

Mark 15:42-16:8 “An Easter Message for a Post-Modern Generation: The Facts Matter”\*\*

**Main Idea: Mark 15:42-16:1-8 enables us to come to grips with two profound, life-changing truths relating to the work of Christ.**

I. Fact #1: Jesus was buried—that verifies that Jesus died (15:42-47).

- A. Joseph requested permission to bury the body (42-43).
- B. Pilate granted permission (44-45).
- C. Joseph buried Jesus (46).
- D. Two women watched (47).

II. Fact #2: Jesus was resurrected—that verifies that Jesus is alive (16:1-8).

Notice four responses exhibited by the women...

A. Response #1: Appreciation (1-3)

- 1. They exhibited devotion (1).
- 2. They encountered difficulty (2-3).

B. Response #2: Amazement (4-5)

- 1. The stone was moved.
- 2. An angel met them.
- 3. Jesus was gone.

C. Response #3: Alarm (6-7)

- 1. Don't be alarmed.
- 2. See the place.
- 3. Go, tell the disciples.

D. Response #4: Awe (8)

- 1. They fled in fear.
- 2. They said nothing.

Application: What effect should the facts have on us?

- 1. We must fear Him.
- 2. We must place our hope in Him.
- 3. We must trust Him.

The bottom line: Has your faith found a resting place?

Last month *The Discovery Channel* aired a program called “The Lost Tomb of Jesus.” The program had to do with the discovery of a first century tomb in Jerusalem that contained ten ossuaries (limestone bone boxes). Six of the ossuaries in this tomb have inscriptions on them, names in fact: Mary, Joseph, Matthew, and *Jesus*. The show suggests that the possibility that these are actually the burial places of the biblical characters who bear those names and in fact contain theirs bones.

I read the following promotional on *Discovery Channel*’s website:

“In the feature documentary *The Lost Tomb of Jesus* a case is made that the **2,000-year-old "Tomb of the Ten Ossuaries" belonged to the family of Jesus of Nazareth** .

All leading epigraphers agree about the inscriptions. All archaeologists confirm the nature of the find...

“The documentary includes dramatic recreations, based on the latest historical evidence, illustrating accurate images of Jesus of Nazareth, his family, his followers, his ministry, his crucifixion and his entombment.

“Part archaeological adventure, part Biblical history, part forensic science, part theological controversy: this is a story that will be carried around the world.”[\[1\]](#)

That’s quite an assertion, to suggest one has discovered the bones of a person who left His grave and took His bones with Him, and who indeed was seen by over 500 witnesses after His resurrection and prior to His ascension into heaven!

What’s even more shocking than the proposed discovery of Jesus’ bones is the response by some that it doesn’t matter, that even if these really are Jesus’ bones, the Christian faith still stands strong. For instance, on Friday, March 09, 2007, Steve Gushee of the Palm Beach Post wrote an article entitled, “Christian Faith Shouldn’t Fear Box of Bones.” He observes:

*The claim that one held the bones of Jesus of Nazareth is highly unlikely. The documentary assumes much and conjectures more to make its case. Even if true, that should not destroy faith in Jesus' resurrection. It might restore a measure of spiritual integrity to a faith awash in false literalism.*

*Religious truth is seldom expressed literally but in images, with poetry and mystery. Resurrection stories are no different.*

*The disciples were convinced that the crucified Jesus was with them. They knew that his living spirit was the driving force in their lives and that, when breaking bread in his name, he was with them. They were convinced that Jesus was alive. That conviction changed the world.*

*The resurrection of Jesus is, for the faithful, a profound spiritual truth about the nature of God and God's relationship with his creation. They need not read the stories that tell of that wonder literally in order to embrace that truth. The resurrection is about new life, not old bones.*

*A seminary dean told me 40 years ago that, even if someone dug up the body of Jesus, he would not believe in that cadaver but in the Jesus embraced by the community that proclaims his resurrection.*[\[2\]](#)

Did he say what I thought he said, that even if the box contains Jesus’ bones it would not destroy faith in Jesus’ resurrection? Yes, that’s what he said.

