



WESTLAKE HILLS
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

“Buried Treasure”
Sermon Series: “The Way of Jesus”

Mark 15:42-16:8

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Easter Sunday – April 4, 2010

Mark 15:42-16:8

(New International Version)

The Burial of Jesus

⁴²It was Preparation Day (that is, the day before the Sabbath). So as evening approached, ⁴³Joseph 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. ⁴⁴Pilate was surprised to hear that he was already dead. Summoning the centurion, he asked him if Jesus had already died. ⁴⁵When he learned from the centurion that it was so, he gave the body to Joseph. ⁴⁶So Joseph bought some linen cloth, took down the body, wrapped it in the linen, and placed it in a tomb cut out of rock. Then he rolled a stone against the entrance of the tomb. ⁴⁷Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Jesus saw where he was laid.

Mark 16

The Resurrection

¹When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices so that they might go to anoint Jesus' body. ²Very early on the first day of the week, just after sunrise, they were on their way to the tomb ³and they asked each other, "Who will roll the stone away from the entrance of the tomb?"

⁴But when they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had been rolled away. ⁵As 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. ⁷But go, tell his disciples and Peter, 'He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.' "

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

Introduction.

Stories of buried treasure are fascinating, aren't they? At the turn of the 19th century, Charles IV was the king of Spain. He was concerned about the French Emperor Napoleon, and he feared that the tyrant could not be stopped.

When Napoleon began to head his army toward Spain, Charles decided to bury his priceless collection of antique clocks and the crown jewels of Spain in the walls of his palace. There were 365 rooms in that palace. Charles instructed a trusted servant to go and bury them in one of the walls of a room somewhere so that even the king did not know where they were. When he was done, he should cover the walls over so that no one could see any trace of the hidden treasure.

This trusted servant did as he was told, and he hid the clocks and the crown jewels in the walls of one of the rooms. He cut a little swatch of the drapery that covered the walls, and he kept it in his pocket so he would be able to remember in which room he hid the treasures should the Spanish monarchy ever get the throne back again.



Charles' fears were correct. Napoleon invaded and conquered Spain, and the Emperor installed his brother, Joseph, on the throne. Several years later, in 1814, Ferdinand VII, the son of Charles IV, came back, and he reclaimed the throne of Spain once again. The first thing he wanted to do was to find the crown jewels and the collection of clocks. However, there was one major problem. Joseph had been somewhat of an interior decorator, and he changed the draperies in all 365 rooms in the palace! The little swatch of cloth that was given to Ferdinand meant absolutely nothing. So he was faced with a difficult choice. Should he tear the walls out of 365 different rooms and search for the crown jewels, or should he just let it go. Amazingly, he decided to take his losses, and he gave up.

It wasn't many years before those in Europe began to assume that this story of the clocks and the jewels was all just a court legend. For if it was true, would any expense have been too great to go and tear out those walls and look for the jewels and the clocks? But was it just a legend?

Just a few years ago, a plumber was called to that palace to repair something. It seems that a pipe in the wall was beginning to leak and drip into another room. So he had to tear out a wall and find the pipe. This plumber found a strange collection of antique clocks. It gave the clue that the crown jewels were there as well. The buried treasure had been found!

Easter reminds me of that story of the palace in Spain. It is also a story of buried treasure. But Easter also reminds me of the reaction of Europe to that story, because many people in the world today believe that all we are doing this morning is really just celebrating a legend. They think it is only a myth that Jesus rose from the dead. People rising from the dead, stories of buried treasure – aren't these things just fairy tales and the stuff of someone's overly-active imagination?

This morning I invite you to dig with me and look at this passage of Scripture which speaks of Jesus' Resurrection. I think you'll discover there are profound reasons to believe in the historicity of this remarkable event, and there is more than enough evidence to persuade any honest seeker of truth. It is also a truth that can change your life.

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Why is it important that the Resurrection actually happened? There are some who argue the bodily resurrection of Jesus doesn't really matter that much, and they say it is the *idea* of the Resurrection or the *notion* of hope it inspires that is really the important thing to keep in mind, regardless of what actually happened to Jesus' body. However, this view disparages the biblical account of the events, and it calls into question the veracity of the truth claims of Christianity.

