

This Changes Everything!

Mark 16:1-8

Introduction: Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! One special boy understood the importance of that message...

Little Philip, born with Down's syndrome, attended a third-grade Sunday School class with several eight-year-old boys and girls. Typical of that age, the children did not readily accept Philip with his differences, according to an article in leadership magazine. But because of a creative teacher, they began to care about Philip and accept him as part of the group, though not fully.

The Sunday after Easter the teacher brought... [empty plastic eggs]. Each receiving one, the children were told to go outside on that lovely spring day, find some symbol for new life, and put it in the... [plastic egg]. Back in the classroom, they would share their new-life symbols, opening the containers one by one in surprise fashion. After running about the church property in wild confusion, the students returned to the classroom and placed the containers on the table. Surrounded by the children, the teacher began to open them one by one. After each one, whether a flower, butterfly, or leaf, the class would ooh and ahh.

Then one was opened, revealing nothing inside. The children exclaimed, "That's stupid. That's not fair. Somebody didn't do their assignment."

Philip spoke up, "That's mine."

"Philip, you don't ever do things right!" a student retorted. "There's nothing there!"

"I did so do it," Philip insisted. "I did do it. It's empty. the tomb was empty!"

Silence followed. From then on Philip became a full member of the class. He died not long afterward from an infection most normal children would have shrugged off. At the funeral this class of eight-year-olds marched up to the altar not with flowers, but with their Sunday school teacher, each to lay on it an empty plastic egg. (Unknown).

I don't know if these were based on that story, but Mary Ann has a set of "resurrection eggs" that each contain symbols of the gospel message. The last one is empty, reminding us of the empty tomb. Christ is risen! Indeed He is risen! That is not a story. It is not a myth. It is a fact of history. And that truth changes everything.

The resurrection of Jesus is not just a religious story we tell at Easter time. It is not just a facet of the Christian tradition. It is a historical fact, and the foundation of our faith! Paul spoke to the importance of the resurrection in I Corinthians 15,

¹³ But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. ¹⁴ And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain. ¹⁵ We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified about God that he raised Christ, whom he did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised. ¹⁶ For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised. ¹⁷ And if

Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. ¹⁸ Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. ¹⁹ If in this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied. ²⁰ But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep... (I Cor 15:13-20).

That is pretty emphatic, is it not? If the resurrection is not true, our faith is useless, we are still in our sins, we are of all men most to be pitied. But if it is true, and it is, it changes everything! Ignatius of Antioch, was being taken to his execution in AD 107. He was expecting to be thrown to the lions, and may have reflected on those verses written by Paul when he wrote the following...

If you come across somebody who says that Jesus Christ never lived, or that He is just an idea, or a concept, or a myth, shut your ears to him.

Jesus Christ was born into a human family, a descendent of David. His mother was Mary. He was persecuted under Pontius Pilate, a fact testified to us by some who are now in Heaven, and some who are still alive on earth. How can this be a phantom, or an illusion, or a myth? These are facts of history!

It is also a fact that he rose from the dead (or rather that his Father raised him up). And that is the most important fact of all, because his promise is that the Father will also raise us up, if we believe in Him. So if Christ Jesus is not alive, neither shall we be. There is nothing left for us to hope for if he is just an idea or a fantasy.

In any case, if he only appeared to rise from the dead —why should I be in chains for this “myth”? Why should I die to support an illusion? I am prepared to die for him, the true and real Son of God. But no one is prepared to die for a shadow.

The resurrection is not just a story we tell once a year at Easter. It is the very foundation of our faith! The tomb was empty, and that truth changes everything!

As we look at this account, we will realize that the disciples, amazingly, were not expecting the resurrection of Jesus. I say this was amazing since Jesus had, multiple times, clearly predicted His death and resurrection! We’ve looked at three of those passages several times on our walk through this Gospel. After the disciples first confess that Jesus is the Messiah, we read in 8:31 Jesus explicitly teaching them about what had to happen. They needed to learn what the Messiah came to do...

Mark 8:31 ³¹ *And he began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be killed, and after three days rise again.*

A chapter later, after casting out a demon from a boy that the disciples had been unable to exorcize, Jesus was teaching His disciples, and in 9:31 He says to them...

Mark 9:31 *"The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill him. And when he is killed, after three days he will rise."*

Essentially the same teaching. Then again we read in...

