

Sermon Title: Trembling and Astonished
Scripture Text: Mark 16:1-8

Speaker: Jim Harris
Date: 4-12-20

You who normally worship with us at Heritage Bible Church know that long ago, we began a study in the Gospel of Mark. It's been well over a year; it's been a wonderful tour through the life of Jesus. When we reached the point at which Jesus had been crucified—the end of Chapter 15—and He had been placed in the tomb, we stopped there because we had a little interim, and I wanted to actually conclude Mark's record of the life of Christ with his record of the Resurrection, and so we saved it for today. We're going to look at Mark Chapter 16, Verses 1 through 8 this morning.

Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John all include different aspects of the events that unfolded on that morning when the tomb was found empty. We're not going to do a full harmony of all four Gospels on this subject; it's a good thing to do, but we're not going to do that because we're going to deal with Mark. We are going to wrap up Mark's Gospel, and we *will* insert a few details from the others, where it helps the most.

Just as Mark is the shortest of the four Gospels overall, his is the shortest of the four accounts of events surrounding the Resurrection of Jesus. Have you ever thought about the fact that, not one of the people who visited the empty tomb woke up that morning full of excitement to go verify that Jesus rose from the dead? The only ones that showed up there who were expecting a resurrection where the angels—not one of the human beings did; not one of them *actually* believed it was physically going to happen. That's true of the soldiers who lied about it. It is also true about even the most faithful followers of Jesus; their spiritual eyes were not opened to actually grasp the Resurrection until *after* they saw the empty tomb and they heard from the angels and, in some cases, not even until they saw Jesus in person (see Lk. 16:31)

So I saved this text for Easter, and since it's been over two months since our last visit to Mark, I want to take you to the last scene that we saw in Mark before we left: Mark Chapter 15, Verses 42 through 47—"When evening had already come"—the evening of the day on which Jesus was crucified—"because it was the preparation day, that is, the day before the Sabbath, Joseph of Arimathea came, a prominent member of the Council, who himself was waiting for the kingdom of God; and he gathered up courage and went in before Pilate, and asked for the body of Jesus. Pilate wondered if He was dead by this time, and summoning the centurion, he questioned him as to whether He was already dead"—and you understand, that had to do with the spear in the side of Jesus, which is not recorded in Mark (see Jn. 19:31-37). "And ascertaining this from the centurion, he granted the body to Joseph. Joseph bought a linen cloth, took Him down, wrapped Him in the linen cloth and laid Him in a tomb which had been hewn out in the rock; and he rolled a stone against the entrance of the tomb. Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joseph were looking on to see where He was laid." (NASB, and throughout, unless otherwise noted)

We know that this tomb actually was Joseph's tomb (Matt. 27:59-60). We know it was the kind of tomb that only a wealthy person could have; it was carved out of the rock, and there was a central area you could enter, and then there would be niches around where bodies could be laid, and the bodies would be laid there until all the soft tissue was gone, and then the bones were gathered up and placed into a box called an "ossuary," and then buried in that way.

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We know that just before that scene that we read about them taking the body from the cross, the two Marys and some other women had been watching all along, from the Crucifixion all the way to the burial. They discreetly—from afar—followed to make sure that they knew where the body of Jesus was laid; that's because they intended to return after the Sabbath to make sure that Jesus's body was treated with all the dignity of which they regarded Him as worthy. To them, Joseph and Nicodemus were almost certainly strangers; we have no reason to believe that they knew those two men; they had not been with Jesus like the women, who had followed Him. And besides, you can think from a human perspective, they were probably thinking, "These are two guys." Maybe the women were worried about the men, in their hasty work to scramble and beat the deadline of the sunset on Friday, that Jesus just wouldn't be treated as He ought to be.

