

Amazement at the Empty Tomb

Scripture: Mark 16:1–8

Code: 41-84

I'm so deeply grateful for the people that God has surrounded me with in my own family, starting with Patricia, and all my children and grandchildren and everybody else that the Lord has brought into my life who has served here, been a part of this church. This is a journey that we've all taken together.

It's not something that's done in isolation by any means. In order for me to be able to do the things that I have set my heart to do, and the Lord has enabled me to do, a lot of other things had to be done by other people who have done well and nobly all the tasks that could ever have been imagined to need to be done in order to enable me to do what I do and what I feel God has called me to do.

And so this is a delight for me to come to this point, to be able to say to you, "Thank you for making it possible. Thank you for not running me out of here a hundred times over through the years. I'm grateful for your love and your support and your encouragement in so many ways - and I mean by that all of you. And you know all the things that you've done to make this ministry possible and joyful, and I am the most blessed.

For me, of course, the joy is in the study. The hours and hours of study every week for all these years has benefited me immensely. You get the overflow of that, you get one hour. It's about a one-to-twelve ratio; for every ten or twelve I spend, you get one. So I'm the one who is most rewarded, I will tell you that.

We come this morning to the end of the gospel of Mark. But before we look at the end of the gospel of Mark, I want you to turn to 1 Corinthians chapter 15 - 1 Corinthians chapter 15. We're going to talk about the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ, and I want to begin by borrowing from the apostle Paul a portion of his inspired writing that lays the importance of the resurrection before us.

In 1 Corinthians 15 and verse 1, Paul writes, "Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you which also you received, in which also you stand, by which also you are saved if you hold fast the Word, which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins, according to the scriptures and that He was buried and that He was raised on the third day, according to the scriptures, and that He appeared to Cephas," - or Peter - "then to the twelve.

"After that, He appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom remain until now, but some have fallen asleep. Then He appeared to James, then to all the apostles, and last of all, as to one untimely born, He appeared to me also." You will notice by the words here of the apostle Paul that the resurrection occupies this portion of Scripture with the greatest footprint. He makes a reference to the death of Christ, he makes a reference to the burial of Christ, but the main emphasis is on the evidences of His resurrection.

The reason for that is the resurrection is not simply a component of the gospel, it is not merely a feature of the gospel, it is the main event. It is, in fact, the greatest event in the life of our Lord Jesus. And since His life is the greatest life, it is the greatest event in all of human history. It is the culminating event in divine redemption. It is the cornerstone of gospel promise. The resurrection is the source of eternal life for us who believe.

In fact, without the resurrection, the cross would mean nothing. The teaching of Jesus would mean nothing. The works of Jesus would mean nothing. Because without the resurrection, there would be no salvation. The resurrection is not the epilogue, it is the climax of the life of Christ and His work. The church does not and never has met on Friday, as important as the cross is. The church has always met on Sunday because the church has always understood the priority of the resurrection.

And by the way, the resurrection of Christ is basically the key to our own resurrection. And what is unique to Christianity is that we who believe in Christ are promised to be raised from the dead - physically, literally, bodily - as He was into a resurrection form in which we will live forever. There is no such promise in Islam. There is no such promise in Hinduism, Buddhism, or any other world religion. What is unique to Christianity is the promise of a physical resurrection into a form that will be perfect, joyful, and eternal.

Returning for a moment to 1 Corinthians 15 and verse 14, we read this, "If Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is vain. Your faith also is vain. Moreover, we are even found to be false witnesses of God because we testified against God that He raised Christ whom He didn't raise if, in fact, the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless. You are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If we have hoped in Christ in this life only, we are of all men most to be pitied." And then verse 20 says, "But now Christ has been raised from the dead."

As we return to the gospel of Mark, a few comments that might help us establish the setting. All four gospel writers tell the resurrection story. As all four tell the story of His crucifixion, all four follow it up with His resurrection. Each of the writers (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John) bring to bear upon the story unique elements and features. The result is a powerful, magnificent blending of all of these inspired accounts to give us the full revelation on this magnificent historical event. Nothing is missing. When we put Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John together, we get everything that the Spirit of God inspired and wanted us to know.

