

Sermon outline and notes prepared by:
Dr. Stephen Felker, Pastor
[Swift Creek Baptist Church](#), 18510 Branders Bridge Rd., Colonial Heights, VA 23834
4/8/07

Mark 16:1-4; Matthew 28:1-9 “Who Moved the Stone?”
(Read Mark passage only at the beginning)

Intro. Don't you like a good mystery? Some of the most popular TV shows involve solving mysteries. When I was growing up one of the most popular shows was Perry Mason. While setting out to demonstrate his client's innocence, Mr. Mason somehow revealed who *really* killed the murder victim by the end of the show. Today there are several popular law enforcement shows that follow criminal investigators seeking to solve crime mysteries.

Well I have a mystery for you to solve today. Let's go back in time almost 2,000. Jesus had been crucified at the insistence of the Jewish leaders. Then, two men who had believed in Him laid Jesus in a nearby tomb and rolled a heavy stone over the opening of the tomb (15:46; John 19:38-39). Some faithful women had followed along, and observed the place where Jesus was buried. The next day, the Jewish authorities insisted that the tomb be sealed with a Roman seal and guarded by a Roman guard, and so Pilate gave the order (Mt. 27:62-66).

I can just imagine what may have happened that Saturday night at the tomb. Perhaps some of the soldiers on guard could have been sitting around talking. One would say, “Why are we here anyway?” Another would reply, “Oh, I heard that this Jesus claimed that He would rise from the dead.” “Really? Do you believe it might happen?” “Of course not. That's impossible.” “Yes, but I heard stories about this man giving sight to the blind, causing the lame to walk, calming the storm at sea. What if he does rise from the dead?” [He hears something] “What's that?” “Oh, relax. It's nothing.”

And so the soldier's waited on guard through the night. I will tell you what happened to the soldiers a little later. By the next morning, the first Easter, eyewitness testimony bears out the fact some devoted women arrived at the tomb. On the way there the women were wondering how they would gain access to the tomb. V.1 says that they, “...had bought sweet spices, that they might come and anoint him.” Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus had already prepared the body of Jesus for burial, but they had little time to do a thorough job. So the women wanted to preserve His body further before it began to decay. Their concern about the stone demonstrates that their purpose in coming to the tomb was to anoint a corpse. They fully expected to see the stone still in place, and the body in the grave.

Now as we look at v.4, we see the first surprise as told by Mark, “But when they looked up, they saw that the stone had been rolled away—for it was very large.” All the Gospel writers mention that the stone was rolled away. Luke 23:3 adds the fact that the women went into the tomb and did not find the body of Jesus. I believe it is undeniable that the stone was rolled away, and the body of Jesus was missing. We have no evidence that the enemies of Jesus ever tried to deny this fact.

Now this morning I want to investigate the evidence, and answer the questions, “Who moved the stone?” and “What happened to the body of Jesus?” So consider with me first of all:

I. THE MYSTERY OF THE STONE

At first sight, it must have been a mystery to the women as to what had happened. Who moved the stone? What had happened? The women were probably afraid that something bad had

happened to the body of Jesus. Were their fears correct? Who really moved the stone & the body of Jesus? Let's explore the possible answers:

A. Did The Women? - As we have already seen, the women themselves discussed the problem of needing help to move the stone out of the way. They were physically too weak. Such large stones weighed approximately one or two tons. They were normally rolled by means of levers against a tomb entrance.

B. Did the Gardener? – Jesus was buried in a garden tomb (Jn 19:41) that belonged to Joseph of Arimathea. According to John's Gospel (20:15), Mary supposed that possibly the gardener had moved the body to some other location. But Mary did not know that Pilate had posted a Roman guard at the tomb & sealed it. A gardener could not have opened the tomb & moved the body. Furthermore, even if the gardener had gained permission to move the body, the new location of the body would have been soon discovered. That would have been no basis for the resurrection stories that began to spread in Jerusalem & the surrounding area.

C. Did The Enemies of Christ? - Surely the enemies of Christ would not have done so. If they had stolen His body they would have produced His body weeks later to prove that the claim of the apostles concerning His resurrection was false. Such an action would have destroyed Christianity. Besides, they would have no motive for rolling the stone away and removing His body.

D. Did the Disciples Move the Stone? – They may have had motive, but did they do it? Well even though the enemies of Jesus charged that the disciples stole the body away (Mt. 28:13), that is incredible. If they came in the darkness of night to take the body, they would have discovered that the tomb was well guarded and sealed. That alone would have caused them to turn away. Every time we read about the disciples immediately after the resurrection we find them scared, hidden in an upper room behind locked doors. But even if they mustered up some courage, could they have slipped past the guard and quietly roll the heavy stone away without drawing the attention of the soldiers? Nor is it possible to believe that they overpowered a trained Roman guard. Would they have been willing to risk arrest and possible death by breaking the Roman seal that was on the tomb? The evidence seems to indicate that it would have been highly unlikely. These are not men who would have bravely faced a Roman guard, broken a Roman seal and stolen away the body of Jesus. They were in no mood to attempt anything like that. Can you imagine "brave" Peter leading the disciples in this? Just a few nights before he had denied Jesus three times for fear of possible imprisonment and to avoid ridicule. No, the disciples did not roll the stone away and take the body of Jesus.

