

International Sunday School Lesson
Study Notes
March 27, 2016 (Easter)

Lesson Text: Mark 16:1-8
Lesson Title: Resurrection Faith

Introduction

Have you ever doubted the resurrection of Christ? Have you ever paused and given serious thought to the central doctrine of biblical faith? Christians believe that Jesus Christ lay dead in a cold tomb for three days and then arose. That is absolutely amazing when you think about. Here is something else that might shock you about the resurrection of our Lord. There was a lot of doubt and unbelief among the first followers. In fact, try to find faith around the resurrection event or the days immediately after. Resurrection faith was almost impossible to find.

It may be easy for us to confess resurrection faith two thousand years after the fact, but what about the women and the disciples who were there the very moment it occurred. No precedence was set. There were no five hundred witnesses at the tomb. There were no songs about resurrection in a church hymnal. All they had was Jesus' word and an open and empty tomb.

The resurrection of Christ is the most astonishing fact in history and therefore the most important aspect of the Christian faith. All the Gospels record it and present it as the climatic point of Jesus' life and work. The Apostle Paul declared the resurrection of Christ as the foundation upon Christianity. He gave it the central place in his preaching (1 Corinthians 15:1-58).

No individual Gospel writer attempted to give a complete account of our Lord's resurrection. Each writer selected and arranged his facts in a manner of keeping with the overall purpose and aim of his Gospel. As you arrive at the final chapters of Mark's Gospel, it is clear Mark handled the death and resurrection of Christ as the most important events in history. Mark's account of Jesus' death is an agonizing record of what seems to be a total failure (Mark 15:1-47). A mock trial, a brutal crucifixion, blasphemous taunts and insults, and a hurried burial. For three long miserable days' hope died in the disciple's hearts. Doctor A.W. Tozer summarized Mark's account, *"Our Lord died an apparent failure, discredited by the leaders of established religion, rejected by society, and forsaken by His friends. It took the resurrection to demonstrate how gloriously Christ had triumphed and how tragically the world had failed."*

Because many people and circumstances were involved in the events of Christ's resurrection, the story lines between the Gospel writers often overlap. Mark recorded the events of resurrection Sunday with intentional simplicity. As you

read his account you feel no need of comment or explanation. His words if believed result in resurrection faith.

The Arrival of the Women at the Empty Tomb (Mark 16:1-4)

On resurrection morning, no one was looking for the risen Christ. The disciples are locked away in a room fearing the Jews might kill them. Later in the day a couple disciples will walk to Emmaus discussing how terrible things have turned out. Their hopes were dashed and as far as they are concerned things are over. Before sunrise on resurrection morning a few loyal women come to the tomb to “anoint” the body of the Lord. They are not looking for a risen Savior. They are coming to finish the anointing process Joseph started prior to our Lord’s burial.

Verse 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.”

“When the sabbath was past...” refers to the time after sunset on Saturday evening. It was then the “sabbath” ended and the first day of the week began. It is now the first day of a new week and of a new dispensation.

Mark identifies the women who were at the tomb. It was “Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome.” These women are the ones previously mentioned as witnesses of the crucifixion (Mark 15:40). Two of them were mentioned again as observing Christ’s burial (Mark 15:47). As previously stated, these women may have observed the hasty actions of Joseph and Nicodemus in preparing Jesus’ body for burial. Because of the approaching Sabbath the two men wanted to get Jesus buried as soon as possible. It is possible the women came to complete the “anointing” process for burial.

Of the women here named, Matthew mentions only the two Mary’s, and John mentions only Mary Magdalene (Matthew 28:1; John 20:1). Luke speaks of Mary Magdalene, and Joanna, and Mary the mother of James, and other women that were with them (Luke 24:10). Thus we have the names of four women, the two Mary’s, Salome, and Joanna, who came to the burial place of our Lord. How many “other women were present we do not know.

The phrase “that they might come and anoint him” indicates these women considered Christ to be permanently dead. They did not come to the tomb expecting to find it empty, therefore they did not immediately believe the announcement of His resurrection when it was made to them.

Verse 2

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

A comparison of all four Gospel accounts reveals the women came at the same time of the day, “very early in the morning the first day of the week...at the rising of the sun” (Matthew 28:1; Luke 24:1; John 20:1). “Very early in the morning, on “the first day of the week,” the sunlight of resurrection began to penetrate the darkness of our Lord’s death and burial.

It was still dark as the women started out for the tomb. As they neared the place of our Lord’s burial the first rays of sunlight began to penetrate the darkness and hopelessness of the hour.

Verse 3

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

In all their preparation and planning the women had overlooked one very important detail. The “sepulchre” was closed off by a great “stone.” This “stone” is likely a large flat stone resembling a millstone which was placed against the entrance of the tomb and could be rolled sideways to gain access to the body (Mark 15:46).

Mark is the only Gospel writer who records the women’s concern over the practical problem of not knowing who they could get to “roll us away the stone.” Apparently the women did not know of the guard which had been placed at the tomb (Matthew 27:65-66).