There is, however, in the midst of this rich harmony of accounts of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, one thing missing. You might be surprised what it is. It is the resurrection itself. There is no account of that. There's no description of what happened. The phenomenon is not described. No one saw it, nor, for that matter, could anyone explain it. How it happened is incomprehensible, supernatural - like creation. That it happened is the critical matter and that fact is fully established by all four writers.

Mark's account is the most brief, but we're used to that with Mark, aren't we? He seems in a hurry. The familiar word in Mark is "immediately, immediately, immediately, immediately." Listen to his account, starting in verse 1 of chapter 16. "When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene and Mary, the mother of James and Salome, bought 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 and fled from the tomb for trembling and astonishment had gripped them, and they said nothing to anyone for they were afraid.” And that’s the end of Mark.

You say, “Wait a minute, there’s more in my Bible.” I’ll explain that tonight. But verse 8 is the end of Mark. It ends abruptly, but it also ends climactically, does it not? With amazement and wonder.

Verses 9 through 20, you will notice in your Bible, are probably in brackets or there is a marginal note explaining that these verses do not appear in the most ancient manuscripts. Mark ends his gospel with the blazing reality of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, gripping the souls of these women with wonder and astonishment.

The four gospels, each, as I said, give differing details of the resurrection. Matthew has a lot more to say beyond where Mark stops the narrative. Luke has a lot more to say beyond where Mark stops the narrative. John has a lot more to say where Mark stops the narrative. And this gives testimony to the fact that the writing of the gospels was not some kind of contrived operation by a committee of people who try to make everything match perfectly.

This is not a group of people who are sitting down, writing histories from a common, single source, as if there existed some source from which Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John wrote their gospels. If they all were writing from a common source, they would be pretty much saying the same thing. These are individually inspired writers, and they’re writing from their own experiences. Mark happens to have sat at the feet of Peter and reflecting much of Peter’s view of things gives us that perspective.

But there’s no contrived effort to make everything match. There is, rather, what we’re very used to in this world, and that is the providence of God by which God takes all the experiences and all the words and all the feelings and all the writing of these four men and they write what’s in their heart to write, and they write it the way they understand it, and the Holy Spirit overrules all of it so that by the providence of God, it harmonizes perfectly.

This is how divine providence works all the time. The realities, the stories are real, they are natural, they are personal. The experiences of each individual person and each individual event are a true expression of that person who is being written about. And yet it all blends perfectly together. You should be struck by how much that attests to the divine authorship of holy Scripture.

And remember also that there are some variations in what people experienced, but all of these people who show up on Sunday morning and experience what they experience, an empty tomb, angels, a confrontation with Christ, and all the amazement of that, are in some state of shock. And, therefore, perception is limited by trauma. This is so wonderful. It’s so wonderful that there’s this much integrity in the scriptures, that we see it the way they saw it, we experience it the way they experienced it, in the midst of being stunned and shocked.

All four writers of the gospels record that Jesus died. They all record that He was truly dead. They all record that He died on a cross, that He was dead on Friday afternoon and He was buried on Friday afternoon, and He was placed in a tomb, and the tomb was sealed with a stone, and they all record that on Sunday morning, He rose from the dead, the tomb was empty, angels explained that He had risen, and Christ began to appear to His followers. They all record all of that, and it can all be wonderfully blended.

Now, footnote: You know I love to do this, and when we go through Mark, we blend in John and we blend in Luke and we blend in Matthew to get that picture. I just want you to know that one of the projects that you're going to see somewhere down the road is something that we're working on right now, and that is a blended - a blended harmony of the gospels. We're taking Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John and blending all of them into paragraphs so that you'll read one story of Christ into which all four writers' elements will be blended. I'm excited about that and that'll be coming.

But for now, let's go to Mark's account, and we will blend in the other three a little. The point here is to give testimony that Jesus arose from the dead. That's very important. Remember now, He said that He would rise way at the beginning of His ministry, as recorded in John's gospel chapter 2, verse 19. He said, "If you destroy this body, in three days I'll raise it up."

