



Mark 16:1-8

Jesus is not here; He has Risen!

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is a historical event. It took place on a given date, at a specified time and place. The facts are Jesus of Nazareth had been crucified and buried two days earlier, and on the third day He came forth from the tomb. The Risen One was the Crucified One.

In Mark 16, the author writes in a brief, blunt and fast-moving pace as he has done throughout his gospel. It is a vivid description of the early morning hours on the first day of the week following the crucifixion and burial of Jesus Christ. Mark places his emphasis on the empty tomb; the other historians place emphasis on the testimony of individuals who saw Jesus alive after His resurrection.

"One thing is certain", writes William Barclay, "if Jesus had not risen from the dead, we would never have heard of Him. . . The attitude of the disciples was that everything had finished in tragedy. By far the best proof of the Resurrection is the existence of the Christian church" (*Daily Study Bible Series, The Gospel of Mark*, p. 368).

Women Arrive at the Tomb to Anoint Jesus (Mark 16:1-3)

After sunset on Saturday, when the new Jewish day had begun three devout women went to the market to purchase sweet-smelling perfumed oils. "When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome, bought spices, so that they might come and anoint Him. Very early on the first day of the week, they came to the tomb when the sun had risen. They were saying to one another, 'Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance of the tomb?'" (Mark 16:1-3). All Scripture references are from New American Standard Bible 1995 Update).

Mark gives credible evidence by identifying the women by name who were eye witnesses of the crucifixion, burial of Jesus Christ, and the empty tomb (Mark 15:40, 47; 16:1).

The women go and buy spices for the anointing of the dead body

The Jewish people did not embalm their bodies in the first century. They poured aromatic spices over the body to offset the stench of decomposing bodies, and to express their love.

These women, like the disciples, were not expecting to find Jesus alive, even though He had repeatedly told the disciples He would after three days (Mark 8:31; 9:31; 10:34).

The Jewish day began after sunset. Mary of Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and James, and Salome on Saturday evening after sunset around 6 pm bought expensive spices so they might go to the tomb and anoint the dead body of Jesus. The shops that had been closed for the Sabbath reopened briefly at the conclusion of the Sabbath. However, it would be too late for the women to go to the tomb. Two of these women had seen the body buried three days earlier (Mark 15:46-47). The three had watched the crucifixion from a distance that terrible day. Archaeologists have discovered in Palestinian tombs dating to the first century clay and glass perfume bottles, ointment jars, etc. that were used to contain the sweet perfume oils for anointing. Mark says the women purchased these spices or aromatics to "anoint" Jesus' body. The women would pour the oils over the burial cloths Joseph and Nicodemus had wound around His body on Saturday.

On Sunday morning it was probably still dark when the women started out in the direction of the tomb, and the sun had risen when they arrived at the tomb. The apostle John tells us Mary Magdalene had arrived at the tomb earlier that Sunday morning "while it was yet dark" (John 20:1). The other two women joined her a little later. She came "while it was yet dark," and they came "when the sun had risen." When she saw the stone rolled back, instead of going in, she ran to tell Peter and John that someone had taken away the Lord out of the tomb. Then she returned to the empty tomb following Peter and John (John 20:1-2).

Two of the women are concerned about the very large stone covering the doorway to the tomb. They were saying to one another as they walked along the way, "Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance of the tomb?" (Mark 16:3; cf. 15:47). They had not thought about asking men to join them and remove the stone. They were also probably not aware of the Jewish officials sealing the tomb and posting guards (Matt. 27:62-66).

The other two women did not jump to conclusions as Mary Magdalene had. They came to anoint the dead body of Jesus, and were astonished when greeted by the "young man" in the tomb who greeted them with the news that Jesus was not there, and that Jesus had risen.

The Empty Tomb (Mark 16:4-6)

The women arrived on the scene heavy hearted and downcast, and suddenly "Looking up, they saw that the stone had been rolled away, although it was extremely large. Entering the tomb, they saw a young man sitting at the right, wearing a white robe; and they were amazed. And he said to them, 'Do not be amazed; you are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who has been

crucified. He has risen; He is not here; behold, here is the place where they laid Him" (Mark 16:4-6).

