

Amazed at the Resurrection

Here we are in the 16th chapter of Mark. It seems kind of strange to be preaching a message on the resurrection at Christmas time. We usually reserve this for another season of the year. When you preach and teach through the scriptures verse-by-verse like I do, it doesn't always correspond to the seasons. But it always corresponds to our need and God's truth.

The resurrection is not just one element in the Gospel story; it's not just one feature of Christianity--it is the main event. The resurrection of Jesus Christ from the grave is *the* greatest event in history. It is the major moment, the major reality of our Christian faith. It is the primary theme of worship and praise. Without the resurrection, the cross, the death of Christ, would be meaningless. The cross would be powerless. If Christ is not raised, the New Testament says then your faith is worthless and you are still in your sins.

The resurrection is not a postscript. The resurrection is not an epilogue. It's not an appendix at the end of the story. It is the climactic high point of the work of Christ. The church doesn't meet on Friday. The church meets on the first day of the week, Sunday. We celebrate the resurrection because of the cross meaningful. This is the cornerstone of our faith.

So today we come to Mark's account of the resurrection, chapter 16.

Now some of you might have a question about chapter 16. We will have to deal with the question sooner or later, so we might as well get it over with: Where does the Gospel of Mark end? Those of you who have the King James Version of the Bible have a complete chapter 16 with 20 verses. Some more modern translations either end Mark 16 at verse 8, or they put verses 9-20 in brackets with a note that says, "The earliest manuscripts and some other ancient witnesses do not have Mark 16:9-20."

All ancient manuscripts of Mark have verses 1-8 of chapter 16. Some later copies have an additional short ending that nearly all Bible scholars reject as not original. The longer ending, verses 9-20, has more manuscript support, but the verses are not in the oldest texts of Mark such as the Codices Sinaiticus and Vaticanus.

In the fourth century two of the early church fathers, Eusebius and Jerome, wrote that almost all Greek manuscripts of the New Testament end at verse 8. Did they know those other endings existed? Yes they knew they existed. In the second century, Justin Martyr and Tatian also knew about other endings. Irenaeus, also in 150 to 200, he knew about this long ending because he quotes verse 19 from it. They knew these endings existed. They existed early. But even by the fourth century, Eusebius says, "The Greek manuscripts do not include these endings...the originals."

Furthermore, the vocabulary in verses 9-20 is not consistent with the rest of Mark. It doesn't even read like Mark. There are eighteen words here that are never used anywhere by Mark. The structure is very different from the familiar structure of Mark's writing. The title, "Lord Jesus," is used here in verse 19, never used anywhere else by Mark. There's no reference to Peter here, although Peter was mentioned in verse 7.

You might say, "Well where did this thing come from?" Well, we don't know who it came from, but I know where. It came mostly from the other Gospel accounts in the New Testament. For example, verse 9 is taken right out of Luke 8:1-3. Verse 10 is taken from

John 20:18. Verse 12 is taken from Luke 24:13-32, the road to Emmaus account. Verse 13 is taken from Luke 24. Verse 14 is taken from Luke 24:36-38; verse 15 is taken from Matthew 28:19. Verse 16 is taken right out of John 20:23 and verses 17-18, with all the signs and things, are consistent with some of the happenings in the book of Acts.

So, Mark 16:9-20, even though it possibly may not have original to Mark, it is certainly Biblical. I will teach more on this longer ending next week. This week I want us to see how Mark ends the story in verses 1-8.

So that brings us to Mark 16:1-8, with its awkward ending. **"So they went out quickly and fled from the tomb, for they trembled and were amazed. And they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid."** There is no appearance of the risen Christ to the women or anyone else. In the Greek text the final phrase in verse 8 is **"for they were afraid."**

Listen to Mark's account as I read 16:1-8:

Mark 16:1-8

- 1 Now when the Sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, that they might come and anoint Him.**
- 2 Very early in the morning, on the first day of the week, they came to the tomb when the sun had risen.**
- 3 And they said among themselves, "Who will roll away the stone from the door of the tomb for us?"**
- 4 But when they looked up, they saw that the stone had been rolled away--for it was very large.**
- 5 And entering the tomb, they saw a young man clothed in a long white robe sitting on the right side; and they were alarmed.**
- 6 But he said to them, "Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He is 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 into Galilee; there you will see Him, as He said to you."**
- 8 So they went out quickly and fled from the tomb, for they trembled and were amazed. And they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.**

Today for the next few minutes I want to focus on what happened to these women on that resurrection Sunday.

First of all we see in verse 1,

1. They arrived early.

These ladies didn't arrive early in anticipation, but rather to take care of unfinished business. Mark 15:47 records that they had seen the tomb and where his body was laid after he was taken down from the cross. Yet, they had to return home where they prepared the spices, and ointments, but their work was delayed because of the Sabbath.

