

Sermon outline and notes:

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Mark 15:42-16:8 “The Good News of Jesus Christ”

Intro. The Gospel of Mark begins with the words, “The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.” Mark’s purpose in writing his gospel account was to tell us the good news of Jesus Christ. I am glad that I have good news to tell today. We have good news from heaven that God has done something about the sin problem of man. Ever since sin has entered into the human race, our world has been cursed with disease, disaster, crime, violence, and death. The good news is that Jesus bore the suffering, shame, and condemnation of sin, He overcame death, and now we can have victory over sin and death.

One of the best summaries of the gospel was written by the apostle Paul in I Corinthians 15:3-4, “For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures.” And so there are 3 essential elements of the good news of Jesus Christ. And these 3 elements are found in my text today. So let’s look into this text of Scripture & see for ourselves the main aspects of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. First of all:

I. HIS DEATH WAS PERCEIVED

Let me take you back to the cross. It is now 3:00 p.m. Jesus has died. He had just cried out, “It is finished!” The struggle is now over. The battle has been won. The work which the Father gave the Son to do is finished (John 17:4; 19:30). The body of Jesus suffers no more pain, for His spirit has entered Paradise (Luke 23:43). It is quiet on Calvary now. Most of the people have left.

But has Jesus *really* died? Could the skeptics and infidels be correct that Jesus did not really die, but only appeared to die? Is that the true explanation of the Resurrection? Well, the evidence is clear and convincing that Jesus was truly dead. There were three witnesses of the death of Jesus in Mark’s account. First, His death was perceived:

A. By Joseph of Arimathea – In v.43 we read, “Joseph of Arimathea, a prominent council member, who was himself waiting for the kingdom of God, coming and taking courage, went in to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus.” We know very little about this Joseph. We do not read of him before or after this incident. But most of what we do know is found in v.43. For example, we know that:

1. He Was a Member of the Sanhedrin – That was the ruling council of the Jews. And he was not just a member but a prominent one, according to v.43. But Luke makes it clear that he did not agree with the actions of the Sanhedrin regarding Jesus (Luke 23:50, 51a).

2. He Was Rich – In Matt. 27:57 we read, “Now when evening had come, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph...” There are two main points to be brought out from the fact that he was rich. First, this fulfilled the prophecy of Isa. 53:9, which predicted that the Savior would be “with the rich at His death.” Nicodemus was also rich, and he assisted Joseph. Jesus said in Matthew 19:23, “Assuredly, I say to you that it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven.” But here is a man who did not trust in his riches to get him to heaven, but he used his riches in service to Jesus. Secondly, we see here an example of the fact that the gospel

touches both rich and poor. It is for all. Though many rich people do not become followers of Christ, at least some do.

3. He Was a Man of Faith – Notice in v.43 that he was “waiting for the kingdom of God.” Here, the word translated “waiting” (*prosdechomai*) means “to expect the fulfillment of promises.” He believed God’s promise that the Kingdom of God would be established on earth. In other words, He was longing for the coming of the Messiah. Hope burned brightly in his heart. And as we shall see, he came to believe that Jesus was the Messiah.

4. He Was a Secret Disciple - Note John 19:38, “Joseph of Arimathea, a disciple of Jesus but a secret one for fear of the Jews.” He was afraid of what people might think if he openly confessed faith in Christ. He did not want to face the ridicule of the Sanhedrin, or lose his seat on the Council. So up to this time he had been a secret disciple.

Why it is that people are this way? Many people will openly identify with a sports team. Are there any Duke fans here today? Or they will openly identify with a certain school, or a certain club, but they are silent about any public identification with Jesus Christ. By what they do in the secular world, you would never know they were a Christian. Joseph was like this until now.

The preacher was standing at the door after the service to shake hands. He grabbed Jack by the hand and pulled him aside and said, “You need to join the Army of the Lord!” Jack replied, “I’m already in the Army of the Lord, Pastor.” So the Pastor said, “How come I don’t see you except at Christmas and Easter?” He whispered back, “I’m in the secret service.” Folks, I don’t think the Lord has a secret service here on earth, except for His angels. Joseph of Arimathea came to realize that you can’t really be a secret disciple. So notice something else we see about Joseph:

5. He Openly Identified with Jesus - Up until now Joseph was like the one Jesus had talked about, who had covered his light with a bushel. But now Joseph stepped forward to identify with Jesus. There was indeed a change brought about in his life. We can only guess what may have contributed to the change. Perhaps his conscience convicted him of his cowardice. I have the idea that Joseph was there at the cross. While his fellow Council members were mocking Jesus, he heard those wonderful words of love & grace from the lips of Jesus as He was dying on the cross. Perhaps he witnessed the miracles of Calvary, such as the darkness for 3 hours. Perhaps he understood the significance of Jesus’ death on Passover as he had searched the Scriptures. So in light of what happened at Calvary, Joseph just could not remain a secret disciple any longer.

