

## *The Empty Grave*

*Mark 16:1-8*

*Allah and Buddha are like Baal,  
Deceiving, dead derivatives  
Designed to disappoint and fail.  
But I know my Redeemer lives.*

*They preen the proud and lead the lost  
To savor false superlatives,  
To know price but not the cost,  
But I know my Redeemer lives.*

*When I would doubt my Lord can save,  
Or question how or what He gives,  
His answer is an empty grave,  
And I know my Redeemer lives.*

*So I'll not waste these last few years  
Rejecting nouns for adjectives  
That cannot conquer final fears,  
For I know my Redeemer lives.*

Deep purple was blooming over the mountains of Moab the morning the three women walked past the fig trees on the Mount of Olives. And by the time the women walked past Gethsemane, dawn was daubing pink paint on the clouds behind them.

It had been a short night for Salome and the two Marys. Yesterday evening, the moment sunset pulled the curtain on the Sabbath day, they hurried to the city market. Friday, the setting sun had forced Joseph and Nicodemus to hurry when they wrapped Jesus' battered body in linen and sprinkled spices over it.

And as they watched the burial, the women were determined to properly embalm the Master's body. But by the time they purchased the spices, it was too dark to visit the grave. Now it was morning.

*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. Verses 1-2*

The women were worried as they threaded their way through the narrow streets. They were determined to anoint their Lord's body. But a massive stone sealed the tomb.

*They were saying to one another, "Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance of the tomb?" Verse 3*

The women didn't know it, but that wasn't their only problem. The scribes persuaded Pilate to post armed guards at the sepulcher.

***...the Pharisees gathered together with Pilate, and said, "Sir, we remember that when He was still alive that deceiver said, 'After three days I am to rise again.' Therefore, give orders for the grave to be made secure until the third day, otherwise His disciples may come and steal Him away and say to the people, 'He has risen from the dead,'" Matthew 27:62-64***

It is strange that our Redeemer's enemies remembered what His disciples forgot. Somehow, it slipped the women's minds that the Master promised He would rise up from His grave.

So, as a slice of sun shimmered over the Mount of Olives, the women didn't realize that morning would change everything for all mankind. After that day, nothing would ever be the same.

All of Christianity is built on the foundation of what those women found that morning. Jesus' virgin birth, His sinless life, even His death as the blood sacrifice for sin would all mean nothing if those women had found the grave sealed in stone and the Master's body still inside, stiff and cold.

At Pentecost Peter stood up and shouted out the good news of the Gospel. But the heart of His message wasn't the cross. No, he proclaimed that Christ had risen up from among the dead.

The apostles understood what we must learn. The resurrection was and is the single most important event both to mankind and to each of us individually.

### ***Christ's Power***

My family cemetery sleeps beside a country road, surrounded by fields and farms. My mother is buried on the right. My grandmother's stone is back on the left. Near the front, my mother's sister is buried. Years ago, I returned to visit my aunt's grave.

With both words and deeds, she shined the Savior's light to me. And there was nothing but love and concern for me in her eyes. I could deny what preachers said. But I had no answer to that.

My aunt didn't live to see me lay my life in her Savior's hands. And as I walked to her grave that summer afternoon, the same hollow regret that ached within the women who visited Jesus' grave was like a weight inside me.

There was so very much I wanted to tell her. I needed her counsel, too. But I had waited too long. So, like the women in Mark's Gospel, I did the only thing I could. I visited her grave.

My aunt's stone was a black marble block. And I approached it from the back, so I didn't see the inscription until I stood before it.

***For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. Philippians 1:21***

There is no greater salve for sorrow than what those women found at the Master's garden grave. Since Adam, death had sealed every sepulcher. But the women didn't find a sealed grave.

***Looking up, they saw that the stone had been rolled away, although it was extremely large. Verse 4***

Before the women arrived, an angel came and tossed the massive millstone aside like a child's toy.

***...an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled away the stone and sat upon it. Matthew 28:2***

The stone wasn't rolled away to let our Lord out. Later, Jesus would appear to the disciples in the upper room when all the doors were shut and all the windows were sealed. So our Savior didn't need to have His grave opened to rise up from His grave clothes.

Yes, the sepulcher was opened so the Christ's followers could see that the grave was empty. But that wasn't the only reason why God sent an angel to move the stone that sealed His Son's sepulcher.

That stone is also a symbol. It is an everlasting reminder that our Savior has defeated death.

That is why the angel sat on the stone.

Just as the soldiers had guarded the grave that no one would move the stone, so the angel guarded it that no one might ever roll it back again. It is a sign that death has been irreversibly defeated.

Jesus' open grave is a marvelous message from God. It is proof the Father accepted His Son's sacrifice for sin. It reminds us that the sorrow and sting of death have been forever removed.

***Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is your victory. O death, where is your sting? The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law; but thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. 1 Corinthians 15:54-57***

Never again do we have to fear God's righteous wrath because we are full of dark desires and selfish sins. His beloved Son has already paid the price of blood and death for our sins. And the empty tomb proves the eternal Father accepted His sacrifice.

One day if our Lord tarries, each of us will die. That is a divine appointment we cannot avoid. But we can face that moment without fear. That is the power of the empty tomb. Job said it best.

***I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last He will take His stand on the earth. Even after my skin is destroyed, yet from my flesh I shall see God; Whom I myself shall behold, and Whom my eyes will see and not another. Job 19:25-27***

## ***Christ's Presence***

By the time the women approached the open grave, the soldiers had all run wide-eyed into the predawn darkness. So the angel, moved inside and sat beside the empty shell of linen and spices where Christ's body had lain.

