

Pitied or Rescued? – Mark 16:1-8
Argyle – 4/16/18 – Easter

Introduction to Scripture Reading

What a week it had been for the disciples. On Sunday, Jesus had marched triumphantly into Jerusalem with the crowds shouting, “Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.” It looked like Jesus really was the long awaited Messiah who was going to deliver the Jewish people from their enemies and establish his kingdom. During the early days of the week, Jesus taught in the Temple. The teaching had an extra intensity to it. Strangely, he talked about his return some day. Return? Where was he going?

On Thursday night they gathered to celebrate the Jewish Passover, but something wasn't right. He turned the focus of the Passover meal onto himself - bread and wine. And there was more talk about his leaving. Late that night they went to the Garden of Gethsemane, one of their favorite spots to hang out, but again something wasn't right. Jesus was really upset. He had never been like that before. It was while they were in the Garden that it happened. Judas, one of their own, came with a mob to arrest Jesus. Arrest Jesus...for what? Exactly! For what?

He was tried by the Jewish ruling council and then by the Roman governor, Pilate. It was obviously a set up. He had done nothing wrong, yet they sentenced him to death. He was to be crucified, perhaps the cruelest form of execution ever

devised. Before Jesus was crucified, they flogged him which meant to be beaten with a cat of nine tails that had chunks of metal and stone in it to rip the recipient's flesh. By the time Jesus was nailed to the cross, he was well on his way to death.

Most of his disciples fled, but a few of the women watched from a distance as he died. A man named Joseph of Arimathea courageously asked to be allowed to bury Jesus' body. Because it was the beginning of the Jewish Sabbath, he was unable to fully prepare the body for burial before he put it in a rock tomb. Mary Magdalene and another Mary watched as Joseph buried Jesus. As was customary, a huge stone was rolled in place to seal the tomb.

At the beginning of the week Jesus' followers were on top of the world. By the end of the week they were in hiding, fearful for their lives. That brings us to this morning's Scripture passage. (Read Mark 16:1-8) (Pray)

Introduction

Tim Keller has written, "If Jesus rose from the dead, then you have to accept all that he said; if he didn't rise from the dead, then why worry about any of what he said? The issue on which everything hangs is not whether or not you like his teaching but whether or not he rose from the dead." (Timothy Keller, *The Reason for God: Belief in an Age of Skepticism*)

The question before us this morning, in fact, the most important question of our lives is "Did Jesus rise from the dead?" The Apostle Paul correctly observed

that if the resurrection of Jesus Christ didn't happen then those of us who are followers of Jesus Christ are in big trouble. He wrote. "And if Christ has not been raised, then your faith is useless and you are still guilty of your sins. ¹⁸ In that case, all who have died believing in Christ are lost! ¹⁹ And if our hope in Christ is only for this life, we are more to be pitied than anyone in the world." (I Corinthians 15:17-19) If Jesus didn't rise from the dead, then our faith is useless and we can't be forgiven for our sins. We are to be pitied more than anyone.

On the other hand, if Jesus Christ has risen from the dead and is alive today, then those who don't believe in his resurrection are the ones who are in big trouble. They are in big trouble because they are missing out in this life on the joy and peace and significance that comes from aligning our lives with our Creator. And even worse, they will miss out on the glory of being with God forever. There is a lot riding on whether Jesus really rose from the dead or not, so we want to give this question our careful attention. How can Mark's account of the resurrection help us answer that question?

Affirms Our Skepticism

For one, it affirms our skepticism. We should be skeptical of people who claim to have died and come back to life. We should especially be skeptical of the claim that a man who had been brutally beaten, crucified, stabbed in the side with a

spear and then buried in a dark, damp tomb for a couple of days has risen from dead. That's crazy and Mark's account of the resurrection affirms our skepticism.

Even Jesus' first followers were skeptical of that possibility. Although Jesus had told them he would be killed and would rise from the dead, no one expected it to happen. Dead people just don't rise from the dead. So, the two Mary came to the tomb that morning not looking for a resurrected Jesus, but to finish preparing Jesus' body for burial.

We learn from other accounts of Jesus' resurrection that when the women told the disciples about the empty tomb and the angel's message, no one believed them. Dead people just don't rise from the dead. John tells us in his account of the resurrection that on the night of the resurrection, Jesus appeared to his disciples, but one of them, Thomas, wasn't with them. When they told Thomas that they had seen Jesus, he didn't believe them. Dead people just don't rise from the dead.