So, according to verse 2, as soon as they could following the Sabbath, early in the morning while it was still dark, they left their homes, met together, and went to the tomb of Jesus. I have to admire the devotion, and courage of these ladies. Oh, how they must have loved Jesus! They want Him to have a proper burial. It was the least they could do. They were courageous in what they did. They did not fear the darkness nor did they fear being found out as followers of Christ.

Second we see that,

2. They arrived expecting.

What did those ladies expect? They expected to find a body. They came there to anoint the body of the Lord with spices, and ointments since they were unable to do so because of the Sabbath. What do we expect when we go to a graveyard? Certainly not an empty casket! We expect to find a corpse.

They also arrived expecting to have a problem. They had seen how Joseph had rolled a large stone over the entrance of the tomb. Their conversation on the way to the tomb was about this barrier. How could they get into the tomb to do the task they had come to do? Their major concern was access to the body. They probably didn't know that Pilate had ordered soldiers to guard the tomb, as Matthew records for us.

But notice verse 4, **"But when they looked up, they saw that the stone had been rolled away--for it was very large."**

When they arrived, the stone was already rolled back. Matthew tells us that very early, long before daybreak, an angel had come and rolled back the stone, and sat upon it. His countenance was like lightening bright and shining, so that he dazzled and dismayed the guards who had been detailed to watch over the tomb. They fell as dead men on the ground, and, then, as they recovered their senses, stumbled off into the darkness in fear. All of this had happened before the women arrived.

When they came, there was no sign of anyone, and the door of the tomb was open. That told them that something amazing had happened. At this point they did not know what it was, but they understood that something remarkable had occurred, for the stone was already rolled away, and the tomb was open.

So in verse 5,

3. They arrived entering.

When they went into the tomb, the body of Jesus was gone! That which they had come to anoint was no longer there. This empty tomb has been the answer to all the arguments of skeptics for twenty centuries. No one has even been able to explain it. Every generation has tried.

It seems so simple. The fact that the tomb of Jesus is empty is one of the most powerful arguments for the validity of the resurrection of Jesus. Those who resist the resurrection usually come up with one of these arguments

- Some say the body was taken by the disciples. This was the original lie made up by the Jewish authorities according to Matthew. However this discounts the fact that guards were posted at the tomb to prevent this very thing from happening. Even if it did happen, why would the disciples perpetuate a lie about a risen Jesus even in the face of persecution and death? Knowing how weak the

apostles had been all along, somebody surely would have "spilled the beans". But the testimony of all the eyewitnesses continued unbroken until their deaths.

- Some say the body was moved by Joseph. They suggest that Joseph had put the body in his tomb only temporarily. Some say he really didn't care about Jesus . . . he was merely concerned about the Jewish law that prohibited these bodies hanging there over the Sabbath observance. But, if this was true why did he only take the body of Jesus? And if Joseph was going to move the body, why would he do it in secret? Besides the testimony is clear: Joseph was a disciple. We are led to believe Joseph gave his tomb as a way of honoring his Lord.
- Some say the body was moved by the Roman guard to keep it from being stolen. Then why not produce the real body when all the resurrection talk began?
- Some say the women went to the wrong tomb. The thought is that when the angel said, "He is not here . . ." it was really someone who was simply trying to say, "He's not here . . . He's over there." It's a clever theory but has no substance to it. Once again, the talk of resurrection could have been silenced forever by the real corpse.

The empty tomb is a powerful argument. If Jesus did not rise from the grave . . . where is His body?

The women saw the empty tomb and they heard the testimony of the angel. The words of the angel to these women contain the answer to all the skepticism of twenty centuries.

The message of the angel was, "This Jesus of Nazareth, this One who was crucified, this same one whom you seek, has indeed risen from the dead." "This very same Jesus, the One you knew from Nazareth, whom you accompanied about the hills of Galilee and Judea, the Jesus who was crucified, whom you saw on the cross with the nails in his hands and the blood running down his side, that same One whom you are seeking, is risen from the dead." That establishes the identity of Jesus.

Then he said to them, "He is not here." That is, "He is not only risen; he is not here." Jesus is not just a spirit. This is not a spiritual resurrection but a bodily resurrection. It was the body of Jesus that rose from the dead. The Bible consistently defends the proposition that it was the very body which was put into the grave, dead, which also rose from the dead. "He is not here." "Furthermore," the angel said, "he goes before you to Galilee." There is a specific geographical spot on the face of the earth, that you well know, where you will see him. He will be there when you get there. "Go and tell his disciples that he goes before you to Galilee." So the angel underscores the claims of Scripture that Jesus is alive, that he rose bodily, and that he is available in specific places.