I’ve entitled this message, “An Easter Message for a Post-Modern Generation: *The Facts Matter*.” In post-modernism truth is relative. That’s why post-modern historians are rewriting the history books. Whether something really happened or not isn’t important. What’s important is how it affects us.

In other words, it doesn’t matter whether or not Jesus literally conquered death and left the tomb. What matters is that the first disciples *believed* He did. They had *faith* that He did, even if their faith lacked the support of the facts.

The facts don't matter. Faith matters. After all, we all need something to believe in and if what you believe in is making your journey through life more pleasant, then great, believe it.

But the facts do matter! We wouldn't settle for a post-modern mechanic. Just imagine your response if your car wasn't running and you took it to a mechanic who didn't even open the hood, but instead put more air in your tires, and billed you \$129. "My car is still dead!" you complained. To which he replied, "It's not really dead. The important thing is that you *believe* it's alive. Just believe!"

Do the facts matter? Absolutely.<sup>[3]</sup> What are the facts regarding Jesus, and what difference do they make? We're going to look at two related historical facts regarding the life of Jesus, two life-changing facts recorded in Mark 15:42-16:8. I'm going to state each fact as well as its significance.

## I. Fact #1: Jesus was buried—that verifies that Jesus died (15:42-47).

Mark documents four historical events related to Jesus' burial.

**A. Joseph requested permission to bury the body (42-43).** Listen to verses 42-43 "It was Preparation Day (that is, the day before the Sabbath). So as evening approached, Joseph of Arimathea, a prominent member of the Council, who was himself waiting for the kingdom of God , went boldly to Pilate and asked for Jesus' body."

Notice the timing. It was evening on the Preparation day, that is, Friday evening. The Jewish sabbath begins at sundown on Friday evening.

A man named Joseph stepped forward to take down Jesus' body (John's gospel tells us Nicodemus helped; John 19:38). Ordinarily, a close relative or friend would have requested the body, but in this case Joseph did.

Who was Joseph? He was from Arimathea, a village about 20 miles north of Jerusalem (the birthplace of Samuel).<sup>[4]</sup> Verse 43 says he was a wealthy, prominent member of the Council, the Jewish Sanhedrin, the very court that condemned Jesus the night before. Joseph had not consented to the decision, according to Luke 23:51, and in fact, was secretly a disciple of Jesus (as we're told in John 19:38). Mark says he was a man who was "waiting for the kingdom of God ."

Which raises a question, "Why does he go public now?" Apparently, he's decided he's spent enough time being a *secret follower* of Jesus.

A couple of weeks ago I was sitting in an airport on a Saturday waiting for my flight home. I had my sermon notes and Bible in my lap. I was reviewing and getting ready for the following morning's sermon. A lady was talking on a cellphone next to me and it was quite apparent by her language that she was not a Christian. I must confess that I found myself a little self-conscious, wondering what this lady would think of me if she read the words on my notes: *We are sinners. We deserve judgment. Christ is our only hope.* I could just see her making a scene, "Are you one of those people who believe the Bible?!" She didn't say a word, and to be honest, I was glad she didn't.

And that thought bothers me. Why am I so timid, so fearful of boldly identifying with my Savior? Ironically, the sermon notes I was reviewing were for the message, "*Forsaken on the Cross.*" He was willing to die for us. Ought we not live openly for Him?

Joseph went public. How did Pilate respond to Joseph's request? Here's event #2...

**B. Pilate granted permission (44-45).** Let's read verses 44-45, "Pilate was surprised to hear that he was already dead [usually victims hung on crosses for days]. Summoning the centurion, he asked him if Jesus had already died. When he learned from the centurion that it was so, he gave the body to Joseph."

Had Joseph not stepped forward, Jesus' body, at best, would have been buried in a common, criminal's grave, and

at worst, would not have been buried at all. Barclay says that often the bodies of criminals were often left for vultures and wild dogs.<sup>[5]</sup> It's been suggested that Golgotha may have been called the place of a skull because it was littered with skulls from previous crucifixions. Here's historical event #3...