Who rolled away the stone?

Mark does not tell us how the stone was rolled back. He simply states the fact. When the women arrived at the tomb they found the "extremely large" stone rolled already away (v. 4). The tomb was that of a rich man, Joseph of Arimathea, which had never been used (Luke 23:53; Matt. 27:50; cf. Isa. 53:9). It had been cut out of bedrock and had a stone bench or shelf cut into the rock parallel with the chamber. Entrance was through a rectangle doorway about two feet high. Small low doorways between the antechamber and the burial chamber were standard features in Jewish tombs during the days of Jesus. The inner chamber where the body of Jesus had been laid was probably six by seven feet square and about six feet high. Archaeologists tell us the tombs of the first century were normally sealed with a flat stone wedged into place to keep animals out. However, since this was a rich man's tomb it probably had a large, circular flat, disk-shaped stone, three or four feet in diameter, like a millstone with a wide slot cut into the rock. The groove would be sloped toward the doorway so that when in a closed position it would be easily rolled into place. However, as the women were preoccupied that it would take several men to roll the stone back in an open position.

The exceptionally large stone was rolled back after the resurrection. It was not rolled away to let Jesus out; it was rolled back to let the witnesses in to see that the tomb was empty. Jesus had already left the tomb when He rose from the dead before the stone was rolled back. Jesus was not in there; He had already left. When God raised Him from the dead He simply passed through the grave-clothes, and the stone tomb, just as He would enter and leave locked rooms during the next forty days.

R. C. H. Lenski has an interesting observation: "Matthew tells us that an angel rolled the stone away and sat on it. It was not rolled aside in its groove in the regular way so as to be rolled back again to shut the entrance. No, it was hurled out of its groove by some tremendous power, thrown flat upon the ground in front of the tomb, thus making a seat for the angel who waited until the women drew near and then went inside the tomb" (*Interpretation of St. Mark's Gospel*).

What did they see in the empty tomb? They saw "a young man" dressed in a white robe who was obviously an angel from Mark's description (cf. Mark 9:3; Matt. 28:3; John 20:12; Rev. 6:11; 7:9, 13), and he is sitting to their right in front of the burial chamber (cf. Matt. 28:2). Luke and John inform us that there were two angels in the tomb (Luke 24:4; John 20:12). Mark and Matthew focus on the one angel who was probably the spokesman. "Entering the tomb, they

saw a young man sitting at the right, wearing a white robe; and they were amazed" (v. 5). Matthew and Mark are describing the same heavenly being in the tomb. In the Bible angels appear to humans in human form so they can be called a man and can communicate to humans in our language (cf. Gen. 18:2, 16; 19:1ff; Judges 6:12ff; 13). The women saw the angel and were "amazed," "alarmed" or "dumbfounded." The compound word (*exethambēthēsan*) expresses strong emotion of overwhelming distress. These women were terrified (*tromos*), trembling with fear, which becomes the dominant idea in verse eight. Angels unwittingly tend to do that to people. The "white" raiment would indicate the dazzling character of their glory.

The women were looking for the dead body of Jesus, but it was not there, of course. But what was left in the tomb? All the undisturbed grave-clothes were in place. These grave clothes were lying in the very folds as they had been wound around the body of the crucified Jesus. The napkin that had been around the head of Jesus was laid separately as it would be separated from the other wrappings as they were around the dead body. Joseph of Arimatea and Nicodemus had wrapped the dead body with many wrappings of linen (John 19:39-40). The linen sheet was not folded around the body of Jesus. For the purpose of wrapping the body the linen was cut into long strips and these wound around the limbs and body. His body was wrapped in bandages of linen, and a hundred pounds of gummy aromatic spices were sprinkled between the wrappings in a careful methodical and organized manner. All of these wrappings were undisturbed, yet the body had gone out of them in a miraculous manner.

