

Three Testimonies of Resurrection Morning

Pastor Chris Baker // 04.21.19 // Centralia FBC

Intro

Thank you for being here with us for this celebration of Resurrection Morning. We're reminded on this day every year of Jesus Christ's resurrection, but every Sunday when the church gathers, it remembers that He rose on the first day of the week, and that's why we meet when we do.

The resurrection is not just one element in the Christian story; it's not just one feature of Christianity—it's the main event. The resurrection of Jesus Christ from the grave is the greatest event in history.

The resurrection is not a postscript. The resurrection is not an epilogue. It's not an appendix at the end of the story. It is the climactic high point of the work of Christ, of the saga of redemption, of the purpose of God to save His people. We're thankful for the cross, but we celebrate the resurrection as making the cross meaningful. And so we meet every first day of the week as we mark out the significance—the singular significance—of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The resurrection is the very cornerstone of our faith.¹

We'll be reading from Mark 16 this morning. We started the month of April picking up in Mark's gospel with Jesus before the Roman governor Pilate. He had already been arrested and stood trial in an illegitimate Jewish court. Pilate questioned Jesus, found no guilt in him, yet at the urging of the crowd decided to convict him anyway.

¹ <https://www.gty.org/library/sermons-library/80-406/testimonies-to-the-resurrection>

Pilate officially ordered him flogged, beaten by Roman soldiers using a whip braided with metal and bone. Afterward, the soldiers furthered the torture on their own. They mocked Jesus, beat him some more, spit on him, and then led him to Golgotha where he was hammered to a wooden cross using spikes through his hands and his feet.

We read on Friday night how he finally gave up his life after what was likely almost 12 hours of relentless torture and pain. We saw in that offering up of his life as a substitute for our own three miraculous works of God the Father.

And today, when we open Mark 16 we'll pick up the story on Sunday morning.

The resurrection is the single most important event in human history. Listen to what the Apostle Paul wrote about the resurrection to the church at Corinth:

1 Corinthians 15:

5 Now I want to make clear for you, brothers and sisters, the gospel I preached to you, which you received, on which you have taken your stand 2 and by which you are being saved, if you hold to the message I preached to you—unless you believed in vain. 3 For I passed on to you as most important what I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, 4 that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, 5 and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the Twelve.

Let's make sure we're on the same page with a few terms here. On Easter we always have a number of guests and due to the importance of what we're talking about today I want to try my best to be very clear about what is at stake today.

Let's talk first of the gospel. Paul says here he wants to clarify the gospel he preached. The word gospel simply means good news. And it's the message by

which the Corinthians, according to verse 2, are being saved. Responding to the gospel is not simply a momentary transaction.

Responding to the gospel is something that happens every day of your life and it works itself out through every relationship you have, every thought you think, and every word you say. We respond to the gospel message with our whole lives. It's not a prayer you pray that changes your eternal destination from hell to heaven but has no impact on the way you live your day-to-day life here.

Your doctrine, that's just a church word for the set of beliefs you hold, works itself out in your daily life. You live out what you believe everyday. If you believe Jesus is your Lord it will be reflected in your life. John Calvin put it this way, "**Doctrine is not an affair of the tongue, but of the life; is not apprehended by the intellect and memory merely, like other branches of learning; but is received only when it possesses the whole soul, and finds its seat and habitation in the inmost recesses of the heart.**"²

Has the gospel penetrated your life enough that it possesses your soul? I hope so. Paul goes on to explain what he means by the gospel in verse 3: **Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, 4 that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, 5 and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the Twelve.**

Jesus Christ really lived. He really was executed by Roman soldiers under the orders of Pontius Pilate. He was really buried. And to this point anyone, Christian, atheist, Muslim, it doesn't matter; to this point anyone could believe in Jesus. But that second phrase in verse four changes everything. He was raised on the third day. There it is. That's the Easter story in seven words. He was raised on the third day. That's the most important event in human history.

