

## ***The Redeemer's Rebuke***

***Mark 16:9-14***

***The sky's malevolent and black;  
The thunder booms and echoes back.  
Tornadoes roar as sheets of rain  
Assault and bolts of lightning crack.***

***But this cacophonist refrain  
Nor yet the midnight dark's disdain  
Is a surprise. I always knew  
That for a season sin would reign.***

***That's why, when faith and hope were new  
I dug out sins before they grew  
And shoveled sifting, shifting sand  
Away until I reached the true***

***Foundation time cannot command.  
Beyond the foolish fairyland  
Of supposition that can lock  
The heart in cells where faith can't stand,***

***I built upon that boulder Block  
The worst of savage storms can't mock.  
So I don't fear the night's attack  
My life is built upon the Rock.***

The Bible is a collection of ancient scrolls. Some were sealed in clay jars hidden away in desert caves. Archaeologists found others beneath the dust and debris of centuries.

More than 4000 ancient leather and papyrus scrolls of the New Testament exist today. Some are old and some are ancient.

All were laboriously hand copied by scribes. Nevertheless, all but a few words and stray passages are absolutely identical.

But those few differences present a serious problem. There is no room for error in the Holy Scriptures. The Bible warns against adding or taking anything away from God's Word.

***Whatever I command you, you shall be careful to do; you shall not add to nor take away from it. Deuteronomy 12:32***

So it is essential to know for sure which of the various texts is correct. However, none of the original scrolls written by apostles exist today. So Bible scholars must decide which handwritten version is an exact copy of the original written by an apostle.

To do that, scholars meticulously compare mountains of scrolls. And if later scrolls contain small passages that are missing in all the more ancient copies, it is obvious that somewhere along the line, someone added that passage.

That is what happened to Mark's Gospel. All the oldest and most reliable copies of Mark's account of Christ's life abruptly end with the eighth verse of the sixteenth chapter. The following twelve verses don't appear until at least a century after Mark first scratched words on a scroll, long after the first generation of believers had all died.

However, that isn't the only reason why Bible scholars are convinced someone else added these last twelve verses. Both the vocabulary and the style of Greek writing of those verses is radically and unmistakably different than the rest of Mark's account.

That doesn't mean these verses in the last half of the final chapter of Mark's Gospel are to be ignored. Many of these verses are merely summaries of post-resurrection accounts recorded by Matthew, Luke and John.

Still, Christians must be careful as they read and study these verses. While we can find important spiritual truths in them, we must not base anything we believe solely upon one of these verses.

However, that isn't a problem in the verses in the first half of that added passage. The subject here is one that is echoed from Genesis to Revelation: faith and doubt.

## ***The Reports***

Mary the mother of James and Salome ran back through the cool, spring morning to tell the disciples the tomb was empty and an angel had spoken to them. But Mary Magdalene didn't go with them.

She stayed behind. And in the first light of dawn, she stood on the grass outside the tomb, her face in her hands and her hands full of tears. She had never felt so lost and alone. But she wasn't really alone at all. As she wept the Savior stood quietly behind her.

***Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?" Supposing Him to be the gardener, she said to Him, "Sir, if you have carried Him away, tell me where you have laid Him, and I will take Him away." Jesus said to her, "Mary!" She turned and said to Him in Hebrew, "Rabboni!" (which means, Teacher). John 20:15-16***

It isn't at all surprising that Jesus appeared first to Mary. Neither is it astonishing that He dealt with her so tenderly.

***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. Verse 9***

Once, Mary had been lost so deep in darkness and so bound by slavery to dark demons, her life was unrelenting torture and torment. But then Jesus came to her dusty village. And with a few words, all the darkness fled.

So it is no wonder her love for our Lord ran so deep nor that she stood so strong. Speaking of another woman He delivered from the devil's darkness, our Savior identified the source of Mary's great love for her Lord.