The apostle John tells us that when Peter and John arrived at the empty tomb they saw these grave-clothes lying exactly as they had been wrapped around the body of Jesus with the exception that the body was not in the wrappings. This convinced them that Jesus was risen (John 20:3-10).

The grave-clothes were not disturbed. They were not unwrapped and carefully folded up and laid aside like taking off your clothes at night. It was not like someone had unwrapped the body of Jesus of the grave-clothing. These undisturbed grave-clothe wrappings demonstrated clearly to the disciples that Jesus was risen from the dead.

The angel was there simply guarding the evidence at the tomb.

The declaration of the angel – "He is risen"

This is the central truth of historic Christianity. Jesus is alive! God raised Him from the dead (Acts 3:15; 4:10; Rom. 4:24; 8:11; 10:9; 1 Cor. 6:14; 15:15; 2 Cor. 4:14; 1 Pet 1:21).

The angel commands the women, "Don't be amazed" (*ekthambeo*) in the original means to stop an action already begun. "Stop being dumfounded." In this context stop being thrown

into terror, stop being terrified. W. E. Vine notes, it is "probably connected with a root signifying 'to render immovable'; it is frequently associated with terror as well as astonishment." William Hendriksen notes, "these women were thoroughly scared, profoundly shocked." They were "astonished, bewilderment, being 'beside themselves' with terror." They are filled with fear and astonishment. "They had been rendered speechless." "It is also true that when they had somewhat recovered from their mental terror they ran to deliver to the apostles the message that had been entrusted to them" (*Mark*, p. 681).

The angel knows all about their coming to the tomb. They are seeking the dead body of Jesus the Nazarene. But there is only one problem; He is not here, and He is not dead. He is risen. Mark stresses that the tomb in which Jesus's body was laid on Friday afternoon was now empty on Sunday morning.

The angel said to the women: "And he said to them, 'Do not be amazed; you are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who has been crucified. He has risen; He is not here; behold, here is the place where they laid Him'" (*Mark* 16:6). The angel clearly identified the Risen One as the Crucified One, Jesus of Nazareth.

Mark identifies the one who was crucified and risen from the dead as Jesus of Nazareth. He had recorded the resurrection prophecies in 8:31; 9:9, 31; 10:34; 14:28. The whole saving Gospel is centered in a historical person who lived, died, and rose from the dead. "He has risen; He is not here; behold, here is the place where they laid Him" (v. 6). Come, look for yourself.

"He has risen." The Greek aorist tense, He is risen, states the reality as a past event. The Greek verb is passive. This "divine passive" points to the fact that Jesus was raised by God.

The New Testament normally refers to the Resurrection as God's act. "He is not here" is irrefutable proof. His resurrection explained why they cannot find His dead body in the tomb. The proof the angel offered them was the empty tomb. Come, see the empty place where they laid Him. You can see for yourself that it is not here. The *Translations Helps* suggests, "'Look! (this is) the place where they placed Him', 'here (is) the place where they laid him.'"

The place where they laid Him was a shelf or niche carved in soft rock. There were usually several of these around a larger space where a visiting family member could stand.

These women were the first to be told the good news, and observe the truth of Jesus' resurrection. This is one of the strongest evidence that the testimony is true. The Jewish courts did not accept the testimony of women. Moreover, the Greco-Roman society in the first century looked down on women. Therefore, the early church did not fabricate the testimony of these women as to the resurrection. They simply told the story as it occurred. It was historical evidence they recorded.

Go and Tell His Disciples (Mark 16:7-8)

"But go, tell His disciples and Peter, 'He is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see Him, just as He told you.' They went out and fled from the tomb, for trembling and astonishment had gripped them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid" (Mark 16:7-8).

The first impulse of the women was to flee, run away, and escape the scene. These women responded the same way Peter did at the Transfiguration (Mark 9:6), and "fled from the tomb, trembling and astonishment had gripped them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid." They were panic-stricken, terrified. The continuing excitement caused their bodies to tremble. These women were profoundly scared and shocked. They were beside themselves with terror. These women did not stop along the way until they reached the disciples to tell them what had happened and the message the angel declared to them. Their silence was only for a little while.

