

Easter 2024

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Mark 16:1-3
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Happy Easter.

Welcome to Redeemer. Thanks for being here. I'm Jon; I'm one of the pastors. So grateful that you're here. Thank you for spending part of this miraculous holiday with us.

Have you ever noticed how expectations play a major role in our happiness or lack thereof? When we bring expectations into a marriage or a job, participation on a sports team, even when we bring them to church, it is our expectations that determine our experience, right? I mean, if we expect this from a spouse or that from a job or a coach, and that's what happens, or what happens is even better than we expected, we're great. Everything is wonderful.

What if what we expect doesn't happen? What if our expectation is far from what actually takes place? That can lead to bitterness, anger, withdrawal, or worse. If you're not a church person, or if you were once a church person but you haven't been for a while, if you're only here today to make somebody happy or because you thought it was just the right thing to do, just know that Christians think what we do and we do what we do because Jesus' tomb was empty three days after it was sealed with his dead body inside.

You might be thinking, "A risen Jesus. Really?" Hearing that, you might think what His first followers thought. Listen to John 20:2: "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid Him." They thought maybe what you're thinking now: His tomb was empty because somebody stole the body. Talk about expectations.

What does that response mean his first followers were not expecting? Think about it. They went to the tomb, they found it empty, and they thought, "Somebody stole the body." What does that response mean, that they were not expecting? A resurrection. That's not what they were expecting. That tomb is empty. Someone must have stolen his body. He told them, Mark 8:31, that He would suffer, be rejected, killed, and after three days, He would rise again. He said this to them numerous times, so they clearly didn't believe him when his tomb was empty. They expected a Messiah who would conquer and reign. They were wrong. He was killed, and they expect the dead to stay dead. How many of them were waiting outside this tomb Sunday morning with popcorn, going, "Okay, let's see the show?" Not even one. Not even one.

In fact, Mark 16:1 tells us that when the Sabbath had passed, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome brought 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. And they were saying to one another, "Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance of the tomb?"

I want to talk to you about these women today. If they are going to anoint Jesus' body, which means that they're going to put spices in the cloths that are wrapping his body to help with the smell. If they're going to do that, what does that mean? It means their expectation was that the body would still be there on the third day. You see, they weren't gullible primitives who were just easily fooled. No, they have the same expectations about dead people that we do. Namely what? That they don't come back, especially dead people whose hearts have been pierced by a Roman spear. Those people stay dead. They're done.

So listen, if you're skeptical about what we're celebrating today, a risen Jesus, that he rose from the grave, you are in good company. His first followers were not expecting him to rise from the dead either. Crazy how they document their unbelief in Jesus' resurrection, though. They do that in ways that we often miss because these accounts are so familiar to us, if we have any background in church or the Bible. But all of this is going to lead us to one conclusion, one fact: Jesus' resurrection is not fantasy. It's history.

Think about this. The first people to the tomb weren't guys like Peter and John. They so deeply believed in Jesus that they were camping out the night before, so that when the sun rose, they could be there to see it all. No, we just saw the first witnesses to the empty tomb were women. All four accounts of Jesus' life agree on this. Women saw Jesus' empty tomb first, and they saw the risen Jesus first. Now, that might not mean much to 21st-Century Americans, but in first Century Israel, this is a massive deal. See, the only, and I mean only, reason women are shown in the Biblical accounts of Jesus' life as the first witnesses to the resurrection is because that's what actually happened. They saw him first. If the writers of these accounts were creating fake news about the resurrection, making women the first witnesses never would have even crossed their minds. It would not have entered their brains at all to do that.

Why? Because the testimony of women was not accepted in Jewish legal courts at the time. They were considered unreliable, not even able to give credible testimony. Roman society didn't give women much credit either, which means the thought never would have fired a single synapse in their brain to fabricate this whole account and then put women as the first witnesses to the resurrection instead of them. They never would have done that in this culture, women were there first. This does not give credibility to their proclamation that Jesus rose from the dead, unless, of course, that's what actually happened.

By the way, there's some who theorize out there that you can explain Jesus' resurrection by the women going to the wrong tomb. Anybody heard that one? They just went to the wrong tomb. That just kind of smacks of the same misogyny that we just heard about a minute ago. No, but that women were the primary witnesses to Jesus' resurrection is strong evidence that the eyewitness accounts that we have in the Bible are historically reliable retellings of actual events, a translation. Jesus really rose from the dead.

Now, think about this too. These first witnesses, notice: They're named. Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome. Mark names these women three times in his account. They're watching when Jesus died. They're watching when he is buried. And here, Mark 16:1, they're up when it's still dark to go to the tomb. This is significant because what it shows is that Mark is not hiding anything. If he's creating fake news with what he's writing, he'd keep things vague so that nobody could fact-check him. "Oh, there were just some women there.: "Oh, who?" "Oh, you know, just some women." No, he, along with the other writers, actually give an eyewitness list of real people with real names that could have been interviewed about the risen Jesus. Their names give additional evidence that these eyewitness accounts are historically reliable retellings of actual events. Translation: Jesus has actually risen.