From the beginning He said, when you kill me, I'll rise. And He always said three days. We've seen that in Mark's gospel chapter 8, verse 31; chapter 9, verse 31; chapter 10, verses 33 and 34. He said to them repeatedly, "I'm going to die, I'm going to rise." "I'm going to die, I'm going to rise." And every time He identified a period of time, whether it was John 2:19, Matthew 12:40, Luke 13:32, every time it was three days.

So we pick up the text of Mark and we're not surprised to find, as we find in all other gospels, that on the third day, what He said He would do is exactly what He did. Now, as we step into this incredible experience, we're going to see evidence of the resurrection along three lines: the testimony of the empty tomb, the testimony of the heavenly angels, and the testimony of the eyewitnesses. Testimony from historical fact, testimony from heavenly revelation, and testimony from personal eyewitnesses. Mark does that in only eight verses, and that's really all he needs to do.

No doubt Jesus said He would rise. No doubt He said He would rise on the third day. All Mark has to show is that He did and give evidence. Let's begin with the testimony of the empty tomb, chapter 16, verse 1. "When the Sabbath was over" - let me stop you there. Sabbath - hmm. What day is that? What day is the Jewish Sabbath? Saturday - Saturday. When Saturday was over - and by the way, for them Saturday, Sabbath Saturday ends at six o'clock. You know, we mark our days at midnight, they mark their days at sundown. So we're now twelve hours into the day after Sabbath.

We're now - Luke puts it this way, "On the first day of the week," so it's what? Sunday. We're twelve hours in. It's early - or nearly twelve hours in - early in the morning on Sunday. And by the way, the Jews had no word for the days. They didn't have Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday, Sunday words in Hebrew, they only used numbers. And all numbers were related to Sabbath. They started numbering the day after Sabbath. The first day after Sabbath, the second day after, the third day after, the fourth, and so forth.

So Luke says, "On the first day of the week." That's Sunday. That's the third day. He was in the grave on Friday. He was in the grave on Saturday. He's been in the grave for perhaps nearly twelve hours on Sunday. That covers the three days in the grave. Any part of a day constitutes a fulfillment of that. It is now Sunday, early in the morning. This is going to be a very, very dramatic change in how the people of God view their days. The most important day for the people of God up until this weekend was always Saturday. The most important day of the week from this weekend on has always been Sunday. This is a dramatic change.

Since that weekend, no Sabbath has been necessary. Since that weekend, no Sabbath has been required. I'll go further. Since that weekend, no Sabbath is even legitimate. It's the same thing as the Passover. The last Passover happened at the end of that week, and Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper as the new memorial feast commemorating His death. And there has never been a legitimate Passover since then. And there has never been a legitimate Sabbath since that weekend, either. Everything changed on the first day of that week. And that is why the church met that day.

Read Acts 20 and verse 7, "The church always met on the first day." Read 1 Corinthians 16, verse 2, "The church gathered on the first day." In fact, it was so established and so standardized that in Revelation chapter 1, verse 10, by the end of the first century, when John is writing, it says, "John was in the Spirit on" - and for the first time, we read this - "the Lord's Day." So it wasn't the first day anymore, it was the what? It was the Lord's Day, and it still is, isn't it? Early on Sunday morning, right on schedule.

"Mary Magdalene and Mary, the mother of James and Salome" - and I'll stop there. Here's these women - we are aware they're around, they've been around a long time, they've been around a couple of years, really. It all started in Galilee, didn't it? Long before. They were the ones who followed Him in Galilee. Go back to verse 41 and chapter 15, "While He was in Galilee, they used to follow Him and minister to Him, and there were many other women who came up with Him to Jerusalem."

They'd been literally following Jesus everywhere and they'd been doing something very unique, following Him and ministering to Him, and it only - it only says that these women and angels were ministering to Christ - never says His disciples were doing that. We know these women. We've met them. Back in verse 40, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James the Less and Joses, and Salome. And there are others. Luke identifies another woman in Luke 24:10 by the name of Joanna.

There are other women. There's a whole group of women who have followed Jesus. They watched His burial. Go down to verse 46 of chapter 15. Joseph of Arimathea, bought a linen cloth, took Him down, wrapped Him, took Him off the cross, wrapped Him in the linen cloth, laid Him in a tomb, which had been hewn out in the rock, and rolled a stone against the entrance of the tomb. Mary Magdalene and Mary, the mother of Joses, were looking on to see where He was laid.

