

EMPTY TOMB. FULL LIVES.

Mark 16:1-20

Last week we talked about defining moments. These are moments that we can look back on in our lives, maybe a decision we made or an experience we went through – positive or negative – that shaped who we are today, forever changing the trajectory of our lives. And we studied how the cross of Jesus Christ was the defining moment in redemptive history that if we behold it and we believe it, it starts to define our lives – we take up our cross and follow. It changes what we think, what we desire, what choices we make. Our hearts are drawn back to God and the way we were designed to live – not selfishly but for God and for others.

But the life-changing gospel doesn't end with the cross, does it? There's a resurrection! This too, if we behold and believe, becomes part of our story as well. Romans 6:4 says, "*as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in **the newness of life**. For if we have been united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be in the likeness of His resurrection.*" Paul is saying that because you have believed in what Christ did for you in that very real, tangible moment in history, you have been united spiritually with Him through the Spirit. You have new, abundant, resurrection life now and to come. You're a new creation indwelt by the Spirit and you can know the power of the resurrection in your life (2 Cor. 5:17; Eph. 1:13, 19; Phi. 3:10; 2 Pet. 1:3-4). **The empty tomb means no more empty life. It's means a full life** (Jn. 10:10). That's our focus as we finish up the gospel of Mark this morning. What the resurrection means for us and we'll also note some resurrection proofs along the way.

Verses 1-8

"When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome, brought spices, so that they might come and anoint Him. Very early on the first day of the week, they came to the tomb when the sun had risen. They were saying to one another, "Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?"

Looking up they saw that the stone had been rolled away, although it was extremely large. Entering the tomb, they saw a young man sitting at the right, wearing a white robe; and they were amazed. And he said to them, Do not be amazed; you are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who has been crucified. He has risen; He is not here; behold, here is the place where they laid Him. But go, tell His disciples and Peter, 'He is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see Him, just as He told you.'" They went out from the tomb, for trembling and astonishment had gripped them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.

I. JESUS' RESURRECTION. (VV. 1-8)

We run into these amazing women again who are faithful followers of Jesus. On the night He was crucified, remember in 15:47, they watched to see exactly where Joseph and Nicodemus buried Him. The reason was so that as soon as the Sabbath was over, they could come and anoint His body with spices and oil. Maybe they bought some on Saturday night when the Sabbath was over

and now on the 1st day of the week, Sunday morning, they're making their way to the tomb bright and early as the sun rises. They're about to discover that **the "Son" with a capital "S" had risen!**

One of the things we make special note of is the fact that **Jesus rose on the first day of the week** (2, 9). That's why we worship on the first day of the week, just like the NT early church did (Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 16:1-2; Rev. 1:10). It's called **The Lord's Day**. But I will also say this: When someone believes in Jesus, they love to gather on Sunday but worship becomes more like a lifestyle.

 **Resurrection-Life Principle #1**
A resurrected life desires a lifestyle of worship.

As a church-goer dead in sins for many years, church was something I did for a few minutes on Sunday. But once I really believed, I saw immediately that it's that and the way we live our lives for Christ. Romans 12:1-2 says offering ourselves to God is our reasonable service of worship. That's what these women are doing here this day. They want to honor Jesus regardless of the day.

The reason they didn't do anoint Jesus earlier because He was buried in a hurry, dying late in the day (3pm) near the start of the Sabbath (6pm). Because the Jews didn't embalm or cremate, they buried their dead immediately. So what they would do is clean the person up, take strips of cloth and wrap each appendage and then the whole body together and as they were doing that they would tuck spices and aloes in between the folds sort of like a cocoon. It was a respective gesture to offset the odors of decomposition.¹

The next thing we see is that they're discussing in vain who will roll away the stone from the grave so they can access His body. I think if they were really listening to Jesus' words and understood prophecy they would've said, "*Let's go see if Jesus is alive yet or not!*" But their ignorance of His resurrection does make for a crucial resurrection proof:

Resurrection Proof A: The element of surprise to His followers.

Even though Jesus predicted His death and resurrection, they still didn't have a predisposition to it. They're as shocked as the disciples are as we'll see before we finish today.

Resurrection Proof B: The stone rolled away supernaturally.

