

INTRODUCTION

My wife keeps telling me I'm losing my hearing. Some husbands call it "selective hearing." An older couple was sitting outside in their rocking chairs one afternoon. She looked at her husband of 60 years and said, "I'm proud of you." He turned to her and said, "I'm tired of you, too." She said, "Thanks!" She looked around at the trees moving and said, "It's windy today." He said, "No it's not. It's Thursday." She said, "Me too, I'll go get us some lemonade!"

Hopefully we won't be hard of hearing when it comes to listening to God's Word. Today we come to the final message in the series from Mark I have called The reMARKable Power of Jesus. Mark is the action-packed gospel with more miracles per chapter than the other Gospels.

Over the next few weeks I'm going to bracket our "I Love America" celebration with two messages entitled "Blessed is the Nation Whose God is the Lord." Then, God willing, starting July 10, we'll begin a verse-by-verse study of Hebrews entitled "Eyes on Jesus."

Now before we get into Mark 16 most of your Bibles have a footnote or a heading that mentions that some of these verses don't appear in the earliest Greek manuscripts. You may be thinking, "What's up with that?" There are over 5,600 Greek manuscripts of the New Testament. It is, by far, the most validated ancient document. For instance, compare that to the number of manuscripts from Plato; there are 7. I love the King James Version of the Bible. I grew up reading it and memorizing it. But when it was translated in 1611, the earliest and most complete Greek manuscripts hadn't been discovered. So are these verses supposed to be in the Bible? I agree with one of my Southern Baptist heroes, Dr. Herschel Hobbs who wrote: "Even if one rejects this ending, one does not lose the basic teaching of scripture that is contained in it. For all of these teachings are found elsewhere in the other three Gospels and in the book of Acts."

Mark 16:1-20. "When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices so that they might go to anoint Jesus' body. Very early on the first day of the week, just after sunrise, they were on their way to the tomb and they asked each other, 'Who will roll the stone away from the entrance of the tomb?'"

"But when they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had been rolled away. As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man dressed in a white robe sitting on the right side, and they were alarmed. 'Don't be alarmed,' he said. 'You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him. But go, tell his disciples and Peter, 'He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.'" Trembling and bewildered, the women went out and fled from the tomb. They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid."

"When Jesus rose early on the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom he had driven seven demons. She went and told those who had been with him and who were mourning and weeping. When they heard that Jesus was alive and that she had seen him, they did not believe it. Afterward Jesus appeared in a different form to two of them while they were walking in the country. These returned and reported it to the rest; but they did not believe them either."

“Later Jesus appeared to the Eleven as they were eating; he rebuked them for their lack of faith and their stubborn refusal to believe those who had seen him after he had risen. He said to them, ‘Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned. And these signs will accompany those who believe: In my name they will drive out demons; they will speak in new tongues; they will pick up snakes with their hands; and when they drink deadly poison, it will not hurt them at all; they will place their hands on sick people, and they will get well.’ After the Lord Jesus had spoken to them, he was taken up into heaven and he sat at the right hand of God. Then the disciples went out and preached everywhere, and the Lord worked with them and confirmed his word by the signs that accompanied it.”

Sometimes we make a mistake of only talking about the Resurrection on Easter Sunday. Because the empty tomb was discovered on a Sunday morning, every Sunday should be a resurrection celebration. The title of this message is “He’s Alive! Do you Believe Him?” At first I was going to ask, “Do you believe IT?” But the resurrection is more than just an historical event that you believe IN. Jesus is a risen Savior, and salvation comes by believing in Him.

In this message we’re going to hear the announcement of the angel, consider the unbelief of the disciples, and hear the Jesus give us our marching orders.

I. THE ANGEL ANNOUNCED, “HE’S ALIVE!”

Once again we must admire the women who followed Jesus. They were there at the cross. They were the last ones in the garden when Joseph and Nicodemus placed Jesus’ body in the tomb. And early on Sunday morning, they were the first ones heading back to the tomb. They were carrying additional spices to anoint the corpse of Christ. They’re biggest concern was how they were going to roll the huge stone away from the opening of the tomb.

But they were totally surprised to arrive and find the stone was already rolled away. These brave women went into the tomb. Jesus wasn’t there, but they saw a young man dressed in white. This is a description the Bible often uses for angels. Of course, the women were confused and terrified. The angel said, “Don’t be afraid. I know you’re looking for Jesus. He isn’t here. He has risen! Then the angel gave them two sets of instructions. These are the same instructions we should follow today.

A. He said, “Come see!”

He invited them to examine the tomb and look for the evidence. The tomb was empty, but it was full of significance. In John’s account, we’re told the strips of cloth that had covered the body of Jesus were stacked up along with the sheet covering His body. These women had to be wondering if this was a dream. They had seen the torture and crucifixion of Jesus. They watched as His body was removed from the cross and placed in the tomb. They knew He was dead. But they were confronted with an empty tomb.