Now, they had been looking on at the cross, right? Back in verse 40, they watched the crucifixion from a distance, eventually. And then they followed Joseph of Arimathea and he met with Nicodemus and they sprinkled spices on Jesus and wrapped Him in linen and put Him in Joseph's unused tomb, the tomb of a rich man in a lovely garden. They watched from a distance, no doubt, perhaps not even being seen. So they had seen His death and they had seen His burial.

And now on Sunday, they come back. Why do they come back? They bought spices so that they might come and anoint Him. Look, they saw what happened late on Friday. They weren't going to be outdone by a couple of male strangers. These were women who'd been with Jesus for a couple of years, perhaps. They loved Him. They adored Him. They served Him. They worshiped Him. They are caught up in horrific sadness - wrenching, agonizing sorrow. Look, this isn't just a friend, this is the One in whom they believed their salvation rested. It is inconceivable what their agonies were like. I couldn't imagine them.

I can't really sympathize with what that late-hour experience was when they went back home after seeing Him buried and then went through the next Sabbath day and part of the night and got up in the darkness of Sunday morning to come back. I don't know what kind of agonies they suffered, horrors, questions, doubts, fears, anxieties. How can this happen? How can this be? But they haven't lost their sense of affection. They haven't lost their love. And they're going to go back and they're going to do what loving families would always do - and they were His family - they were going to put the spices on His body.

This is an action of love on their part. So they come. Verse 2 says, "They come very early on the first day of the week." Luke says, "At the early dawn." Matthew says, "When it began to dawn." But John says, "While it was still dark." So was it dawn or was it dark? Well, come on, you could experience that, couldn't you? You could say it's dawning and yet you could be caught up in dusky darkness. This, again, is such a wonderful, wonderful illustration of the integrity and honesty of the eyewitness accounts of Scripture that blends together these things without trying to make some artificial correction.

It's daybreak. And you could say it's dawning or you could say, "Well, it's still a little dark." I don't have a problem with that, especially in the situation there because blocking the whole eastern side of the city of Jerusalem is the Mount of Olives, which towers over the city. You could see the glow of dawn which had already broken on the desert to the east. You could see the glow across the mountain and yet you could be in dusky darkness in the city until the sun arose across the top of the Mount of Olives. So much credibility lies in those untampered perspectives.

But there's really something more than that here because it is John who says it was dark. And here's what he says, John 20 verse 1, "Mary Magdalene came early to the tomb while dark." Mary Magdalene came to the tomb while dark. These women arrive, and when they arrive, the sun has already risen. What does that tell you? These women came later.

Now let me follow that up for just a minute. Matthew tells us that when Mary Magdalene started out, it was obviously not alone, she had a companion, Mary, another Mary was with her, Mary, the mother of James and Joses, one of these women. So they all start together. But John says when Mary Magdalene arrived, it was dark. Simply, what happened was Mary went ahead.

These women may have been coming from different locations. Starting together, Mary gets there first. She arrives, John says, on the dark side of dawn. It's light enough to see the tomb is open, the stone is gone. So Mary Magdalene arrives first, before her companion. Remember, they're in the dark. They may have been separated, couldn't wait for each other. Certainly Mary Magdalene seemed to be way out front. The other women, coming in the dark at different speeds. She sees the stone rolled away, says John, she doesn't go in, she bolts, spins on her sandals, heads for Peter and John.

She's going to tell them. And what's the message? John says, chapter 20, verse 2, "They have stolen the corpse." That's her conclusion. By the way, that tells us she didn't believe in a resurrection. She doesn't say, "Oh, it happened, just like He said it would." No. They never believed it. Even with all the miracles, they didn't believe it. So when she arrived, it's dark, but there's enough light to see that the stone is removed. She concludes that grave robbers have stolen the body, and grave robbery was a problem in those days because people were very often buried with valuables, although Jesus had none.

She just makes the assumption His body has been stolen, and she turns and runs back in the dusky darkness to tell Peter and John. Doesn't even see the other women who are coming.