It was sundown on Friday when we last left our studies in Mark, and we need to get to Sunday morning. Well, between Friday evening and Sunday morning, there is Saturday. Between Friday evening and what happens in our text for this morning, some very significant things happened, and it started on Saturday morning. For this, we want to flip over to Matthew Chapter 27, starting at Verse 62—"Now on the next day, the day after the preparation, the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered together with Pilate, and said, 'Sir, we remember that when He was still alive that deceiver said, "After three days I am to rise again." Therefore, give orders for the grave to be made secure until the third day, otherwise His disciples may come and steal Him away and say to the people, "He has risen from the dead," and the last deception will be worse than the first.' Pilate said to them, 'You have a guard; go, make it as secure as you know how.' And they went and made the grave secure, and along with the guard they set a seal on the stone."

This is incredible! How wonderful it is, in the providence of God, that He used the *flagrant* hypocrisy of the chief priests and the Pharisees. They did this *first thing in the morning*—that was smack dab in the middle of the Sabbath! They *broke* their own Sabbath regulations, which they had gotten pretty good at doing by now; they broke all their rules about having contact with Gentile people and Gentile places. And what *they meant* to use to prevent the possibility of someone faking the Resurrection, *God* actually used to guarantee that He would provide independent testimony of Roman soldiers to the *reality* of the Resurrection! On a side note: Isn't it ironic that Jesus's worst enemies understood that He predicted His physical resurrection, but His most devoted followers, even if the words registered in their head, they didn't believe it until *after* it happened (see Lk. 24:25, 45).

Yesterday in my e-mail to our flock, I posed a question; it goes like this: When you put together everything in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John about Jesus rising from the dead, what is missing? Have you ever thought about that? I got some answers; I didn't get any *wrong* answers. One answer I got was: "Nothing—because the Bible contains 'everything pertaining to life and godliness' (2 Pet. 1:3)"—*that's* absolutely true. Another one I got was: "Good works; we're not called to *do* anything, only to believe in this." I actually got several, but none of them are the one that I have in mind. When you look at all four Gospels—and neither is it in any of the other books of the Bible—what you don't find is: the Resurrection itself! There is *no description* of what happened at that critical moment when Jesus's dead body came to life.

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Now, in the resurrections Jesus performed during His ministry, we have precise descriptions; "He... took her by the hand, and the girl got up" (Matt. 9:25); He had her sit up, she opened her eyes, she spoke—all of those things. What we *do* have, though, without any description of the actual miracle itself—we have a quadrasonic description of various people *discovering* that the Resurrection has happened. There is no description of Jesus's body suddenly coursing to life. We have no description of Him or an angel removing the wrappings that were applied by Joseph and Nicodemus. We have no description of Jesus exiting the tomb. All we have recorded in the Scriptures is a chorus of witnesses to validate that, indeed, Jesus rose from the dead (Acts 1:3; 2:32; 3:15; 1 Cor. 15:4-8).

He was in the tomb before sundown on Friday. By Jewish reckoning, that counts as Day One—He was there *on* Friday, so that's "a day." He was in the tomb during the entire Sabbath—that would be sundown Friday until sundown Saturday; that would be Day Two. And then it was, roughly, about 12 hours into Day Three—from sundown to sunrise on Sunday—that was when the women came to the tomb at the crack of dawn.

From Matthew, we learn that what happened sometime during the darkness of Saturday night, or the wee hours of Sunday morning—that's what we already read from Matthew. Matthew, like Mark, tells us about the arrival of the two Marys at the tomb. When you factor in Luke and John, you piece together: there were more than just those two—probably four or five. And we also know that they didn't all arrive at the same moment; they would have come from different places in the city—they left before sunrise, they got there as the sun was rising—but we do know that they all observed the same scene in the early light of dawn. Matthew 28, Verses 2 through 4—"And behold, a severe earthquake had occurred"—that had happened before this; that earthquake happened, apparently, *at the moment* of the Resurrection; we can surmise that—"for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled away the stone and sat upon it. And his appearance was like lightning, and his clothing as white as snow. The guards shook for fear of him and became like dead men."

