

Hard to Believe It's True: Mark 16:1-14, Easter 2022

Talk about **Go Sunday**

Mark 16:1-8 *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.*

² *Very early on the first day of the week, just after sunrise, they were on their way to the tomb*
³ *and they asked each other, "Who will roll the stone away from the entrance of the tomb?"*

⁴ *But when they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had been rolled away.*

⁵ *As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man dressed in a white robe sitting on the right side, and they were alarmed.*

⁶ *"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.*

⁷ *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.'"*

⁸ *Trembling and bewildered, the women went out and fled from the tomb. They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid.*

Pray **[Title Slide]**

In the middle of COVID as the world was kind of falling apart, Adam Robinson, who is a polymath, a world chess champion, I think he's running hedge funds now, brilliant, and certainly not a Christian. But he did an interview you can watch on youtube¹. Very insightful, and he called what we are going through in our culture a "Spiritual Crisis". He went through the history since WWII of chasing materialism and a variety of other isms, political ideologies and technological salvation as an attempt to quell the soul's ache. He says, this has left an entire generation burned out, racked by anxiety, alienated from one another. He said this has "left the human heart empty, lost and crushed." One the whole, he says that Millennials and Gen Z are rejecting the story that was handed to them but he says, "We have not given them a better story to replace it, at least not one that is grounded in reality."

You don't need to look far today to deeply sense that Adam is right. We are storyless...our culture is telling every individual to create their own story, there is no metanarrative to connect to. You do you. It is the culture of expressive individualism. It is the culture of NOW, disconnected from the past with little trajectory for the future. Like a digital tower of Babel- we are told to make a name for ourselves...and yet left disoriented, fractured from one another,

¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v-NuNCCAzbA>

increasingly drawn to isolation, escapism, self-medication. Adam Robinson concludes, “The world needs a better story.” I could not agree with him more.

But as fractured and individualized we have become, there is a story that connects us all, it is the most beloved story of every generation, what J.R.R. Tolkien called, “Eucatastrophe.”² In his essay “On Fairy Tales” he says that eucatastrophe is when pain, tragedy or evil threaten and even seem inevitable, and yet when all hope appears lost, there is a turning of the tables, the heralding of hope, the breaking out of triumph, quote, “giving a glimpse of joy beyond the walls of this world.” That describes well the epic *Lord of the Rings*. He said humans are drawn to these stories because they point to an underlying reality. Tolkien was a Christian and he argued that the gospel story of Jesus is not simply one more great eucatastrophe story, pointing to an underlying reality. Rather the gospel story of Jesus is the underlying reality to which all the other stories point. It was this realization that led C.S. Lewis in Oxford years before, an ardent skeptic, to become a Christ follower.

What Tolkien and Lewis were arguing is that we cannot make any sense of our present, we cannot truly love ourselves, name ourselves, discover meaning, and find hope in pain unless it is firmly rooted in THE story. The world needs a better story, and I want to submit to you that the Easter story is that better story; it is that ultimate story that grounds our past, present and future in one historical person and event, the Resurrection of Jesus. [Title Slide]

A couple years ago I invited someone to come on Easter and he said, “I understand why people would want to come and hear that story- that Jesus rose from the dead and now we can live forever, but you don’t really believe it do you?” It is a story that we might all agree is hard to believe in the natural world we occupy. It seems like it comes right out of a sci-fi novel. A dead leader rising from the grave, angels showing up on the scene...it seems all too hard to believe it really happened. But the Gospel writer Mark shows that it was just as hard to believe for those first century Jewish people who witnessed it...and yet they did and the gospel story exploded and changed our world forever. Why? Let’s take a look.

Now as we get to chapter 16, we just learned that Jesus, the Jewish Rabbi that so many of his followers hoped was the Messiah, the one who would come to save their people, was instead rejected, beaten, brutalized and died a slow painful death on the torture method invented by the Romans known as crucifixion. And the Mark tells us that all his followers while this was happening essentially abandoned him, ran away in fear that they would be caught up in this conspiracy. Talk about not having a story to live for. All their hopes and dreams, identity and purpose were dashed that Friday when Jesus died. Their hope was buried with Jesus in that tomb. Mark 16:1 tells us three women who show up that Sunday morning: *Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome*. They weren’t coming for a resurrection. They were coming to mourn and pay their respects to their dead rabbi and friend. And so imagine the paradigm shifting moment when they find not only is the stone rolled away, but an angel who

² J.R.R. Tolkien, essay *On Fairy Tales*.

says v.6 **"You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him."**

They are in utter shock. "It couldn't be!" Mark describes these women, not as worshipping and celebrating, but terrified. It goes on to say that they fled the tomb **v.8 trembling and bewildered**. But these women weren't the only ones who would struggle to believe it was true. **¹⁴ 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.** Of course, poor Thomas has forever received the moniker, "Doubting Thomas" but the Bible says none of the disciples believed until they saw Jesus, the scars in his hands and feet, for themselves.

