

LIVES

We celebrate the resurrection of Jesus each year and mark it as one of the, if not the most, important events in God dealing with man. We sing the song, “He Lives!” and it captures the celebrative nature of the commemoration. However, as this event was unfolding, the followers of Jesus did not think that they had a lot to celebrate. In fact, it was just the opposite. This was a time of great bereavement. They had just witnessed the betrayal, the beatings and berating of Jesus. They had seen the mock trial, watched Jesus carry a cross to a hill outside the city, and had watched Him die. To them, it was not a time to celebrate. It was a time of grief and there was work to be done.

Buried – 15:42-47

⁴² When evening had already come, because it was the preparation day, that is, the day before the Sabbath, ⁴³ Joseph of Arimathea came, a prominent member of the Council, who himself was waiting for the kingdom of God; and he gathered up courage and went in before Pilate, and asked for the body of Jesus. ⁴⁴ Pilate wondered if He was dead by this time, and summoning the centurion, he questioned him as to whether He was already dead. ⁴⁵ And ascertaining this from the centurion, he granted the body to Joseph. ⁴⁶ Joseph bought a linen cloth, took Him down, wrapped Him in the linen cloth and laid Him in a tomb which had been hewn out in the rock; and he rolled a stone against the entrance of the tomb. ⁴⁷ Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Jesus were looking on to see where He was laid. Mark 15:42–47 (NASB95)

Not many of the eleven remaining disciples are mentioned as being at the place of crucifixion. It is estimated that Jesus physically died around mid-afternoon. That was the beginning of “early evening” which was essentially the last three hours of a day in the Jewish reckoning of hours in a day. From the various accounts in the Four Gospels we find the names of four followers of Jesus who were there after Jesus died.

It is in the event of securing the body of Christ for burial that we first encounter Joseph from the town of Arimathea (which was probably Ramah in the territory of Benjamin, the birth place of Samuel). We see that he was well known and respected by both the Romans and the Jewish religious elite. He was a member of the Sanhedrin and was apparently wealthy. Matthew and John’s Gospel identify Joseph as a disciple of Jesus. Mark and Luke included a comment that Joseph was “waiting for the kingdom of God.” The term “waiting” might be expressed in our vernacular as “eagerly looking forward to the coming of” the kingdom of God.

We have no way of knowing what he was thinking about how this “coming kingdom” would find expression in the world in which he lived. Was he thinking about the “kingdom” in the same terms as the Zealots or was he thinking about the rule and reign of God in the lives of those who put their trust in God as revealed by the Messiah and His work of salvation? A more important question would be, what did Jesus mean when He told people about the coming of the “kingdom of God?”

It is very likely that most of those followers of Jesus were NOT thinking about the “kingdom of God” in the first few hours after He had died on the Cross. They probably were not making any association of what Jesus had said less than twenty-four hours before that the bread they had eaten at the supper was His broken body and that the wine they drank was His blood poured out for them. Do you think that they saw what was happening on the cross as the end of the sacrificial system of the Jewish religion and that a New Covenant was being instituted and consecrated by His shed blood? Considering what happened in the next few days, none of those who had been close to Jesus had any hope of His resurrection.

It was late afternoon and sundown was approaching which would signal the start of the Sabbath day. The Jewish day started at what we would call 6:00 P.M. This was not just any

Sabbath, but it was the Sabbath associated with the Passover. The Jewish leader did not want anything so ugly as three crucified bodies hanging on crosses marring the appearance of the city, so they asked the Romans to hurry the death process along. The Romans cooperated and set about to break the legs of those being crucified. When they came to Jesus, He had already died and they did not break His legs. (This fulfilled the O.T. scriptures that said "not a bone (of the Messiah's body) was broken.")

Joseph of Arimathea had noted what was happening in the events surrounding the life of Jesus and he had seen what his colleagues had done in condemning an innocent man to death. He had stayed in the background until the crisis had developed to such a point that his help was really needed. It is not likely that anyone of lesser importance (politically) could have secured the permission of Pilate to take down the body of Jesus at that particular time. We are told in John's Gospel that Nicodemus also helped by bringing the spices (myrrh and aloe) traditionally used in preparing a corpse for burial.

Joseph of Arimathea had a new tomb (sepulcher) that he made available for Jesus to be placed. This sepulcher was a hewn cavity in a rock and a stone was placed over the entrance after a body was placed in it.

Here we see two people Joseph and Nicodemus who were believers in Jesus that were not in the limelight and yet they were available for God to use them at the right time. Many people are like that today. They believe but are not often seen by others and yet their ministry becomes important at particular times. Both these men were witnesses to what happened at the trial of Jesus and it is likely that after He was sentenced to death that they began getting things ready for His burial. The tomb had to be gotten ready, cloths had to be bought and spices had to be obtained. Apparently, there was preparation underway even before Jesus died.

The preparation of Jesus' body for burial was hurried because of the approach of the Sabbath day, and some of the women that were followers of Jesus took note of where the body was interred so they could return to finish the job after the Sabbath was over. These women were identified as Mary Magdalene and Mary (the mother) of James. We are somewhat familiar with Mary Magdalene. The Mary associated with James is probably the same person mentioned in verse forty of this chapter as Mary the mother of James (the less or younger) and of James. This was likely Jesus' mother who had sons named James, Joseph (or James), Judas, and Simon. She also had two daughters – Salome and Mary. We also know from John's account that Mary was at the crucifixion site before Jesus died when He addressed "the disciple whom He loved" and His mother and entrusted the care of Mary to this unnamed disciple.