Now turn over the Mt. 28:2 and we will solve the mystery of what really happened to the stone. There Matthew reports, "And behold, there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat on it." So here we see what is really the best explanation of what happened:

E. The Angel Moved the Stone! – That is the testimony of the women who arrived at the tomb. That is the testimony of the Gospel writers. And this testimony is very plausible. A mighty angel of God would have no trouble against the Roman guards. Their spears and swords would be useless against him. Beside, v.4 says, "And the guards shook for fear of him, and became like

dead men.” Fear can paralyze people to the point where they become unconscious. The original uses words derived from the same root to describe both the action of the earth and of the guard, so that the literal rendering might be: “Suddenly there was a violent earthquake... the men on guard quaked...” They were so overcome with fright that if anyone had been present at the scene, he could hardly have guessed what was shaking more: the earth or the members of the guard! The latter were then knocked unconscious. They lay there in a condition of utter powerlessness, motionless as if dead. Oh, how Christ & His angel had overwhelmed them! None withstood the angel, to hinder him from rolling to stone away from the tomb.

All 4 gospels mention the presence of 1 or more angels at the tomb of Jesus that first Easter morning. Angels accompanied the birth of Jesus, and so I am not surprised that angels were present around the time of His resurrection.

Do you believe in angels? I do. And if you do, you are in good company. Gallup reported in 2004 that 78 percent of Americans believe in angels. I believe that the best answer to the question, “Who moved the stone,” is the one Scripture gives. An angel did!

Now you may be saying, “So what? The angel moved the stone. What does that prove? And how does that relate to my life today?” Well, the angel did more than move the stone from the door of the tomb. For in Matthew’s Gospel we not only solve the mystery of the stone, but we also hear:

II. THE MESSAGE OF THE ANGEL

In both actions and words the angel had a message for the early disciples and for us. In fact, the word “angel” means “messenger.” I want to show you why you should listen to the angel. In v.3 we read about the appearance of the angel. His face was like lightning. You might compare it to the Shekinah glory of God as it was transmitted to Moses. Matthew also says the angel’s garment was white as snow, which represents God’s purity and holiness. The marvelous radiance of his countenance gave proof of his descent straight from heaven, as Matthew says in v.2. This was truly a messenger from God.

Another evidence of this fact is that a great earthquake accompanied his arrival. When the angel touched down on the garden, it created seismic shock waves! The earthquake means: “The Lord is speaking. Listen!” When the Lord came down to Mount Sinai in the days of Moses, we read that the mountain quaked (Ex. 19:18). Furthermore, there had been an earthquake at the moment of Christ’s death (Matt. 27:51). So God was saying something when the earth quaked that Easter morning.

So we must give heed to this divine messenger! What happened on that first Easter morning almost 2000 years ago can make an eternal difference in your life. If you believe and respond, you can have hope in the face of grim death. You can enjoy freedom from the guilt of sin. And you can know that eternal life is yours.

Notice with me His message beginning in v.5:

A. Fear Not or “Do not be afraid” - The soldiers had reason to fear when the angel appeared. The women were also afraid (Gk. μή with a present imperative). But those who loved Christ had no *reason* to fear. Did the earth quake? Fear not: God can preserve you though the earth quake. Did the angel descend in terrors? Fear not: there are no terrors in heaven for the child of God who comes to Jesus.

Well you may have fears in your own life. You may be afraid of dying. You may fear for the safety of your children, or for your own safety. You may be afraid of the next terrorist strike. So let me tell you why we need not fear, no matter what happens to us. For the angels goes on to give good news:

B. He Is Risen! – Not only did the angel roll the stone away, but he also demonstrated that the body of Jesus was no longer there. In v.6 the angels says, “He is not here....” Then he explains what happened, “for He is risen....” Your great ground and reason for consolation, seeker, is that you do not seek a dead Christ, and you do not pray to a buried Savior; He is really alive. Today He is as able to relieve you as He was to help the poor blind man when He was on earth. Heb. 7:25 says, “Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.”

Notice the assurances of the resurrection that we see in our text:

1. Christ Predicted It – In v.6 the angel said, “He is risen, as He said.” Jesus very plainly predicted that He would rise from the dead on several occasions. What other mortal man would predict His own resurrection and not be laughed at?

