

SERMON

2 And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb. 3 And they were saying to one another, "Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance of the tomb?" 4 And looking up, they saw that the stone had been rolled back—it was very large. 5 And entering the tomb, they saw a young man sitting on the right side, dressed in a white robe, and they were alarmed. 6 And he said to them, "Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, 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 that he is going before you to Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you." 8 And they went out and fled from the tomb, for trembling and astonishment had seized them, and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid. 9 Now when he rose early on the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, from whom he had cast out seven demons. 10 She went and told those who had been with him, as they mourned and wept. 11 But when they heard that he was alive and had been seen by her, they would not believe it. 12 After these things he appeared in another form to two of them, as they were walking into the country. 13 And they went back and told the rest, but they did not believe them. 14 Afterward he appeared to the eleven themselves as they were reclining at table, and he rebuked them for their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they had not believed those who saw him after he had risen.

Introduction

1. It's hard to accept when things don't end like we hoped they would or like we believed they would. Meeting Jesus, watching Jesus, following Jesus, believing Jesus to be the promised Messiah, expecting big things from Jesus – all shattered at the cross. He was dead. All hope was gone. If He was put to death for what He claimed and these people declared their belief in Him and what He taught, their future was grim. I cannot imagine the fear that gripped the followers of Jesus beginning early Friday morning all through Saturday and into Sunday.
2. The head was saying there was reason to be very afraid, but the heart was saying there was some unfinished business, so a few women made their way to the tomb to anoint the body of Jesus. Joseph and Nicodemus had already prepared His body Friday before sundown, but it had been done in haste. Whether to make sure it was properly done, or simply to express their devotion one final time, these women made haste to the tomb. On the way

they realized that they had no access into the tomb. There was a giant stone covering the entrance. They had given no thought as to how to get in. And they apparently knew nothing of a government seal or of armed guards. But love is a strong motivation. They continued.

3. As they came in view of the tomb, their greatest concern was answered. The stone was rolled away! Mark says it was very large. But that posed no problem now! They go in. Sitting inside is an angel. They are freaked out! You would be too. We don't handle surprises well – especially when they happen in creepy dark places! But the angel calms them and answers their unexpressed questions. **“You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has risen; he is not here. See the place where they laid him.”** And then the angel gives them an assignment – **“go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going before you to Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.”**
4. The angel gave them the truth. The angel reminded them that this was what Jesus had said when He was with them. But it's here that things unravel. “He's alive. He was dead, but now He lives – just like He said He would. He will appear soon. Make it known.” And then we read verse 8 – **“And they went out and fled from the tomb, for trembling and astonishment had seized them, and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.”** The same words used to describe the mass exodus of the disciples in the Garden of Gethsemane when Jesus was arrested are used here. They bolted, terrified. What happened? Why didn't they believe? Why didn't they do what the angel said?
5. Kids, Welcome back, and thanks for singing! This is a great day. With reference to Jesus, what makes this day such a great day (Jesus is **alive**)? That's your first word. One of the reasons the women who came to the tomb didn't believe that Jesus was alive was because they were what (**afraid**)? What did the angel tell them to do (**go** and **tell** that Jesus was risen from the dead)? What did they do (they **ran away** and **didn't tell anyone**)? Finally, if you believe that Jesus is alive, that His death paid for our sins and His resurrection give us the promise of eternal life, what would be a good word to shout out (**Hallelujah**)?

6. Again, what happened? Why didn't they believe? Why didn't they do what the angel said? And this is not the only problem with believing Jesus to be alive. We are going to see three unbelieving responses to the news of Jesus' resurrection and we are going to learn why. And hopefully we will see how this is very up to date and how it also affects our, sometimes, unbelieving responses to the truth about Jesus. From this account we can conclude that...