This disk-shaped stone, Mark says, is "*extremely large*" and would've weighed several hundred pounds. I think it would be comparable to trying to move a large round-bale by yourself – yeah, not going to happen! By mentioning its size, Mark is emphasizing something supernatural has just occurred here and reaffirming the Isaiah 53 prophecy that he would be buried in a **rich man's tomb**. Only wealthy could afford a disk-shaped stone like this. The average person could only afford square-shaped stones. Looking up, though, the women saw the stone already rolled away.

Sometimes I think we're a lot like these women here, debating and worrying about something that is never going to be an issue. How many times have our hearts restlessly worried about something only to turn around in the end and find out, God knew what He was doing the entire time? We need to look up more and trust Him to do His thing.

When they peer into the tomb, Mark says they see a **young man**. Matthew says this is an **angel**. Luke says there are 2 of them in dazzling white clothes. Who's right? Both. Mark only mentions one, not two, because only one does the talking. It's not contradictory, but complementary.

Resurrection Proof C: The angelic confirmation and instruction.

Why is he described as a young man? Because every now and then God allows angels to assume human forms (Gen. 18-19) and they always appear in a masculine form, just like **pre-incarnate appearances of Christ in the OT (theophany)**. Genesis 18-19 is a prime example of that. The Lord and 2 angels visit Abraham and have a meal together...maybe ate some angel hair pasta (jk).

Something that stood out to me more than usual this time through the resurrection account was what the angel directs their attention too. He basically says, "*Behold, nothing!*" while pointing to where Jesus was. Behold, nothing. He has risen. He is not here, indicating Jesus' resurrected, proving His testimony to be true. He is the Son of God. That's been Mark's intention since chapter 1, verse 1. Mark wants us to understand Jesus is God who died for our sins, so that we can have new life, everlasting.

☪ Resurrection-Defining Principle #2

A resurrected life begins with faith in the crucified & risen Son of God.

It's a simple message. We believe that He died for our sins, was buried and rose again so that all who believe in Him will everlasting life. The first man fell into sin but Jesus is God who took on flesh and never deserved to die because He never sinned, but died in our place so we could be restored to fellowship with Him. Everyone who trusts Christ is born again by the Spirit and will be raised too.

☪ Resurrection-Life Principle #3

A resurrected life possesses the hope of future bodily resurrection.

By pointing to nothing the angel is emphasizing this is a bodily resurrection has taken place. It's not merely spiritual. It's His real body. He still has scars. He can still eat. Yet, there's something about His new body that is different. He can disappear and reappear. His body is fit for heaven. He is a prototype of what our bodies will be like as for when we live on a New Earth someday.

There are 2 words in the angel's instruction I find highly comforting: "*Go and tell his disciples and Peter*" I like that touch, "*and Peter*" because last time we saw Peter, he was weeping over his denial of the Lord. That tells us Jesus still loves Peter, He wants to restore Peter and use Peter. It's actually the failure that humbles Peter's self-confidence and makes him useful for the Lord. It tells us Jesus is available not just to the crowd but to the individual. God works with individuals because each individual was created for Him. He longs to heal us and satisfy our hearts with Himself.

☪ Resurrection Life Principle #4

A resurrected life involves a personal relationship with the Lord.

Verse 8 says they went out trembling and astonished, or **amazed**. This word, or words conveying a similar thought, appears over and over and over again in Mark. It's **thematic** in Mark. They were

amazed at His teaching because He taught like no one else. They were *amazed at His miracles*. He heals the paralytic and they say, “*We’ve never seen anything like this!*” They were *amazed, amazed, amazed* – over a dozen times. We even had a sermon titled *Amazed at Jesus*. We’ll be amazed at Jesus for eternity. The gospel ends in amazement over His greatest miracle, the resurrection. It’s so amazing that the disciples struggle to believe it initially.

Verses 9-14

[Now after He had risen early on the first day of the week, He first appeared to Mary Magdalene, from whom He had cast out seven demons. She went and reported to those who had been with Him, while they were mourning and weeping. When they heard that He was alive and had been seen by her, they refused to believe it.

After that He appeared in a different form to two of them while they were walking along on their way to the country. They went away and reported it to the others, but they did not believe them either.

Afterward He appeared to the eleven themselves as they were reclining at the table and He reproached them for their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they had not believed those who had seen Him after He had risen.