We pick up the story in verse 3, then, of Mark. The other women arrive. As they get near, they say to one another, verse 3, "Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance of the tomb?" Look, they knew where the tomb was and they knew the stone had been rolled over it because they saw that on Friday. They're wondering how they're going to remove the stone. Verse 4 says, "Looking up, they saw that the stone had been rolled away, although it was extremely large." Wow - what a shock. What are they going to conclude? Well, instantaneously, they would conclude the same thing that Mary Magdalene concluded because none of them expected a resurrection.

You say, "Well, don't you think these women came expecting a resurrection?" No, they came expecting to anoint a dead body. Why would they be anointing a dead body with spices? To mitigate the stench. If they were convinced there would be a resurrection that day, why spend the money and waste the time? And by the way, they didn't know what happened on Saturday. Saturday was a big day at the tomb, but they had no idea. Mary Magdalene had no idea, these women had no idea.

I'm sure you'd like to know what happened. I'll show you what happened. Turn to Matthew 27. Here's Matthew's account. If you look at verse 60, you see the Friday burial. Joseph puts the body in a clean linen cloth, lays our Lord's body in a new tomb, hewn out of the rock, rolled a large stone against the entrance, went away. Mary Magdalene was there and the other Mary, sitting opposite the grave. So they saw it all, the burial, on the next day. What's the next day? Saturday, Sabbath day, the day after the preparation, which was Friday. "The chief priests and the Pharisees gathered together with Pilate."

So on the Sabbath, they go in to Pilate. This is desecration of the Sabbath, the Passover weekend, as they go into a Gentile place again - at least by their own laws. They said, "Sir, we remember that when He was still alive, that deceiver said, 'After three days I'm going to rise again.' Therefore, give orders for the grave to be made secure until the third day; otherwise, His disciples may come and steal Him away and say to the people He has risen from the dead, and the last deception will be worse than the first."

So they go to Pilate and they say, "We need a guard to make sure the disciples don't come and steal the body to try to pull off a phony resurrection." We know, however, that none of them believed in a resurrection. They didn't expect one. They weren't going to fabricate one. And I'll give you another little simple principle: They weren't going to fake a resurrection and then go die as martyrs for a fake resurrection.

By the way, people will lie to make money. They won't lie to be executed. They'll lie to avoid execution, but not to get executed. People don't lie to be made martyrs. They don't give their lives for lies. They want you to give your life for their lie, not their own life.

So Pilate said to them, "You have a guard." Gave them some Roman soldiers. Said, "Go make it as secure as you know how." They went and made the grave secure, and I'm telling you, when the Roman soldiers made something secure, they made it secure because they knew what was at stake, had to do their duty, or the consequences were dire. Along with the guard, they set a seal on the stone, they put a seal on it, simply identifying it as sealed by the Roman power and the seal not to be broken.

So that's what happened on Saturday. There's now a Roman guard at the tomb. The women have no idea about this. They didn't go back on Saturday. Why? Because following Jewish law, they wouldn't go and touch a dead body on the Sabbath, they wouldn't take a trip on a Sabbath, they wouldn't do work on a Sabbath, so they're not going to go back until Sunday morning. But on Sabbath, the Romans take up their post.

Something else happened in the deep, dark hours of Sunday morning. Sometime after the Sabbath ended at six o'clock, sometime in the darkness of the dark - I'll show you what it is. Chapter 28 of Matthew, verse 2. "A severe earthquake." It had already occurred by the time the women arrived, "A severe earthquake occurred for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled away the stone and sat upon it. And his appearance was like lightning and his clothing as white as snow. The guards shook for fear of Him and became like dead men."

Wow. Some interesting things going on there over the weekend. Roman guard, all of a sudden in the deep darkness of night, there is an earthquake, severe earthquake - severe earthquake, maybe an eight-point earthquake, localized supernaturally. And in the terror of the earthquake, the soldiers see a blazing angel roll the stone away and sit on it. And they're so terrified, they go into a coma. We've seen this before in Scripture - haven't we? - with Ezekiel and Isaiah and others. Blazing, heavenly presence of this angel gives them a divine anesthetic and they have no idea what hit them.