Mark 10:32-34 ³² *And they were on the road, going up to Jerusalem, and Jesus was walking ahead of them. And they were amazed, and those who followed were afraid. And taking the twelve again, he began to tell them what was to happen to him, ³³ saying, "See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death and deliver him over to the Gentiles. ³⁴ And they will mock him and spit on him, and flog him and kill him. And after three days he will rise."*

Each time, after Jesus' teaching, the disciples said or did something that *proved* they did not understand. After the scene on the Mount of Transfiguration Jesus had told Peter, James, and John to tell no one about what they had seen until after He rose from the dead. So we read in 9:10, "...they kept the matter to themselves, questioning what this rising from the dead might mean." They would soon know! That is...

The *Maine Idea:** The resurrection changes everything! It proves that He is who He claimed to be and that He accomplished what He came to do! We'll look at Mark's account of that morning and consider 1) The devotion of the women, as only they, among the followers of Jesus, risk going to the tomb on Sunday morning to anoint the body of Jesus; 2) The declaration of the angel in 5-7, appearing as a young man dressed in white who declares the Good News, *He is not here, He is risen*, and finally; 3) The deduction of the witnesses, as it strikes them as to what this must mean!

I. The Devotion of the Women: Only they, among the disciples, risk going first to the tomb to anoint the body of the Lord (1-4).

When the Sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him. ² And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb. ³ And they were saying to one another, "Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance of the tomb?" ⁴ And looking up, they saw that the stone had been rolled back- it was very large.

The disciples had been scattered, and are still out of sight. These faithful women, who had followed from Galilee, watched from a distance at Golgotha. and had followed Joseph to the tomb, are first to arrive. Again, the fact that Mark reports that these women were the first witnesses of the empty tomb and that they received the angelic announcement of the resurrection, is a powerful testimony to the authenticity of the record. Women were truly second-class citizens in the ancient world. At the time of Christ they were not allowed to testify in legal matters. They were considered unreliable witnesses. If Mark was making this story up, he would not have had the first

witnesses as women! But he reports it that way because that is the way it happened. As God inspired Mark to write this account, he highlights the role of these women as faithfully following Jesus, from Galilee to Jerusalem, they are watching as He is crucified (while the men were scattered, and nowhere to be found), they follow Joseph of Arimathea to the tomb when Jesus is buried on Friday afternoon, and they arrive at the tomb to tend to His body on Sunday morning.

It seems only on the way do they start to think about how they are going to move the huge stone they saw rolled in place to seal the tomb (3). God had a plan about that. They arrive, and the stone is already moved! Who moved the stone? That the title of a book about the resurrection by a man named Frank Morison. He set out to disprove the resurrection, and like many before and after him, when He looked at the facts and considered the evidence, like the centurion at the cross, like the thief crucified at the side of Jesus, his heart was opened to the truth—surely this man was the Son of God! Dr. Simon Greenleaf, founder of Harvard Law school had a similar experience. His book was entitled, *The Testimony of the Evangelists: The Gospels Examined by the Rules of Evidence*. Lee Strobel's *The Case of Christ* is a modern example. He arose! The resurrection changes everything! It proves that He is who He claimed to be and that He accomplished what He came to do!

II. The Declaration of the Angel: *He is risen; He is not here* (5-7).

⁵ *And entering the tomb, they saw a young man sitting on the right side, dressed in a white robe, and they were alarmed.* ⁶ *And he said to them, "Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has 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 to Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you."*

An alarming sight (5). Mark describes this scene in the simplest, most straightforward terms. A young man, dressed in white. We know from the parallel accounts that this was indeed an angel, and his appearance was like lightning (Mt 28:3) and he was dressed in dazzling apparel (Lk 24:4). The word Mark uses here can have the sense of “amazed” or “alarmed,” or even “distressed.” No wonder! They were already distressed about the events of that week, but now they find the tomb open and the body gone, and this angelic figure seated in the tomb! As shocking as all that was, I assume that what He says goes even further...

A shocking statement (6). They were alarmed at the sight of this angelic figure sitting in the tomb. Wouldn't you have been?! But the announcement the angel made had to be even more shocking: *He is risen!* These women may have been there in Capernaum when Jesus raised the daughter of Jairus to life. More recently, they might have been at the grave of Lazarus when Jesus called Him forth! But Jesus now had died. They saw His dead body taken down off the cross, wrapped in linen by Joseph of

Arimathea, laid in a tomb, and then a rock rolled in front of the door to seal it in. *He's alive? Do you know what this must mean?* Yes, this was a “shock and awe” moment!

Look at the place where they laid Him – It is as though the angel is saying, “Impress this on your mind, consider what it means, you are going to be a witness to this earth-shaking event! This changes everything!”