**C. Joseph buried Jesus (46).** "So Joseph bought some linen cloth, took down the body, wrapped it in the linen, and placed it in a tomb cut out of the rock. Then he rolled a stone against the entrance of the tomb."

Do you see the careful attention Joseph gave in the treatment of Jesus' body? Mark records five specific details in verse 46. One, Joseph bought fine linen. Two, he took the body down from the cross. Three, he wrapped the body. Four, he laid the body in a rock-hewn grave. And five, he rolled a heavy stone in front of the opening to the tomb.

Why does Mark give us all these details pertaining to Jesus' burial? Don't miss this profound reason. It's to show beyond question that Jesus indeed *died*. That's the *fact* of the matter, and the *facts matter*!

Each of the four gospel writers is careful to include an account of Jesus' burial. Skeptics throughout history have tried to discount the gospel by saying, "Jesus didn't really die." The swoon theory says he merely fainted on the cross, and was revived in the cool air of the tomb. But the fact that He was buried makes it clear that the ones who buried Him were convinced that *Jesus did die*.

The entire gospel message rests on this fact. In 1 Corinthians 15:3-4 Paul defines the gospel, "Christ died for our sins, according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day." He DIED and was BURIED.

You might respond, "What's the big deal? Why does it matter if Jesus died?" My friend, if Jesus did not really die, then the penalty for sin has not been paid ("for the wages of sin is death," Rom. 6:23). And if sin's penalty remains, then there is no hope for sinners like you and me to ever enter the holy presence of God. Do the facts matter? Indeed, they do!

I'm struck that Joseph buried Jesus at great cost to himself. He risked his reputation to openly identify with Jesus. He bought expensive linen. He donated his burial plot.

By the way, someone made an interesting observation about Joseph, "Joseph is the man who gave Jesus a tomb when he was dead but was silent when he was alive. It is one of the commonest tragedies of life that we keep our wreaths for people's graves and our praises until they are dead. It would be infinitely better to give them some of these flowers and some of these words of gratitude when they are still alive."<sup>[6]</sup>

Now the fourth event...

**D. Two women watched (47).** Verse 47 says, "Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joses saw where he was laid." Why does Mark include what seems at first to be an incidental piece of information? Why does he want us to know that these two women saw where Jesus was buried? We find out in the next verse. These women were the same ones who went to the tomb on Sunday.

Bible critics have asserted, "The reason the women found the tomb empty on Sunday was not because Jesus rose again, but because the women went to the *wrong* tomb." Does that theory hold water? No way. Mark clearly states that Mary and Mary *saw* where Jesus was laid.

Often, people who criticize the Bible the loudest know the Bible the least. "How could a book that took over fifteen centuries to write," they say, "a book with over thirty people contributing to its message, how could that book be without contradiction?" The answer is because in reality, the Bible has but *one* author.

2 Peter 1:19-21 says [KJV], "We have a more sure Word of prophecy...For the prophecy came not at any time by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit."

You can trust your Bible. But do you? You ask, "How can I tell if I trust it?" For starters, answer this. Do you

read it? Listen, I'm not a legalist, but I would suggest that if you are not spending personal time in the Bible at least four days a week, then you're not trusting it. If you're not in the Bible in essence you're saying, "I can live without it."

But if you trust your Bible, you'll cherish it. You'll memorize verses from it. You'll make church a priority because you want to study it. You'll share it with others. Those who trust it do.

This morning we're making the point that when the Bible says something, it matters. The *facts matter*. Jesus *did* die. He chose to die. In His own words, He came "to give His life as a ransom payment for many (Mark 10:45)."

"I was smoking pot the first time I heard the gospel," writes C. J. Mahaney. "People often ask me why I'm so confident in God's grace. I explain that my understanding of Scripture and my own conversion experience leave me with no other explanation. God came looking for me. I'm a Christian because God showed mercy, not because I was worthy or wanting to be saved. No, I wasn't searching for God. I was stoned."

