deer with their car and suddenly the day changes. The weather takes an unexpected turn and plans have to be adjusted. You can get a phone call that something happened, and you abandon your plans and go in a different direction. Or on a positive note, maybe you knew there was a bunch of snow and you planned to spend several hours digging yourself out, only to go outside and discover someone had already done it for you. Or maybe you planned to spend the day working on a project, only to have things come together quickly and with no problems. Or maybe someone says something that lifts your mood and puts you in a better place for the rest of the day.

As we look at the story of the resurrection this morning from Mark 16, we'll see what is probably the ultimate example of this phenomenon at play. Jesus' disciples started the day in mourning, but ended in a very different place. The women went to the tomb that Sunday morning with a job to do, but left without doing anything. The truth is, what the disciples experienced that Easter morning didn't just change their day, it changed the entire course of their lives.

## Going to the Tomb

Last week we looked at the death and burial of Jesus at the end of Mark 15. There is a full day that passes between chapter 15 and chapter 16. We know that Joseph of Arimathea, Nicodemus, and the women had to hastily bury Jesus before sundown on Friday because the Sabbath began at sundown and no work was allowed to be done. I often wonder what that Saturday looked like for the disciples. I suspect it was a very quiet and somber time—a time when the disciples didn't feel like there was much to celebrate. I wonder if they even found themselves questioning if God was really going to be true to His promises of sending a Messiah, because they had been so confident, only to have their hopes dashed at the cross. The scriptures don't tell us what that Sabbath day was like, but Mark picks up the story again at sundown on Saturday (which was the end of the Sabbath) and tells us what the women did.

Saturday evening, when the Sabbath ended, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome went out and purchased burial spices so they could anoint Jesus' body. <sup>2</sup>Very early on Sunday morning, just at sunrise, they went to the tomb. <sup>3</sup>On the way they were asking each other, "Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?" <sup>4</sup>But as they arrived, they looked up and saw that the stone, which was very large, had already been rolled aside. (Mark 16:1-4, NLT)

At sundown on Saturday, the Sabbath ended, so it was once again permissible to do work. The women planned to set out for the tomb early the next morning, so they began gathering supplies Saturday night, purchasing burial spices to put on Jesus' body.

Some have suggested that a body that had been in the tomb for about 36 hours would have already begun to decompose, so anointing it with burial spices would have been an exercise in futility. But I think that misunderstands the women's intent. I think the women's goal was not so much to preserve the body as it was to honor the one they loved. They simply wanted to afford Jesus the best burial possible.

The fact that they went out on Saturday night to buy a whole bunch of spices reveals that they had no expectation that Jesus would rise from the dead. If there was any uncertainty in their mind about whether Jesus would still be dead, they wouldn't have made such a significant purchase in advance. They would surely have gone to confirm He was still dead first before buying all the spices. But they saw no reason to expect anything different. After all, everyone they had ever known who died stayed dead (with the exception of Lazarus!)

We also see this as we look at their trip to the tomb Sunday morning. The three women, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome (who many people believe was the mother of James and John, and the wife of Zebedee) headed out at sunrise to go to the tomb to complete this labor of love. As they were walking, they began to anticipate a problem...the tomb was sealed with a heavy stone rolled in front of it! They knew this because they had been there when the tomb had been sealed. They realized they hadn't made arrangements to have someone there to move the stone for them! They weren't sure exactly how they would get into the tomb, but they continued on, fully expecting to find the tomb sealed with Jesus still inside, just as they'd left it.

We know from chapter 15 that the women had seen the tomb when Joseph placed Jesus there. The fact that they knew it was sealed with a stone that needed to be rolled away supports this fact. It seems, however, that they didn't know that the Jewish leaders had requested the Romans post a guard at the tomb to prevent Jesus' disciples from stealing the body and claiming that Jesus had risen from the dead. This makes sense, as Matthew's gospel says that the Jewish leaders made this request on Saturday, the Sabbath. So it is not surprising that the women didn't know about it.

If Jesus had not risen from the dead, the women still would have been in for a surprise. The Roman guard would have been unlikely to allow the women into the tomb to anoint the body. They would have made the trip to the tomb, but unable to complete the task they had set out to do, they would have returned home dejected, and maybe angry.

Fortunately, when the women arrived at the tomb, there was no guard, and the stone they had been worried about had already been moved aside. I have to imagine the women had mixed feelings about this. On the one hand, they might have felt relief that the one obstacle they had failed to account for had been taken care of. But I also

wonder if they might have had some anxiety about seeing the stone rolled away as well. Invariably, the question would have been, why has it been rolled away? Clearly someone had done this, so what were they doing? Were they desecrating Jesus' body? Stealing it? Or something else? Whatever thoughts ran through their mind as they approached the tomb, I suspect none of them anticipated what was going to happen next.