² <http://www.theologywebsite.com/etext/calvin/institutes/bkiii10.htm>

If the resurrection didn't happen we might as well all go home. Without the resurrection, the cross, the death of Christ, would be meaningless. Without the resurrection, the cross would be powerless. If Christ is not raised, says the New Testament, then your faith is worthless and you are still in your sins.

Listen to what Paul says just a few verses later: 1 Corinthians 15:13ff

13 If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised; 14 and if Christ has not been raised, then our proclamation is in vain, and so is your faith. 15 Moreover, we are found to be false witnesses about God, because we have testified wrongly about God that he raised up Christ—whom he did not raise up, if in fact the dead are not raised. 16 For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised. 17 And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins.

Without the resurrection everything we're doing here is pointless. We don't worship a dead savior. Islam's prophet Muhammad is buried under the Green Dome in Medina, Buddha was cremated at Kushinagar in India, Joseph Smith is buried in Nauvoo, Illinois, but Jesus Christ isn't resting anywhere. Because He was resurrected by the power of the Holy Spirit on Resurrection Sunday. I'm thankful that I can affirm alongside hymn writer Alfred Ackley that,

I serve a risen Savior

He's in the world today.

I know that He is living,

Whatever men may say.

I see His hand of mercy;

I hear His voice of cheer;

And just the time I need Him

He's always near.³

I don't know about you, but I needed Him this week. I need Him today! And as Paul said, if Christ has not been raised, our faith is worthless.

With that in mind, let's turn to Mark's gospel where we'll find in his account three testimonies of resurrection morning. But before we do that, let's go to the Lord in prayer and ask his blessing on our study of the Word.

Amen. Let's first look at the testimony of the empty tomb.

The Testimony of the Empty Tomb

The first four verses of Mark 16 tell us this:

16 When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, so that they could go and anoint him. 2 Very early in the morning, on the first day of the week, they went to the tomb at sunrise. 3 They were saying to one another, "Who will roll away the stone from the entrance to the tomb for us?" 4 Looking up, they noticed that the stone—which was very large—had been rolled away.

Jesus was crucified on a Friday and died before sundown. His burial by Joseph of Arimathea would have happened quickly because they needed to finish the deed prior to sundown so as to avoid breaking the Sabbath law. The Sabbath was observed on Saturday, so no work would have been done that day. Other gospels tell us Pilate posted guards at the tomb. And as soon as the sun rose on Sunday morning, Mary Magdalene, Jesus' mother, and Salome prepared to visit the tomb.

³ <https://www.hymnal.net/en/hymn/h/503>

Their plan was to perform the standard burial rituals of the time to wash the body and preserve it with perfumes and oils. But along their journey they were worried. I can't imagine the number of worries that accompanied them on this trip. They had devoted themselves to being followers of this Jesus. They didn't abandon him even in his arrest, humiliation, and crucifixion. Many did so, but Mark specifically mentions these faithful women present in chapter 15. What would they do next? How to they interpret all the things Jesus said now that he's gone? Do they go back home? Do they stay in Jerusalem?

The hurt, pain, and stress of this weekend would have been severe. One of their concerns was the heavy stone that would have been used to seal the entrance to the rich man's tomb Jesus had been placed in. This tomb would have had a groove carved out of the ground in front of it where a large round stone would have been placed to create a closed door.

They saw this stone on Friday. How were they going to move it? They knew it was too heavy for them so they wondered aloud how they'd get in the tomb to access Christ's body. We know what they didn't, though. They weren't going to have to worry about the stone. Matthew helps us see what is at play here:

2 There was a violent earthquake, because an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and approached the tomb. He rolled back the stone and was sitting on it. (Mt. 28:2)

As we piece together the story from all four gospels it seems the soldiers had already gone when the women in Mark 15 arrive at the tomb to find it open and empty.

And that empty tomb testifies to a truth that you and I desperately need to reckon with: God raised Jesus from the dead. God the Father, through the power of the Holy Spirit, raised Jesus from the dead and brought Him out of his borrowed tomb

on that first Easter Sunday. The resurrection is a Trinitarian act and so is our salvation. All three persons of the Trinity are involved in the resurrection and in our salvation.

