



Sunday School Lesson for June 26, 2005.
Released on June 22, 2005.

"Hope in the Midst of Despair"

Printed Text: **Mark 16:1-16.**
Devotional Reading: **Matthew 28:16-20.**
Background Scripture: **Mark 16.**

Time: A.D. 30
Place: Jerusalem

Mark 16:1-16

1 And when the sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome, had bought sweet spices, that they might come and anoint him.

2 And very early in the morning, the first day of the week, they came unto the sepulchre at the rising of the sun.

3 And they said among themselves, Who shall roll us away the stone from the door of the sepulchre?

4 And when they looked, they saw that the stone was rolled away: for it was very great.

5 And entering into the sepulchre, they saw a young man sitting on the right side, clothed in a long white garment; and they were affrighted.

6 And he saith unto them, Be not affrighted: ye seek Jesus of Nazareth, which was crucified: he is risen; he is not here: behold the place where they laid him.

7 But go your way, tell his disciples and Peter that he goeth before you into Galilee: there shall ye see him, as he said unto you.

8 And they went out quickly, and fled from the sepulchre; for they trembled and were amazed: neither said they any thing to any man; for they were afraid.

9 Now when Jesus was risen early the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom he had cast seven devils.

10 And she went and told them that had been with him, as they mourned and wept.

11 And they, when they had heard that he was alive, and had been seen of her, believed not.

12 After that he appeared in another form unto two of them, as they walked, and went into the country.

13 And they went and told it unto the residue: neither believed they them.

14 Afterward he appeared unto the eleven as they sat at meat, and upbraided them with their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they believed not them which had seen him after he was risen.

15 And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.

16 He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.

Today's Aim

Facts: to show how Jesus' resurrection brought hope to the despairing disciples.

Principle: to teach that true hope comes only when we recognize the power of our Lord's resurrection.

Application: to show students that we can have true hope today because our Saviour, Jesus, is alive.

How to Say It

Magdalene. *Mag-duh-leen* or *Mag-duh-lee-nee*.

Salome. *Suh-lo-me*.

sepulchre. *sep-ul-kur*.

Introduction

On 15 July 2003, a little two-year-old boy named Logan, who lived in North Carolina, was tragically pinned under a pickup truck on the grounds of a Christian camp. He went to heaven immediately, but for those who saw it happen, including his older sister, and for his family, it was a heartbreaking time. His mother anguished over the fear that he might have suffered until a paramedic assured her that he had not suffered at all but had experienced an instant death. The pain of the loss, however, continues to this day, for he was a lovable boy.

It became apparent that the parents possessed unusual spiritual depth and godliness when they told how they viewed the situation. They understood that God knew all along that He was sending Logan to earth for just two-and-a-half years and that Logan needed a special family to take care of him during that brief time. They rejoice in the fact that they were that special family. What really carries them through each day, though, is the assurance that they will see him again someday in heaven. They know he is alive and well and safe with Jesus.

Lesson Background

The events that come just before today's text have been sobering, indeed. Jesus Christ, the King of the universe, had been put to death in an act of judicial murder. One of His closest disciples had betrayed Him for a paltry thirty pieces of silver. His other disciples had deserted Him. The death He suffered was one of the most cruel, agonizing, and humiliating possible. "He came unto his own, and his own received him not" (John 1:11).

Those who first seek Jesus are a group of loyal women followers. It is not a living Jesus they seek, however, but a dead one. A resurrection is the furthest thing from

their minds. After (what we can suppose to be) a sleepless night or two, they are in for quite a shock!

Trip to the Tomb (Mark 16:1-4)

Women and Mission (vs. 1, 2)

1. Why did the women wait until Sunday morning before going to the tomb?

"*The sabbath*" had ended at sundown on Saturday night, but darkness prevented the women from visiting the tomb until Sunday dawn. These are women on a mission: they intend to finish a respectful preparation of Jesus' corpse (Luke 23:56), a process that had been delayed to prevent violation of the Sabbath.

These were the same women who are mentioned as having witnessed the crucifixion and the burial that followed (Mark 15:40, 47). They were prepared very early Sunday morning (cf. John 20:1), to return to the place where they had seen Jesus buried, taking the spices with them.

The Jews did not practice embalming, so the spices were not going to be used for that purpose. They were to help conceal the stench of the decaying body. It was simply an act of love and devotion on the part of these women to go and anoint Jesus' body in this fashion.

The women's devotion to their "dead" Master was inspiring. How often do we see the same level of devotion expressed to our *living* Lord? How can we encourage that level of devotion among our fellow Christians?