God the Father dispatched an angel to open the tomb; the angel did it—either by means of, or in conjunction with, what is called here "a severe earthquake." This was a miraculous, highly localized, very specialized earthquake; it reminds me of the one that happened in Philippi when Paul and Silas were in jail there, and this earthquake happened, and the result of the earthquake wasn't that the city of Philippi was devastated—it was that the prison "doors were opened and everyone's chains were unfastened" (Acts 16:26). That's a *very* special earthquake; this is a similar one.

I don't know how it happened, but maybe the angel came down—and I can just picture him kind of stomping his foot in front of the great stone covering the tomb, and flipping the stone away like a tiddlywink. Some of the pronouns in the Gospels make you think the stone was not just rolled away to expose the entrance, but it was actually removed from the entrance of the tomb. The guards were there when the angel showed up. Now, just like *any* human who sees a holy angel in person—unless that angel is impersonating a human being—they were *terrified* (see Dan. 8:16-17; Lk. 1:12; cf. Rev. 19:10; Rev. 22:8-9).

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There's a wonderful wordplay there in Matthew 28. The noun *seismos*—sounds familiar to you, right? That's the word that's translated "earthquake" in Verse 2. In Verse 4, we have the verb form—*seiō*—translated "shook." With the arrival of the angel, the *earth* "shook"; and then, immediately upon seeing the angel, the *soldiers* "shook." And notice also: they "became like dead men." They didn't die, they were not killed by this, but what do you call it when someone becomes "like" a dead person? "Unconscious." They were probably in a divinely-induced, short-term coma.

In our text, we are going to see about the conversation between the angel and the two women—and actually, there were two angels, but Mark focuses only on the one who spoke. But notice: when the women arrived, there were no soldiers; that already happened. The soldiers were there, the angel came, the earthquake happened, and they were blinded by this lightning-like light, and then put into their coma. I doubt that the women even knew that the soldiers had been guarding the tomb. People would not have been out and about during the Sabbath, to report that back to people in the city. The women probably would have been afraid to go there for fear of the wrath of the soldiers, or maybe thinking that they might be arrested or harmed if they came there and began to poke around.

I want to finish up the saga of the soldiers, and then we'll get to our text. After the angel spoke to the women and sent them to tell the disciples what they had seen—we will see that in our text—this went down: Matthew 28, Verses 11 to 15—"Now while they were on their way"—the "they" refers to the women, who by this time had talked to the angel, and they were on their way to report to the disciples—"some of the guard came into the city and reported to the chief priests all that had happened. And when they had assembled with the elders and consulted together, they gave a large sum of money to the soldiers, and said, 'You are to say, "His disciples came by night and stole Him away while we were asleep." And if this should come to the governor's ears, we will win him over and keep you out of trouble.' And they took the money and did as they had been instructed; and this story was widely spread among the Jews, and is to this day." By the time Matthew wrote, about 25 years later, that was still the story that was being told.

Remember when we were studying it in Mark Chapter 15, we saw how good the chief priests and the elders were at manipulating Pilate? They had this guy in the palm of their hand, and they did exactly what they said they would do. Interestingly, although they were Roman soldiers, they did not report to a Roman commander; they went to the chief priests, because *they* were the ones who demanded that the tomb be guarded, and so they were going to take care of Pontius Pilate.

Notice also: The guards did not witness the Resurrection. *They* were the ones present, but they were "like dead men"—they were unconscious. The last thing they saw was the blinding light of the angel. The last thing they remembered experiencing was shaking like crazy. They probably felt the earthquake, and then—they woke up. Wouldn't it have been interesting to hear them talking about this? "Rufus, what do *you* remember?" "I saw the light, just like you did. We shook like crazy. I woke up, and the stone was gone!" That's all they could say: They saw the angel, perhaps saw the stone being removed, and then the empty tomb.