If you are skeptical about the resurrection of Jesus Christ, you are in good company. 2000 years ago, all of Jesus' first followers were skeptical, as well. Sometimes we have this image that these were ignorant, pre-scientific people who were susceptible to believing anything. The record just doesn't support that. They, like some of you, were skeptical that Jesus could rise from the dead. In telling their story, Mark affirms our skepticism. The resurrection is not something we should blindly believe.

Gives Us the Facts

A second way Mark's account of the resurrection helps us to figure out if Jesus really rose from the dead or not is that he gives us the facts. Recently I heard an interesting quote from the late NY senator, Daniel Patrick Moynihan.

Moynihan said, "Everyone is entitled to his own opinion, but not his own facts."

You can believe whatever you want about the resurrection of Jesus Christ, but the facts are the facts. From Mark we learn two important facts.

One, I have already mentioned - no one expected the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Yet, most of Jesus' closest followers were killed because of their insistence that Jesus had risen from the dead and was alive. How do we account for this dramatic change of perspective? People don't generally die for something they know isn't true. These people went from being skeptics to being willing to die for their belief in the resurrection. Something must have happened to cause such a dramatic change.

A second fact Mark tells us is that the tomb was empty. On Friday the two Marys had seen the dead body of Jesus put into this tomb, yet on Sunday morning his body was gone. How do we account for the empty tomb? There have been a number of theories to explain the empty tomb, but frankly it takes more faith to believe any of them than it does that Jesus rose from the dead. A faith informed by the facts is actually more rational.

I commend to you the little book Bryan mentioned during announcements (picture) - *The Case for Easter: a Journalist Investigates the Evidence for the Resurrection*. Lee Strobel, who was the legal editor for the Chicago Tribune, takes a look at all of the theories about and evidence for the resurrection. It is pretty interesting reading.

In addition to the changed lives of Jesus followers and the empty tomb, the other three gospels mention other facts. One of the most important of them is the appearances of Jesus. Over the course of 40 days between his resurrection and ascension, Jesus appeared several times to individuals, small groups and even to a group of 500. Ten of those appearances are recorded in the Bible. You'll want to check them out carefully in your own investigation.

Did Jesus really rise from the dead? Mark and the other Gospel writers give us some important facts to help us answer that question.

Shows Us How to Discover the Truth

One other way Mark's account of the resurrection helps us figure out what really happened is it shows us how to discover the truth. Why is it that Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were the first ones to know about the resurrection? Two reasons - they showed up and they listened. When you read the account of Jesus death, the loyalty of these women is extraordinary and inspiring. They had traveled with Jesus and his disciples, caring for their needs. When Jesus was

arrested they didn't run and hide like most of the disciples. They showed up. We are told that they were there watching from a distance as Jesus was dying on the cross. We are told that they were there when Jesus body was laid in the tomb. And on that first Easter morning, they headed to the tomb to anoint Jesus body. They kept showing up.

If you want to know if the resurrection is true or not, you will need to show up. You'll need to read the accounts of Jesus' death and resurrection. You may need to read some of the books that have been written about the resurrection. You'll need to talk to some of Jesus' followers to find out how Jesus' resurrection has impacted their lives. You can't really know if Jesus rose from the dead or not if you aren't willing to show up.

And you need to listen. Some of you are not going to like what I am going to say, but it is the other key ingredient to discovering the truth. When I say "listen," I don't mean listen to preachers like me or the authors who have written books on this. I mean that you need to listen to God. Notice how the women came to understand what had happened to Jesus' body. God revealed it to them through an angel. They didn't figure it out on their own. There is a spiritual blindness that we all suffer from which keeps us from understanding spiritual truth on our own. It is a result of our sin, of our rebellion against God. So, we need God to reveal the truth to us about who he is and what he is like and how we can know him. We

pride ourselves in how smart we are and we are pretty smart. God has blessed us with amazing brains. Yet, because of our sin, we are unable to understand God and his ways. We can't figure out on our own things like, did Jesus really rise from the dead.

We do need to do our part, which is to show up to take an honest look at the evidence. But we ultimately need to have God reveal himself to us. Try praying a simple prayer like, "God, I want to know the truth about you. Show me if the resurrection really happened." Or, "God, I am not even sure that you exist, but I don't want to miss out on knowing you if you do. Please reveal yourself to me." Then keep showing up and pay attention to how God will answer your prayer.

Conclusion

Are Christians to be pitied or have we been rescued from the penalty of our sin and a life without God? It depends on whether Jesus rose from the dead or not. What does the evidence indicate? What has God revealed to you? Are you listening?