

Wheelersburg Baptist Church 4/5/15

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Mark 15:42-16:8 “Appreciating Easter: The Facts Matter”^{**1}

Series: “*Preparing for Passion Week: Seeing the Cross from Mark’s Perspective*”

Main Idea: If we are going to appreciate Easter, the facts matter. We need to know what they are, and respond rightly to them. According to Mark 15:42-16:1-8, there are two important facts we must consider.

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)
- B. Response #2: Amazement (4-5)
- C. Response #3: Alarm (6-7)
- D. Response #4: Awe (8)

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?

Scripture Reading: Matthew 28:1-15

I want to begin by saying something controversial that, at first, won’t sound controversial, but is very much so. In fact, it divides millions of people sitting in churches right now into two categories.

If we are going to appreciate Easter, the facts matter. We need to know what they are, and respond rightly to them.

Millions would say yes. Millions would say no.

A few years ago *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 their bones.

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

^{**}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.

¹ For a previous development of this passage, see the series in Mark’s Gospel preached in 2007.

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?

I've entitled this message, "Appreciating Easter: *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 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, of course, no one really believes that. 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."

Do the facts matter? Absolutely.³

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

Mark documents four events associated with 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,

² I'm indebted to Al Mohler's comments concerning Steve Gushee's article; See www.albertmohler.com

³ 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.

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).⁴ 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 few years 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, at times, am I so timid, so fearful of boldly identifying with my Savior? 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?

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.⁵ It's been suggested that Golgotha was called the place of a skull because it was littered with skulls from previous crucifixions.

Here's 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

⁴ Wessel, 784.

⁵ Barclay, p. 366.

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 when it comes to Jesus 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.

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."⁶

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.

The critics says, "How could a book that took over fifteen centuries to write, 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.

⁶ Barclay, 367

But do you? You ask, “How can I tell if I trust it?” Answer this. Do you read it? If we’re not spending personal time in the Bible on a regular basis, rather than trusting it we’re basically saying, “I can live without it.”

But if we trust the Bible, we’ll cherish it. We’ll memorize verses from it. We’ll make learning it on the Lord’s Day a priority. We’ll share it with others.

Friends, 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, brothers and sisters. Your sins. My sins. That’s what makes His death so significant. *Christ died for our sins*.

I urge you to make it personal, as did the hymnwriter, Horatius Bonar.

*’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

If we’re going to appreciate Easter, the facts matter, and here’s the first fact we’re considering. Jesus was buried. That verifies that Jesus indeed died.

“But wait,” you say. “Lots of great men have died. Why makes Jesus’ death unique?” The answer brings us to the 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.

⁷ C. J. Mahaney, *The Cross Centered Life*, pp. 72-73.

⁸ Taken from *The Cross Centered Life*, by C. J. Mahaney, p. 63.

Mark doesn't actually include an appearance of the risen Christ at the tomb. Matthew does. And John does too. 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 was the effect? And just as vital, 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? First, 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).⁹ 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.

Keep in mind it was dangerous for the women to be associated with a condemned criminal. But that didn't matter to them because of their devotion. They loved the Savior.

But their devotion was tested—true devotion always is. 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 meant 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.

Just ponder that for a moment. 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 something about these women. They had 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 now with His body laying in the tomb, they are still wanting to be near Him.

Sometimes we make the Christian life too complicated. Here's a simple lesson. Do you want to be a vibrant Christian? Then make it your number one aim to be near Jesus. To become a Christian you must know Jesus. To become 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 the spiritual pacesetter in your home? Is it obvious to those under your influence that being near the Lord is your highest priority in life. More important than the job, or the golf clubs, or anything else.

⁹ Wessel, p. 786

Can your wife say of you, “The most important thing in my husband's life is pleasing Christ”? Can your kids. They ought not have to wonder.

Must they see perfection? That won't happen in this life. But by His grace, let's show those around us that nothing is more important than Jesus in our lives.

There's the first response, *appreciation*.

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.” Of course, 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.” You'll 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. The angel was there. The grave clothes were there. But...

3. *Jesus was gone.* Jesus' body (the one they had seen placed in that tomb) wasn't there! Please keep in mind that 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 it elicited a third response.

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

I love reading verses 6-7, “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 delivered three shocking instructions to the women.

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 conjured up 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 began to live again, not simply as it was, a mangled crucified body, but as a death-conquering, glorified body. And the person with this death-conquering, glorified body left the tomb as a victorious, eternal-life-offering Savior.

Friends, those are the facts, and the facts matter. As Paul put it, “If Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith (1 Cor 15:14).” If we don't believe that Christ literally left the tomb alive, we might as well shut the doors and go home.

But we do believe. Therefore, we have an assignment. Which brings us to the next set of instructions the angel gave the women.

3. *Go, tell the disciples.* Tell them what? Tell them Jesus is going ahead of you into Galilee. And tell them you will *see Him* there.

He's not done with you. You disowned Him, but He had not disowned you. He wants to see you, to unleash you on a mission. Including Peter.

I'm so encouraged by those words. *And Peter.* Tell the disciples *and Peter.* Jesus knows Peter is heartbroken. Peter had made big promises, and then failed to follow through. But Jesus wasn't done with him, nor with the other Peters in this world, including those here this morning.

If you can identify with Peter, my friend, then know this about Jesus. He has a message for you, too. He wants to see you too, to restore you, to unleash you into His service, no matter what you've done.

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."

So after hearing the angel, 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.

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.

Have you noticed how many times in the Bible, when people experienced the supernatural, they were shook to the core? Sometimes they loathed themselves, and 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.

These are the facts, and the facts are powerful. Jesus was buried—that verifies that He died. And Jesus was resurrected—that verifies that He is alive.

Application: What effect should the facts have on us?

Let me suggest three implications.

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. If I can put it this way, it's not wise to trivialize someone that powerful. We'd better fear Him.

¹⁰ Cole, p. 333.

Listen, the *Lord* Jesus Christ will not settle for second place in our lives. His title *Lord* makes it clear He's not interested in our leftovers. He who did battle with our greatest enemy, death itself, and won, is not Someone we can ignore.

Do you fear the Lord? No, it's not the only response, but it's the initial one.

2. *We must place our hope in Him.* I'll say it as plainly as I can. God accepts those who place their hope in Jesus Christ, who believe He died as their substitute, for their sins, and who believe He rose again to secure their eternal salvation. 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!*

How about this?

*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 the person and work of Jesus Christ? It matters not who you are or what you've done—good or bad. To be saved, you must 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.* Trust Him for salvation, yes, but it doesn't stop there. 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!

My fellow Christian, are you struggling today? Maybe it's a habit. Maybe it's fear or anxiety. Whatever it is, you can become the person God wants you to be.

How? Not by your own strength—for we do not have the ability to achieve God's holy standard. But we 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.

That's what church is all about. Doing life with a people who cherish the cross, who find their identity in it, who work together to make the message of the cross known to the world. If you don't have a church family, talk to me afterwards. We're here for you.

Fear Him. Hope in Him. Trust Him. 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.¹¹*

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

¹¹ “My Faith Has Found a Resting Place,” by Lidie H. Edmunds