Before we dive into the text, I want to touch on something for a bit. One of the things you might have noticed is that the rest of the chapter appears in **brackets**. I usually don’t bring them up but this is a larger portion than normal in brackets, and in two sections, one long and one short. And at the bottom of your Bible, you may have a footnote that says something along the lines of, “*These verses do not appear in two of the earliest manuscripts.*” What’s up with that? Well, it is helpful to think that as you’re holding your Bible, you’re not just holding one, long, written document but thousands of manuscripts. Actually the NT alone is the compilation and intense scrutinizing of around 25,000 manuscript copies. And these 2 postscripts to Mark aren’t in 2 of the earlier manuscripts (*Codex Sinaiticus and Codex Vaticanus*) and that’s what they’re informing us of.

Even though those 2 manuscripts don’t contain these next 12 verses, they did leave a lot of blank space at the end suggesting they may have known about a longer ending but just didn’t have it.ⁱⁱ Considering ancient documents didn’t waste much space, I find that interesting. It is also true that the majority of Greek manuscripts do contain these verses and the earliest church fathers quoted from them. The vocabulary and style is a bit different from Mark’s style to this point, but it doesn’t mean he couldn’t have added it later or that it isn’t inspired. What is here is true and it meshes with the other gospels and Acts. I also talk about this more in the devotional this week.

II. JESUS’ APPEARANCES. (VV. 9-14)

To start out here, I want to mention 3 resurrection proofs briefly.

Resurrection Proof D: The 17 appearance to Jesus; even 500 at once (1 Cor. 15:6)

The text presents 3 of Jesus’ 17 post-resurrection appearances. First, is that of Mary Magdalene and the other women which becomes another resurrection proof for this chapter.

Resurrection Proof E: Women as initial witnesses.

For anyone seeking to fabricate a false, but believable story in the first century Jewish life, the last person they would make initial witnesses are women. Women in this day weren't allowed to testify in court of law but Mark records it that way because that's what happened.

Resurrection Proof F: The grief and doubt of the disciples.

The text says they refuse to believe **Mary**, and Luke's gospel says they regard her witness as nonsense. Even when the **two disciples** who met Jesus on the Emmaus Road came and told the eleven about how they saw Jesus, they don't believe them either! You can read about that in Luke 24. As the 2 are sharing, Jesus appears among them and has to reprove the eleven for their unbelief.

I find in Mary another resurrected life principle: even though she had a **rough past**, having had seven demons cast out of her, she is a new and useful creation for Jesus.

☪ Resurrection-Life Principle #5

A resurrected life is a new, useful creation for Jesus, regardless of the past.

It's typically our past that Jesus is going to use to be a ministry to other people (2 Cor. 1). We can also enjoy the **emphasis on the resurrection during the disciples' grieving**. What people need when they grieve the loss of someone is the hope of the resurrection. Without the resurrection, we might as well go on grieving forever as hopeless, pitiful, evolutionary accidents who cease to exist when we die. But if Jesus is true, there is no greater hope or greater news that someone could hear. Jesus wants us who know Him **to share the hope** of forgiveness and resurrection life in Him.

☪ Resurrection-Life Principle #6

A resurrected life brings people hope.

Verses 15-20

And He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved; but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned. These signs will accompany those who have believed: in My name they will cast out demons, they will speak with new tongues, they will pick up serpents, and if they drink any deadly poison, it will not hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover."

So then, when the Lord Jesus had spoken to them, He was received up into heaven and sat down at the right hand of God. And they went out and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them, and confirmed the word by the signs that followed.][And they promptly reported all these instructions to Peter and his companions. And after that, Jesus Himself sent out through them from east to west the sacred and imperishable proclamation of eternal salvation.]"

III. JESUS' COMMISSION. (VV. 15-18)

It's similar to Matthew's ending. Matthew says, "*Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. And lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.*" This says to **take the good news of Jesus' death for sins, burial and resurrection to all of creation** – basically, everyone in the world. Let everyone hear it. Bring the hope of the gospel to the young and old, rich and poor, Jew and Gentile. Why? Because it's the power of God unto salvation. If you don't believe it, Jesus says, you stand before God *condemned*. But the opposite of that is, **if you believe, you stand justified** – that's a judicial term that means *declared righteous*. In Christ, He takes our sins and in exchange places upon us His righteousness. It's a judicial act of God.