In his book *Know Why You Believe* author Paul Little once said the following about importance of the Resurrection. If Jesus **did** actually rise from the dead, it is the most sensational event in human history, and it answers the profound questions of our existence: where have we come from? why are we here? and where are we going? But if Christ **did not** actually rise from the dead, then Christianity is just an interesting museum piece, and we are poor deluded fools. Our faith as Christians stands or falls with our belief in the Resurrection. Disprove the Resurrection, and Christianity comes tumbling down like a house of cards. That is how important this article of faith is to a Christian understanding of things.

To determine the veracity or truthfulness of a claim, there are two different methods we can use. One is the scientific method, and the other is the historical-legal method. The scientific method utilizes a controlled experiment that is repeatable in which observations are made, data is drawn, and the results are empirically verified.

However, when one comes to an event in history, one cannot apply the scientific method of inquiry to determine the truthfulness of a claim. Instead you have to use what is called the historical-legal method do discover the truth when it comes to matters of history. In this approach,



you secure oral and written testimony from eye witnesses, and you study the physical evidence available. Photographs, clothing, written documents, and the like, as well as oral or written testimony concerning the physical evidence, are examined. We use this method in courts of law where evidence is presented to judges and juries to establish what really happened.

When it comes to the Resurrection, there is no shortage of reliable evidence to demonstrate the credibility of the claim that Jesus actually rose from the grave. It is clear from the written testimony Jesus was dead. The executioners examined Him before Joseph of Arimathea took His body (Mk. 15:44; Jn. 19:31-37), and Pilate even questioned the centurion soldier on this matter (15:44,45). Jesus' body was placed in a new tomb that was hewn out of rock, and a large stone as rolled in front of it after the body was placed there.

We learn from Matthew's gospel that a Roman seal was then placed upon the tomb (Mt. 27:66), and to break a Roman seal was to break Roman Law. We also learn Roman soldiers were stationed to guard the tomb, because the Jewish leaders were afraid that Jesus' followers might try to steal the body (Mt. 27:62-66). If a Roman soldier fell asleep or left his post while on guard, the resulting penalty was death. After Jesus died, all the disciples fled, and they scattered in fear.

Then on the first day of the week, that first Easter Sunday, very early in the morning just after sunrise, three women – Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Solome went to the tomb to anoint the body of Jesus with spices and complete the task of burial. They wondered who would roll the stone away for them because it was so heavy. However, when they arrived at the tomb, they discovered the stone had already been rolled away, and the tomb was empty. We learn from Luke's gospel the linen grave clothes were still there, and Matthew tells us the Roman soldiers fled at the Resurrection, and the chief priest and members of the Sanhedrin bribed them to tell a different story.

All told in the New Testament, there are 11 appearances Jesus made to the disciples after the Resurrection. Our Lord appeared to: Mary Magdalene; the women returning from the tomb; the apostle Peter; the two disciples on the road to Emmaus; the apostles with Thomas absent; the apostles with Thomas present; the seven by the Lake of Tiberias; a multitude of 500 on a Galilean Mountain; James, the Lord's half-brother; the 11 disciples when Christ gave the Great Commission in Matthew 28; and then at His ascension in Acts 1. In addition, the Lord appeared to Stephen when he was stoned to death, the apostle Paul on the road to Damascus, and the apostle John when he was in exile on the island of Patmos.

If one applies the historical-legal method of inquiry, the Resurrection is one of the best attested events of ancient history. Even the enemies of Christ gave no refutation of the Resurrection. Just present the body of Jesus, and the case is closed. But that never happened, because the body was never found. Jesus rose from the dead.

Dr. Paul Maier, professor of ancient history at Western Michigan University, has written, "If all the evidence is weighed carefully and fairly, it is indeed justifiable, according to the canons of historical research, to conclude that the tomb in which Jesus was buried was actually empty on the morning of the first Easter. And no shred of evidence has yet been discovered in literary sources, epigraphy or archaeology that would disprove this statement."ⁱ

There was a British lawyer by the name of Frank Morrison who had been brought up in a skeptical environment. He came to the opinion the Resurrection was nothing more than a fairy-tale with a happy ending, and he felt he owed it to himself and others to write a book that would present the truth about Jesus and dispel the mythical story of the Resurrection. However, upon studying the facts, he, too, came to a different conclusion. The sheer weight of the evidence compelled him to believe that Jesus actually did rise from the dead. Frank Morrison did write his book, but not the one



he planned. It is entitled, *Who Moved the Stone?*, and the first chapter is, "The Book That Refused To Be Written."