2. The Empty Grave Demonstrates It – He said in the last of v.6, “Come, see the place where the Lord lay.” Now we see the main reason the angel rolled the stone away. It was not to let Jesus out. I’m sure that Jesus had already left the tomb by this time. Elsewhere we see that His new body was not limited by physical barriers.¹ So the angel rolled the stone away to let the women & others into the tomb to see for themselves that the body was gone. Afterwards even the enemies of Jesus could see for themselves that His body was no longer there.

What did the women see in the tomb? According to John’s Gospel (20:5-7), they probably saw the grave clothes lying on the stone shelf, still wrapped in the shape of the body. Jesus had passed through the grave clothes and left them behind as evidence that He was alive. They lay there like an empty cocoon. There was no sign of struggle.

Aside from the grave clothes, how else do you explain the missing body from a sealed, guarded tomb? Do you have any other credible explanation?

So far the evidence is compelling. The appearance and message of the angel, the stone rolled away, and the empty tomb all proclaim, “He is risen!” But that may not be proof enough for some. So we see one more evidence right here in Matthew:

3. The Appearance of Christ Proved It – In v.9 we read, “And as they went to tell His disciples, behold, Jesus met them, saying, ‘Rejoice!’ So they came and held Him by the feet and worshiped Him.” This is just one of several resurrection appearances that took place. Jesus appeared several times to the remaining 11 disciples. And the apostle Paul reported that Jesus appeared to about 500 people in all. Hundreds of witnesses could verify the reports of the resurrection that were circulating in Israel in the first century.

So the resurrection of Christ is not a fable of ancient mythology. This is sober truth, attested with more evidence than any other event of ancient history.

How do you evaluate this overwhelming historical evidence? What is your decision about the fact of Christ’s empty tomb? Do you believe that Christ rose from the dead, just as He said? If so, say “Amen.”

¹ No one, including the guard, saw Jesus rise from the dead & leave the tomb. In His supernatural resurrection body, Jesus was able to pass through walls and locked doors to meet with the disciples in the upper room (see John 20:19, 26). His body was able to pass through the walls of the sepulcher to leave the place where He lay.

Now we have solved the mystery of the tomb. We have heard the message of the angel that Christ is risen. But we still have not explored the meaning of the resurrection. So what if the stone was rolled away? So what if Christ has risen? Well I want to conclude by sharing with you, not only the message of the angel, but also:

III. THE MESSAGE OF THE STONE

The stone was rolled away to let the disciples into the tomb. And the stone remains as a monument and memorial to the risen Christ. It is not at all an uncommon thing to find in Scripture stones used to bear witness. I shall call this stone as a witness to valuable truths of which it was the symbol. First:

A. The Stone Is a Trophy of Victory – This truth was first proclaimed by the actions of the angel. We read in the last of v.2 that the angel “rolled back the stone from the door, and sat on it.” The enemies of Christ thought He was dead. But the angel was sitting upon the stone to symbolize Christ’s triumph. He sat there silently and gracefully, breathing defiance to the Jews and to their seal, to the Roman legionaries and their spears.

Furthermore, the stone was rolled away as a memorial of Christ’s eternal victory over the powers of death and the grave. His enemies thought that they had vanquished Him. They thought that the Crucifixion had not only killed Him, but also demonstrated that He was accursed & rejected of God. They grimly smiled as they saw His lifeless body wrapped in the winding-sheet and put away in Joseph’s new tomb. But their joy was momentary; their boastings were but brief, for at the appointed moment He arose and came forth from beneath their power.

As we look at that stone, it becomes us to remember that His victory was achieved for us. We have to fight with sin, but Christ has overcome it. We are tempted by Satan: Christ has given Satan a defeat. And our greatest enemy is death. It takes loved ones away. And unless Jesus tarries His coming, every one of us will face death. Death is “the ultimate statistic”: one out of one dies. In fact, Hebrews 9:27 clearly states, “And as it is appointed to men to die once, but after this the judgment.” And death seems so irreversible. A wise woman once said, “For we will surely die and become like water spilled on the ground, which cannot be gathered up again” (2 Sam. 14:14). Now when death comes, will you be defeated by death, or will you be victorious over death? Well there is only one way to be victorious over death. It is by placing your faith in the One who conquered death. If the Head conquers, the members shall not be defeated. Thus, we have no need to fear death.

Mr. Walker accidentally strolled into the scene of a holdup at a store in Memphis, Tenn., and heard the gunman order him to surrender his money or “I’ll shoot you.” “You just go ahead and shoot,” Walker said. “I just got through reading my Bible, and I’ve already said my prayers.” The robber was dumbfounded and Walker, a man in his sixties, walked away.² I’m not recommending that approach to a robber, but I’m just illustrating how Jesus can remove the fear of death. You can enjoy life more when you’re not wasting your time being afraid of death.