2. What problem did they encounter, and what did they find instead (vs. 3,4)?

The women apparently didn't think about how they would gain access to Jesus' body until they are already on the way. Belatedly they recall that *the sepulchre* had been sealed. This was done with a heavy disk-shaped *stone*, carved to fit tightly over the tomb. Rolling the stone back will require several strong men. The issue is resolved when they arrive on the scene: the massive stone already has been removed and the tomb is open.

Mark does not explain when the stone was moved, but Matthew does: "And, behold, there was a great earthquake: for the angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat upon it" (28:2). This took place before anyone arrived at the tomb, so it probably occurred sometime just before daybreak. When the women arrived, they were totally surprised to see the open tomb.

Encounter with an Angel (Mark 16:5-8)

3. What caused the women to be greatly alarmed (v. 5)?

It is difficult to harmonize all the details of resurrection morning, for each Gospel author wrote only part of the information. When these women arrived, the angel mentioned in Matthew spoke to them and invited them inside to see where Jesus had

been lying (28:5-6). Luke 24:4 mentions that two angels were present, while Matthew and Mark refer to just one. Perhaps their intent was to focus on the one who was the spokesman for the two, giving information and direction.

It has often been said that the stone was removed not to let Jesus out but rather to let people see inside the tomb and recognize that Jesus' body was no longer there. Mary Magdalene may well have rushed off at this point to tell the disciples what she had seen (John 20:2). If so, it was the other women who entered the tomb. It was frightening to them to see instead of a body the presence of "a young man sitting on the right side, clothed in a long white garment" (Mark 16:5).

4. How did the angel assure them that they were in the right place (v. 6)?

The angel sensed how afraid the women were and quickly reassured them that they did not need to fear. He revealed that he knew they were looking for Jesus of Nazareth, thus assuring them that they had not arrived at the wrong tomb. He also spoke of the fact that Jesus had been crucified, assuring them that they were not in error about what they had seen two days earlier. Then he gave them the wonderful news that Jesus had risen from the dead and was alive. The angel invited the women to see where His body had been laid.

"The resurrection of Jesus from the dead is the central fact of Christian history. On it, the church is built; without it, there would be no Christian church today. Jesus' resurrection is unique. Other religions have strong ethical systems, concepts about paradise and afterlife, and various holy scriptures. Only Christianity has a God who became human, literally died for his people, and was raised again in power and glory to rule his church forever" (Barton, Mark: Life Application Bible Commentary, Tyndale).

5. Why did the angel give separate mention of Peter (v. 7)?

The angel now told the women they should go tell the disciples, especially Peter, that Jesus was on His way to Galilee as He had said (16:7).

It is encouraging to read the angel's command that Peter be given special attention. He was the one who had denied Jesus in Caiaphas's courtyard and then left over his failure (Mark 14:72). It seems the Lord wanted Peter to be reassured that his failure was forgiven and that he was still useful to Him. God is wonderfully forgiving when we confess our sins. Peter is not the only one in Scripture to be given a second chance, and there are many serving the Lord today who have also known this grace and mercy of God. The Lord's kingdom has a place for anyone and everyone who has failed! Otherwise, who could be a part of it?

A Hasty Retreat (v. 8).

6. Where did the women go next (v. 8)?

We often pass over this statement quickly and miss the intense reaction that is described here. We are told that trembling and astonishment gripped the women, driving them to get out of the tomb as quickly as they possibly could. What they had just seen and heard was totally overwhelming to them. They believed, but it was such a shocking turn of events and was communicated to them in such a miraculous way that their human response was to get out of the tomb quickly and flee as fast as

they could.

As they went, the women said nothing to anybody they met; their goal was to reach the disciples quickly. Their fear apparently caused them to feel the need to be in the presence of the disciples, share what they had witnessed, and let them decide what to do next. Matthew 28:8 describes it this way: "And they departed quickly from the sepulchre with fear and great joy; and did run to bring his disciples word." Luke says they "returned from the sepulchre, and told all these things unto the eleven, and to all the rest" (24:9).

Truth and Unbelief (Mark 16:9-13).

7. To whom did Jesus first appear (v. 9)?

"Mary Magdalene" has shown her great loyalty to Jesus. She was last at the cross and first at the tomb. Jesus had transformed her life by releasing her from tremendous spiritual bondage. It is entirely fitting that Jesus chose her to be the "first" witness of more than just the empty tomb. She sees the risen Lord!

