

The Angel's Easter Message

Mark 16:1-8

Pastor John Miller

Read with me Mark 16:1-8. "Now when the Sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, that they might come and anoint Him. Very early in the morning, on the first day of the week, they came to the tomb when the sun had risen. And they said among themselves, 'Who will roll away the stone from the door of the tomb for us?' But when they looked up, they saw that the stone had been rolled away—for it was very large. And entering the tomb, they saw a young man clothed in a long white robe sitting on the right side; and they were alarmed. But he said to them, 'Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, Who was crucified. He is risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid Him. But go, tell His disciples—and Peter—that He is going before you into Galilee; there you will see Him, as He said to you.' So they went out quickly and fled from the tomb, for they trembled and were amazed. And they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid."

The Resurrection of Jesus Christ is the most wicked, heartless hoax ever fostered upon the minds of men, or it is the greatest event in history. Obviously, I believe that it is the greatest event in history. I probably scared some of you for a minute; right? It is April Fools day. But the Resurrection of Jesus Christ is no April Fool. It is the greatest reality in the history of mankind. I think of the Resurrection as the greatest event that ever happened in human history. The great theologian Carl Henry said, "Christ's Resurrection planted the only durable rumor of hope amid the wide-spread despair of a hopeless world."

I want to visit with you the tomb from which Jesus rose from the dead. It starts with the women on the first day of the week. Verse 1 says, "Now when the Sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene..." who the Bible tells us had seven demons, was delivered from them by Jesus. "To whom much is given, loveth much. She had been forgiven of much and delivered by Jesus, so she came in love to finish the anointing of his body. There was also "...Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, that they might come and anoint Him."

What's happening is that Jesus was crucified on Friday. I'm a traditionalist; I believe Jesus was crucified on Friday. From 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.—for six hours—Jesus hung on the Cross, and from noon until 3:00 p.m., there was a great darkness. Jesus, hanging on the Cross, cried, "Father, into Your hands I commend My spirit...And bowing His head, He gave up His spirit." Jesus gave His life voluntarily on the Cross.

Because it was the Sabbath day starting at sundown, the women had to hurry to prepare His body. His body was put in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea. They found that they weren't able to completely prepare the body the way they wanted to. They hurried to put the ointment on, and wrapped it in grave cloths. But now that the Sabbath was past, being Sunday morning, the first day of the week, they got up very early, before the sunrise, and were making their way down to the tomb to finish the job of anointing and preparing the body of Jesus.

As they journeyed, verse 3 says that “They said among themselves, ‘Who will roll away the stone?’” There was a large stone laid in a slot in front of this tomb, and it would be very heavy to move. They were not thinking about this obstacle. They just went to the tomb to prepare the body.

When the women arrived at the tomb, there were three surprises. The first surprise was that the stone was already rolled away. Verse 4 says, “But when they looked up, they saw that the stone had been rolled away—for it was very large.” The Bible says that an angel of the Lord appeared and actually moved this large stone.

So the first surprise was that the stone was rolled away. Isn’t it funny that we worry about things that never develop? We worry about things that really aren’t an issue? God goes ahead of us, and He takes care of the problem. When the women got there, the stone had already been rolled away.

The second surprise is in verse 5. It says, “And entering the tomb, they saw a young man clothed in a long white robe sitting on the right side; and they were alarmed.” There were actually two angels in the tomb. Mark only mentions one, because this is the one who spoke. The Bible says that the grave cloths were still lying there; Jesus had passed through them. At the areas where the head and feet of Jesus had been laying, there were two angels. So an angel showed up and rolled away the stone, and there were two angels hanging out inside the tomb.

The third surprise is the one we want to focus on, which is the angel’s Easter message. The angel gave them a message in verses 6-7. “But he said to them, ‘Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, Who was crucified. He is risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid Him. But go, tell His disciples—and Peter—that He is going before you into Galilee; there you will see Him, as He said to you.’”

This angel’s Easter message contains two parts: It first has an assurance, and then it has an invitation. I want to break down this message the angel gave.

He first gives them an assurance. The assurance is threefold. Notice what he says to them in verse 6. He said, “You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He is risen! He is not here.” That is the assurance that the angel gave to these women. Number one, He was crucified. Then angel wanted to be very clear and specific that this crucified one is this “Jesus of Nazareth.” He was born of a virgin, lived a sinless life, died a substitutionary death on the Cross, was buried and now we’re going to see that He also was risen from the grave.