Go and tell the disciples and Peter... Why does the Angel specifically mention Peter? Remember his response when Jesus looked at him in the courtyard of the High Priest, after Peter had denied Him three times? He was broken. Broken and broken-hearted, Peter needed restoration—he had denied the Lord. It's hard to read that “*Go and tell*” without thinking of the Great Commission, and our mandate to share the Good News of Jesus with the world around us (see I Corinthians 15:1-3; Matthew 28:18).

“...he is going before you to Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.” Remember that after Jesus predicted that they would all be scattered, and that Peter would three times deny Him, Jesus said to them,

“...You will all fall away, for it is written, 'I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered.'” ²⁸ *But after I am raised up, I will go before you to Galilee.”* ²⁹ Peter said to him, *“Even though they all fall away, I will not.”* (Mk 14:27-29).

We know how that worked out for Peter! But consider the grace that Jesus is extending. They would all desert Him, Peter would deny Him, but Jesus would be raised and go before them to Galilee. That speaks to restoration and forgiveness. Even for Peter, and even for us! God's grace is bigger than our sin. That is why Jesus came, that is why He died. And the resurrection changes everything! It proves that He is who He claimed to be and that He accomplished what He came to do!

III. The Deduction of the witnesses: Consider what this means! (8).

And they went out and fled from the tomb, for trembling and astonishment had seized them, and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.

Astonished and fearful they fled from the tomb! One preacher said, “The resurrection confronts before it comforts.” That has been true of other miracles that Jesus did earlier in his ministry. Jesus was giving glimpses of the future kingdom and clues to His identity in the acts of power He did. They were signs, testifying to His identity, revealing the presence of the Kingdom in the person of the King! They didn't just casually leave the tomb, chatting about the theological implications of what they had just seen. Mark tells us they “*fled the tomb.*” He uses three words to describe their feelings of awe at that moment: *trembling... astonishment... afraid...* That shouldn't surprise us too much in the light of what we have already seen in our survey of the Gospel of Mark. It is the response of humans as they get a glimmer of the answer to their question: “Who is this man?” (cf. Mk 4:40-41). Sinclair Ferguson said,

“In Mark’s Gospel, this fear is always man’s response to the breaking in of the power of God. It is the fear the disciples experienced when Jesus stilled the storm; the fear of the Gerasenes when Jesus delivered Legion; the fear of the disciples as they saw Jesus setting His face to Jerusalem to die on the cross. This fear is the response of men and women to Jesus as He shows His power and majesty as the Son of God...” (Let’s Study Mark, p. 271)

I believe Mark intends us to understand that they went directly to the disciples, speaking to no one on the way (8). It doesn’t say that does it? Remember that Mark is writing to a group of believers, a church. They had heard the Gospel message, they knew the story of the death and resurrection of Jesus from the testimony of the Apostles. I Corinthians was one of Paul’s early letters. In chapter 15 of that letter Paul says that Jesus appeared to Peter, and to the twelve, and on one occasion to more than 500 brothers at once! We learn from the book of Acts that after the resurrection Jesus appeared to them over a period of 40 days, teaching about the kingdom, until he ascended to heaven. There is a phenomenon in reading the Bible that is called *“intertextuality.”* The writers of Scripture could assume that their readers had a context, a background, that would inform how they hear the story. We’ve seen that in Mark’s allusions to the Old Testament Scriptures. I think that same principle extends to the teaching and preaching of the apostles that was at the heart of the faith of the church from the beginning. *Of course* the women eventually took courage and told the apostles what they had seen! If not, they would never have gone to the tomb to see!

More than likely these women ran in silence back to the house where they disciples were huddled. All the while, considering what all this meant, what they had seen and heard. Their excitement probably grew as they drew nearer. The evidence was compelling, evidence that demands a verdict! If the tomb was empty, that means that Jesus conquered death—He really is who He claimed to be! Sinclair Ferguson wrote,

“Mark began his Gospel by telling us who Jesus is. He wrote his Gospel to make us ask the question: Who is Jesus? And answer it accurately. Now he shows us the nature of a true response to Jesus. It is to be moved with a sense of awe and wonder that the Son of God came among men, and lived and died and rose again for our salvation. That sense of awe is the beginning of a new life of fellowship with a risen Lord...” (Ibid, p. 272),

What is God saying to me in this passage? The resurrection changes everything! It proves that He is who He claimed to be and that He accomplished what He came to do!

What would God have me to do in response to this passage? Over the last two years we’ve been looking at Mark’s Gospel from the perspective of three questions, Who is Jesus, why did He come, what does it mean to follow Him. The resurrection is the exclamation point at the end of this Gospel. He is God, the Son. He came to rescue us from wrath, to reconcile us with God. Will you trust Him? Will you follow Him? AMEN.