## **At the Tomb**

<sup>5</sup> When they entered the tomb, they saw a young man clothed in a white robe sitting on the right side. The women were shocked, <sup>6</sup> but the angel said, "Don't be alarmed. You are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He isn't here! He is risen from the dead! Look, this is where they laid his body. (Mark 16:5-6, NLT)

The women entered the tomb, unsure of what they might find there. When they came in, they saw a young man clothed in a white robe sitting there. Mark then identifies this young man as an angel. It seems that this angel had taken on the appearance of a man, which we see happen on several occasions in scripture.

There is sometimes some controversy as people discuss the four gospel accounts of the resurrection. One of the arguments that resurrection skeptics make is that the accounts contradict each other because Mark and Matthew say there was one angel, while Luke says there were two angels. But this isn't a contradiction at all. Most likely, Mark and Matthew simply mention the angel who spoke, while Luke mentioned that there was also another angel who was present. It's a difference in emphasis, not a contradiction. Any time you have eyewitness accounts, you will have slight differences like this, simply because people will focus on different things.

What is most important, however, is what the angel said to the women. He started, as was customary for angels to do, with the phrase, do not be alarmed (or afraid). Ironically, that rarely seems to work, as the most common response to encountering angels is fear! And this time was no different—the women were terrified.

The angel knew exactly why the women were there—they were looking for Jesus of Nazareth who had been crucified. This established some validity in what he was going to say next. He said, "He isn't here! He is risen from the dead!" For Christians, these are familiar words, so familiar that we may not hear them as nearly as shocking as they truly were. The women were expecting to find Jesus' dead body lying in the tomb, but instead they found this young man who told them Jesus' body wasn't here, because He had risen from the dead.

I wonder if their minds just kind of blanked at this point. They could clearly see Jesus wasn't there. I doubt the statement that He had risen from the dead even computed in their minds. None of this made any sense to them.

The angel told them to look at the place where they had laid the body just a little over a day before. Clearly, there was now no longer a body there. Some of the other gospels tell us that not only was the body not there, but the linen in which they had wrapped Jesus on Friday night was still lying there. Most people believe they were still in the same position they had been, only now they were empty! In other words, the body hadn't been unwrapped, the body had simply vanished from inside the wrappings! And the fact that the wrappings were still there meant it was impossible to conclude that someone had stolen the still-wrapped body of Jesus either. The fact that the angel tells them to look at the place where they had laid Jesus is significant—he was showing them convincing evidence that what he was saying was true. As strange as it sounds, the most logical explanation was that Jesus really had risen from the dead!

## **Marching Orders**

After the angel told them that Jesus had risen, he gave the women some instructions on what they should do now.

<sup>7</sup> Now go and tell his disciples, including Peter, that Jesus is going ahead of you to Galilee. You will see him there, just as he told you before he died.” <sup>8</sup> The women fled from the tomb, trembling and bewildered, and they said nothing to anyone because they were too frightened. (Mark 16:7-8, NLT)

Clearly, their day was taking a very different turn. They had come to the tomb expecting to anoint Jesus' dead body with spices, but now they were being told the body wasn't there because Jesus was alive. It seemed too good to be true—and yet, all the evidence pointed to this very conclusion.

The angel then told the women that they should go tell the disciples, including Peter that Jesus would meet them all in Galilee, just as He said He would.

We made note of this verse a couple of weeks ago when we looked at Peter's denial in the garden. Peter was wracked with guilt over having denied Jesus, but we saw that even though Peter failed, this did not disqualify him from serving the Lord, nor did it remove him as one of His disciples.

Still, I find it noteworthy that the angel specifically mentioned that Peter was to be included in the disciples. We don't know why that is, but it's possible that word of Peter's denial may have already spread amongst the disciples, including these women. Maybe they were all wondering if Peter was like Judas, no longer part of their number because of his betrayal. I even wonder if Peter saw himself this way. He had been so confident he would never abandon the Lord, and then mere hours later he was doing exactly that.

Whatever the case was, the angel specifically told the women that Peter was still included as part of the disciples. He told the women they should tell the disciples to meet Jesus in Galilee as he had told them would happen before He died.

If you're like me, you may say, I don't remember Jesus telling the disciples He would meet them in Galilee after He died!? How could the disciples not have remembered that? Well, whether you remember it or not, Jesus said exactly that in Mark 14.