"As they gained control of themselves and they began to realize the profound reality that had been declared to them, they felt 'great joy' (Matt. 28:8) and astonishment or 'ecstasy.' They felt an utter amazement which swept them quite outside their normal selves" (Edmond Hiebert, *Mark: A Portrait of the Servant*).

James Brooks said, "The fear may not be natural fright but religious awe" that we see often in the Old Testament "(Exo. 3:3; Isa. 6:1-5; Jer. 1:6-8; Ezek. 1:22; Luke 1:29-30)" (*The New American Commentary, Mark*, p. 273). The *NET* Bible translation note reads, "they began to have trembling and bewilderment." It was a reverential fear in the presence of the LORD God who had raised the dead. William Lane says, "The cause of the women's fear is the presence and action of God at the tomb of Jesus" (*NICNT, Mark*).

The angel wants them to especially tell Peter, the very disciple who had denied Jesus (Mark 14:66-72). Jesus appeared to Peter; he has been forgiven (Luke 24:34; 1 Cor. 15:5-6). The resurrection appearances of Jesus around Jerusalem were necessary to convince the disciples of the reality of His resurrection. Jesus had told the disciples before His death that He would meet them in Galilee (Mark 14:28; Matt. 28:7).

Mark's commission of the disciples is probably a part of the Great Commission given by Jesus on the mountain in Galilee (Matt. 28:16-20; cf. Luke 24:47-49; John 20:21; 21:15-17; Acts 1:4-8).

Jesus' post-resurrection appearances (Mark 16:9-14)

Mark 16:9-20 is known as "the longer ending of Mark" and presents one of the most difficult and most disputed textual problems in the New Testament. It is not my purpose to enter into that discussion here. All scholarly commentaries on Mark discuss it at length. The issue is not whether you believe in the inspired, inerrant and infallible Word of God. Were these verses included or omitted in Mark's original text? Most conservative commentaries on Mark state that this section was not written by Mark, but is included by all translations. Most modern English translations make note of the textual variations indicate by brackets, section headings or footnotes that Mark did not write it, but was added by scribes attempting to give a smooth ending to the gospel. It may not have been in the original manuscript.

The Greek scholar A. T. Robertson observed, "It is difficult to believe that Mark ended his Gospel with verse 8 unless he was interrupted. A leaf or column may have been torn off at the end of the papyrus roll. The loss of the ending was treated in various ways. Some documents left it alone. Some added one ending, some another, some added both" (*Work Pictures in the New Testament, vol. 1, Mark*).

Mark gives us a summary report on three post-resurrection appearances of the risen Christ. Observe how Mark stresses the fact that the disciples reacted to the reports of Jesus resurrection with unbelief.

Mark 16:9-11 gives Mary Magdalene's abrupt return visit to the tomb while it was still early on the same morning. Jesus appeared and made Himself visible to Mary (John 20:14-17). She was the first person to see Jesus alive after His resurrection. "Now after He had risen early on the first day of the week, He first appeared to Mary Magdalene, from whom He had cast out seven demons. She went and reported to those who had been with Him, while they were mourning and weeping. When they heard that He was alive and had been seen by her, they refused to believe it" (Mark 16:9-11; cf. Luke 8:11; 24:11; John 20:1-18). Evidently Jesus appeared also to the other two women urging them to go and tell the disciples (Matt. 28:1, 9-10). It is quite possible that Jesus appeared to the other women as they were hurrying back from the tomb.

Only Mark tells us that all the disciples in general were "mourning and weeping." They were doing what any normal person does when they have lost a dear friend and loved one. "All their hopes were crushed by the death of Jesus," notes Lenski.

All of the disciples refused to believe Mary until they saw Jesus personally with their own eyes. They would not believe the report that He was living and had been seen by her. *Apisteo* means "disbelieve, refuse to believe."