The same thing should be true today. In light of what Jesus did for you at Calvary, there is no way you can justify being a secret disciple. Jesus publicly died for you, and you should at least publicly declare that He is your Savior. It is time that you come forward like Joseph, and confess that you believe in Jesus, and you are ready to follow Him in baptism. I will give you the opportunity to do that at the end of the message.

So the last of v.43 says that he, “coming and taking courage, went in to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus.” He desired to assume responsibility for the body of Jesus: to take it down from the cross and to give it an honorable burial. Granting permission to relatives or to friends, to take charge of the body of a crucified person was not anything unusual. Isn’t it interesting that Jesus had a Joseph who cared for him at His birth, and now He has a Joseph who cared for Him at His death?

This act did indeed take courage. By means of what Joseph of Arimathea was now doing he was openly professing before the entire world, including the entire Sanhedrin, that he was a believer in Jesus Christ! Others had honored and confessed our Lord when they saw him working miracles, but Joseph honored Him and confessed himself a disciple, when he saw him as a cold, blood-sprinkled corpse. He did more than the remaining eleven disciples, who had fled the scene to avoid a similar fate as Jesus!

By the way, we are told by John that Nicodemus, another prominent member of the Sanhedrin, helped Joseph. Fear is contagious, but so is boldness. If you decide to stop being a secret disciple and step forward to confess faith in Christ, your example may help others make the same decision. It is time to declare that you are on the Lord's side!

There is another who bore witness that Jesus was indeed dead:

B. By Pilate – In vv.44-45 we read, “Pilate marveled that He was already dead; and summoning the centurion, he asked him if He had been dead for some time. So when he found out from the centurion, he granted the body to Joseph.” Why did Pilate marvel at the news that Jesus was already dead? It was because only 6 hours had passed, and death by crucifixion was generally a very slow process. Sometimes it would take 2-3 days for people to die on a cross. But the fact that His body was released (v.45) is proof that Jesus actually died on the cross, for the Roman officials would not have released the body without proof that Jesus was dead. So there was a special providence, that Pilate should be so strict in his inquiry, that there might be no pretense to say Jesus was alive.

Furthermore, the death of Jesus was attested to:

C. By the Centurion – In v.45 we see that the Centurion certified that Jesus was in fact dead. In fact, the Gospel of John tells us that his soldiers made sure that Jesus was dead. One of them took a spear and thrust it into His side, and out came blood and water. There was no doubt; Jesus was dead.

So the evidence is very clear. Jesus died. Therefore, Jesus identified with us in death. He bore upon Himself death, which is one consequence of sin. We are not just in the land of the living, but in the land of the dying. The young may die and the old must die. And Jesus tasted death for every man.

We have seen that the death of Jesus was perceived. Now let's move on to the second main scene where we see:

II. HIS BURIAL WAS PREPARED

It was important that His body be prepared for burial so that the empty grave clothes could be left behind in the tomb (John 20:1-10). Also, as I have noted, the way He was buried fulfilled prophecy (Isa. 53:9).

In other countries the Romans allowed some crucified victims' bodies to be left on the cross, to be eaten by vultures and other such creatures. But for the Jews, it was against their law to leave a dead body on a tree overnight (Deut. 21:23), especially on the Sabbath. However, that did not mean that Jesus would normally have received a proper burial. If it had been left up to the enemies of Jesus, His body would have been disposed of by casting it into the burning garbage dump of Jerusalem. But God would not allow that. So who was going to take care of a proper burial? The disciples had fled (Matt. 26:56). The women had no clout with the Roman authorities, and they did not have a proper place of burial readily available. Most of His followers were from Galilee, not Jerusalem. So His burial was prepared:

A. By Joseph of Arimathea – Beginning in the last of v.45 we read that Pilate “granted the body to Joseph. Then he bought fine linen, took Him down, and wrapped Him in the linen...” (-v.46a). God made sure that His Son Jesus would have an honorable burial. So after Joseph had

received permission, he took the body of Jesus down from the cross and wrapped it in linen. Now white linen in Bible is symbolic of righteousness. Though Jesus died like a criminal, He never committed a criminal act. In fact, He never did sin even one time. He did not die for His sins, but for the sins of others.