"It was 1972. I was sitting in my bedroom smoking a joint when my friend Bob began to share the simple story of Jesus dying for my sins. I'd grown up in the Catholic church and had never heard the gospel. But that night as I listened, God revealed Himself and regenerated my heart. I believed. The cross was for *me*. Jesus was *my* Savior. The worst of sinners, in the midst of his sin, was born again."[\[7\]](#)

He died for our sins, beloved. Your sins. My sins. That's what makes His death so significant. *Christ died for our sins*. Let the words of this hymn by Horatius Bonar grip your soul:

'Twas I that shed the sacred Blood,  
I nailed him to the Tree;  
I crucified the Christ of God;  
I joined the mockery.  
  
And of that shouting multitude  
I feel that I am one;  
And in that din of voices rude  
I recognize my own.  
  
Around the cross the throng I see  
That mock the Sufferer's groan;  
Yet still my voice it seems to be,  
As if I mocked alone.[\[8\]](#)

We're considering two facts that have the power to change your life. Here's fact #1—Jesus was buried. That verifies that Jesus died.

"But wait," you say. "Lots of great men have died. Why is there hope for change in that?" The answer is because of a second fact, the one revealed in Mark 16:1-8.

II. Fact #2: Jesus was resurrected—that verifies that Jesus is alive (16:1-8).

J. D. Jones offered this insight, “It is only in the light of Easter morning that we can understand the Cross!” Jones is right.

Mark doesn't actually include an appearance of the risen Christ at the tomb. Matthew does. Matthew 28:9 reveals that Jesus appeared to the women who fell at His feet. In John's account there's a description of Jesus' appearance to Mary Magdalene (20:14). But Mark's focus is on the effect Jesus' resurrection had on people, namely three women.

What effect did the resurrection have on the women? For that matter, how should it affect us? We'll observe four responses exhibited by the women...

### A. Response #1: Appreciation (1-3)

Let's pick up the narrative at verse 1, “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.” Answer this. Why did the women go to the grave that morning? In going...

1. *They exhibited devotion (1).* The text says the women went to anoint Jesus' body. The anointing was not for the purpose of preserving the body (the Jews didn't practice embalming).<sup>[91]</sup> It was an act of love and devotion. Israel's hot climate caused corpses to decay rapidly, and the anointing was intended to reduce the stench.

I remind you it was dangerous for the women to be associated with a condemned criminal, much less at His tomb. But that didn't matter to them because of their devotion. But their devotion was tested—true devotion always is—for in verses 2-3...

2. *They encountered difficulty (2-3).* Verse 2 states, “Very early on the first day of the week, just after sunrise, they were on their way to the tomb.” In verse 3 we find out the question that perplexed the ladies as they made their journey that Sunday morning, “And they asked each other, 'Who will roll the stone away from the entrance of the tomb?'”

Frankly, that was a major hurdle. The construction of first century Jewish sepulchers was such that these women could NOT have entered the tomb without help. And who would help them? The soldiers? Hardly. Who then? They didn't know. But love prompted them to do what reason would not.

Ponder that thought. Why did the women go to the tomb? They had one, simple motivation—*to be near Jesus*. In fact, if you'll look back at verses 40-41, you'll discover an insight about these women. They followed Jesus and cared for His needs when He was in Galilee. And when He was on the Cross, they were there with Him. And when His body lay in the tomb, they were there wanting to be near Him.

Sometimes we make the Christian life too difficult. Right here is a great model. Do you want to be a successful Christian? Then make it your number one aim to be near Jesus. To be a Christian you must know Jesus. To be a strong Christian, you must know Jesus well. And how do we get to know Him well? By spending time with Him. Daily time in His Word and prayer. Weekly time with His Body, the church.

And I can't help but ask a question in light of this text. Where were the MEN?! Mary and Mary and Salome were at the tomb, but where were the men? For that matter, where are the men today?