In Acts 1:3 the Bible says Jesus offered the disciples many more “convincing proofs” that He was alive. In years past I’ve talked about the convincing proofs of the resurrection. If you are going to examine the evidence of the resurrection, you have to start with the empty tomb. Even the enemies of Jesus admitted the tomb was empty. Then you are confronted with only three possibilities. First, Jesus really didn’t die; that’s the swoon theory. Second, His body was stolen, either by his enemies or by his disciples. Or third, God raised Jesus from the dead. Come see. Decide for yourself. But as I said earlier, it’s not about believing IT; it’s about believing Him.

B. He said, “Go tell!”

The angel told the women to go tell the disciples that Jesus was alive and He would meet them in Galilee. However, notice their reaction in verse eight. It says trembling and bewildered they fled: They didn’t tell anyone because they were afraid. I can’t really blame them. They were in shock. A little while later Jesus appeared to Mary Magdalene and she delivered the message.

We’ve been given the same command to “go tell” the world that Jesus is alive. How often have we been guilty of the initial behavior of the women? Like them, we are too afraid to share the Good News. I recall as a teenager when I first learned that Jesus wanted me to share my faith with others. I knew I was supposed to, but I was afraid. I had been given some Campus Crusade tracts “The Four Spiritual Laws.” My first attempt was a total failure. I finally got up enough courage to ask one of my classmates. “Have you heard of the Four Spiritual Laws?” He said, “No, what songs do they sing?” I was so flustered, I said, “Never mind!”

But later that year I finally found enough courage to ask a classmate of mine named Charles if he would be willing to take a religious survey. It was also a Campus Crusade tool. It was during study hall and the teacher let us use the conference room. I didn’t have to say anything. The survey basically led him through the plan of salvation. The last question was something like, “Would you like to turn from your sins and place your faith in Jesus right now?” He wrote, “Yes.” And then he read a prayer of commitment. I didn’t know anything about follow up or discipleship, so I just said, “Thanks for taking the survey.” Several years later Charles thanked me for leading him to Christ that day. God can use even shy teenagers and God can use you to go tell. The best tool to use is your personal faith story. Just tell people naturally what the risen Lord has done in your life.

II. THE DISCIPLES DOUBTED THE REPORTS

Meanwhile the eleven disciples (twelve minus Judas), we hiding behind closed doors weeping and mourning. Mary and the women come running in, “Jesus is alive.” The Bible says they didn’t believe her.

Mark mentions that later two other people show up claiming they had seen Jesus alive. In Luke 24 we read the story of Jesus appearing to two disciples who were walking from Jerusalem to Emmaus, a distance of eleven miles. They didn’t recognize Jesus. I would have loved to have been on that original walk to Emmaus, because the Bible says Jesus started with Moses (that’s Genesis) and took them all the way through the Old Testament telling how all the scriptures predicted the Messiah would suffer and die. When they finally arrived at their house, they invited

their companion to join them for dinner. Jesus, who was the guest, became the host, because the Bible says when He broke the bread, their eyes were opened and they recognized it was Jesus. Then He, poof!, just disappeared. They were so excited they turned around and traveled eleven miles back to tell the disciples. I imagine they ran this time. Out of breath, I can hear one of them telling Peter, "We saw the Lord! He's alive!" Mary probably chimed in, "See I told you!" But it says the disciples still didn't believe.

Of course, Jesus is aware of all of this, so He appeared in the room and rebuked the disciples. He said, "Where's your faith, guys? I told you I would come back from the grave, and then these witnesses told you. But you guys are stubborn as a mule. Here I am. Now do you believe?" I'm sure they backtracked and said, "Sorry, Lord. Yes, now we believe!"

I think we learn an important lesson from this episode. The best proof of the resurrection isn't an empty tomb. The best proof of the resurrection is when you meet Jesus.

I know Jesus is alive not because of any of the arguments about the historical resurrection. I know He's alive because He's my best friend. He lives inside of me and I talk to Him all the time.

When Saul was persecuting the church, he heard all their claims that Jesus was alive, but he didn't believe any of them. In fact, he approved of Stephen's death, and was active in arresting Christians. But one day on the road to Damascus he suddenly believed in the resurrection, because he had a close encounter of the Jesus kind. Later he wrote about the post-resurrection appearances of Jesus. "He presented himself alive to Peter, then to his closest followers, and later to more than five hundred of his followers all at the same time, most of them still around (although a few have since died); that he then spent time with James and the rest of those he commissioned to represent him; and that he finally presented himself alive to me." (1 Corinthians 15:5-8 MSG)

Paul had heard all the arguments, but he didn't believe it. But when he met Jesus, he believed Him. It's great if you ever get a chance to visit the empty tomb in Jerusalem, but you don't need to see that. You just need to know Him. Salvation isn't knowing *about* Jesus; it is *knowing* Jesus.

III. JESUS GAVE US A JOB TO DO

In these final words of Mark's writing, he packs the great commission, God's promise of protection and the ascension together. Jesus has given us three tasks to do.