Now, I want to come back to this idea of expectations that these first witnesses had. They were not expecting a resurrection. Remember, they are there to make Jesus' decomposing body smell a little better. That's why they are there that morning. These women must have really loved Jesus to put themselves through that. I don't know about you; probably not going to do that. But what it shows us is that for them, his death was final. That's why they're going to anoint his body, as an act of love to honor a friend who's gone. It's like bringing flowers to a grave. The last thing you would do is bring flowers to the grave of a friend that you expected to be alive when you got there. You wouldn't do that.

It's the same thing going on here, and in a bit of humor, they're so preoccupied with these spices that they seem to forget that there's this large stone that's keeping them out of the tomb. "Who's going to roll this thing back for us?" So I want you to see their actions, as well as their conversation, are both screaming, "Jesus' death is final. It's over." They are not anticipating. They are not expecting Jesus to be resurrected at all.

This means, by the way, that those who say that Jesus' followers hallucinated a resurrection. Anybody hear that one? "It's just hallucination." No, let's think about that for a second. Those who believe that have to explain how hallucination is possible for men who ran away in fear and regret because they followed a guy, they thought was king but actually was murdered. And it has to explain how these women, who were expecting a corpse, not a celebration that Jesus rose from the dead. Again, even though he told them many times, their expectation was not that he would return, which means that the emotional, even the psychological conditions needed to hallucinate his resurrection, they don't exist with these first followers.

Besides, if you think about it, if the resurrection was not real, if it was just a hallucination, how does that explain the empty tomb? I mean, if I'm hallucinating Jesus being raised, where's his body? Still in the grave, right? See, their lack of expectation for a resurrection is even more solid evidence that we do not have fake news in the Bible. No, Jesus really is alive.

So picture this for a second. They meet the risen Jesus. They find out that what he told them over and over again was true, that he did, in fact, rise from the dead. Their expectation was wrong. So after saying something like the Jewish equivalent of, "Wow," whatever that would be, what do you think they said? Maybe something like, "I should have believed you. I should have trusted

you." Think about it. Jesus' first followers didn't trust him. They were not waiting by the tomb in expectation. They withdraw in defeat. They run away in fear. They didn't go to the tomb to applaud in victory: "Hey, we're here. Let's see this." No, they're there to anoint a body. They didn't believe him. They didn't trust him. They were gone. I mean some of them, what did they do? They went back to fishing. "Well, I guess this whole thing's done. Got to go back to my job."

So you got to think about it. You got to ask yourself what turns them around, and not turns them around reluctantly, like, "Okay, I guess I'll do this whole thing." What turned them around so dramatically that they go from cowards, cowering in fear, to champions? What changed them from being fraidy cats, afraid of the Roman Empire, afraid of the Jewish leaders? What changes them from that to fearless martyrs for this message that Jesus rose from the dead? What changed that? What did that do to them? Answer: They saw the risen Jesus. And they didn't just see him like, "Hey, is that him over there? I don't know. Let's go." No, they ate with him. They talked to him. They were taught by him after watching him being viciously and ruthlessly murdered. It is their eyewitness testimony that we have in the Bible, and we have that testimony without loss, without edit, without mixing a bunch of air into their testimony. We have their pure testimonies right here.

Most died for something they did not believe in at first. That's because more than just a fact of history, the resurrection actually matters. It matters. The resurrection of Jesus can change your life in much the same way that it changed theirs. And by the way, there are dozens of people, hundreds of people in this room, who could say, "Amen to that. He sure can change my life." You see, after getting past the idea that Jesus rose from the dead, once you're convinced that that's true, like they were, that's not enough. You see, the next, and really the most important question, is, "So what? So what if he rose from the grave?" Well, Romans 10:9 tells us what when it says, "If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved."

Now, that does not mean, just ask somebody: "Is Jesus Lord?" "Yes." "Did he rise from the dead?" "Yes." "Okay, good, your sins are forgiven. Moving on to the next one." No, that's not what this means. Confessing Jesus is Lord is not just saying the words or even saying, "I agree with the words." That's because Lord means God, and God means master, authority, king. However, if we are honest, all of us already have a Lord. Who is that? Usually our Lord is who? It's us, right? So confessing that Jesus is Lord means rejecting you as Lord. Means abandoning you as Lord. It means removing you from the throne of your life and replacing you with Jesus as Lord of your life. It's giving yourself to him. It's identifying yourself: "I am one of his followers." It is a pledge of allegiance to Jesus, a lifelong commitment to him as your Savior, your Lord, your God, in charge of you.

This is what it means to believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead. Your heart in the Bible is not your emotions. Your heart in the Bible is your core; it's your true self. It's the real you. So to believe in Jesus means that at the center of your being, you are committed to Jesus. You trust in him alone, no one and nothing else. Him and him only. You trust him that he lived

and he died and he rose again. And Romans 10:9 doesn't end, "Well, if you do that, if you confess and believe, then you will save yourself." No, it says, "You will be saved," meaning you don't save yourself. You can't save yourself. You are in danger, and somebody has to save you. Someone has to rescue you, and that someone is the risen Jesus, who will forgive all of your sin when you trust in him.