<sup>28</sup> But after I am raised from the dead, I will go ahead of you to Galilee and meet you there." (Mark 14:28, NLT)

During the Last Supper Jesus had explicitly told them He would be killed, but He would also rise from the dead, and then He would go ahead of them and meet them in Galilee! Unfortunately, this statement was likely lost in the shuffle of their minds, because it was immediately after this that Peter said that even if everyone else deserted Jesus, he never would.

No one outside of the twelve disciples would have known that Jesus said this. The women weren't at the meal, and some random stranger at the tomb would have had no way of knowing that Jesus said these words either. When the disciples heard this, they realized it could only have come from God. As they remembered what Jesus had said their hearts surely began to race, and then they began to cautiously question, could it be true? Could He really be alive?

This is what the angel told the women to tell the disciples, but Mark says they were terrified and fled the tomb and didn't tell anyone what had happened. We know that Mary Magdalene did eventually come and tell Peter and John that Jesus' body was no longer in the tomb. They ran to the tomb and saw that what she said was true. Clearly at some point, the message did get relayed to the disciples as well, and they believed that Jesus really had risen from the dead, just as He said!

## Conclusion

This was an amazing turn of events that seems almost too good to be true. Even today, I have moments where I find myself questioning, is this just a fairy tale? Is it just something we believe to make ourselves feel better? It seems kind of far-fetched...but all the evidence points to the conclusion that Jesus really did rise from the grave. There is a mountain of evidence that supports it, and after 2,000 years of trying, no one has been able to disprove it. Because of that, when those moments of doubt come creeping into my head, I come back to the evidence for the resurrection. If Jesus really did rise, then it changes everything. It gives us the confidence that He is worth following, and that we can trust Him. So let's look at some applications we can draw from the reality of the resurrection.

**First, it means that we too can be raised from the dead.** In 1 Corinthians 15, the Apostle Paul's treatise on the resurrection of the dead, he said that,

<sup>20</sup> But in fact, Christ has been raised from the dead. He is the first of a great harvest of all who have died. <sup>21</sup> So you see, just as death came into the world through a man, now the resurrection from the dead has begun through another man. <sup>22</sup> Just as everyone dies because we all belong to Adam, everyone who belongs to Christ will be given new life. (1 Corinthians 15:20-22, NLT)

Because Jesus has risen from the dead, we can have assurance that the promises He made to us that we, too will live even though we die are true. Jesus' resurrection demonstrates that His words are true and that there really is life beyond the grave! It means we have hope that is not just for this life, but for all eternity!

**Second, it means Jesus' team wins!** The religious leaders of Jesus' day did everything they could to stop Jesus. They lied, they cheated, they pulled every string they had to stop Him. And they still failed. Later, as the disciples began boldly preaching about Jesus' resurrection in defiance of the religious leaders, they had them arrested and commanded them to stop. During the course of these proceedings, a wise Jewish leader named Gamaliel spoke up and said this,

“So my advice is, leave these men alone. Let them go. If they are planning and doing these things merely on their own, it will soon be overthrown. <sup>39</sup> But if it is from God, you will not be able to overthrow them. You may even find yourselves fighting against God!” (Acts 5:38-39, NLT)

For 2,000 years, people have been trying to silence Christianity. And yet it persists. A movement that started with 11 normal guys from Jerusalem now spans the world millennia later. It's not because of them, but because God cannot be defeated. The world will try to silence the Lord. They will use whatever weapons they have at their disposal to try to stop the message of the gospel and God's work in our world. *And they will fail!* No matter how dark the world seems, we must remember that Jesus will always prevail. That Saturday while the disciples waited had to have been dark and dreary—but Sunday was coming! Remember that when it seems like the world is winning, the resurrection reminds us that God will always prevail!

**Third, it has to result in a change in our lives.** If the resurrection is true, then it means Jesus is indeed God in the flesh. That means He deserves (and requires) us to submit to Him. If we claim to believe the resurrection really happened, it must change us. Look at the change we saw in the disciples. These men went from denying they even knew Jesus, hiding and fading into the background to suddenly standing in the middle of the temple, unafraid of what the world could do to them. They risked their lives telling others about Him. And as a result, they changed the world. If you truly believe in the resurrection, it must make a difference in your life. If you claim to be a Christian but do not see any difference in your life, then I might humbly submit that you don't really get it. In truth, I think even those of us who have followed Jesus for a long time need to be reminded of this truth. If Jesus is alive, then we must follow Him! He continues to lead us to make changes in our lives, to love the world around us, and to share the message of salvation with others.

The women who went to the tomb that Sunday morning went expecting to anoint Jesus with the vast number of spices they brought with them. They went home with those spices still in hand. The resurrection changed their day, but even more than that, it changed their lives...and their eternity. I hope the same will be true for you.

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