But you can’t have a resurrection unless you first have a crucifixion. In the Crucifixion, we must make perfectly clear that Jesus actually died. The reason the angel said that Jesus was “crucified” was because he wants us to understand that Jesus Christ was actually dead. When we say “dead,” we mean dead—physically dead; He had died. You say, “Well, why is it important that Jesus died?” Because if He didn’t really die, then He didn’t really rise from the

dead. So we have the death of Jesus Christ.

The famous radio preacher, J. Vernon McGee, received a letter from a listener. It said, "Mr. McGee, our pastor said that on Easter Sunday, Jesus swooned on the Cross, and the disciples nursed Him back to health. What do you think?" Dr. McGee replied, "Dear Sister, beat your preacher with a leather whip for 39 heavy strokes, nail him to a Cross, hang him in the sun for six hours, run a spear through his heart, embalm him, put him in an airless tomb for three days and see what happens." I like that. Jesus actually died. He wasn't just in a swoon. One of the crazy explanations for the empty tomb was that Jesus just passed out; that He didn't really die. So they tried to deny the Resurrection.

The Bible is clear about the Resurrection. In Mark 15:44-45, it says that Pilate marveled that Jesus was already dead. Pilate made sure of that by asking the Centurion, who confirmed that Christ indeed had died.

How did Jesus die? The angel said that Jesus had died by crucifixion. Jesus said, "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto Me." That "lifted up" means He would be dying on a Cross. Jesus predicted that He would be handed over into the hands of sinful man, He would be crucified and He would be slain.

We first saw that He did die. But why did Jesus die? How did He die? The answer is in 1 Corinthians 15:3: "Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures." The Bible is very clear on this. Yes; when Jesus died, He demonstrated God's love. What a blessing that is. In the Cross, God is saying, "I love you." There are some who only believe in what is called "The-love-of-God theory." The Cross is just God saying, "I love you." It is that, but it's much more. It's actually the substitutionary death of Jesus for our sins. The whole purpose of the Incarnation and the Crucifixion was that God would give Himself on the Cross to die for man, for the creature's sin.

You'll never understand the Cross unless you understand that we are sinners, and that sin demands a penalty. The punishment for the breaking of God's law was death. "The wages of sin is death." Jesus took our death on the Cross. His death was a substitution, His death was a reconciliation and His death was a propitiation. He died to satisfy the demands of God's holy, righteous law.

Secondly, the angel tells them that Jesus is now risen. This is the second assurance. The first assurance was that Jesus was actually dead. The second assurance is that Jesus is risen. Notice verse 6: "He is risen!" Those are the best words you've ever heard. In 1 Corinthians 15:4, Paul says, "He rose again the third day." All four Gospels—Matthew, Mark, Luke and John—record the Resurrection of Jesus Christ.

What does the Bible mean when it says that Jesus rose from the dead? I want to be perfectly clear. When we celebrate the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, His Resurrection was not spiritual and it wasn't metaphysical. It wasn't just a spiritual raising from the dead where Jesus is with

us in spirit; no. The Resurrection of Jesus Christ was physical, literal and bodily. It's the physical, literal, bodily Resurrection of Jesus Christ. There are false teachers going around saying that Jesus' Resurrection was just spiritual or metaphysical. No. It was a physical resurrection. He physically died, He was buried and He physically, bodily rose from the grave. The same Jesus of Nazareth, Who was crucified, is now risen in the same body but now is glorified in an immortal body that will never, ever die.

Think about this: No one down through history and no one in history in the future has or will ever die and come back in an immortal, glorified body. Yes; people died and have come back from death only to die again, which is kind of a bummer—once is enough. But Jesus came out of the grave in a new body. It was a metamorphosis; it was a resurrection into a glorified body. He could pass right through the sepulcher. The stone was rolled away, by the way, not so Jesus could get out. He wasn't inside saying, "Let me out! Let me out!" The stone was rolled away so the others could get in to see that Jesus Christ was risen from the dead.