A. "Tell everyone the good news about Me!"

Jesus said, "And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come." (Matthew 24:14) As I've said before, we're not seeing a spiritual awakening in North America but there is an amazing explosion of growth in the global church. There are 2.3 billion Christians, twice as many as the number of Muslims. Christianity is the fastest growing faith in the world. There are over 400,000 missionaries taking the gospel to every people group on the planet. There are more Christians in China than any

other nation. At the current rate of growth, there will be more Christians in China than the entire U.S. population by 2030. The largest church in the world is the Redeemed Christian Church of God in Nigeria.

We need to be aware that international missions can happen right here at home. Each year 2.2 million internationals visit the U.S. Over 600,000 of them are university students. East Texas has a huge population of internationals. I want to challenge our church to intentionally reach out to the international community here in East Texas and show them God's love.

B. "I will equip and empower you!"

Jesus said, "I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high." (Luke 24:49) It's a dangerous plan to start driving your car across a desert with your gas tank on empty. You won't make it. And it's frustrating to try to serve the Lord without the power of the Holy Spirit. If the disciples had immediately gone out and started sharing, they would have failed. But they prayed for ten days after Jesus ascended and they were filled with the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost and they were empowered and equipped. Thousands were saved and added to the church. We're the same way. We must always pray for the filling of the Holy Spirit. "It's not by your might, or by your power, but by my Spirit says the Lord."

C. "I will protect you until you finish your assignment!"

"Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze. For I am the Lord your God." (Isaiah 43:1-3)

Did you catch what Jesus said about poisonous snakes and drinking poison? Obviously, there are some churches that have taken those words so literally that they have services where they take poisonous snakes out of boxes and handle them to show their faith. How many of you have heard of snake-handling churches? These tend to be small Pentecostal churches in the Appalachian region. Snake handling is outlawed in every state except West Virginia.

Wendy Bagwell was a Southern Gospel singer and comedian. He tells the story about his group being in a little church to sing and they started bringing out the rattlesnakes to handle. Wendy asked the pastor, "Where is your back door? We're leaving." The Pastor said, "We don't have a back door." Wendy asked him, "Well, where do you want one?"

Someone once asked me what I thought about snake handling and I said, "I think a lot of them are dead." And indeed dozens of them have died. I suppose because their faith wasn't strong enough. I don't want to make fun of any group, because these folks are sincere. I just think they're sincerely wrong. So what was Jesus talking about? I think the perfect fulfillment of his promise can be found in Acts 28. The Apostle Paul was shipwrecked on the island of Malta. They were building a fire on the beach. A viper came out of the woods and bit Paul on the hand.

He just shook it off into the fire. All the natives expect him to swell up and die. But when he didn't, they thought he was a god, so they took him to the main official on the island.

Eusebius one of the early church fathers wrote about a young pastor named Justus Barsabbas who was going to be executed by the Romans. They fed him poison. But he survived.

These words shouldn't be a license to tempt God. But it's Jesus' promise that He will protect you while you are on mission for Him. You wonder, "I know of some missionaries who have died in service for the Lord." The Bible says our days are numbered and it is appointed once for a person to die. Sometimes God gets more glory in the death of a servant than in their living.

CONCLUSION

When I was studying to teach about the radical reformers and our roots that stretch to the Anabaptists I learned about the Moravian Believers in Herrnhut, Germany. In 1727 they started a round-the-clock prayer meeting that lasted over 100 years. It might have been one or two praying for an hour at a time, but the prayer meeting continued. Out of the prayer meeting rose a desire to send missionaries to the New World. These were the very first missionaries sent out from Europe. Many missionaries were sent to Jamaica to evangelize the slaves. The Moravians willingly sold themselves into slavery in order to evangelize them. Before all the Moravian missionaries left Germany the church there held their funeral—while they were alive! It was their way of saying they were willing to die to share the gospel.

Dr. Martha Myers was a graduate of Robert E. Lee High School in Montgomery, Alabama. She graduated from Samford University and attended medical school at UAB. After graduation she completed a residency in OBGYN at the University of South Alabama School of Medicine. Then she went straight to the mission field as a Southern Baptist Missionary to Yemen. For 22 years she gave free medical care to the women and children in Yemen, showing them the love of Jesus. In 2002, a man walked into the Baptist Hospital carrying what looked to be a child wrapped in a blanket. It was a rifle. He pulled it out and shot four missionaries. Three of them died, including Martha Myers.

When asked why he shot her, the gunman, whose wife Dr. Myers had led to Christ reported, "She was spreading the love of Jesus in my nation and soon she would convert everyone."

She had requested to be buried in Yemen. On the day of her funeral, 40,000 Yemenis lined the streets. Thousands gathered at her burial. And in a nation where being a Christian is punishable by death many hundreds were singing "He is Lord" and praying The Lord's Prayer in Arabic.

The believers in Yemen still talk about Dr. Martha, and reports continue to pour in of the power of the underground church in Yemen.

If you've learned anything from our study of Mark, I hope you realize there is no limit to the Remarkable Power of Jesus Christ.

He's alive! Do you believe Him? Do you know Him? Will you follow Him?

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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes



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