They were carefully observing the burial place so they could return after the Sabbath and complete the application of spices which was traditionally done in the Jewish culture.

Grieved – 16:1-4

¹ 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. ² Very early on the first day of the week, they came to the tomb when the sun had risen. ³ They were saying to one another, "Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance of the tomb?" ⁴ Looking up, they saw that the stone had been rolled away, although it was extremely large. Mark 16:1-4 (NASB95)

In the traditional treatment of this account of the Resurrection we see significant themes being unfolded. The women took the first opportunity following the observance of the Sabbath to show honor and respect for Jesus whom they assumed was dead. Honoring God is always a good starting point when we are trying to get on with life after some great tragedy as these followers of Jesus had just experienced.

Mark again names two women named Mary and this time the "other Mary" is referenced

as the mother of James which is how she was identified in verse 15:40. A third woman was mentioned in verse 40 and again in 16:1 as Salome. This person is generally thought to be the wife of Zebedee and the mother of James and John and she was also the sister of Mary (Jesus' mother).

What could they do, now that He was dead? They started with traditional ways of showing honor which was represented in the account by them bringing spices to anoint the body. It is in times of great emotional stress that we can find some comfort in following traditions since we may not be thinking clearly regarding what we should do and how we should do it. As we faithfully follow the traditions, we may find additional ways to show honor and just going through the motions we certainly can find ourselves in a position to learn what God would reveal to us.

As they approached the garden where the sepulcher was located, they remembered that a huge stone was placed over the entrance and they wondered how they might get in. Evidently, they did not know that the Jews had requested that guards be posted there to keep the disciples of Jesus from attempting to steal the body. Had they know that, they might have counted on the guards to help.

As we seek to honor the Lord, we realize that we are inadequate to access Christ without some help. This is a major part of the ministry of the Holy Spirit, Who by the grace and power of God reveals Jesus to us in the Word of God. On that Resurrection morning God had sent angels to remove the barriers that would keep them from the next step that they took of entering into the tomb.

Resurrected – 16:5-8

⁵ Entering the tomb, they saw a young man sitting at the right, wearing a white robe; and they were amazed. ⁶ 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." ⁷ "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.'" ⁸ 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. Mark 16:5–8 (NASB95)

When they arrived, they could see that the stone was already rolled away and when they looked in they didn't see the body of Jesus but they saw a young "man" dressed in a long white garment sitting inside the sepulcher. The other gospel writers identify this person as an angel. Needless to say, the women were frightened and probably very confused by what they saw.

The angel knew why the women were there and he had the privilege of proclaiming the most significant news in the history of mankind. "He is risen!" It is not often that God sends an angel to make an announcement to people; however, we have to believe that such messages are very significant.

The angel was a messenger sent from God and he delivered his message with instructions to pass it on to others. The message was simple and yet it was significant. It told the followers of Jesus where to go to meet Him. Peter was singled out in the message probably because he needed some special encouragement to be assured that Jesus still valued him even though Peter had denied Jesus three times. The message is also significant in that we see that wherever Jesus sends us He goes before us. The disciples were given the hope of seeing Jesus if they obeyed what they were told to do. As we obey the commandments of Christ, then we will be able to see Jesus in our lives and more importantly, others also will be able to see Him in us. As we are like Him in our attitudes, our words and what we do, then we show Him to the world around us.

We would do well to follow the actions of the women as they left the tomb. *They went*

out quickly. We need to have a sense of urgency about carrying out the work of the Kingdom of God. One thing is different though: they were frightened and did not tell anyone. We can be free from fear and we should tell everyone that Jesus lives today and that we know it without a doubt, not because we were there two thousand years ago, but because He lives in our hearts and reigns as Lord of all.

Let's go back two thousand years and put ourselves in the place of the disciples and those who followed Jesus and try to imagine our reaction to seeing the opened tomb with a young "man" dressed in white telling us that the dead person that we had come to anoint with spices had risen from death and was not where we expected to find him. Let's count up the number of followers of Jesus who expected Him to arise from death. Name one!

Were His followers not paying attention or even listening when He repeatedly stated (recorded about 20 times in the four gospel accounts) that He would be killed and would rise again. The Jewish leadership was certainly listening and they remembered statements being made but did not believe it would literally happen. They thought that Jesus' followers would try to steal His body. Apparently, the disciples did not believe it even when an angel (or two) told them what had happened. They did not believe it when Mary Magdalene told them she had spoken with the Risen Christ. They did not believe it when two disciples who encountered Christ on the road to Emmaus reported what had happened to them.

What do we do with the Good News that Christ is risen? Most of the time, we are thinking "everybody knows that" and we just don't tell anyone else. The problem is that many in the world do NOT know that Christ is risen and they do not have a clue as to "why He died." As Jesus' followers were told about Christ being risen, they were amazed and astonished even to the point of having trouble believing it. This is the situation with many people today. If they hear the message that Christ died on the Cross and rose from death they will find the story hard to believe.

It was only when Jesus appeared to these followers and demonstrated the reality that He was alive that they could accept the truth and make the connection with all that Jesus had been teaching them.

There are accounts in some parts of the world that Christ has sovereignly appeared to people to affirm the truth about Himself. Those are rare instances. What about those who are lost and have not experienced Christ appearing to them? How are these going to believe the message that Christ is risen? Another way to ask this question is "If we have been resurrected with Christ, how do we show that Christ is alive in us and that we have a new life resident in us?"