Resurrection-Life Principle #7

A resurrected life has the guarantee of justification.

Some want to try to use this text to argue for water baptism as a requirement for salvation because it says, "*he who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved.*" All that's saying according to clear NT doctrinal teaching is that water baptism *should* follow belief. Notice that the issue of justification or condemnation is belief. Notice baptism missing in the 2nd half of the verse, "*but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned.*" Unbelief is the great sin that condemns a man.

To believe is to trust. It is to depend on. *What are you depending on to get you to heaven?* What are you trusting in? If it's anything other than Christ, even your own water baptism, you stand condemned, and need to accept the good news or get back to it. **Baptism is an outward expression of inward belief.** Water baptism though, is important because it is part of our marching order to baptize people and it is something **symbolic of our new life in Christ**. It is a **picture of Spirit baptism** – the moment we believe we are baptized into the death, burial and resurrection of Christ and given new life by His power (Eph. 1:17; 1 Cor. 12:13). It is to **publicly identify with Christ**.

Resurrection-Life Principle #8

A resurrected life desires to publicly identify with Jesus through water baptism.

This is a natural desire of one who has the new life in Christ. I would say if you have believed in Christ and want to follow Christ, let's get you baptized before the water gets too cold out there!

IV. JESUS' ASCENSION. (VV. 19-20)

After Jesus ascended into heaven to sit at the right hand of God (v. 19) as our High Priest, He sent the apostles out by the power of the Holy Spirit to lay the foundation for the Church and He granted them **miraculous power to confirm the gospel** they were preaching (v. 20) like casting demons, speaking in new languages, healing people, etc. These are what Paul called in 1 Corinthians 12:2 refers to as "*the signs of an apostle*" and what we see them fulfilling through the book of Acts. The signs were God's way of saying, "*I'm with the apostles' and the good word they're proclaim*"

And some people consider this the greatest resurrection proof.ⁱⁱⁱ

Resurrection Proof G: changed Lives; the cowering disciples become powerful witnesses who refuse to recant.

The NT records 4 out of 5 of these miraculous signs mentioned. It doesn't record them drinking poison but if someone secretly tried to poison them and they didn't die, I guess they wouldn't know! God just overruled it. The snake thing was likely fulfilled with Paul on the island of Malta. He was bit by a venomous viper as he was gathering firewood and the people thought he was cursed but when nothing happened to him, they considered him a god! This does not mean we make a church practice out of handling snakes and drink strychnine to prove our faith like some Appalachian churches do. If anyone brings a snake in here, I'm out! But seriously, to do that is to exploit the promises of God^{iv} like Satan tempted Jesus to do (Mt. 6-7). Throw yourself off the temple and prove you're the Son of God! That's testing God and it's the opposite of faith.

But here's what neat about this. What God did for the apostles, empowering them for service in their unique way, is what He does for us. When Christ ascended, He sent the Holy Spirit who empowers us and gives us spiritual gifts to carry out our part of the mission.

Resurrection-Life Principle #9

A resurrected life becomes a Spirit-empowered servant like the Savior.

Verse 20 says, "*the Lord was with them.*" When you serve Jesus, you're never alone. He is with you, empowering you. That's one of the major themes we are going to discover as we embark upon the book of **Acts** in, Lord willing, a couple of weeks (making a pit stop in **Philemon** first). **The Spirit is energizing, guiding, and directing the apostles** as the Church is birthed and the gospel advances around the world. And remember, that's an unfinished task we are still part of and as new creations with new desires, should desire to be a part of.

Resurrection-Life Principle #10

A resurrected life desires to share the good news with others.

We get to be the ones who bring the hope and joy of Jesus to a hopeless world.

ⁱ William Lane, *New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Gospel According to Mark* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1974), 585.

ⁱⁱ John D. Grassmick, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 1983), 193.

ⁱⁱⁱ William Varner, *Passionate about the Passion Week* (Dallas, TX: Fontes Press, 2020), 76.

^{iv} David Breese, *Satan's Ten Most Believable Lies* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1974), chapters 8 & 9.