I. SOME COULD NOT BELIEVE BECAUSE THEY FEARED THE MESSAGE (7-8) Why did they fear the message?

- A. They were unprepared for what they would see. They expected to see a dead Jesus. They saw a living angel! I have no problem with their initial fear. My translation says they were "alarmed." If they were not alarmed I would wonder about them! But the angel told them not to be alarmed and then told them that Jesus had been raised from the dead, and how they were to respond. But they were so unprepared and so afraid, they could not believe the angel's message. They were unprepared for what they would see.
- B. They were unprepared for what they were asked to believe. This wasn't new information, but it was a new experience. Jesus had told His disciples, His followers that He would rise again. It is likely that these women were present when Jesus raised Lazarus; certainly if they were not present they heard about it. But even that living illustration was not enough to calm their fears. They were unprepared for what they would see and unprepared for what they were asked to believe.
- C. They were unprepared for what they were asked to do. They were to go and tell what they heard and saw. But they were so overwhelmed they couldn't even speak. I suspect they were so unsure of what just happened that they were not confident to say anything. What if someone asked them questions? They just couldn't believe. So they ran! Before we judge them, we sometimes do the same. We are surprised when what Jesus does is not what we expected and we don't know what to make of it. It may even frighten us. We don't mention it. But eventually word of what happened got out. Mary Magdalene's experience went beyond the other women's experience. Jesus

Himself appeared to her. When she saw Him her fears melted away and she ran to tell. So some are now hearing from an eyewitness that He is alive. But they didn't believe either! Why? Some could not believe because they feared the message.

II. SOME WOULD NOT BELIEVE BECAUSE THEY DIDN'T TRUST THE MESSENGER (9-11)

Verse 10 tells us, "**She** (Mary Magdalene) **went and told those who had been with him, as they mourned and wept.**" She was an eyewitness. She talked to Him. She even touched Him. But verse 11 says, "**But when they heard that he was alive and had been seen by her, they would not believe it.**" Why wouldn't they believe her? I suspect two possible reasons.

A. Maybe it was because of who she was or used to be?

1. In first century Palestine, women were at best treated as second-class citizens. Their testimony was not even admissible in a court of law. It made little sense to those who were listening, that Jesus Himself would make His first appearance to a woman. Not trusting the messenger, they rejected the message.
2. It may not have made any difference, but Mark does mention that this is the Mary from whom Jesus had cast out seven demons. She was clearly a devoted disciple of Jesus, but what she was in the past may have made her testimony less credible. That shouldn't have happened, but it may have. We make the same misjudgments today. Sometimes our message is muted because of who we are or who we used to be.

B. Maybe it was because they were just too upset to listen?

1. The disciples were mourning and weeping. They were overwhelmed with grief. It's Sunday morning. Jesus died on Friday afternoon. Their grief was still raw. There was no doubt at all that He had died, and no woman could comfort them by claiming to have seen Him alive. It was too unbelievable.
2. You remember the story of Thomas. He refused to believe unless he actually saw with his own eyes the Lord Jesus, complete with the marks of crucifixion. We judge Thomas for such a faithless response – but it was really no different than everyone else. The grief was too great, the testimony was too good to be true and the eyewitness was of

questionable credibility. The grief over Jesus' death did not subside. Some could not believe because they feared the message. Others would not believe because they didn't trust the messenger.

III. SOME DID NOT BELIEVE BECAUSE THEY MISSED THE MESSAGE ALTOGETHER (12-13)

Mark doesn't give us too much here, but knowing Luke's account (chapter 24), we can fill in the details. These were the Emmaus disciples – probably a husband and wife. They walked with Jesus and talked with Jesus but they failed to recognize Jesus. Luke makes the case that there was a problem far worse than failing to recognize that this was Jesus to whom they were speaking. The real problem was that they had failed to understand the message altogether! The message of the death and resurrection of Jesus should have been widely understood from the OT writings – but those truths were not. Further, Jesus was not silent concerning His approaching death and resurrection. They understood that He said He was going to die, but somehow they totally missed His teaching regarding His resurrection. When the revelation came to them and they recognized Jesus, He immediately disappeared. So they hurried back to Jerusalem to tell the others of their experience with Jesus. And the others didn't believe them. You see they too had failed to see what had been in front of them all along!