So Jesus had a glorified body, and for 40 days He appeared and reappeared to the disciples. It's called the "post-Resurrection appearances of Jesus." He ate with them. He talked with them. They talked to Him. They felt Him; they reached out and touched Him. Then Jesus ascended back into heaven, and they watched Him as He went. An angel said, "This same Jesus, Who you have seen go, will come again in like manner as you have seen Him go."

You ask, "Well, what proof is there that Jesus actually rose from the dead? Here's the third and last assurance that the angel gave the women in his message: "He is not here," verse 6. So the angel said three things: number one, He "was crucified"; number two, "He is risen!"; and number three, "He is not here." Not only did Jesus raise from the dead, but He no longer is laying in the tomb; it's empty.

We were in Israel just a few weeks ago. We went to Jerusalem to what's called "Gordon's Calvary." By best estimations, and archeologists agree, that this is very possibly the spot where Jesus Christ was buried. We went into that empty tomb, we looked around and I didn't see Jesus, by the way. He was risen. If you go to the tomb of Lenin, he's still there. If you go to the tomb of Muhammad, Buddha or Confucius—all these leaders—their bones are still there. But Jesus Christ is not there; He is risen from the dead. But I guess you could say it wasn't quite empty, because the grave cloths were still there in the shape of the body.

I believe with all my heart that the hope of all humanity lies in that empty tomb of Jesus Christ. Not only was the tomb empty, but Jesus was seen by others. That's another indication that He rose from the dead. In verses 9-11, He was seen of Mary Magdalene. The theme of that is love. In Luke 24:13-35, He was seen by the two on the road to Emmaus. That is one of my favorite post-Resurrection appearances of Jesus.

Cleopas and his friend had been in Jerusalem and now were walking the seven miles back to their town of Emmaus. They were sad, discouraged and bummed out. This is one of the coolest stories in the Bible. Guess who showed up walking along with them? Jesus, but He

was incognito. He was wearing His sunglasses and overcoat and had a hat on. Maybe He flipped up His hoodie; I don't know. Then Jesus asked them, "Why are you guys so sad?"

They say, "What do you mean, 'Why are you so sad?' Are you a stranger here? Haven't you heard about Jesus of Nazareth?" All the time they were actually talking to Jesus.

"What about Him?"

"We thought He was from God. We thought He was the Messiah. We thought He was the Savior, but He got crucified. Some of the women went to the tomb and said that they saw Him. He said He would rise, but we can't believe those women. They don't know what they're talking about. They're kind of confused."

Actually I commend the women; they were the brave ones who went to the tomb Easter morning. The men were crying and weeping behind locked doors. The women were the brave, courageous ones; they went down to the tomb. The men were crying. A bunch of wimps!

So as these two men walked along to Emmaus, Jesus began to speak to them from the Bible. Can you imagine Jesus giving a Bible study? He went from the prophets to the psalms in the Old Testament and began to show them how the Messiah must suffer, die and be risen from the dead. When they got to the stop they were going to, they said, "Man, you're such a great Bible teacher. Can You come and have dinner with us?" So Jesus went in with them, and they asked, "Would you pray?" When Jesus prayed, He was breaking the bread, their eyes were opened and they realized it was Jesus. Perhaps they saw the scars in His hands. The moment they saw that it was Jesus, He vanished out of their sight. They said, "Did not our hearts burn within us while He talked with us on the road? I thought He knew His Bible pretty well. Man, that was amazing!" So they quickly ran back to Jerusalem, a long seven-mile trip in the dark. They told the others that Jesus had risen, but again, they were not believed.

The third post-Resurrection appearance, verse 14, was to the eleven. I believe that Thomas was present. He was the doubter. He was the disciple who was from Missouri, the Show Me state. He said, "Unless I see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe." Then Jesus appeared in the room where Thomas was, and Thomas said, "My Lord and my God!" Jesus said to him, "Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." So the eleven saw Him.

In Acts 1:3, Luke says that Jesus "presented Himself alive after His suffering by many infallible proofs, being seen by them during forty days." And in 1 Corinthians 15:6, it says that Jesus "was seen by over five hundred brethren at once," which kind of shoots down another theory that tries to deny the Resurrection. It was the theory that it was a hallucination. How do you get 500 people to hallucinate at the same time to see the same thing? Jesus Christ rose from the dead.