Do you realize that you must have complete righteousness to enter into heaven? You can't get into heaven clothed in the dirty rags of sin. And Jesus is the only one who can clothe you with the white linen of righteousness, for He is the only one who died to wash away your sins. The hymn writer wrote, "When he shall come with trumpet sound, Oh may I then in Him be found, dressed in his righteousness alone, faultless to stand before His throne." When I go to heaven, I will not get there in my own goodness, but by the shed blood and righteousness of Jesus.

Then the last of v.46 says, "And he laid Him in a tomb which had been hewn out of the rock, and rolled a stone against the door of the tomb." In the providence of God Jesus was buried in the manner of a rich man. God was preparing everything for the resurrection of His Son Jesus.

So His body was prepared not only by Joseph, but also:

B. By the Women

1. They Noted the Place of Burial – In v.47 we read, "And Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joses observed where He was laid." The Father in heaven took care that at every step there were faithful witnesses. In the present case simply to say that these women "saw" where Jesus was laid fails to bring out the full picturesque description. The New King James uses the word "observed" (*theoreo*). The verb is in the imperfect tense, which indicates ongoing action. They were observing very carefully, intently, and devoutly the location of the tomb, for they intended to come back to that very spot. You can be sure that they did not come back to the wrong tomb.

2. They Purchased the Ointments for Burial - Chapter 16 picks up with Saturday after 6 P.M. The Sabbath was ended. Some of the bazaars are open again. Based on what Mark reports in v.1, we may assume that the women purchased spices that evening in order that they might go to the tomb the very next morning to anoint Jesus' body. They were evidently afraid that decomposition would take place if they should wait any longer.¹

In a dying world we should always remember what the Bible says, "It is appointed unto man once to die and after this the judgment." We are all going to one place, and we naturally shrink from it. When you see a funeral procession, you ought to reflect upon the fact that some day you will go to your grave. Tomorrow will be my 53rd birthday, and the older I get the more death is becoming a reality, especially when I hear of people even younger than I dying.

Have you prepared for the reality of death? Are you ready for the grave? Do you have hope beyond the grave? Or do you just ignore the cold hard reality of death? The believer in Jesus has hope and comfort as he faces death and the grave. Jesus Himself was once there on our behalf, but as we shall see, He has risen from the grave, and has robbed death of its sting. As surely as He rose again victoriously from the tomb, so surely will all who believe in Him rise gloriously on the day He appears.

Burial also pictures what Jesus has done to our sins. As the hymn writer proclaimed, "living He loved me, dying He saved me, buried He carried my sins far away." You can have the assurance that your sins have been buried with Jesus, and the stone of forgetfulness has sealed them from the mind of God. The Bible says that our sins are removed as far as the east is from the west. The Bible

¹ This seems to support the belief that Jesus died on Friday.

says that God has cast our sins into the depths of the sea. And one person said that He has put a “No fishing” sign there!

We have seen that His death was perceived, and His burial was prepared. Now let’s move to the next scene where we see:

III. HIS RESURRECTION WAS PROCLAIMED

This is what we celebrate on this Easter Sunday! It is true that these women should have paid more attention to the Lord’s repeated prediction that He would rise again on the third day. On the other hand, while we may criticize their lack of sufficient faith—a lack which they shared with the male disciples—let us not overlook their exceptional love and loyalty. They were at Calvary when Jesus died, in Joseph’s garden when their Master was buried, and now very early in the morning, here they are once more at the tomb, in order to anoint the body of Jesus. To get up early to show honor to One which their nation had despised, this was a mighty boldness indeed. These holy women had experienced our Lord’s pardoning mercies. Their hearts were full of gratitude to Him for light, hope, comfort and peace. They were willing to risk all consequences in testifying their affection to their Savior. Why is it that we see so little of this strong love for Jesus among Christians today? There is only one answer. It is the weak faith, and the low sense of gratitude to Christ.

So notice how the resurrection of Jesus was proclaimed. First of all:

A. By the Stone – In v.3 we read, “And they said among themselves, ‘Who will roll away the stone from the door of the tomb for us?’ On the way toward the tomb the women became worried about the huge stone in front of the tomb’s entrance. In fact, according to v.4, it was “very large.” But suddenly they saw—probably at a turn in the path—that the heavy stone had already been removed (v.4). Thus, their fears were needless. Their expected trouble was found not to exist. What had taken place? Matthew, by divine inspiration, supplies the answer: “Suddenly there was violent earthquake, for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven, stepped forward, rolled away the stone and was sitting on it. His appearance was like lightning, and his garment white as snow” (28:2-3). Why did the angel have to remove the stone? Not to enable Jesus to make His way out (see John 20:19, 26) but to enable these women, and also Peter and John, to enter the tomb.