Mark 16:12-13 is a summary of the two disciples on the road to Emmaus who encountered the risen Christ (Luke 24:13-36). They had heard the rumors of the day about women who said they had seen Jesus alive, but they didn't believe them. From various post-resurrection passages Jesus appeared to them in a form different from that in which they previously recognized Him. The disciples did not even believe these two men! Now men and women are reporting to the disciples that they have seen Jesus. Jewish people accepted only the testimony of two witnesses. Now three women and two men declare they have seen Jesus alive. As the day progresses more and more people are seeing Jesus alive (Luke 24:36-43; John 20:19-31).

Mark records Jesus' rebuke of His disciples' unbelief because they refused to accept the testimony of the eyewitnesses to His resurrection earlier during the day. "Afterward He appeared to the eleven themselves as they were reclining at the table; and He reproached them for their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they had not believed those who had seen Him after He had risen" (v. 14).

Jesus commission to His disciples (Mark 16:15-18)

He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation" (Mark 16:15). The main verb is in the imperative, and the participle also has imperative force, "You go!" The primary duty is simply stated to go forth into the entire world and preach the good news of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. No part of the world is to be omitted. We are "to preach the gospel" (*kerusso*).

After His resurrection and before His ascension Jesus gave several commissions to His disciples to go and preach the gospel to all nations (Matt. 28:18-20; Luke 24:47-49; John 20:21; 21:15-17; Acts 1:4-8).

The misinterpretation of Mark 16:15-16 comes from a superficial reading of the passage. John 3:16-18, 36 teaches that a person who does not believe is condemned already, even if he is baptized in water. The first century church taught that under normal circumstances believers would be baptized because they had believed on Jesus Christ (Acts 2:41; 8:36-37; 10:44-46). They were not baptized in order to be saved, but they were baptized because they were already saved by putting their faith in Christ. Baptism is the outward, public expression of that faith in Christ. Baptism is not a necessary requirement for personal salvation. The only Biblical basis for appropriating God's provision of salvation is personal faith in Jesus Christ (Rom. 3:21-28; 10:9-10, 13; Eph. 2:8-10; Gal. 2:16; John 3:16).

A. T. Robertson notes, "The omission of baptized with 'disbelieved' would seem to show that Jesus does not make baptism essential to salvation. Condemnation rests on disbelief, not on

baptism. So salvation rests on belief. Baptism is mere the picture of the new life, not the means of securing it."

Bratcher and Nida in *Translation Helps* note "the single definite article governing both participles joins the two verbs together in describing the man who will be saved; the clause could be translated, 'the baptized believer.'" It is an individual response to the gospel. The one article connects "the inward reception of the gospel by faith and the outward testimony to that faith in baptism," says Edmund Hiebert. Unbelief condemns a person whether baptized or unbaptized in the Day of Judgment. The issue is not whether a person is baptized or not, but faith in Jesus Christ. We are saved by God's free grace alone, through faith alone in the saving gospel of Jesus Christ alone to the glory of the Lord God alone.

Mark 16:17-18 gives authenticating signs that took place in the first century by the Apostles (cf. Heb. 2:3-4). These are recorded in the book of Acts (Acts 2:3f; 10:46; 19:6; 1 Cor. 12:28; ch. 14). Hiebert states, "The promise is not that each individual believer will experience such signs in his own life. The promise is to the church collectively.... These signs were the authenticating credentials of the apostolic message, exhibiting the presence of the living Christ working with and through His messengers. They served not to accredit the faith of the individual but the validity of the faith he represented" (*Mark: A Portrait of the Servant*).

We have no Biblical evidence of anyone drinking poison and handling snakes in worship services. Paul was bitten by a poisonous viper on the island of Malta and survived (Acts 28:3-6). In the historical context of the first century Christianity we understand these authenticating signs were normative only for the apostolic area (2 Cor. 12:12; Heb. 2:3-4). With the establishment of the churches and the formation of the New Testament canon these signs were no longer necessary and ceased with the first century.

The Ascension of Jesus Christ (Mark 16:19-20)

"So then, when the Lord Jesus had spoken to them, He was received up into heaven and sat down at the right hand of God. And they went out and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them, and confirmed the word by the signs that followed" (Mark 16:19-20).