***Entering the tomb, they saw a young man sitting at the right, wearing a white robe; and they were amazed. Verse 5***

When the women looked inside, they were stunned. An angel in a dazzling white robe sat on a stone ledge inside mausoleum.

He didn't return to Heaven when the soldiers fled because the Father hadn't sent him merely to move the stone. He was also sent to deliver a message to the Master's followers.

***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." Verse 6***

The angel's message wasn't only for those three women and the disciples who huddled in the upper room. He also speaks to each of us today. And his message is especially and specifically for those who are looking for Jesus the Nazarene.

The angel would remind us that if we seek to know Jesus, we must not only believe that He was and is God's sinless Son. It isn't even enough to believe He died to pay for our sins.

If we are to be saved, we must also believe He has risen up from among the dead, never again to die.

***...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; Romans 10:9***

But trusting Jesus as our crucified Redeemer and risen Lord does more than deliver us from darkness, defeat and death. It also delivers us from the desolation of loneliness.

After two of the women ran back to tell the disciples what they had seen, Mary of Magdala lingered at the tomb. And there in the garden, Jesus appeared to her.

Later, two of the Master's men walked with Him on the road to Emmaus. Later still, He appeared to His disciples in the upper room.

Yes, the Master did appear to His followers to assure them He was alive. But that wasn't His

only purpose. He also came that they might know He would always be with them.

*...lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age. Matthew 28:20*

*He Himself has said, "I will never desert you, nor will ever forsake you," Hebrews 13:5*

The men and women who followed Jesus had grown accustomed to His encouragement, companionship and counsel. And now that He was alive again, He would continue to walk with them.

For three years, the Master guided them. They didn't decide where to go or what to do. He did. And that, the angel assured the women, would continue now that He was alive again.

*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.' Verse 7*

Before He died, Jesus told His disciples He would go to Galilee after He returned from the grave. And they were to follow Him.

So it is that for more than a month, God's Son was with them in Galilee, teaching and training them.

*...the eleven disciples proceeded to Galilee, to the mountain which Jesus had designated.*

*When they saw Him, they worshiped Him; Matthew 28:16-17*

But the power of our Lord's resurrection not only allowed Him to be with His disciples then. It also extends across the ages to us. Our Savior's victory over sin and death enabled His blessed Holy Spirit to come and live both with and within each and every person who comes to Christ in confession and commitment.

Our risen Redeemer isn't a God far off. He is as close as our own hearts and minds. His Spirit is within believers as a Companion, Comforter and Counselor.

He is our loving Shepherd. When our hearts are hard, He convicts us. When our faith is weak, He encourages us. And when we wander, He brings us back.

Our Savior's resurrection brings us countless gifts. But in this life, none of them is quite so sweet as the Giver Himself. He Himself is the greatest gift the cross and the empty tomb provide.

### ***Christ's Purpose***

For three years, those women had lived with a high purpose. They were serving the Son of the living God, the Messiah, the King.

But after the cross, the Man they called Christ was a cold corpse. And their purpose in life was reduced to numbly keeping His grave.

Ah, but when they found the grave open and empty, all of that changed. They were given a new mission that was so important, God sent an angel all the way from Heaven to tell them about it.

*...go, tell His disciples and Peter, 'He is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see Him, just as He told you.' Verse 7*

Our Redeemer's resurrection promoted the women who came to the grave that morning. Years earlier, they began as believers.

Then as their faith grew, they graduated to servants. Now God was calling and commissioning them to serve as witnesses.

An encounter with the risen Christ does the same thing today. It transforms believers into servants and servants into witnesses.

But Mark's bare bones account presents a problem. If this was the only record we had of this visit to the open sepulcher, we would be forced to look upon these women with regret.

*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. Verse 8*

At first glance, it would seem the women didn't obey the shining angel's command. But Matthew's account of this same story contradicts that conclusion.

***And they left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy and ran to report it to His disciples. Matthew 28:8***

Later, one of the men who walked with Jesus on the road to Emmaus spoke of it.

***...some women among us amazed us. When they were at the tomb early in the morning, and did not find His body, they came, saying that they had also seen a vision of angels who said that He was alive. Luke 24:22-23***

No, Mark's account isn't in error. It is merely incomplete. The women did bear the message as they were instructed. And they did so precisely as Christ commanded.

Years earlier in Galilee, our Savior sent the Twelve to fan out to farms and villages as His healers and heralds. But before they left, He gave them specific instructions.

The disciples weren't to waste their time chatting with people they met on the way. They were to bear the Master's message without being distracted.

***Carry no money belt, no bag, no shoes; and greet no one on the way. Luke 10:4***

That is precisely what the women did. The angel told them to relay his message to the disciples, not to the people in the street.

So, even though they were still astonished and afraid, they hurried back to the disciples without pausing to tell any of the people they met on the way.

There is a message in that. Those women not only bore the message of the Redeemer's resurrection. They did so precisely as they were commanded. And we can do no less.

After all, we aren't only called to serve as witnesses. We are also called to obey Christ's commands. And we must always serve our Savior His way, not our own.

But that isn't the end of the commission to which Christ's resurrection calls Christians. The women were told to relay the angel's message to the disciples and especially to Peter.

The big fisherman had denied the Lord he loved. And he was so in deep despair, he didn't even consider himself a disciple any more.

So the women were also to make sure Peter knew the Savior still loved him. The glorious good news was for him, too.

The message to us in that is clear. We are also called to restore believers who are defeated and despondent.

God has commissioned us to seek out His sheep who have wandered away and bring them back to full faith and fellowship. But to do that we must be as sensitive and loving as our Redeemer was.

We must love people who are lost in defeat and despair, in sin and sorrow as much as He does. We must only tell people about Jesus' love. We must show them His love.

We must love them into Christ's kingdom.