However, when Mary Magdalene shares the truth of the risen Lord, she is rejected (vs. 10,11). There are two reasons for this rejection. First, a woman is not thought to be a credible witness in the ancient world. Some scholars maintain that a woman's testimony was not considered valid in ancient Jewish courts. This, however, does not seem to be the primary reason Mary's story is rejected. The main reason her story is not believed is simply that believing in the resurrection takes a lot of faith, more faith than the disciples have at this point.

8. Mary Magdalene had seen the risen Lord, but her testimony was rejected. What lesson is there in that for believers today who share their faith with friends and family members?

We are not told how Mary responded when her testimony was rejected. We do not know how much she pleaded for a hearing or whether she wept as the disciples refused to believe her. But we do find her remaining close. Apparently she was patient with the unbelieving disciples. She did not go off in exasperation and start her own group. We, too, need to be patient with friends, family members, and even fellow Christians, whose faith is not where we'd like it to be. It took time and more evidence for the disciples to believe, but they did come to belief. With patience and love and the providence of God, our loved ones may grow in their faith as well.

9. Who did Jesus appear to next (vs. 12, 13)?

A second story follows, one that is given fully in Luke 24:13-35. Jesus appears to *two* male disciples as they journey away from the city by foot. These men return to *the residue* who are still in the city, but their testimony is received just like Mary's story-it is not believed.

Truth is powerful, but it cannot overcome stubborn unbelief. Mark never tries to hide embarrassing details from us. The fact is that those who first experience the resurrection of Jesus are not believed by the larger group of disciples. This shows how difficult it is to accept that the crucified Jesus, stone cold dead days ago, is alive and free from His tomb. It should give us confidence in the testimony of the early church concerning the resurrection. They do not come to faith quickly or rashly, but slowly and carefully.

A Rebuke and Challenge (Mark 16:14-16)

10. What did Jesus say to those who were gathered at the table (vs. 14,15)?

As the day wore on, it came time for the disciples and those with them to sit down and eat. It was then that Jesus appeared in the room. John gives these details: "Then the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews, came Jesus and stood in the midst, and saith unto them, Peace be unto you" (20:19). Mark tells us He then rebuked them for not believing the witnesses who had reported to them. Mark focuses on unbelief and hardness of heart as the factors that kept the disciples from responding to the good news. This was not simply a cautious approach; it was a willful disbelief. The evidences had been presented to them through eyewitnesses, and yet they had refused to believe. Throughout the Bible there are many examples of God's displeasure over unbelief. One example is Israel's failure to enter Canaan because of unbelief (Num. 14:11; Deut. 1:32). This resulted in forty years of wilderness wanderings.

11. What can we learn from Jesus' displeasure over their unbelief?

Perhaps we should pause to remind ourselves that God has given us His written Word and that unbelief regarding God's Word can keep people from being born again. It is also serious for believers to doubt God's Word and act as if they were not responsible for obeying it.

Jesus then told His disciples they had a great task before them. He wanted them to begin spreading the gospel to the entire world (Mark 16:15). This would lead to salvation for those who believed and to condemnation for those who did not (v. 16). The despair that rocked the disciples was changed into hope for the world.

Eventually there was growing excitement among Jesus' disciples and other followers as word spread that He was alive. The hopelessness they had felt gave way to hope and joy. It is this same living Christ who still changes hopelessness into hope and joy for those who come to know Him, and He is the one who enables believers to maintain hope even in a time of sorrow and tragedy.

Conclusion

The resurrection means that Jesus is alive today and will come again as He promised!

Think about what this says about Christians and Christianity. We don't just follow the teachings of Jesus from centuries ago like Confucians do with Confucius's teachings. Rather, we make Jesus the active Lord of our lives. We don't just pray the way He taught us like Muslims do with Muhammad. Instead, we pray to the throne of God, where Jesus sits at the right hand. We don't just follow His pathways of spiritual enlightenment like Buddhists follow the Buddha. On the contrary, we allow Jesus to change us through the transforming power of His Word and His Holy Spirit. We don't just admire His courage and integrity, as secularists do with their historical heroes. Rather, we actively look for Jesus to return in power and glory to take us to be with Him forever.

Prayer

Mighty God, we frail human beings are terrified by death. It is a curtain we cannot pull back, a darkness we cannot light. But You have shown us that death is not the end. You have proven that death holds no power over You. You have given us hope by allowing Your Son, Jesus Christ, to die, and then raising Him from the dead forevermore. May we live confidently in the strong belief that Jesus left an empty tomb because He came back to life, and that we, too, will share in His resurrection. In His holy name we pray, amen.

Thought to Remember

His tomb was empty because Jesus is alive!

Anticipating Next Week's Lesson

In our lesson next week we will see how true happiness can be experienced even in this world. Study Matthew 5:1-16.

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