Mark says, Jesus "was received up into heaven" or as RSV reads, "taken up into heaven." The Father drew His Son to Himself. Jesus' work on the earth is completed, now He sits at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven interceding for us as our Great high Priest (Luke 9:51; 24:51;

John 6:62; 10:17; Acts 7:55-56; Rom. 8:34; Eph. 1:20; Col. 3:1; 1 Tim. 3:16; Heb. 1:1-4; 8:1; 10:12; 12:2; 1 Pet. 3:22; 1 John 2:1-2; Rev. 3:21). "Jesus "sat down at the right hand of God" is highly metaphorical language to direct our attention to the transcendent glory of our risen and ascended Lord and Savior. This session at God's right hand signifies permanence, rest, and dominion, in glory, majesty, and blessedness. Albert Barnes says: "We are not to suppose that God has hands, or that Jesus sits in any particular direction from God. This phrase is taken from the manner of speaking among men, and means that He was exalted to honor and power in the heavens. It was esteemed the place of the highest honor to be seated at the right hand of a prince. So, to be seated at the right hand of God, means that Jesus is exalted to the highest honor of the universe" (*Matthew and Mark, Notes on the New Testament*).

Robertson helps us understand the chronology of the ascension. "Luke gives the fact of the Ascension twice in Gospel (Luke 24:50f) and Acts 1:9-11. The Ascension in Mark took place after Jesus spoke to the disciples, not in Galilee (16:15-18), nor on the first or second Sunday evening in Jerusalem. We should not know when it took place nor where but for Luke who locates it on Olivet (Luke 24:50) at the close of the forty days (Acts 1:3) and so after the return from Galilee (Matt. 28:16)" (*Word Pictures of the New Testament, vol. 1, Mark*).

Some Abiding Principles and Practical Applications

1. God rolled away the very large stone to let the witnesses in to see the empty tomb.

Yes, he used the angels (Matt. 28:2). There was also the powerful earthquake. The removal of the stone was a supernatural event to prove to the women and the disciples that Jesus had risen from the grave and was alive.

2. Jesus Christ was "delivered for our offenses, and was raised again for our justification" (Rom. 4:25).

Jesus died for our sins and rose from the dead so that God could be just and the justifier of the sinner who puts his trust in Christ for salvation.

3. The resurrection of Jesus Christ proves that He is the very Son of God (Rom. 1:4).

Here is the evidence that Jesus is who He claimed to be. Here is the reason why we can put our confidence in Him to save us for all eternity. Because He rose from the dead all our sins are forgiven, and we stand right in our relationship before God.

4. The resurrection of Jesus Christ proves that death has been emptied of its power by the death and resurrection of Christ.

Because He lives, we too shall live with Him for all eternity. Christ's resurrection is the crowning proof that Jesus Christ paid the price in full for the sinners redemption, and that it has been accepted by a holy and righteous God. Jesus paid it all; the sting of death has been removed forever.

5. "Thousands are washed in sacramental water, who are never washed in the blood of Christ.

. . . The baptismal water itself conveys no grace," wrote J. C. Ryle. This passage of Scripture teaches us that absolute necessity of faith in Christ for salvation. It is not baptism, church membership, good works, sacraments, etc., but a personal faith in Jesus Christ for salvation.

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead" (1 Peter 1:3).

6. How do we respond when we contemplate the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ and the mighty power of God?

"If you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation.... for 'Whoever will call on the name of the Lord will be saved'" (Romans 10:9-10, 13).

Wil is a graduate of William Carey University, B. A.; New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, Th. M.; and Azusa Pacific University, M. A. He has pastored in Panama, Ecuador and the U. S, and served for over 20 years as missionary in Ecuador and Honduras. He had a daily expository Bible teaching ministry head in over 100 countries from 1972 until 2005. He continues to seek opportunities to be personally involved in world missions. Wil and his wife Ann have three grown daughters. He currently serves as a Baptist missionary and teaches seminary extension courses and evangelism conferences in Honduras, Nicaragua, Peru and Ecuador.