Men, are you exercising spiritual leadership in your home? Is being near the Lord your highest priority in life. Be honest. For a lot of men, what's most important is the job, or the golf clubs, or something else. Can your wife say of you, “The most important thing in my husband's life is pleasing Christ”? She ought not have to wonder.

On a positive note, I am very thankful when I see what's happening in the lives of many men and women and young people in this church. Pleasing Christ *is* your priority because you're filled with appreciation for what Christ has done for you.

### B. Response #2: Amazement (4-5)

What amazed the women? They confronted three surprises in verses 4-5.

1. *The stone was moved.* Verse 4 states, “But when they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had been rolled away.” Never forget this. The stone wasn’t moved to let Jesus out. The stone was moved to let the women in. And they were let in so they could be witnesses of the amazing fact that the tomb was empty!

2. *An angel met them.* Verse 5 says, “As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man dressed in a white robe sitting on the right side, and they were alarmed.” Notice Mark doesn’t call him an angel (Matthew does). In the Bible, angels are not typically depicted as winged creatures, but as men. But the greatest surprise of all was the third.

3. *Jesus was gone.* The angel was there. The grave clothes were there. But Jesus’ body (the one they had seen placed in that tomb) was not! Please keep in mind that at this point for the women an empty tomb only raised a question: “Where was Jesus’ body?” They needed a word from God to explain WHY the tomb was empty. Had the body been stolen? Was it the wrong tomb? The answer came in verse 6, and the answer elicited a third response.

### C. Response #3: Alarm (6-7)

Verses 6-7 are thrilling to read: “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. 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.’”

The angel gave the women three shocking instructions...

1. *Don't be alarmed.* Verse 5 says they *were* alarmed, but the angel’s first words were, “Don’t be alarmed!”

2. *See the place.* As the KJV renders it, “Behold the place where they laid him.” Remember the seminary dean I mentioned at the outset, the one who said that even if someone dug up the body of Jesus, he would not believe in that cadaver but in the Jesus embraced by the community that proclaims his resurrection? Know this. The doctrine of the resurrection is not about some idea that was raised in the hearts of Jesus’ followers. It’s about Jesus’ body, the very one that died and was placed on a stone slab. That body was resurrected in glory, and that body left the tomb! The facts matter!

3. *Go, tell the disciples.* Tell them what? Hear the angel: tell them Jesus is going to Galilee , and tell them you will *see* Him there!

Beloved, a dead Savior can’t save anybody. But Jesus isn’t dead, is He? The angel’s announcement is true! “He is not here. He is risen!”

How did the women respond to that pronouncement?

### D. Response #4: Awe (8)

It went from *appreciation* to *amazement* to *alarm* and culminated with *awe*. Verse 8 declares, “Trembling and bewildered, the women went out and fled from the tomb. They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid.” In response to the angel’s announcement, the women did two things.

1. *They fled in fear.* The word "bewildered" ["amazed" in the KJV] in verse 8 is the Greek word *ekstasis*, a term which indicates a sense of joy as well as fear.[\[10\]](#) The news was just too much to grasp. So the women fled in fear. Secondly...

2. *They said nothing.* The word means ‘dumbfounded’ ( NEB ). As the women fled they said nothing.

That is, nothing at first. The other accounts make it clear that after they collected their wits, the women did a lot of talking (Matt 28:8). But at first, they were scared speechless.

Unfortunately, not a few Christians today have lost the sense of holy awe in their worship. We tend to domesticate Jesus. Yet did you ever notice how many times in the Bible, when people experienced true worship, they didn't feel good about themselves? They loathed themselves. They cried out for mercy!

When Jesus did the miracle in Peter's boat, remember Peter's response? He begged the Lord to leave him, saying, "I am a sinful man!" When Isaiah saw the Lord, he fell on his face and cursed himself, "Woe is me!" So too, when the women realized they were in a holy place, they trembled.

So here are the facts. Jesus was buried—that verifies that He died. And Jesus was resurrected—that verifies that He is alive. Do the facts matter? Without a doubt.