And by the way, the stone rolled away - just as a footnote, not to let Jesus out but to let the women in. The soldiers at some point wake up from their stupor, and you can imagine the buzz. "Did you see that angel? What happened after that? I don't know what happened after that." Nobody knows what happened after that, they just went out like lights.

By the time the women arrive, there are no soldiers or they would have encountered them. They just arrive, and in verse 5, it says, "They entered the tomb." There aren't any soldiers there. There's not even any evidence of soldiers there. The soldiers have no one to guard. They awoke at some point out of their stupor in the depth of darkness and they knew they had a problem. They had failed at their duty. And they have to report to the ones that they are accountable to, and that's not Pilate but, rather, the Sanhedrin who asked Pilate to give them to them, to the Sanhedrin. So they go to the Sanhedrin and they report to the Sanhedrin.

Well, you know what they say. "We were doing what we're supposed to do, what we always do, we were guarding. All of a sudden, there was a terrifying earthquake, it was shaking everything, and then blazing angel, angelic being, came out of the sky, sat on the stone after rolling it away, and

that's the last thing we remember. And when we woke up, we checked the tomb, He wasn't there."

We'll come back to them in a minute, but for the moment, please, let's return with the women. They come and there are no soldiers, entering the tomb. Luke says they didn't find the body of the Lord Jesus. Now what are they going to conclude? What Mary Magdalene concluded? Maybe initially, but it doesn't take long for them to get another explanation. We're going to get that in a minute. But let me just stop you right here and give you the simple point that Mark is making.

Everything I've said to you so far is to demonstrate one thing, one thing and one thing alone: The tomb is not occupied. Okay? Got that? That's it. You have an empty tomb. That's what Mark is conveying and so does John and Luke and Matthew. The tomb was empty. And we know the disciples didn't steal the body because they didn't even believe in a resurrection, which then didn't necessitate that they fake one. But the body's not there.

The Roman soldiers knew they didn't steal the body. The women knew they didn't steal the body. Peter and John, when they arrived, knew they didn't steal the body. But the Jewish leaders were afraid somebody might steal the body. Well, why would they even think like that? Because they were very, very experienced fakes and liars. And they thought other people thought like they thought. They would lie to perpetuate their religion every day. That's what hypocrisy is.

So all the facts, all the physical facts, make clear the tomb is empty - the tomb is empty. And everybody knows the body was not stolen. That's confirmed - back to Matthew 28 - in a most interesting way. Let's go back to the soldiers meeting with the Sanhedrin. Verse 11 of Matthew 28, "They came into the city and reported to the chief priests what had happened." They gave them the story of what had happened, just the way it happened. An earthquake, an angel, a coma, we woke up, the body's gone.

Oh, we got a problem now. We have a real resurrection on our hands, what are we going to do to discredit that? Isn't that amazing? How deep and profound is unbelief? They're so comfortable with a lie, they're so used to a lie, they're so familiar with hypocrisy that the truth totally escapes them. They not only don't see it, they don't even have an interest in it. So they assembled the elders together, the Sanhedrin gets together, consulted, and they gave a large sum of money to the soldiers. There's a word for that. Yes - bribery. And they said to them, "This is what you are to say, 'His disciples came by night and stole Him away while we were asleep.'"

That'll go over real big with our superiors. They're not supposed to be asleep, supposed to be fulfilling our duty. Oh, by the way, if it comes to the governor's ears, we'll win him over, keep you out of trouble. They were good at winning Pilate over, I promise you. They won him over in the execution of Jesus. They could intimidate the sandals off that man.

Well, the soldiers, they had no other option, so (in verse 15) they took the money and did as they had been instructed. They went everywhere saying, "The disciples stole the body," "The disciples stole the body," "The disciples stole the body." And the story was so widely spread among the Jews that it's still around when Matthew writes twenty-five years later.

Do you know the leaders of Israel never denied the empty tomb? The women knew the tomb was empty. The disciples knew the tomb was empty. The guards knew the tomb was empty. The

Sanhedrin knew the tomb was empty. That's the testimony, the first line of testimony. No one ever pointed to an occupied tomb. No one ever denied that Jesus' tomb was empty.