He never sinned. We pretty much always sin. When you believe in him, he trades his righteousness, his perfection. He trades it for all of your sin. He's punished on the cross for your life. You are then rewarded, based on his perfection, when God allows you into heaven. Not because of you, but 100% because of him.

So how can that trade happen for you, personally? That should be the question that you are asking yourself. How does that happen? And all trust in yourself, all trust in anything or anyone else and the hope of saving yourself by your good works, by your good intentions, and instead, all that trust and hope and dependence that you have in yourself, take all of that and give it to Jesus. All that trust, all that hope, put it in him. Trust him, that he is willing to save you, that he is able to save you from the penalty you deserve for your sins.

Now, how do we guess? Not guess, but actually know that Jesus is very willing and very able to save you. Answer: Because of what we're here to celebrate today. He rose from the dead. It's not fantasy; it's history. It's true, and since it's true, the only right response to this truth is to come to Jesus today. It doesn't matter who you are. It doesn't matter what you've done. It doesn't matter if you are hearing this for the very first time or you have heard this your entire life. It doesn't matter. Today is the day to come to Christ and live.

Anybody here like hot dogs? I like hot dogs; I'll own that publicly, on recording. I'll own that, but if I'm honest, I do not want to know the truth about hot dogs. You know what I'm talking about? Don't want to know how they're made. Don't want to know what they're made out of. No, thanks. Keep that information to yourself. Don't want to know. I just want to eat in blissful ignorance about hot dogs. I've never looked at the ingredients. Thankful they're hot. Pretty sure they're not dogs. Don't want to know the truth about hot dogs. I want to enjoy it; don't tell me.

And I wonder if that's how you are with Jesus. "Just want to believe what I believe about Jesus." "He is risen." "Don't bother me with the facts." "He is Lord." "I don't want to know the truth about Jesus. I've been living in blissful ignorance about this stuff. Just keep that information in the Bible. Keep all that resurrection stuff. Just keep it to yourself. I'm good." "Listen, but what if it's true? What if he's alive?"

That's belief based on what you want to be true, versus belief based on what is actually true. I want to believe hot dogs are made out of vitamins and minerals, not lips and hooves. It just makes me feel good. Or maybe you'd say, "Yes, it's all true; Jesus is risen." But you wouldn't know it by how you live your life. You wouldn't know it by how you treat people. You wouldn't know it by what you think about reality. You wouldn't know it by how you spend your time or what you do when no one's watching. But listen, if it's true, if Jesus is risen, then Christianity is

reality. Christianity is the way the world is. Christianity is not an option on the religious buffet line. It is the only right answer if he rose from the dead.

That is what Easter, that is what this service, that is what this church, that is what this whole movement of Christianity is all about. He did not stay dead. He is risen. He is alive today. The truth is staring you in the face, demanding that you respond, because this matters. Jesus' resurrection matters. Are you going to leave here saying, "Yeah, He is risen; it's all true," and then go right back to living like it's not? How about not today? How about not now? How about today is the day when you say, "If it's true, then I'm going to live my life in commitment to the risen Jesus?"

When Jesus rose from the dead, it was the greatest event in history. That's not preacher exaggeration. That's not speaker hyperbole. Rising from the dead is the greatest event in history, accomplished by the greatest person in history. His birth splits history. Everybody's birthday is calculated from his, and his movement is the most diverse, most influential in history. That's because he conquered sin and death when he rose from the grave. He now looks at death like a conquering general looks at the battlefield: victorious. But instead of being arrogant about it, Jesus turns to you, one of the enemy soldiers, and says, "You can enjoy the benefits and the blessings of my victory here. Your rebellion can be forgiven. Your soul can be clean. You can be at peace. You can have peace with the God that you are at war with. Not other people: You can be free forever."

Trust in Jesus. I don't want you to ever say, "Wow, I should have trusted in you." No, give yourself to him. Believe in him. Trust in him today. Let's pray.

Jesus, it is right for me to pray to you. It is right for me to talk to you because you are alive, never to die again. That's what it means to be resurrected. Jesus, we have two holy days, your birth and your resurrection. These days are special in our culture, and they are special because of you. We put a whole bunch of stuff around those things: family, friends, food, fun. We put all that stuff around it, and if we're not careful, those things can distract us from the fact that you rose from the dead. And so every single one of us is hearing this in different places with you. For many here, this is a cause for celebration and awe and wonder and amazement, that not only that you rose from the dead, but that our lives are defined by you rising from the dead, that our hope in life and death comes from the fact that you rose from the dead. That our purpose in life, living our meaning, all of that comes from this truth, and that our hearts are filled with joy and gratitude and wonder that we even know you at all. And yet, there are still others who this truth is combative. It confronts because if you rose from the dead, that has implications for our lives and our eternities. So my prayer is that you would use your word today to draw every single one of us closer to you. At the end of the day, that's all that matters. You are all that matters. You stand in victory over sin, death, and hell because you rose again, and you say to us, "you can have the victory over these things too, when you trust in me." Thank you for being so gracious and so kind to rebels against you, pray all of this in your wonderful name. Amen.