



Mark 16:1–8

16 When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices so that they might go to anoint Jesus' body. 2 Very early on the first day of the week, just after sunrise, they were on their way to the tomb 3 and they asked each other, 'Who will roll the stone away from the entrance of the tomb?' 4 But when they looked up, they

saw that the stone, which was very large, had been rolled away. 5 As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man dressed in a white robe sitting on the right side, and they were alarmed. 6 ‘Don’t be alarmed,’ he said. ‘You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, 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, “He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.”’ 8 Trembling and bewildered, the women went out and fled from the tomb. They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid.

Reflection

The scene is a graveyard early in the morning. Three world-weary women are unable to let go – Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Salome. They've followed Jesus from Galilee, they've gone through the trauma of seeing him die and their hopes and dreams die with him, and now they've come to see his grave. For them, everything has come to an end; they see it, they feel it and they know it. They're like so many throughout human history who've gone to see a grave; like so many who have stood by the graveside of a friend, a relative, a lover, and looked at the end. The journey through life with a companion is over. There is nowhere else that we can go. The relationship is broken forever and any words left unsaid, any business that isn't done by now will forever remain unfinished.

Graves speak so eloquently. When you gaze upon a grave you come face to face with the dreadful reality of the human condition. Humanity's last and greatest enemy has won. Mortal flesh comes to an end under that mound. Life, once so full and rich, suddenly ceases. Those left behind are confronted with the certainty of their own mortality and in their grief they find a deep and unexplainable sense of wrongness, that death, the inescapable reality of us all, should not be, was not meant to be.

It's thoughts like these that no doubt filled the minds and broken hearts of the two Marys and Salome, and perhaps a few other women according to Luke's account, as they made their way to Jesus' tomb just

before daybreak on Easter Sunday. That is until their whole world lurches upon finding the door Jesus tomb wide open, Roman sentries nowhere to be seen. Here's what happens next from Mark 16:1–8,

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And what a fascinating ending to Mark’s gospel! Why end here? Let’s explore it a little. Remember, it’s the third day; Sunday morning, dawn on the first Easter Sunday. Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of

James and Salome resume their graveside vigil. The two Marys were there when Joseph of Arimathea prepared Jesus' body and lay him in a tomb fit for a king. Presumably they were there also when shortly after a huge contingent of temple guards armed tooth and nail set up a perimeter around the grave site sealing the heavy stone that blocked its entrance with a wax seal bearing Roman insignia. And this morning, before first light they'd set out along with Salome to resume their vigil. Luke tells us that they'd brought some additional spices to anoint Jesus' body, as if the 30 kilos that Joseph of Arimathea had lavished on Jesus was not enough. It's likely that they weren't thinking clearly being so filled with grief. How did they think they would move the heavy stone in front of the tomb? Did they really think

the temple guard would do it for them and break the seal that they'd so recently set over it? Yet in our grief, we do things like this. Perhaps Matthew captures it best in his account, he doesn't mention the spices, but just says simply,

Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb.

In their grief, they simply went to look at the tomb. Last at the cross, first at the tomb, ever by their Lord's side. The scene that greeted them was one that they would never forget. No guards, the stone is rolled away, they enter and find the tomb empty. The shock of it is almost too much for them to process in their grief-stricken state. And the sudden appearance of an angel didn't do much to calm their nerves either. Now

at the mention of angels, just a brief sidebar here, before you start thinking of Cupid-like caricatures.

Angels sometimes appear in the Old Testament, and when they do, they don't sit on clouds and play harps, they're fearsome. To give you an idea, in 2 Kings 18 & 19, Jerusalem is under siege by the wicked king Sennacherib of Assyria, and by way of background, ancient historians liken his regime to that of Hitler, Stalin, Mao & Pol Pot all rolled into one for the way he treated prisoners of war. More than 200,000 of Sennacherib's troops surround Jerusalem after taking all the other cities of Judah. The situation is dire. God's people are melting in fear. But King Hezekiah is a man of faith who has found favour in the eyes of God. He prays for deliverance.

And God sends him one angel. Just one.
I'll read the verse,

35 That night the angel of the Lord went out and put to death a hundred and eighty-five thousand in the Assyrian camp. When the people got up the next morning—there were all the dead bodies! 36 So Sennacherib king of Assyria broke camp and withdrew. He returned to Nineveh and stayed there.

Angels don't sit on clouds and play harps. They're fearsome. In the Bible they're part warrior and part messenger, when they're not worshipping God and magnifying his glory in heaven. Whenever they show up it's either death or a message, and if it's a message, invariably that message begins

with ‘Do not be afraid’ – for obvious reasons – because they’re fearsome.

In the presence of these warrior-messengers sent from God, the women lay prostrate on the ground, daring not to even look up. But just as at Jesus’ birth, so at his re-birth the angels bear glad tidings,

6 ‘Don’t be alarmed,’ he said. ‘You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him.’

Resurrection. Why do you look for the living among the dead? He has risen! Just as he told you.

Think & Pray

Let's look with these women into that empty tomb for a moment. What should we see when we look upon that empty tomb? The 19th century preacher Charles Spurgeon, when he preached this passage, suggested five things.

Firstly, we should see the condescension of Jesus Christ. He was with his Father from all eternity and will be with him forever. We should never expect Jesus to die. But he did die for us. Looking into that empty tomb we should marvel at the condescension of such an amazing God.

Second, we should see the horror of our sin, because it was our sin that put him there. Death is the punishment of sin. But

Jesus had no sin, it was our sin that put him there. We should look into that tomb in horror of our sin that put Jesus there.

Third, as we look into that tomb we should be reminded that we too will die. We too will be separated from the ones we know and love. In that tomb we see our own mortality and we are warned that there is a life beyond this life for which we must prepare.

Fourthly, and most importantly, when we look into that tomb we must see that Jesus is not there. He is risen. He has conquered death.

And fifthly, as we look into the tomb we learn that we shall also rise from the dead

just as he did if we are joined with him. Are you joined with him? He has conquered death and through him we can too.

Have you come to Jesus in repentance and faith? Do you see how his death and resurrection changes everything? Are you obeying his call to go and tell others the good news? Or are you living life outside of Jesus Christ? In denying him, is your life lived under the shadow of death and in fear of the grave?

It's such a fitting place to end – trembling women and resurrection. Do you tremble at the thought of resurrection? Thirty years later after the Spirit-led explosion of the early church, after the personal testimony of hundreds who'd witnessed the resurrected Jesus and seen his disciples

continuing his work in power through the Holy Spirit Mark's ending when it was first read would have been anything but an anti-climax. Trembling. Jesus' most loyal followers, these precious women, trembling. Filled with fear and awe at the resurrection of Jesus. Caught forever in moment that changed everything.

Spend some time praising God to close our series. Praise him that through the work of his Son humankind's greatest enemy has been defeated. Praise him that through Jesus we no longer need to live in fear of death, setting us free to pour out our lives in joyful love and service of him, living life to its fullest this side of heaven.