Well, the women are now in shock. And the shock is escalated in the second line of testimony, the testimony of angels. We'll go through this quickly. In verse 5, again, it says, "When they got inside the tomb, they saw a young man sitting at the right, wearing a white robe, and they were amazed." They saw a young man sitting at the right wearing a white robe, a blazing, dazzling robe? Yes. Luke says there were actually two angels who suddenly stood near them in dazzling clothing.

If you saw a dazzling angel, you might not figure out whether it was one or two. John says in John 20, verse 12, there were actually two angels. A little later, as the women encounter the angels, they're standing near them, first of all, then they move away, and they were sitting, one at the head and one at the feet on the slab where the body of Jesus was lying. So you have two angelic witnesses. In the mouth of two witnesses, even angelic witnesses, according to Deuteronomy 19:15, truth is confirmed, so one of the angels speaks.

I think this was a very natural conversation. They were probably trying to process walking for the first time in their entire lives into angelic presence, blazing, shining angelic messengers from the very presence of God and trying to figure out what's going on. The stone is away, the tomb is empty, the blazing angels are there, and the angel who speaks is trying to communicate the message past the shockwaves. Perhaps they spoke and said different things. In fact, there are different things recorded here by Mark and other writers.

But for now, the women were amazed. The word is *ekthambeō*. It means to be terrified. Terrified not in the sense that you fear for your life but that there's something around that cannot be rationally comprehended. You can't get it, you can't grasp it. Bewilderment. In fact, Luke says they were terrified, and they literally fell with their faces toward the ground. This is so shocking. Luke uses a word from which we get the word phobia, kind of severe fear, a fear - a phobia is a fear of something that's not rationally grasped or explained.

Well, finally, one of the angels is recorded to have said to them in verse 6, "Do not be amazed." Easy for you to say, sir. "Do not be amazed. You are looking for Jesus, the Nazarene, who has been crucified," and here is the first word concerning the resurrection, "He has risen." That's one word in the Greek, *ēgerthē*, one verb, He - literally passive, He has been raised - He has been raised. Luke adds in Luke 24:5 that one of the angels also said, "Why are you seeking the living One among the dead?"

So it's a very natural conversation. Things were said as the angels tried to communicate past, as I said, the shockwaves that were going on in the minds of the women. "He is not here," he said, "He has risen, He is not here. Behold, here is the place where they laid Him. He's not there."

We've seen testimony from earth, an empty tomb. Now we hear testimony from heaven, heavenly angels. To deny the resurrection of Jesus Christ is to deny the historical realities of the empty tomb, and it is to deny the historic revelation of heavenly angels. They speak for God, don't they? They speak for God.

There's a third line of evidence to prove the resurrection, just briefly. Verses 7 and 8, it's the

testimony of eyewitnesses. I love this. The angels continue to talk. "Go, go, this is a command." And by the way, just in case you're kind of looking through there, Mark doesn't actually use the word "angels" but the other writers do, so we know that these are angels and this is an angel who speaks.

"Go," the angel - I want you to be sure you know this is an angel because this angel speaks for God and gives a command. "Go, tell His disciples and Peter," why does he throw Peter in there? Because Peter needed a little personal touch of love and recovery because the last scene with Peter in it was really pretty ugly. His denials. "Tell Peter and the rest that He's going ahead of you to Galilee. There you will see Him just as He told you." Tell the men, ladies, when you leave, go to the apostles, tell them to go to Galilee. He's going to meet you there.

He had already said that back in chapter 14, verse 28, "After I've been raised, I will go ahead of you to Galilee." He told them, "I'm going to meet you in Galilee. I'm going to appear to you in Galilee. So go tell them to head for Galilee." Guess what - they didn't go to Galilee. When the women arrived, they said, "No, this can't be true, this can't be true." In the meantime, Mary Magdalene has got Peter and John running on their own to the tomb.

The rest of them, whoever were gathered in this meeting with the apostles, they didn't believe it. They didn't go to Galilee. That night, you remember, He appeared to them in the upper room where they were huddling in fear. During that week, He appeared to two of them on the road to Emmaus. During that week, He had a private appearance to Peter, referenced in 1 Corinthians 15, and a private appearance with James, referenced there as well.