Number one, the tomb was empty; number two, Jesus was seen; and a third proof of the

Resurrection is that Jesus' disciples were changed. Mark 16:10 says that the disciples "mourned and wept." They didn't believe He arose. Verse 13 says, "They did not believe them either." Verse 14 also says, "They did not believe those who had seen Him after He had risen." The first unbelievers of the Resurrection were the disciples. They didn't believe that Jesus rose from the dead. But something happened to change them from unbelief to faith, from a hopeless end to an endless hope. The only thing that could have changed them was that they saw Jesus alive after His death. They saw Him. They spoke with Him. They ate with Him. They touched Him. They watched Him ascend back into heaven.

Jesus Christ is alive right now; He's not dead. Jesus Christ is seated at the right hand of God the Father in heaven. He lives to save us. He can forgive your sins. He can give you a new heart. He can change your life from the inside out today if you haven't trusted Jesus Christ. It's not just about Easter and Easter bunnies and Easter eggs and family and friends. It's about the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. It's about making sure that you have accepted Christ as your Savior and that your sins have been forgiven; that if you die, you're ready to go to heaven. By the way, you're not ready to live until you're ready to die. And you're not ready to die until you've been born again after trusting Jesus Christ. You must put your faith and your trust in Him alone.

So the angel gave an assurance that Jesus Christ was crucified, that He rose and that He is gone. But I want you to notice, secondly, what Jesus Christ accomplished on the Cross. The angel now gives an invitation in verse 6. He said, "See the place where they laid Him." So two simple points: First there was an assurance, and secondly, there was an invitation. "See" or "behold." The word "behold" means to look with understanding. It's an invitation to think about the significance, the meaning of the Resurrection. I don't think we really understand Easter until we stop and understand why Jesus rose from the dead.

"So what?" Let me give you the "so whats." First of all, it means that my sin can be forgiven. That's good news. Our sins can be forgiven. Jesus, when He was hanging on the Cross, cried "Tatelestai" or "It is finished" or "Paid in full." He was buried, and God the Father said, "Amen" by raising Him from the dead. The Resurrection of Jesus Christ was God the Father saying "Amen" to the work that Jesus did; the Cross is a work as well as a word. It is God not only saying, "I love you," but God is accomplishing a work in paying for our sins, taking our place in dying on the Cross. Our sins can be forgiven. Psalm 103:12 says that "As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us."

And don't be deceived; we've all sinned. I can almost feel it when I make a point like this. I can tell some people are saying, "Speak for yourself, preacher boy. You may be a sinner. You may be a wicked guy. You may need to get saved, but I'm a good person." The Bible says, "All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. No one is righteous; no, not one."

Do you know that Jesus said that if you look lustfully after a person that you've committed adultery in your heart? You say, "Oh, no! I'm busted." Jesus said also that if you have anger in your heart toward someone, you've committed murder. Try driving the freeways in California and not kill somebody; it's pretty hard. Pride, anger and unforgiveness is sin. Maybe somebody

has wronged you or hurt you, and you refuse to forgive them. You can't really forgive until God's forgiven you. When you experience the forgiveness of the Cross, how can you not forgive others who have sinned against you? We pray in the Lord's Prayer, "Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors." When we come to know God's forgiveness, we cannot but be forgiving toward others. So it means that my sins can be forgiven.

Secondly, the Resurrection means that I have purpose for living. This is a broad, general point, but I love this idea that because He lives, life has purpose and meaning. Without the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, you might as well live like a dog and die like a hog. Don't quote me on that.

"What did the preacher say?"

"His Easter message was, 'Live like a dog and die like a hog.'"

No. I'm telling you that that's the philosophy of the world apart from the Resurrection; there's no purpose beyond the grave, and there's no life after death. Do whatever feels good. Have a good time. Avoid suffering, pain and sorrow. Do what you want, because there's only one life. Live it with gusto. That's the epicurean philosophy.

But God says in His Word that there is life after death, so we need to be ready to die. Only Jesus Christ can give us purpose and meaning. The famous song say,

Because He lives,

I can face tomorrow.

Because He lives,

All fear is gone.

Because He lives, I can have purpose, hope and meaning. What a glorious truth that is.