***...her sins, which are many, have been forgiven, for she loved much; but he who is forgiven little, loves little. Luke 7:47***

After her encounter with Christ, Mary ran back to the disciples and added her story to that of the other two women.

***She went and reported to those who had been with Him, while they were mourning and weeping. Verse 10***

Later that same day, our Lord walked down the Joppa road with two men who, though not numbered among the Twelve disciples, were His faithful followers.

***After that, He appeared in a different form to two of them while they were walking along on their way to the country. Verse 12***

That verse is a summary of the complete account Luke wrote of that encounter. And he added another reason why the two men didn't recognize the Lord they loved.

***...their eyes were prevented from recognizing Him. Luke 24:16***

As Jesus walked with His disciples, He spoke to them with words that they later exclaimed burned within their hearts.

Our Lord explained how Old Testament Scriptures from Moses to Malachi prophesied the Messiah must be sacrificed and rise up from His grave. Finally, when they paused at an inn for supper, the Savior broke bread. And suddenly, they recognized Him.

Those two men reacted precisely as the women had that same morning. They ran back to tell the others.

***They went away and reported it to the others, Verse 13***

Everyone to whom our Redeemer revealed Himself reacted in the very same way. Bubbling over with excitement, they ran to tell their friends what had happened to them.

The lesson in that is wonderfully simple. It is especially intended for those of us who have tasted the sweet serenity and delightful deliverance of coming to know and love Jesus Christ.

We have both the honor and the obligation to tell our friends what the Savior has done for us. Indeed, that was Christ's command to a man dark demons called Legion.

After Jesus drove the demons out, He was getting into a boat to leave. And the man wanted to go with Him. But the Savior said no.

***He said to him, "Go home to your people and report to them what great things the Lord has done for you, and how He had mercy on you." Mark 5:19***

However, a deep desire to tell others about our personal encounter with Christ doesn't grow out of a sense of obligation. Peter and John put it best when they stood before the ruling council at Jerusalem months after Christ rose up into the clouds.

***...we cannot stop speaking about what we have seen and heard. Acts 4:20***

Overwhelming love for the Lord Jesus grows out of a knowledge of how much the Master has done for us.

And that love makes us want to tell others what He has done us.

## ***The Responses***

Mary of Magdala found the disciples in deep despair. With their Master mutilated and murdered, their sorrow was compounded with confusion and fear.

So we would expect them to welcome Mary's wonderful news. But they didn't

***When they heard that He was alive and had been seen by her, they refused to believe it. Verse 11***

Luke wrote that the disciples treated all the reports the women brought to them with both skepticism and contempt.

***Mary Magdalene and Joanna and Mary the mother of James; also the other women with them were telling these things to the apostles. But these words appeared to them as nonsense, and they would not believe them. Luke 24:10-11***

The same scene was repeated when the two men panted in after their long hike back from Emmaus.

***They went away and reported it to the others, but they did not believe them either. Verse 13***

According to Luke, while those two men were telling their story, the Savior came and stood in their midst.

But the disciples' doubt was so deep, even Christ's personal presence couldn't convince them. ***While they were telling these things, He Himself stood in their midst and said to them, "Peace be to you." But they were startled and frightened and thought that they were seeing a spirit. Luke 24:36-37***

Their disbelief was so deep, they not only found it impossible to believe what the two men told them. Even when they did see Jesus as the others had, they refused to believe their own eyes but thought they were seeing a spirit.

We are surprised at doubt so deep and disbelief so unyielding. But even more astounding is the reason why the disciples found it so difficult to believe Jesus was alive again.

In His parable of a rich man and a godly beggar named Lazarus, Our Redeemer said the root of all doubt has the same source. It is caused by a failure to believe God's Word.

***If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be persuaded even if someone rises from the dead. Luke 16:31***

That was also true of the disciples. They refused to believe those who had seen the Savior that first Easter because they didn't believe what He had told them time and time again.

***Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and all things which are written through the prophets about the Son of Man will be accomplished. For He will be handed over to the Gentiles, and will be mocked and mistreated and spit upon, and after they have scourged Him, they will kill Him; and the third day He will rise again. Luke 18:31-33***

Had the disciples really believed what their Lord had told them, they wouldn't have been at all surprised when their friends reported they had seen Jesus alive. They not only would have believed their reports. They would have expected them.

But they didn't believe what Jesus had told them. So any attempts to forge a genuine faith was like building a house on shifting sands. After all, God's Word is the immovable rock that must always form the foundation for faith in God.

***...faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. Romans 10:17 (NKJV)***

On that day of all days, the disciples were lost in grief and despair. And even the most glorious of all news couldn't breathe faith into their hearts.

That is the penalty for refusing to believe what God has said in His Word.

But it is not the only penalty.

## ***The Rebuke***

As the two men who walked with Jesus on the road to Emmaus told their story, suddenly the Savior came and stood among His disciples. And sometime that evening, He expressed His displeasure at their deep doubts.

***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. Verse 14***

This verse wasn't lifted from any of the other accounts of our Lord's post-resurrection appearances. But it isn't the only time Christ rebuked His disciples for their lack of faith that first Easter.

***O foolish men and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary for the Christ to suffer these things and to enter into His glory? Luke 24:25-27***

Our Lord rebuked His disciples for their entrenched unbelief for good reason. Their lack of faith wasn't the result of ignorance or a lack of information, of emotional stress or spiritual weakness. Like all doubt, theirs was a choice they made.

When Mary returned full of joy, bubbling that she had seen Jesus, the disciples didn't merely

doubt her story. *They refused to believe.* The same was true when the two men returned from Emmaus. The disciples simply refused to believe.

Our Redeemer's rebuke reminds us that refusing to believe both His Word and the testimony of His apostles is a sin. That is why He included it among the most heinous of all sins.

***...the cowardly and unbelieving and abominable and murderers and immoral persons and sorcerers and idolaters and all liars, their part will be in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death. Revelation 21:8***

It was essential for the disciples to believe the reports others brought to them. In a few short weeks, they would be the ones telling the story. Then others would have to believe them.

And that includes us. Everything we believe about Jesus' miracles and majesty, His sinless life and sacrificial death, His resurrection and return is built upon what those men experienced.

And that, John wrote, is the foundation of the Gospel itself.

***What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the Word of Life--and the life was manifested, and we have seen and testify and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was manifested to us--what we have seen and heard we proclaim to you...1 John 1:1-3***

Jesus also reprimanded His disciples because their hearts were too hard and insensitive to believe their friends' reports. And that too is a sin. It is a tragic choice that we make.

***Therefore, just as the Holy Spirit says, "Today if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts..." Hebrews 3:7-8***

Never forget. Our Redeemer doesn't rebuke believers out of anger or animosity. He rebukes us out of His infinite love for us.

***Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline; therefore be zealous and repent. Revelation 3:19***

Our Savior's Spirit convicts us of the sin of refusing to believe His Word that we might repent. That is the only possible solution to an insensitive spirit and a hard heart.

We must confess all our doubts and disbelief. And we must ask our loving Lord not only to forgive us, but also to help us trust Him as we should.

Jesus took the disciples' doubt as a personal insult. They had walked with Him for three years. And never in all that time had He misled them or been mistaken. Yet they still refused to believe His clear statements that He would rise up from His grave.

And that hasn't changed. Christ still considers our doubts and disbelief a personal insult.

When we refuse to believe His promises, He would ask us, "When have I ever failed to keep my Word?" When we wonder if He really will meet our needs, He would ask us, "When have I ever let you go hungry and cold?" And when we refuse to believe He is with us, He would ask us, "When have I ever left you?"

We must never indulge our doubts and make excuses for our disbelief. We must treat lack of faith like a poisonous sin.

Because that is what it is.