Romans 6:4 testifies to the Father's involvement in the resurrection: **Therefore we were buried with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too may walk in newness of life.**

He was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father and 1 Peter 3:18 tells us he was made alive by the Spirit:

For Christ also suffered for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring you to God. He was put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit,

Raised by the glory of the Father, made alive by the Spirit, and Jesus himself spoke of his own authority over his life in John 10:18.

No one takes it from me, but I lay it down on my own. I have the right to lay it down, and I have the right to take it up again. I have received this command from my Father.

We saw last Sunday how Christ totally emptied himself as he poured out his life. He became nothing so that we could have everything in Him. Here we see all three persons of the Trinity participating in the resurrection that led to the empty tomb the women discovered that morning.

And in much the same way, all three persons of the Trinity are involved in our salvation. Jesus did not die because he needed to convince or persuade the Father to love us. Rather, Jesus died on the cross because of the Father's love for us, as

John 3:16 says: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life." The Father and Son are united in their work for the salvation of those who believe. Listen to John 6:37-40

37 Everyone the Father gives me will come to me, and the one who comes to me I will never cast out. 38 For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me. 39 This is the will of him who sent me: that I should lose none of those he has given me but should raise them up on the last day. 40 For this is the will of my Father: that everyone who sees the Son and believes in him will have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day."

The same harmony exists between the Son and the Spirit. We learn in 1 Peter that he's writing to those . . . **"chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to be obedient and to be sprinkled with the blood of Jesus Christ."** (1 Peter 1:1b-2)

There's a beautiful harmony in both the testimony of the empty tomb and the testimony of our salvation. Christ died as our substitute, the Holy Spirit convicts our heart of that truth, and God saves us. And those things are only possible because of the resurrection. God even gave us a supernatural testimony to help convince us of that fact. Let's see verses 5-7:

The Supernatural Testimony

5 When they entered the tomb, they saw a young man dressed in a white robe sitting on the right side; they were alarmed. 6 "Don't be alarmed," he told them. "You are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they put him. 7 But go, tell his disciples and Peter, 'He is going ahead of you to Galilee; you will see him there just as he told you.'"

Mark has a gift for understating things. I've said before I love his writing style. He has urgent news and he shares it urgently. He also shares it in a manner familiar to many of you men. He gives just enough details to know what happened but if you want the particulars you're often going to have to get some help.

He tells us here there was a young man dressed in a white robe sitting inside the tomb—and they were alarmed. Almost as if he's doing it in passing. The other gospels identify this visitor as an angel and I think that's most likely what we're seeing here.

But somewhere along the line many of our perceptions of angels became skewed. I all too often see angels depicted as naked babies with wings. I have no idea why. But I do know this: they're terrifying. Angels open almost every speaking moment they have in Scripture with 'Don't be afraid' or 'Get up.' Their duty simply put is to help the people of God.

Angels are always present in the Bible at significant moments of redemptive history: in Eden, with the patriarchs in the giving of the covenant, at Sinai in the giving of the Law, at the birth of Jesus, in the temptation of Jesus, in Gethsemane.⁴

Sometimes they demonstrate their incredible power, like in 2 Kings 19, where one angel killed 185,000 Assyrians. No wonder these women are afraid. You see, God is saying here this is a significant moment in the history of redemption. It belongs with the birth of Jesus. It belongs with the death of Jesus. It belongs with the ascension of Jesus. It belongs with the Second Coming of Jesus, which also is surrounded by angels.

If we were not yet convinced, the appearance of an angel here should remind us just how momentous this occasion is. But the importance of this testimony is not just in

⁴ <https://www.fpcjackson.org/resource-library/sermons/up-from-the-grave-he-arose-website-dead-and-buried-bulletin>

the appearance of the angel. It's in his message, did you see it? I think there's a foreshadowing of the Great Commission even here. Go, tell. Go and proclaim the news that Jesus is risen. That is immediately the command of God based on the resurrection of Christ and it hasn't changed. How does the resurrection change what you do with your life? Everywhere you go and with everyone you know the right response to the news of the resurrection is to tell. Well, what do these women do? Let's see finally the testimony of the eyewitnesses:

The Testimony of the Eyewitnesses

8 They went out and ran from the tomb, because trembling and astonishment overwhelmed them. And they said nothing to anyone, since they were afraid.