Then the third reason for the Resurrection is His promise. Jesus made a promise to come again. John 14:1-3 says, "Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many mansions...;"—that's a reference to heaven—"...if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you." By the way, He would have to rise from the dead in order to go to prepare a place for us. "And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again." If He didn't rise from the dead, He won't come again; right? A dead person can't help you. If you're really in need, do you look to someone who's dead? No; they can't help you. Since Jesus Christ is alive, He can help and He can save. He also said that He will "come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also." Simply, said, Jesus is going to come back and take us to heaven. That's good news; amen? I have the hope of heaven in my heart, because Jesus Christ died and rose from the dead, so I look for His promise to be fulfilled.

There's also an implication that Jesus' Resurrection is also our pattern. Jesus said in John 14:19, "Because I live, you will live also." Jesus is called "the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep," 1 Corinthians 15:20. The Resurrection of Jesus Christ was a prototype. I emphasized a few minutes ago that He physically, bodily, literally rose from the dead. Someday, you who have trusted Jesus Christ will also physically, bodily, literally rise from the dead. That's the hope of our resurrection because of Jesus' Resurrection. Jesus is the first fruits of those who later have trusted Christ.

When Paul wrote to the believers in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-17, He said, "But I do not want you to ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus. For this we say to you by the Word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain...will by no means precede those who are asleep..."—or "died." "For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ shall rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up..."—or "raptured"—"...together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord."

Now don't be confused—when a Christian dies, he goes immediately to be with Jesus Christ; He goes immediately to heaven. The Bible says that it's a sleep; you fall asleep and wake up in heaven. But the body is still in the grave. Yet when Christ comes for the church—the resurrection of the dead and the translation of the living—our bodies will be resurrected.

You say, "Well, what if our body decays or is eaten by a shark or burned in a fire? Or you're cremated?" Do you think that's going to be a problem for God? It's not reconstruction; it's resurrection. "Then the dead in Christ shall rise." What a glorious thing that is. There's going to be a resurrection. What a blessing that is.

Lastly, not only do we have His pattern, but we also have His punishment. It grieves my heart to have to make this point, but I feel it is important. You say, "Well, what does that mean, Pastor Miller?" It means that Jesus Christ, in Revelation 20, is going to sit on a great, white throne. The Bible says that the books will be opened and the wicked dead, or those who reject Christ, will be resurrected too. Every human being will be resurrected because of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. The righteous will be resurrected to life, and the wicked will be resurrected to condemnation and judgment. The books will be opened, and those whose names are not found written in the Book of Life, will be "cast into the lake of fire." Jesus described it as a place where there will be "weeping and gnashing of teeth," where the fire is never quenched.

I know that it's popular today not to believe in hell. But Jesus believed in hell, and Jesus taught about hell. He not only talked about His Father's house in heaven, but He talked about a place where we don't want to go: hell. He talked more about hell than anyone else. Hell is real. Easter means that you don't have to go to hell. You don't have to die and be separated from God for all eternity. Would God give His Son to die on the Cross if you could be good enough to get to heaven? I don't think so. It took the death of Jesus Christ to save us from our sin and

to save us from hell.

In Acts 17:31, when Paul was preaching in Athens, on Mars Hill—I've had the privilege a couple of times to preach this sermon on Mars Hill in Athens. Paul said, "...because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead."

Here's my question to you: Is your name written in the Book of Life? When the books are opened, will your name be found written in that book? Do you know your name is in that book? You ask, "Well, Pastor, how do I get my name written in the Book of Life?" You have to repent of your sin. You have to receive Jesus as your Savior. You have to trust Him and Him alone. You have to realize that you're a sinner and that you can't save yourself. God loves you and sent His Son to die on the Cross for you so that your sins can be forgiven. Then you will become a child of God so you can go to heaven.

You say, "Well, that's hard for me to understand." I can't understand it either, but I trust it and I believe it. Jesus Christ has changed my life, and Jesus Christ has changed many other lives. And Jesus Christ can change your heart today. He can take that heart of stone and give you a new heart. He can take out the hatred and give you love. He can make you a new person. The Bible says that "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new."

Today, trust Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior. We all stand in need of salvation, and there's only one way: Jesus Christ. He is "the way, the truth and the life, and no one comes to the Father except through Him." You need to trust Him as your Savior. I want to give you that opportunity now.