

**THE EMPTY TOMB**

Mark 16:1-8

**Intro:** When the Apostle Paul was preparing to write to the Corinthian church about resurrection, He began by reminding them of the Gospel which he had preached to them, which they had received, and upon which they were standing. That is, they had no question as to the truth of the message that Paul had come to Corinth preaching. And yet it was a most amazing message. It was a message about Christ. It was a message about the death of Christ. It was a message that Christ had died for their sins, and not because of anything illegal or immoral that He had done. It was a message about the death of Christ, the Messiah, that had been predicted in the Scriptures, the OT Scriptures. These were truths about which they had no question. Their faith in Christ was founded upon these facts about Christ. They knew that the fact that He had died was underlined by the fact that He had been buried.

But their faith, while being founded upon the death of Christ, did not stop there. The Gospel was also a message about the resurrection of Christ. They believed that He had been raised from the dead on the third day as He had predicted that He would be. And they believed that this also was “according to the Scriptures.” That in itself was sufficient for them, that it had been predicted in the Scriptures. But, as God often does to strengthen our faith, they knew that after His resurrection He had been seen, not by Pilate, nor by any of those Jews who were so anxious to see Him die, but that He had been seen by a host of believers, most of whom were still living when Paul wrote to them. This was the Gospel which they had received, which they had believed, and by which they had been saved. This was the Gospel, the message, which Paul told the church at Rome that he was not at all ashamed because, it, and it alone, was “the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth” (Rom. 1:16). It was not just a message that Jews needed to hear and to believe, but the same message was for Gentiles to believe and to be saved. Wherever the apostles went, and whether they were speaking to Jews or Gentiles, men or women, adults or children, master or slaves, the wise or the unwise, this was the message that was preached to them. This is the message that thousands of people believed, and this is the message by which they were saved from the penalty of their sins.

Let me read what Paul wrote to the Corinthians in the passage I have been referring to. Most of you know that it is found in 1 Corinthians, chapter

15, and begins with verse 1:

- 1 Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand;
- 2 By which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain.
- 3 For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures;
- 4 And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures:
- 5 And that he was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve:
- 6 After that, he was seen of above five hundred brethren at once; of whom the greater part remain unto this present, but some are fallen asleep.
- 7 After that, he was seen of James; then of all the apostles.
- 8 And last of all he was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time.
- 9 For I am the least of the apostles, that am not meet to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.
- 10 But by the grace of God I am what I am: and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me.
- 11 Therefore whether it were I or they, so we preach, and so ye believed (1 Cor. 15:1-11).

This is the Gospel. This is what OT saints looked forward to, and this is what we look back upon as the one and only message by which people in all ages and in all nations have been saved.

We have been gradually going through the book of the Bible which is called *the Gospel according to Mark*. Basically it is the same message that anybody will find if they read *the Gospel according to Matthew*, or *the Gospel according to Luke*, or *the Gospel according to John*. It is the only Gospel, the only good news as to how people can be saved from divine judgment and can receive by grace, not by our works, but by the work of Jesus Christ on the Cross, the gift of eternal life.

And so, if Mark had to stop with chapter 15, we would have no Gospel. There would be no salvation for anyone. But he went on to tell us what that angel, who appeared as a young man, told those three ladies who

appeared at the tomb of the Lord early on that Sunday morning. The angel said, “He is risen; He is not here; behold the place where they laid Him” (Mark 16:6). “He is risen; He is not here.” He had put away our sins. He had defeated death. He had defeated the Devil. He arose the Victor. That is why we can sing, “Hallelujah, Christ arose.”

Perhaps you are thinking that I should have saved this message for Easter Sunday when the church has historically remembered the resurrection of Christ. Let me tell you that every Sunday is resurrection Sunday. That is why we meet on Sunday, because it was on Sunday, the first day of the week, that Christ rose from the dead. We don't know which Sunday it was. That is why we celebrate the resurrection of Christ every Sunday. Churches that meet on Friday or Saturday for their main service seem to have forgotten the significance of the first day of the week. There is no law in the Bible that says that we have to meet on Sunday, but that is what the early church did, and it is why it has been the habit of the church until recently when we started doing things to please ourselves, meeting on Saturday, or Friday, so we can have most of the weekend for our own pleasure. It is a commentary on the days in which we live.

But now let us go to our text in Mark 16. Chapter 16 begins as chapter 15 ended, with a concern for:

## **I. THE BODY OF THE LORD JESUS CHRIST (Mark 16:1-2).**

We learned last week about how concerned Joseph of Arimathaea was about the body of the Lord Jesus. He personally threw caution to the wind, as we often say, and went himself to Pilate, pleading for the body of the Lord Jesus because he wanted to give the Lord's body a descent burial. After wrapping it in linen, he laid the Lord's body “in his own new tomb, which he had hewn out in the rock: and he rolled a great stone at the door of the sepulchre, and departed” (Matt. 27:60).

Here at the beginning of Mark 16 we read that the same three women who had watched the Lord die from a distance, came on that first resurrection morning, very early, just as the sun was rising, with their “sweet spices,” to anoint the dead body of the Lord. And they did all of this because God the Father had put it in their heart to do so. The Lord's body was a body that God had especially prepared for Him. This, according to Hebrews 10:5-7 is the meaning of Psalm 40:6-8. In Hebrews 10:5-7 we read these words:

5 Wherefore when he cometh into the world, he saith, Sacrifice and offering thou wouldest not, but a body hast thou prepared me:

6 In burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin thou hast had no pleasure.

7 Then said I, Lo, I come (in the volume of the book it is written of me,) to do thy will, O God (Heb. 10:5-7).

God gave our Lord a human body when He was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary, because He came into the world to do the will of the Father which was that He would die for sinful human beings. But it was important that His body be preserved because He not only was to die, but to be raised from the dead in that same body – glorified!