What makes matters worse is that all throughout Mark's gospel you see that **Jesus predicted his death and resurrection on the third day**, he says it in Mark 8,9,10. Why is it that not one of these disciples woke up Sunday morning and were like, "Guys, it's the third day. Maybe we should at least send someone to go check on the tomb, just in case Jesus was actually serious. 1,2,3 Not it!" Here's the point: **Nobody believed he was actually, literally, bodily going to be resurrected...until it happened.** The resurrection was as inconceivable for the first disciples, as impossible for them to believe as it is for many of us today. We often assume that ancient people were primitive, they must have been gullible, believing in magic and superstition...more like the Monty Python characters. C.S. Lewis calls this "Chronological Snobbery." The story isn't that there was a group of hysterical fanatics who wanted to believe the resurrection so badly that they tricked themselves into believing it. They didn't, they were planning how to move on with life until that third day, Peter went back to fishing! Scholar N.T. Wright explains at length in his landmark book *The Resurrection of the Son of God* that Jewish people in the 1st century did not believe a man could be God (which was blasphemy and earned the death penalty) and would have never believed it was possible for an individual in the middle of history to rise from the dead.³ And yet, somehow thousands and thousands of Jews suddenly began believing both of these things were true, hundreds of witnesses of the risen Jesus began telling everyone and Christianity exploded throughout the world despite the fact that they gained no benefits and in fact many lost their lives, never recanting what they believed. Even though they thought it was impossible, they allowed the reality and evidence to challenge their worldview and change their entire sense of what is true.

If you doubt and are skeptical that Jesus actually rose from the dead, if you are going to be intellectually consistent, what you have to do is come up with some other plausible theories to explain everything. You have to try to discern how against all odds, when all other messianic movements died out immediately after the death of their leader, why this one exploded. Do you have one? Let me challenge your cynical worldview that might reject things that are old, or supernatural or religious. **What if you allowed evidence to challenge your worldview?** I believe this is the better story, that is grounded in reality. And when that becomes THE story of your life, it begins to ground your past, present and future in cohesive meaning and hope.

³ N.T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God: Christian Origins and the Question of God*, vol. 3, p.81-84

The resurrection brings meaning and hope to your past. When you type in google “How can I learn to...the number one thing people google is “love myself.” Humans are constantly burdened with trying to fill the heart-shaped whole in their hearts with something else. But because of the resurrection it means we aren’t the result of blind chance and chemical reactions and survival of the fittest. But the loving design of a beautiful mind. We are image-bearers of God, created in love, by love, for love. We can reclaim our deepest and truest identity- not just creatures of God, but children of God, loved unconditionally.⁴ Because at the cross Jesus wipes away our sins, paying our debt- saying “It is finished” it means we are fully accepted despite your dysfunctions, regrets, your self-loathing and the darkest corners of your heart you don’t want anyone to see.

The resurrection brings meaning and hope to your future. All future hopes on this earth ultimately fail us. Money is fleeting, our health and fitness fail us, comforts never truly satisfy, children move away and grow up, we can’t hold on to relationships and ultimately the flood of death takes everything away. But if the resurrection is true, it means that **John 11:25 is true. Jesus said I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies.** His death means no eternal death for us. His resurrection results in our resurrection. It means that death has lost its sting. Jesus promised that one day he will return to this earth and completely make it new. And as Sally Lloyd-Jones put it, “All the sad things will come untrue.” There will be permanent joy, life exhilaration, laughter, deep contentment, complete peace, day after day being overwhelmed by beauty. Picture a day you felt most free, most you, most fulfilled, most loved, most thrilled.

The resurrection brings meaning and hope to your present, even to the most painful moments. Some of you know Matt and Karen Douglas, Matt was diagnosed several years ago with Huntington’s Disease. It’s a neurodegenerative disease that slowly and surely eats away his ability to control his body, to control moods, to think until it finally kills you. It’s an awful disease presently there is no cure. And as painful as that is, if you know Matt and Karen, as you are interacting with them you say, “Man, what’s wrong with me? Why am I not more joyful?” I asked Matt, how does the resurrection give you hope? “I choose to believe Jesus is alive because I choose to believe the Bible and when I talk to Jesus I can see him answering my prayers. Even when not every prayer is answered the way I want it to be. I get frustrated on this earth when I can’t get anything straight, when I try to talk and can’t and when I can’t do the things I used to, and need people to help me walk. But Jesus is still using me. Everyone has something they get frustrated with on this earth. **Knowing Jesus died for me and was resurrected makes me excited to know I’m going to get to run and see Jesus in heaven. That gets me through every day. What on this earth do you look forward to being perfect in the resurrection?”** Matt has a cohesive story, grounded in the Resurrection of Jesus, that brings his life meaning and hope.

What is your grand story that makes sense of your life? Do you have one? **We have a better story. He has risen!** For those who want to enter into that story of the Savior, the way we do

⁴ John Mark Comer, <https://bridgetown.church/teaching/gospel-of-mark/the-resurrection-hope/>

that begins with the invitation from Jesus to trust in him. Why Easter Book, You need to sign up for **Christianity 101**.

Maybe you are still searching, and that is a good thing. You might be skeptical like the disciples once were, like the Apostle Paul, C.S. Lewis once were, like I once was. You owe it to yourself to discover. Why Easter Book, You need to sign up for Christianity 101.

Maybe you are already a Christian, but you feel that you need to be better grounded in your faith, need some more answers...maybe you are like the father of the young boy who was troubled in Mark 9- I believe, but help me with my unbelief. You need to sign up for Christianity 101.