A. The message of the death and resurrection is not hidden.

1. The Law, the prophets and the writings all declared that the Messiah would rise from the dead. Here are just two examples of many: Psalm 16:10 – **“For you will not abandon my soul to Sheol, or let your holy one see corruption.”** Isaiah 53 – looking ahead 700 years to the crucifixion, Isaiah writes, **“when his soul makes an offering for guilt, he shall see his offspring, he shall prolong his days; the will of the Lord shall prosper in his hand.”**
2. Jesus often spoke of His death and resurrection. Matthew 16:21 is representative of many declarations in the Gospels - **From that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised.** He angered the Pharisees with, “Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up.” That should have encouraged

the disciples, but they missed His point. Jesus' enemies got it. That's why they sealed the tomb. The disciples missed the message altogether! But it right there in front of them!

B. The message of the death and resurrection is well documented.

1. One of the greatest pieces of evidence for the resurrection was the empty tomb. Jesus said He would rise. He told the disciples when He would rise. If He arose from the dead, the tomb would be empty. They go to the tomb. It's empty. Of course it's empty. So what is their conclusion? Someone stole His body!
2. The women saw the empty tomb. John and Peter saw the empty tomb. The soldiers saw the empty tomb. The Sanhedrin accepted the evidence of the empty tomb. There was no doubt the tomb was empty. The issue was how was it emptied? The rumor started by the religious leaders was that His disciples had stolen the body. They paid people to say that. But it wasn't stolen. He came out on His own and He appeared to individuals and groups and crowds of people over a forty-day period of time before returning to His Father in heaven. The evidence is clear. The reason the message is missed is not for lack of evidence.

C. The message of the resurrection continues to be dismissed. Why? I think for some of the same reasons we have outlined today. People don't hear the message. They are not prepared for it. They are not looking in the right place. They are so preoccupied with their own issues they can't see God. If they do hear the message they dismiss the messengers. "They are kooks, fanatics, zealots for fairy tales, stuck in another century or another world, judgmental do-gooders..." Look at verse 14...

CONCLUSION - *Afterward he appeared to the eleven themselves as they were reclining at table, and he rebuked them for their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they had not believed those who saw him after he had risen.*

1. Did you notice why Jesus rebukes His disciples – their unbelief and their hardness of heart! Even Jesus' disciples sometimes fail to believe who He is and what He's done. Sometimes our hearts get hardened toward Him as we live in a world that has turned from Him tuned Him out. O, but He's alive. He is

the Savior. Last Sunday we sang a little song – it's quickly becoming one of my favorites. Here are the words: The mystery of the cross, I cannot comprehend. The agonies of Calvary, You, the perfect Holy One, crushed Your Son, who drank the bitter cup reserved for me. By Your perfect sacrifice, I've been brought near. Your enemy, You've made Your friend, pouring out the riches of Your glorious grace; Your mercy and Your kindness know no end... Your blood has washed away my sin. Jesus, thank you. The Father's wrath completely satisfied. Jesus, thank you. Once Your enemy, now, seated at Your table! Jesus, thank you."

2. We began today by singing together, "Christ the Lord is risen today!" I mentioned that when Charles Wesley first penned the lyrics, the repeated word, "alleluia" was missing. I hope it's not missing in your life. I hope you can say with me, "Forever He is glorified; forever He is lifted high; forever He is risen; He's alive!" So what do we do? "We sing hallelujah..." What do we do? "We sing hallelujah!" What do we do? "We sing hallelujah!" Why? The Lamb has overcome – death, sin, our resistance, the enemy, our unbelief – everything that would separate us from Him. Hallelujah! Kids...