Do you know that our bodies are a part of God's redemptive plan for us? Our bodies are going to be raised and glorified. We now are to present our bodies as living sacrifices to God. That's why I hope that you won't let your body be cremated when you die. I don't even like the present-day practice of having a memorial service instead of a funeral where the body of our loved one is there. It, I believe, is a part of our testimony to the world. I know that often the bodies of Christians had been blown to nothing in a terrible explosion. The bodies of early Christians were sometimes eaten by animals. Sometimes Christians die at sea. These are not problems for the Lord. He can bring those bodies together at the resurrection. But when we have a choice, let us bury the bodies of our Lord ones, because when the Lord returns, those who have been with the Lord, are going to be reunited with their bodies, and glorified so that they and we will have bodies like our Lord. Read Philippians 3:20 and 21.

I believe that there are lessons for us to learn from the fact that God did not allow our Lord's body to be thrown away in some disgraceful way, but He moved upon the hearts of Joseph and those three ladies to do what they could to show their love for the Lord after He had died. The body of the Lord Jesus was precious to God, but it was precious also to Joseph of Arimathaea, and to those three ladies.

But now let us think for just a moment about:

## **II. THE STONE (Mark 16:3-5).**

As they approached the tomb on that Sunday morning, they remembered that a very large stone had been rolled into the mouth of the tomb. They

knew that they couldn't move it, and it was so early that they didn't expect anyone to be around who could move the stone away. But they found that the Lord had already taken care of that. There were two angels there that morning; Mark only mentioned one. They had removed the stone. But note: they didn't have to remove the stone so that the Lord could get out; they removed the stone so that those ladies could get in. I am sure that God told the angels that the ladies were coming, and so He prepared to surprise them.

Isn't it often the case that the things that we think are going to be problems, are already taken care of by the Lord before we have to deal with them. But we are told that when the ladies saw the angel, they were "affrighted," as it is expressed in the KJV. The same word is used again in verse 6. It means that they were *utterly astonished, totally amazed*. This is not at all what they expected to find. They could not imagine what had happened to the body of the Lord.

Now this leads to:

### III. THE MESSAGE OF THE ANGEL (Mark 16:6-7).

The angel sought to calm their fears. Notice that the first ones to know about the resurrection of Christ, were angels. And they were sent to bring the good news to the Lord's people. He said, in effect, "I know why you are here. I know whom you are looking for." And note that we can add the testimony of this angel to the fact that the Lord really died: "Ye seek Jesus of Nazareth, which was crucified: He is risen; He is not here." And then he told them to look where the Lord's body had been. The other Gospels give us more details than John Mark has given us. But the message is the same in each case.

But then the angel added to his words some instructions as to what they were to do. It was not to go to the Jews, nor to the Romans, but to His disciples, to tell them what had happened to the Lord. But notice those words, "tell His disciples, **and Peter.**" You and I can be sure that it was the Lord Jesus Who told that angel what he was to tell those ladies: "tell His disciples" (let them be the first to know), **and Peter.**"

You will remember that when our Lord was arrested, *all of His disciples forsook Him, and fled*. They "fled" for their lives, fearing that they might suffer the same fate that the Lord was about to suffer. And Peter, who

had so strongly declared that he would never forsake the Lord, that he would die rather than leave the Lord, afterwards denied three times that he even knew the Lord. The disciples, but especially Peter, had some very serious sins charged against their records. And even when they were told about the resurrection, at first they did not believe. Thomas even said that he wouldn't believe until he could see the Lord. And the Lord even accommodated Himself to what Thomas had said. How would the Lord deal with them? Would He keep them as His disciples?

They probably didn't understand then what the Lord would do, but they learned later, as the Apostle John wrote, that "the blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleanseth us from all sins." The other night I was reading in Jerry Bridges' book, *Is God Really in Control?*, a quotation that Matthew Henry made on Zephaniah 3:17 which tell us,

17 The LORD thy God in the midst of thee is mighty; he will save, he will rejoice over thee with joy; he will rest in his love, he will joy over thee with singing.

Matthew Henry's comment was, "The great God not only loves His saints, but He loves to love them." I don't know if any of the disciples had remembered that the Lord had told them that He would meet them in Galilee, but the Lord hadn't forgotten it even after all that He had been through. He wanted to love them and to comfort them and to tell them that in spite of all that they had done, His love for them was unchanged.

As I close, look with me at:

#### **IV. THE RESPONSE OF THE LADIES (Mark 16:8).**

It was almost too much for them, wasn't it? They were overwhelmed by all that had taken place, and also by this sudden turn of events. But probably most of all by the evidence of God's grace and God's love toward His people who had failed to watch with Him, and to stand by Him in the worst hour of His life.

**Concl:** Dr. Mitchell would often conclude his messages by saying, "And what about you, my friend?" And then he would ask us what effect the Word had had upon us. Have you ever trembled and been amazed at the grace of God, and His love for you, especially when you have failed Him in some way, or as you look back over your life and marvel that he would ever have wanted to have anything to do with you? I have, and I go through it all again every once in a while. Let us all

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remember that message that the Lord sent to His disciples through that angel, “tell My disciples, and Peter, especially Peter because I know how he is suffering, tell them that our appointment still holds, and that I am looking forward to being with you again in Galilee.”

For any of you who have never trusted the Lord Jesus Christ as your Savior, how can you resist such love and such grace. It is only because Christ died for our sins, and rose again triumphantly from the dead, that I have any message of hope to give you this morning. Come to Him now. Confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord, and believe in your heart that He is the only Savior of sinners, and He will receive you and cleanse you and forgive you, and make you acceptable to God because of what He did on Calvary’s Cross. Come to Him today, and be saved.