Perhaps the greatest argument for the Resurrection is the resulting effect it has had on the world. If Jesus did not rise from the dead, there is no explanation for the Christian Sabbath being observed on Sunday or the creation of the Church. William Barclay has written, "One thing is certain -- if Jesus had not risen from the dead, we would never have heard of Him. The attitude of the women was that they had come to pay the last tribute to a dead body. The attitude of the disciples was that everything had finished in tragedy. But the best proof of the Resurrection is the existence of the Christian Church."ⁱⁱ The changed lives of the disciples also presents compelling proof. All the disciples abandoned Jesus and fled at His arrest, and those who followed the events of the crucifixion did so at a distance. But just 40 days later, these same disciples were in the streets of Jerusalem boldly proclaiming the Resurrection. Peter, who denied Christ three times, stood before the Sanhedrin, the same court which had sentenced Jesus to die, and he stated unequivocally with great boldness, *"Rulers and elders of the people! If we are being called to account today for an act of kindness shown to a cripple and are asked how he was healed, then know this, you and everyone else in Israel: It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, who you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you completely healed"* (Acts 4:8-10).

The only thing that can explain the radical turn around on the part of the disciples is the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is **the** verification point of Christianity. Nothing else could have changed sad and despairing men and women into people radiant with joy and flaming with courage, willing to die for this claim! The Resurrection of Jesus Christ is **the** central fact of the Christian faith.

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On this Easter morning, I ask: do you believe in the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, and, if you do, how does it affect the way you live? Do you live in the light of this amazing truth, or do you live as though Jesus is still in the grave? Do you have hope and optimism this morning as you face a difficult situation, or a problem at work, or a broken relationship, or are you discouraged and crushed by the weight of it all? The Resurrection gives us hope and confidence even in the face of death itself, no matter what comes our way.

One of the most curious things in this passage is to read of the way these three women went to the tomb and discovered it empty, they saw an angel and heard his report that Jesus had risen from the dead, they received the charge to go and tell the disciples and Peter this amazing truth and that He would meet them in Galilee, but the text tells us *"they went away trembling and bewildered..and said nothing to anyone."* They couldn't believe it was true, and they remained in their grief.

How often are we like them? The good news of God's love has been given to us, we've been offered the transforming power of Jesus' Resurrection, but we live our lives as though He was still in the grave, and we are afraid to tell anyone about it.

Friend, there is nothing that can overtake us which our Lord cannot transform for good. The Resurrection does not promise that we will be delivered from our problems. Jesus was not delivered from the cross. But the Resurrection does give us the assurance that God will see us through our problems, and He will transform us in the midst of them. That is the resurrection power of God which is available to you and me this day as we celebrate Easter today.

W.E. Sangster was a famous British pastor. In the prime of his life, he began to notice some uneasiness in his throat and a dragging in his leg. He went to a doctor and found he had an incurable



disease that causes progressive muscular atrophy. He learned his muscles would gradually waste away, his voice would fail, and his throat would soon be unable to swallow.

Rather than dwell on his misfortune and sink into self-pity, Sangster determined to make the most of his days, and he threw himself all the more into his work. Figuring he could still write and would have even more time for prayer, he worked harder than ever. Sangster wrote articles and books, and he helped organize prayer groups throughout England. When asked about his illness, he would say, "I'm only in the kindergarten of suffering."

Gradually Sangster's legs became useless. His voice disappeared completely, but he could still hold a pen, shakily. On Easter morning, just a few weeks before He died, he wrote a letter to his daughter. In it he wrote these words, "It is terrible to wake up on Easter morning and have no voice with which to shout, "He is risen!" But it would be still more terrible to have a voice and not want to shout it!"ⁱⁱⁱ

The Lord Jesus Christ **did** rise from the dead, and His resurrected life and power are available to each one of us this day. Rejoice in the goodness of God's grace! Rejoice in the blessedness of His love! And rejoice in the strength of His power to turn night into day, sadness into joy, and death into life! The resurrected body of Jesus and the empty tomb is the greatest story of buried treasure in the history of the world. May this Easter be the best ever for you and your family as you celebrate the wonder and the mystery of this good news. He is risen! He is risen indeed! Amen.

ⁱPaul L. Maier, *Independent Press-Telegram*, Long Beach, CA, April 21, 1973, p. A-10.

ⁱⁱWilliam Barclay, *The Gospel of Mark*, p.368.

ⁱⁱⁱSource unknown.