The third thing the angel says is put in these extraordinary words that only Mark records: "But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going before you to Galilee." That is a wonderful touch. What a gentle, tender word that is! The last time we saw Peter in this Gospel account, he was standing in the courtyard of the high priest during the trial of Jesus. And a little maiden, a little slip of a girl, kept following him around, saying, "I know you. You were with him, weren't you?" Peter kept denying it; three times he denied it. And the last we saw of Peter, he went out into the darkness of the night,

weeping bitterly. What a tender thing it is for the angel to say to these women, "Go and tell the disciples and Peter that he goes before you to Galilee."

What does this say to us? Well, that says that Jesus is available to individuals -- not just to the crowd at large, not just to the world in general, or the church, but to you. Put your own name in there, if you like. This accessibility to individuals has been the hallmark of Christianity ever since. Each one of us can know him personally, intimately -- not just as a figure of history, nor as a coming King, but in that intimate, personal, real savior and Lord.

The last thing the angel said was, "He is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him, as he told you." That is, these are faithful words. Jesus had already promised that he would do this. This ought not to have taken them by surprise, because he had said that he would go before them to Galilee when he rose from the dead, and there he would meet them. The angel is here underscoring the reliability of the words of Jesus. He is absolutely trustworthy; he does what he says he will do. His promises can be believed. Whatever he said, he also fulfilled, and you can rely upon it to the very last letter.

4. They departed excited!

Mark's account ends in verse 8 with the women who had come to the tomb leaving filled with such joy and awe and exploding hope that they dared not breathe a word of it to anyone. When the close of the passage says "they were afraid," it would be a mistake to read it as though it means they were terrified, or threatened because they were not.

Verse 8 says, **"they trembled and were amazed."** The word for "trembled," is the word "tremos" in the original Greek, and the word "amazed" is literally "ecstasy." They were caught up in the trauma and ecstasy of the resurrection. They were filled with excitement and trembling awe at what they heard from the angel in the tomb.

What a great way to leave a cemetery? Amen? We don't usually leave graveyards excited? We usually leave their in pain over the death of a family member or friend! Even, if it's not someone that we were closely acquainted with....excitement is not an emotion we usually feel after leaving the graveyard...yet, these ladies were excited! The source of their excitement was, of course, the resurrection of The Lord Jesus Christ.

An empty tomb and a message from an angel is frightening. Everything the women understood about life was turned upside down. In that one incredible moment death was shattered, and the world they knew were changed forever. As someone once said, "if death is not the end, then all the cards in the deck may be wild." Nothing is the same. God had come. Jesus Christ is risen. Life could never be the same. The women couldn't even begin to understand what life on this side of the resurrection was all about. They simply knew that Jesus was indeed alive, risen from death itself. Then somehow their lives would never be the same again. And that is frightening.

The women had come to the tomb that morning thinking that the story of Jesus Christ had come to an end, that it was all over between them and Jesus. To their astonishment, and to their great fear, they found it was NOT over.

And so Mark's final word is "So they went out and fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid."

It is a story that is unfinished, because it is meant to be unfinished. It is meant for you and I to take it up, to decide for ourselves how the story will end. Frightening isn't it? We each have the opportunity, amazing and disturbing though it is, to finish the story in our own lives. Jesus Christ died and rose that he might meet you here. He has come to offer you new life, Resurrection Life. What will you do with the news? Will you hear the words of the young man at the empty tomb?

"You are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised, he is not here...He is going ahead of you, you will see him".

How will you finish the story?

The story is told of a young man once came home from a prisoner of war camp who had been reported killed in action. His family and his buddies and even his girlfriend had mourned him as dead and then more or less got over their grief. His sudden reappearance was disturbing to say the least. They had all loved him, but they had in effect written him out of their lives. His girlfriend was engaged to marry someone else. Moreover, he didn't seem like the boy who had gone off to war. He was thin and haggard and haunted. However, he was now mature, self-possessed, and, astonishingly, happy. He hadn't smiled much as a kid and rarely joked. Now he was witty and exuberant all the time. A quiet kid had become an outgoing adult man. He didn't fit in the patterns of relationships he had left behind. Quite the contrary, his happiness and maturity were unsettling. He congratulated his former girlfriend on her coming marriage and shook hands cordially with her fiancée. His family went to the pastor. There's something wrong with him, they said. There sure is, the pastor replied, he has risen from the dead and now lives a new life.

This is the reality of the Resurrection. The dead are given new life. Will you take hold of the new life Christ offers? Will you accept the frightening, awesome, wonderful news that will forever change your life?