Furthermore, the stone rolled away testifies to the fact that:

B. The Prison Door of Death Has Been Flung Open - The massive door was taken away from the grave. It was not opened just enough to allow 1 person to pass by, but it was completely

² *Gospel Herald* in Paul Lee Tan, *Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations: #868* (Rockville, Maryland: Assurance Publishers, 1979), 281.

rolled away from the doorway of the tomb; and henceforth death's ancient prison-house is without a door. The saints shall pass in, but they shall not be shut in.

When Samson slept in Gaza and was beset by his enemies, he arose early in the morning, and took upon his shoulders the gates of Gaza - post, bar, gates, and all - and carried all away, and left the Philistine stronghold open and exposed. So has it been done unto the grave by our strong Master.

Why is it that death & the grave no longer can hold us? Christ suffered to the full, the great substitutionary equivalent for our suffering, and then He was confined in the tomb as a hostage until His work was fully accepted. That acceptance would be notified by His coming forth from the dead, just as the High Priest demonstrated that God had accepted the yearly sacrifice by coming forth from the Holy of Holies alive. And that coming forth would demonstrate our justification, just as the apostle Paul said in Romans, "He rose again for our justification." If He had not fully paid the debt He would have remained in the grave. If Christ has not risen, we have no proof that the crucifixion of Jesus differed from that of the two thieves who suffered with Him.

Come, dear Christian, let us rejoice in this. In the empty tomb of Christ, we see sin forever put away. Our sins were the great stone which held us captives in death. But our sins are now forever rolled away, and hence death is no longer a dungeon dark and drear, but rather it is merely a vestibule through which we merely pass on our way to heaven.

Now we see why the women were told not to fear. Do you fear what your sins can do to you? You should if you are not yet a believer in Christ. But once you have placed your faith in Christ, fear not, for they are all gone. The stone bears witness of the fact that sin no longer had hold us in the grave, just as the stone could not hold Christ in the grave. Do you fear death? To you who believe in Jesus God's word is, "Fear not." Jesus said, "Because I live, you shall live also" (John 14:19). To be doubting, and fearing, and trembling, now that Jesus has risen, is an inconsistent thing in any believer.

There is one other truth I want to mention about the stone:

C. The Stone Represents the Foundation of the Christian Faith – In a few months our Contractor will begin construction of our new building. And one thing that will be done is to lay a strong foundation, that the building will stand strong. A building is no better than its foundation. Well the stone that was rolled away bears witness to the resurrection. And the fact of the resurrection is the foundation stone of Christianity. Disprove the resurrection of our Lord, and our holy faith would be a mere fable. Or as the apostle said in 1 Cor. 15:17, "if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins!" All the great doctrines of our faith fall asunder like the stones of an arch when the key-stone is dislodged.

But, brethren, that Jesus rose from the dead is a fact better established than almost any other in history. The physical evidence was convincing. The witnesses were many. They were so persuaded that it was the fact, that most of them suffered death for bearing witness to it, and would not deny it to save their necks.

My dear hearers, are your hopes for the forgiveness of sin resting upon the death & resurrection of Christ? Are you resting your hope of eternal life upon the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead? If so, you have a foundation of fact and truth, a foundation against which the gates of hell shall not prevail.

What are you counting on to gain eternal life? The majority of people in America believe or hope they will go to heaven when they die. But if you are building upon anything that you

have done, or anything that priestly hands can do for you, you are building upon the sands which shall be swept away by the all-devouring flood. Oh, to build upon the living stone of Christ Jesus! Oh, to rest on Him who is a tried corner-stone, elect, precious! (1 Pet. 2:4). If you are trusting in anyone or anything else for eternal life, I call upon you to place your faith in Christ, who died for your sins and rose from the dead.

Sources: William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary: Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1973); John MacArthur, Jr., *The Resurrection of Jesus Christ: Matthew 27:57-28:15* (Panorama City, CA: Word of Grace Communications, 1989); Josh McDowell, *Evidence for the Resurrection* (Internet article); 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); Charles H. Spurgeon, *12 Sermons on the Resurrection* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1971 reprint), 31-41. Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982).

ABOUT THESE SERMON NOTES

© Dr. Stephen Felker. These notes may be used and even shared for personal study or ministry, but not for commercial purposes. The author credits the sources listed above for much of the content. Since Dr. Felker's sermons are preached without notes, the "live" recording of this sermon will be more completely in the author's own words. To obtain an audio recording of this message, you may send \$2 for each audio cassette tape or CD ordered, plus \$3 shipping & handling for each order mailed in. Up to 2 messages come on each cassette or CD. Make checks payable to Swift Creek Baptist Church, P.O. Box 235, Colonial Heights, VA 23834.