Verse 4

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

Upon their arrival the women “looked” and “saw that the stone was rolled away.” Matthew explains how this happened: “*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*” (Matthew 28:2). Obviously the stone was not rolled away in order to let the risen Christ out of the tomb, but to permit the women to see into the tomb and know Christ was no longer there.

“For it was very great” is a detail inserted by Mark to explain how the women could see the “rolled away” stone at a distance, even though daylight had not yet fully come. These small details will all contribute to resurrection faith.

Faith does not rest on speculation or opinion. It rests on truth and biblical fact. These women are not yet women of resurrection faith. But they will be soon!

Verse 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.”

Realizing the stone has been rolled away, the women “enter into the sepulchre.” This is a reference to the tomb’s outer room that led to the inner burial chamber. There they “saw a young man sitting on the right side, clothed in a long white garment.” Matthew says this “young man” was “*an angel*” (Matthew 28:5). Luke says there were “*two men*” (Luke 24:4). This is no contradiction. Mark apparently makes reference only to the angel who served as spokesman. He is called “a young man” because his outward appearance was that of a man.

The “long white garment” worn by the angels attracted the women’s attention. Luke says their raiment was “*shinning garments*” (Luke 24:4). Matthew says their clothing was “*white as snow*” (Matthew 28:3). There is no question Mark and the other Gospel writers believe these angels are messengers sent from heaven with a divine message.

The text suggests the women did not leave in praise or excitement; they leave “affrighted” in trembling and astonishment. “Affrighted” means “trembling.” They are too afraid to talk to anybody because what the angel is telling them is too good to be true. Mary Magdalene in John 20 goes to the disciples and says, “Somebody stole His body!” She cannot imagine there has been a resurrection.

The Announcement of the Angel at the Empty Tomb (Mark 16:6-8)

Verse 6-7

“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. 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.”

The angel’s message itself seems too good to be true. Remember, the message the angel is delivering is the Father’s message, not the angel’s. Speaking for God the Father, the angel says, “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. 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.”

“Go your way” literally means “depart” or “be gone.” It seems to denote urgency, suggesting the women should lose no time discharging their duty. They are to go tell Peter he will see Jesus in “Galilee.” The reference is apparently to the promise which Christ made on His way from the upper room in Jerusalem to the garden of Gethsemane (Mark 14:28).

Think of the last time those disciples saw Jesus. Think of their response to the circumstances that were taking place around them in the Garden of Gethsemane as Jesus is betrayed and arrested. God could have justifiably sent a message like this with the angel. “You tell those faithless, backstabbing, disloyal and disappointing cowards that Jesus might be willing to see them in Galilee if they repent and beg forgiveness! And oh, by the way, tell Peter to keep his mouth shut. He is doing more harm to my cause than good!”

God the Father sent a message too good to be true. Jesus is going ahead to “Galilee” and He will be there waiting for them! Evidently our Lord has already forgiven Peter before Peter has asked for forgiveness. Resurrection faith like all faith begins from God’s side (Ephesians 2:8).

Note: If resurrection seems too good to be true, think about our Lord forgiving us for doubting, questioning, and walking away from it. Sometimes being forgiven seems too good to be true.

Verse 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.”

The women found an empty tomb and received a personal message from an angel sent from God. How did they respond? Mark says, “they went out quickly, and fled from the sepulchre.” The word “fled” means “they ran away, they shunned, they vanished.” It is the same word used in Matthew 26:56 when the disciples “fled” in the Garden of Gethsemane. These women “fled” from the tomb in the same manner the disciples “fled” when Jesus was arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane.

At the beginning of Mark’s Gospel there is a story of Jesus healing a leper (Mark 1:40-45). The leper is commanded to go to the priest but not to tell anyone what the Lord has done for him. The leper disregarded Jesus’ words and “*published it much*” and “*blazed the matter abroad*” (Mark 1:45). In other words, he told everyone. At the empty tomb the women are told “tell his disciples” and they are afraid to tell the greatest news in the world.

Why did the women “flee?” Why were they “afraid.” They stood in awe of what they witnessed and heard at the tomb. In spite of all the evidence and the word of a heaven sent messenger, it seemed too good to be true. So they “fled”

in “fear.” Although Matthew tells us these women did go and tell the disciples later, they originally hesitated. Remember, Peter is probably the one dictating these events to Mark as he writes his Gospel. It is as if Peter wants us to know resurrection faith is not easy to possess. It takes time. It takes obedience. It takes forgiveness. It takes courage.

Conclusion

There is no greater success story than the resurrection, when apparent tragedy was transformed into eternal victory. The essence of the Gospel is that Christ died for our sins, that He was buried, and that He was raised from the grave, never to die again.

Where do you stand today in regard to resurrection faith? Do you believe? Have you read the Scriptures and considered everything Jesus has said about His death, burial, and resurrection? If you have never read what the Bible says, read the Gospels today. If you have read and believed, thank God today for resurrection faith (John 20:29).

Amen.