And the next week, eight days after the first appearance, He appeared to them again, and all of those appearances were in Jerusalem because they didn't go to Galilee. They're just huddled around, trying to figure it out. The women got it a lot faster, they got it within a few minutes - days for the men. Well, finally, they got their act together and they went to Galilee, and John 21 records the appearances of Jesus in Galilee, and that's where, I believe, He appeared to 500 people at one time - 500 believers gathered in Galilee.

Well, the astonishing wonder of this resurrection reality is dawning on the women by the empty tomb and the angelic message. So verse 8 says they become the first eyewitnesses. "They went out, fled from the tomb, for trembling and astonishment had gripped them and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid." And that's the end. It's a great verse.

The word "trembling," *tromos*; the word "astonishment," *ekstasis*, ecstasy. Some kind of transcendent feeling, detached from reality. Afraid, *phobeō*, phobic. These are all experiences that transcend reason. They can't process what's going on. It isn't because they're afraid something's going to harm them, it's the inability in their bewilderment to give a rational explanation for the realities that have now dawned on their understanding.

They are so stunned - here's the proof - they are women and they said nothing to anyone. No. Come on. Wow. How stunned were they?

When it says they were afraid, it means they were in that phobic condition of not being able to give reasons or explanations to what was going on. And that's the end of Mark. The empty tomb, the heavenly angels, and the experience of the women, all evidence of Jesus' resurrection. But I don't

want to end here. I want to end in Matthew - Matthew 28. You're going to like this. Verse 8, Matthew picks up the story.

"They left the tomb quickly with fear" - oh, I'm so glad this is in here - "and" - what? - "great joy." Their fear is melting into joy as it all begins to come clear. "And they ran to report it." What? The resurrection to the disciples. I love this, verse 9, "And behold, Jesus met them and greeted them." Hi, Ladies. I mean this is really amazing. "They came up and took hold of His feet and worshiped Him."

What a day for them, huh? And isn't it something that women were the first eyewitnesses of the risen Christ? Jesus said to them, "Don't be afraid. Go take word to my brethren. Tell them to leave for Galilee" - He was trying to get a message across - "and there they will see me."

And you know the rest of the story. The women go, and they can't convince them, and they don't believe it, and they hang around for eight days. But Mark ends it, where Mark, by the providences of the Holy Spirit, intended to end it, in wonder, in awe, as anyone's response should be to the resurrection of Christ.

The resurrection thus is established as a fact of history, as a fact of theology by the angelic testimony. It is the most important event in the life of Christ. It is the most important event in the history of the world. It is the most important event in your life and mine because it is by His resurrection that we are justified and that we will live forever. To deny the resurrection is to deny the testimony of the facts. To deny the testimony of the angels, to deny the testimony of the eyewitnesses, and to deny the testimony of Scripture and to deny the truth of God.

You say, "Well, why is that other stuff added?" Come tonight and I'm going to tell you. You're going to really love it. Let's pray.

What a wonderful experience for us, Lord, to be part of that morning, that Sunday morning. May this not just be history, though it is history. May it not just be theology, though it is theology. May it not be just testimony, though it is testimony. But may it be to us life. May we confess with our mouth Jesus as Lord and believe in our hearts that you raised Him from the dead and thus be saved.

Father, thank you for the whole story, front to back, of the incarnation. Thank you for the exquisite joys that have been ours in going through Mark from start to finish. And we know now that what Mark said at the very beginning is really true. When he started writing, the first thing he said was, "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God." And what proves it? He is declared to be the Son of God by the resurrection from the dead. So says the apostle Paul.

And so the whole story is proven to be genuinely the story of the Son of God as evidenced by His resurrection. And if He is the Son, and He is, then He is the Savior, the only Savior, our only hope, our only rescue, and the only source of life. We rejoice in knowing Him, loving Him and serving Him, pray for those who have to this point rejected Him, that they would fall on their face like the women and worship the risen Lord. All things to His glory, we pray. Amen.

END

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