### Application: What effect should the facts have on us?

We must respond in three ways.

*1. We must fear Him.* If Jesus is alive, and He is, it means that He was powerful enough to conquer death, to break the chains of the grave, and to defeat the evil forces of hell. My friend, we'd better not trivialize someone that powerful! We'd better not ignore someone that powerful. We'd better fear Him.

Listen, the Lord Jesus Christ will not settle for second place in our lives. He's not interested in our leftovers. He Who went nose to nose with our greatest enemy, death itself, and won, is not One we'd be wise to ignore. Do you fear Him?

*2. We must place our hope in Him.* I'll state it as plainly as I can. God accepts those who place their hope in Jesus Christ, in His death as their substitute, and in His triumphant resurrection. Is that your hope? Does the following reflect your heart's cry?

*Bearing shame and scoffing rude, in my place condemned He stood,*

*Sealed my pardon with His blood, Hallelujah! What a Savior!*

*My sin—O the bliss of this glorious thought—my sin, not in part but the whole,*

*Is nailed to the cross and I bear it no more, praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O my soul!*

Where is your hope this morning? Is it in Christ? It matters not who you are or what you've done—good or bad. You need to place your hope in Christ. "Neither is there salvation in any other name under heaven whereby we must be saved (Acts 4:12)."

We must fear Him. And we must place our hope in Him. Thirdly...

*3. We must trust Him.* We must trust Him for salvation, yes, but we must also trust Him for daily living, and here's why. We are so weak! But He, the One who conquered death, is so strong!

Fellow Christian, are you struggling today? Maybe it's your tongue or a habit. Maybe it's fear or anxiety. Whatever it is, you can change.

How? Not by your own strength—for we do not have the ability to achieve God's holy standard. But you can change—by living in light of Christ's death and resurrection.

One of the best proofs of Jesus' resurrection is the change that happened to Jesus' followers in the book of Acts. Obnoxious Peter became a humble servant. Skeptical Thomas became confident. Judgmental, self-righteous Paul became dead to self. Timid Mark became bold. Proud John became selfless. These people were changed.

Beloved, we need to live with the cross and the empty tomb in mind, not just at Easter, but *every day!* We need to live cross-centered, empty-tomb-centered lives moment by moment.

“How do I do that?” you ask. “Be practical,” you insist. Okay, I will. Read C. J. Mahaney’s *The Cross Centered Life* this month and do what it says. I’m serious. Pastor Mahaney offers plenty of practical steps that will help us keep the cross fixed in our daily gaze. I want us to read it as a church family, and talk about it together, and apply it.

Why? Because the facts matter! Lidie Edmunds got it right...

*My faith has found a resting place, not in device or creed*

*I trust the Ever-living One, His wounds for me shall plead.*

*I need no other argument, I need no other plea;*

*It is enough that Jesus died, And that He died for me.<sup>[11]</sup>*

**Here's the bottom line: Has your faith found a resting place?**

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<sup>\*\*</sup>Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

<sup>[11]</sup> <http://dsc.discovery.com/convergence/tomb/explore/explore.html>

<sup>[2]</sup> I’m indebted to Al Mohler’s comments concerning Steve Gushee’s article; See [www.albertmohler.com](http://www.albertmohler.com)

<sup>[3]</sup> By the way, post-modernism isn’t anything new, so don’t be intimidated by it. One hundred years ago the modernists made similar claims when they denied the supernatural and tried to recreate Christianity without the miraculous.

<sup>[4]</sup> Wessel, 784.

<sup>[5]</sup> Barclay, p. 366.

<sup>[6]</sup> Barclay, 367

<sup>[7]</sup> C. J. Mahaney, *The Cross Centered Life*, pp. 72-73.

<sup>[8]</sup> Taken from *The Cross Centered Life*, by C. J. Mahaney, p. 63.

<sup>[9]</sup> Wessel, p. 786

<sup>[10]</sup> Cole, p. 333.

<sup>[11]</sup> “My Faith Has Found a Resting Place,” by Lidie H. Edmunds