This might not be what you expected. It might cross over from unexpected to downright shocking when you read the note in many of your Bibles that says 'some of the earlier manuscripts conclude with 16:8.'

I actually believe this to be the original ending of Mark's gospel. We talked last week about text criticism and why in a handful of places in the New Testament there is some disagreement about what the original manuscripts actually said because, even though we have over 6,500 Greek manuscripts of the New Testament, we don't have any original copies. I won't go back into all that detail but you can find the manuscript or the audio of last week's message for more detail on that.

But in this case, I and many modern scholars, think that Mark's original gospel ended right here. With this being the last testimony of the earliest eyewitnesses to Christ's resurrection. They went away and didn't immediately say anything. Matthew comes along and helps us here as we find out they eventually did tell Peter and the other disciples.

By the way, just for the sake of clarity, I don't believe Mark 16:9-20 to be blasphemous or anything like that. I believe somewhere along the line someone in the early church looked at the shocking end to Mark and decided something needed to be added to explain how the gospel message continued forward. And they mostly seem to have pulled from the other gospels.

For example, verse 9 is pulled out of Luke 8. Verse 10 is taken from John 20:18. Verse 12 is from the road to Emmaus account in Luke 24. Verse 14 is taken from Luke 24:36-38. Verse 15 is taken from the Great Commission in Matthew and Verse 16 is taken right out of John 20:23.⁵ It's not that it's not Biblical. It's just that based on the earliest and best manuscripts we have I believe Mark probably stopped writing at verse 8. So what does that tell us?

I believe it actually serves to emphasize the miracle of the resurrection. Because the testimony of the eyewitnesses in Mark isn't actually much of a testimony at all. They don't do what the angel said, at least not right away. And yet, God still worked to build His church. God brought His good news of the resurrection to His people despite the first recipients of the news being so awed by it that they didn't share it right away.

God was sovereign over the events of Jesus' arrest. He was sovereign over the events of Jesus' trials, his humiliation, his torture, his crucifixion, and his death. The end of Mark makes it clear to us that God is Sovereign over the events of Resurrection Day as well.

And because the events of the resurrection are fact. Because what we've seen testified to by the empty tomb, by the angel, and by these first eyewitnesses there are five truths established here that all of us need to come to terms with:

⁵ <https://www.gty.org/library/sermons-library/41-85/the-fitting-end-to-marks-gospel>

(1) There is a God; (2) Jesus is that God; (3) the Bible is true; (4) heaven and hell are real; and (5) Jesus makes the difference whether you go to one or the other.⁶

Because the resurrection is true it means that everything Christ taught us is true. We stand today like the women at the tomb. We've been given life-changing information. Now, what do we do with it? I want to leave us today with a parable Jesus spoke as he closed his sermon on the mount. He said in Matthew 7

24 "Therefore, everyone who hears these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. 25 The rain fell, the rivers rose, and the winds blew and pounded that house. Yet it didn't collapse, because its foundation was on the rock. 26 But everyone who hears these words of mine and doesn't act on them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. 27 The rain fell, the rivers rose, the winds blew and pounded that house, and it collapsed. It collapsed with a great crash."

When I read of that great crash I can't help but be reminded of watching the Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris burning this week. It's an incredible structure, hundreds of years old, and yet that fire caused the spire that pointed to the heavens to collapse. If we build our lives on anything less than the truth of the resurrection, we'll eventually see everything we've worked for collapse with a gut-wrenching crash.

What truth have you built your life on today? Have you heard the words of Jesus Christ and acted on them? Or are you staking your life on something else? Let's pray.

⁶ Akin, Daniel L.. Exalting Jesus in Mark (Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary) (p. 359). B&H Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.