

## **ALIVE**

### Mark 16:1-14

Resurrection! The idea of coming back to life has intrigued people for a long time. The idea of "living again" explains the pyramids in Egypt. Eastern religions have turned the idea into reincarnation. The expressions of the concept of resurrection had significant influences in the way those people live their lives. The Egyptian Pharaohs spent their life's energies preparing a place to preserve their own bodies and to hold their accumulated wealth so they could have it when they came back to life. Many people were literally worked to death building a place for one person and his possessions. You might say that many died so one might live. Contrast this with Jesus who died without any material possessions. Even His robe was stolen. He didn't own a piece of ground big enough to be buried in. (As it turned out, He didn't need it.) Here we have the opposite of the self-centered Pharaoh: Jesus was One who died so many would live.

The world has seen many great people come upon the stage of history and leave their mark. There have been great philosophers, great teachers, and people who have done good things. There have even been those who would dare to die for someone else. Among all of these there is one unique individual who was also a great philosopher, a great teacher, and One who did good things for others. A person who did dare to die, not only for what was right, but also for Who He was. The one thing that sets this Person apart from all the rest is that when He died, He didn't stay dead. Jesus rose from death. This one happening, more than anything else, validated His claim that He is the Messiah – God in the flesh. Our faith in the fact of the Resurrection is important and gives boldness and hope to all who will believe.

Many people will listen to the story of the life of Jesus, they will learn about His philosophies, his teachings, and marvel at the good works He did. They even believe He died on a Roman cross; however, they simply will not believe He rose from the dead.

Paul encountered this view among the Greeks in Athens. They were eager to hear what he had to say until he talked about Jesus being raised from the dead. They would not accept that possibility. When we honestly face up to the question of the resurrection, then we must face up to who Jesus is and having done so, then we must respond to Him and His requirements for our lives.

We might say that believing in and expecting "resurrection" is an expression of hope. If we wanted to see a picture of the opposite of hope, then you could not find one any clearer than the little band of followers of Jesus immediately after He was crucified. That hopelessness grew as the hours passed and they considered the last three years of their lives and the expectations that they had. It all seemed to have resulted in failure. He had taught them to not go the way of the world and they would have victory. Yet, it seemed the world had won.

### Sought – 16:1-4

<sup>1</sup> When the Sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him. <sup>2</sup> And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb. <sup>3</sup> And they were saying to one another, "Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance of the tomb?" <sup>4</sup> And looking up, they saw that the stone had been rolled back—it was very large. Mark 16:1-4 (ESV)

During the time of Christ, the observance of the Sabbath was a significant measure of a person's devotion. Since their return from captivity in Babylon the Jews had been careful to observe the Sabbath. Even the need to embalm a body was not sufficient reason to violate the observance for these women.

In Luke's gospel account of this event, he mentioned a fourth woman named Joanna who

went with these three whom Mark named. This is just one of several differences in the details of the resurrection account mentioned in all four gospels. There are several conclusions that we can note just from these few verses. The first thing we notice is that these women either did not know that Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus had already anointed the body of Jesus or they wanted to anoint His body with more spices as an expression of love rather than because it was needed.

The main reason a dead body was anointed with spices was to control the smell of decomposition. Jews did not practice embalming, and the funeral spices were a way to help minimize unpleasant odors. We remember from John's account at the tomb of Lazarus, when Jesus asked for the stone to be rolled away from the mouth of the tomb, Martha objected: "By this time there is a bad odor, for he has been there four days." The spices the women brought to Jesus' tomb were intended to eliminate such an odor and honor the body of Christ.

A second thing we should notice is that the fact that the women bought spices to anoint Jesus' dead body showed they were not expecting Jesus to physically rise from death. Their discount of that possibility along with the disbelief expressed by each of the disciple when they first heard that Jesus was alive shows us that they were not aware of any plot to steal the body of Jesus and to make up a story about the resurrection as some claim.

The primary concern of these women as they were almost at the site of the tomb was how the stone would be moved to allow them to enter the tomb and use the spices they brought with them. The fact that they wondered about moving the stone that sealed the tomb would strongly suggest that they knew nothing about two Roman soldiers who had been assigned to guard the tomb against any possible plot by the followers of Jesus to steal the body. It is likely that none of the men who closely followed Jesus were even aware of what these women planned to do. When they arrived at the tomb, they were surprised to see the stone already rolled away. No mention was made by Mark of any guards being around by the time they arrived at the tomb.