What a striking picture we have in this simple narrative of the experience of many Christians! How often believers are oppressed and cast down by anticipation of evils, and yet, in the time of need, find the thing they feared removed and the “stone rolled away.” And those who are carried by holy zeal, to seek Christ diligently, will find the difficulties in their way speedily vanish. We carry mentally tomorrow’s troubles, as well as today’s. And often, very often, we find at the end that our doubts and alarms were groundless and that the thing we dreaded most has never happened at all.

Not only was the resurrection proclaimed by the open tomb, but also:

B. By the Angel –It says in v.5, “And entering the tomb, they saw a young man clothed in a long white robe sitting on the right side; and they were alarmed” (*ekthambeo*). There was a mix of fear & amazement. So the angel said in v.6, “Do not be alarmed...” They need not fear the angel, nor fear what happened to the body of Jesus. Now notice what the angel came to do:

1. He Proclaimed that Christ Is Risen! - He said in the middle of v.6, “You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He is risen!” The good news is that Jesus is alive from the

dead. And every Sunday ought to be a celebration of the fact that Jesus is alive. Though we rightly preach Christ crucified, a dead Savior alone cannot save anybody. The resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead is as much a part of the Gospel message as His sacrificial death on the cross (1 Cor. 15:1-8). The Resurrection proves that Jesus Christ is what He claimed to be, the very Son of God (Rom. 1:4), and that God had accepted His sacrifice for our sins (Rom. 4:25).

The angel gave additional evidence that Jesus had risen. He said in the last of v.6, “He is not here. See the place where they laid Him,” no doubt pointing to that very spot. The fact that the tomb was empty has been well attested and established. The evidence is such that it would be acceptable in a court of law. In order to deny the resurrection of Jesus, you need to come up with a credible explanation of what happened to the body of Jesus.

Over in Jerusalem there is one tomb that many believe was the tomb of Jesus. At one time there was a heart-shaped baptismal pool made right in front of that tomb. And early believers would be baptized in such a way that when they came up out of the water, they would face the empty tomb of Jesus. They are alive with Christ, the risen Savior!

2. He Gave an Important Command – In v.7 he said, “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.” The women were to be the first messengers of the glorious Resurrection message! Even so, we are to be messengers of wonderful news that Jesus is alive!

The women were specifically told to go and report to the disciples. The angel did not expect the fleeing, disheartened disciples to come by. Note that the angels still called them “his disciples,” even though in the hour of bitter trial they had all left Him and fled. Also notice that the angel said “and Peter,” and this in spite of those terrible denials, accompanied at times by curses. Observe in this passage the great kindness of God towards His backsliding servants. Simon Peter, who had denied His Lord three times, is specially mentioned by name. There were to be no exceptions in the deed of grace. All were to be pardoned. All were to be restored to favor—Simon Peter as well as the rest.

Have you strayed away from God, or even denied Him? I want you to know that God will forgive you. Come back to Him this Easter Sunday. God is more than willing to forgive, based on the all-sufficient sacrifice of Jesus. And as we have received forgiveness from God, let us follow God’s example & never be unforgiving towards other people. If Christ is so ready to forgive us, we ought to be very ready to forgive others. Is there someone you haven’t forgiven? Go to them this Easter Sunday, and extend the same grace to them, and this will be a glorious day indeed!

Conclusion: They were told that Jesus was going before them to Galilee. There they would see Him again. Well I have good news for us today. Because Jesus rose from the dead, He has gone before us to glory, and there we shall see Him, if we do not see Him first at His second coming. What a joyful hope we have! Do you have this hope? Do you know that your sins are forgiven? Have you been a secret disciple? Isn’t it time that you publicly confess Jesus as your Savior? I can think of no better day to do so than Easter Sunday. Do it today!

Sources: William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary: Mark* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1975); Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1961); J. Vernon McGee, *Thru The Bible*, Vol. 4 (Pasadena, CA: Thru The Bible Radio, 1983); Larry Pierce, *Online Bible* [CD-ROM] (Ontario: Timnathserah Inc., 1996); J.C. Ryle (1816-1900), *Mark: Expository Thoughts on the Gospels* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1993); Jerry Vines (sermon tape of 6/24/84); Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Diligent: Mark* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1987); Kenneth S. Wuest’s *Word Studies From the Greek New Testament*, Vol. 1, Mark (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1950). Other sources listed in the footnotes. Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982).

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