### Risen – 16:5-8

<sup>5</sup> And entering the tomb, they saw a young man sitting on the right side, dressed in a white robe, and they were alarmed. <sup>6</sup> 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. <sup>7</sup> 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." <sup>8</sup> 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. Mark 16:5-8 (ESV)

Tombs were typically cut into a limestone rock. The entry way into the room of the tomb was relatively small (36 inches high by about 30 inches wide) which made it easier to seal the tomb with a large stone that was rolled into place in a groove in front of the entrance. A three-foot diameter by one-foot-thick stone would weigh about a half ton. If the stone was closer to a four-foot diameter, then it would weigh about fifteen hundred pounds. Typically, the room inside would be about four to five feet high and seven feet square. A square hole (about 2 feet deep) would be cut into the floor which would allow a person to stand up and that would create three benches along the back and side walls. The body of a deceased person would be placed on one of these benches and prepared for burial. The body would remain on this slab for at least a year and then the bones would be transferred to bone boxes (called ossuaries) which were stored in niches (loculii) cut into the walls above the benches. Multiple people could be buried in the same tomb over several decades or even generations. The tomb in which Jesus was buried had never been used and historians claim that the niches for storing bone boxes had not yet been cut into the walls. It was still being worked on (under construction) when Joseph offered it to be used to entomb the body of Jesus.

The fact that the stone was moved was not the only alarming surprise they experienced that morning. Mark indicated that one or two of the women went into this semi-dark cavity and saw a young man (dressed in white) sitting on the right side of the chamber. You may remember that Matthew's account had only mentioned two women and one angel. According to Matthew, the angel had rolled away the stone during an earthquake and was sitting on the stone outside of the sepulcher. As we have already seen, Mark mentioned three women and one angel sitting inside the tomb. Luke indicated there may have been as many as five women, while John mentioned only Mary Magdalene who upon seeing the stone removed, immediately ran to tell Peter. Peter and John then ran to the tomb area and John looked inside and saw the burial cloths. When Peter got there, he immediately went into the room and saw the cloths and the napkin that had covered the face of Jesus. John then followed Peter into the tomb but they did not see any angels. Apparently, Mary Magdalene came back to the tomb area and when she stooped down to look inside, she saw two angels – one at the foot and another at the head of where Christ's body had been placed.

While the details of what these women (as well as Peter and John) saw and heard have some variations, the main message was consistent. That message was "Jesus of Nazareth Who was crucified is no longer in the sepulcher but had risen and He was going forth ahead of them into Galilee." It had been three decades (or more) before these events were documented. Therefore, it is not surprising that the details would vary among the various sources.

The combination of fear and joy that the women experienced should be normal for Christians. As we see the power of God operating in our lives, we should be filled with awe and amazement and, at the same time, we should be gloriously happy that we have been chosen by God to be a part of what He is doing in the world.

#### Seen – 16:9-14

<sup>9</sup> Now when he rose early on the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, from whom he had cast out seven demons. <sup>10</sup> She went and told those who had been with him, as they mourned and wept. <sup>11</sup> But when they heard that he was alive and had been seen by her, they would not believe it. <sup>12</sup> After these things he appeared in another form to two of them, as they were walking into the country. <sup>13</sup> And they went back and told the rest, but they did not believe them. <sup>14</sup> Afterward he appeared to the eleven themselves as they were reclining at table, and he rebuked them for their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they had not believed those who saw him after he had risen. Mark 16:9–14 (ESV)

Mark touched upon several events that the other gospel accounts provide more specific details. After Peter and John had left the area where the tomb was located, Mary found her way back there to learn more. Apparently, the angels could not be seen by Peter and John but a little later they could be seen by Mary Magdalene. There is no indication in John's account that Mary was alarmed at seeing these two inside the sepulcher. She was crying and the angels ask why and Mary said that she believed someone had moved the body of Jesus to an unknown place. Before they could give her the same message given earlier to the other women, Mary (who was still outside the entrance) turned to see someone standing behind her. She assumed it was the caretaker of the sepulchers. He asked her the same question – why are you crying. Her response was, "Sir, if you have moved the body, tell me where it is so I can take care of it." "The gardener" spoke her name and she immediately recognized that she was talking to the risen Lord.

Once again, she hurried back to where the grieving followers of Jesus were staying. This time, she was the bearer of "good news." We don't have a quote from her but it was probably something close to "He's Alive!" No one believed her.

Mark also briefly mentioned the experience of two followers of Jesus who were on their way to Emmaus which Luke's account provides significant details. When these two hurried

back to Jerusalem to tell the disciples of Jesus, they were not believed either. Mark did not even mention the incident when Jesus suddenly appeared in the room with the disciples and others when Thomas was absent from the group. Mark did mention the next time Jesus repeated coming into the room without opening the door when Thomas was there. It was at that meeting Jesus had some words of rebuke for their unbelief of things reliable witnesses had told them. This unbelief was especially egregious since the account of the witnesses perfectly agreed with what Jesus had told them was going to happen.

Christ's words about His resurrection were obviously heard by all the disciples, however, these words were misunderstood as to their obvious meaning. They may have been thinking what Martha the sister of Lazarus was considering before Lazarus was raised from death – that Jesus was talking about something that would happen in “the last days.” It is not surprising that they were not expecting to see Jesus alive since they had seen Him die and saw that He was buried.

Something for us to remember from their experience is that “Truth that is only half understood, however plainly spoken, is always forgotten when the time to apply it comes.” This quotation from Alexander MacLaren can serve to remind us of the importance of diligently studying the word of God to know not only know what it states but to also know what it means and how it applies to our lives.