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Well, with the tomb empty, there was no more reason for them to stay there; they were assigned to guard a dead man, and they knew now that He was gone, so they ran to the corrupt and wicked high priests, and you know the rest of the story.

People will often lie for money. They will often lie to save their lives. But people don't lie in order to get the privilege to be martyred. Look who lied, and look who told the truth about the empty tomb. And oh, how hard were the hearts of those chief priests and elders! They had heard Jesus speak countless times. They had watched His miracles for over three years, and *still*—even after all of that—they arrested Him, and they had Him killed. They knew He predicted His resurrection, yet *even though it happened*, instead of saying, "I think we should rethink this! Maybe we were wrong!"—they chose to pay a huge bribe...and guess where that money would have come from? It would have been stolen from the temple treasury.

Alright, you've been waiting 81 Sermons to get to the last one from the Gospel of Mark. Let's go to Mark Chapter 16, Verses 1 through 8. Just as He had promised, Jesus rose from the dead, and Mark wraps up his book with three strains of powerful evidence of the Resurrection. Number 1: The Tomb Is Empty; Number 2: An Angel Announced It; and Number 3: The Women Were Astonished.

At last: Mark Chapter 16, Verse 1—"When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome, bought spices, so that they might come and anoint Him." These dear women waited—just as the Law required—until after sundown on Saturday; then, they went and "bought spices." They loved Jesus to the point of that kind of sacrifice, but realize: They didn't come to witness or verify the Resurrection—they didn't yet *believe* in a resurrection. They bought spices to come and "anoint" a dead body; they were going to finish what they considered the unfinished job of taking care of the body of Jesus. It was the normal burial custom for a loved one. It was likely a sleepless Saturday night for them—probably Friday night, as well.

Again, when you harmonize all four Gospels, we know that there were more than these two women named Mary. We know they started out at different times, some of them starting out while it was still dark. They came from different places in the city. We know that they all got there about the same time: just as the sun rose.

As they were heading to the tomb, they wondered about a problem they knew was going to face them, because remember: they had watched the burial, and they had watched these men roll this *huge* flat stone over the entrance to the tomb, and they wondered how they were going to get that stone moved. So look at Verses 2 and 3—"Very early on the first day of the week"—we call it "Sunday"; they didn't have names for their days of the week, it was just "first day of the week." They had the Sabbath, which was the seventh; that was their big day of Jewish worship; and now, forevermore, the day of worship for God's people is "the first day of the week," because of the Resurrection (see Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 16:2; cf. Rev. 1:10). "Very early on the first day of the week, they came to the tomb when the sun had risen. They were saying to one another, 'Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance of the tomb?' "

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Oh, what a surprise they got when they arrived! Look at Verse 4—"Looking up, they saw that the stone had been rolled away, although it was extremely large." As I mentioned a minute ago, it was *completely removed* from the entrance to the tomb. And now, that angel—whose "appearance was like lightning" (Mat. 28:3)—he is nowhere to be seen.

By the way, realize that the stone was removed for a very important reason. It wasn't because Jesus might suffocate in there; He was already dead. It wasn't because He needed a way out—if you can rise from the dead, you can get out from behind a big rock. It was removed to allow witnesses to *enter and see* that Jesus wasn't there! Mark's first line of evidence for the Resurrection of Jesus is the first two groups who found the empty tomb. The first group was the soldiers; they were guarding it, they were knocked unconscious, they woke up—and He's gone! The second group was the first-responder women, who came at sunrise.

Do you realize: no one has ever refuted the fact of the empty tomb? Read in the book of Acts—in the early preaching of Peter and the others, they consistently referred to the Resurrection, they consistently referred to the empty tomb, and they said it's "a fact to which we are witnesses" (3:15; cf. 2:32). All anybody would have ever needed to do, to shut up those early proclaimers of the risen Christ, was just produce the dead body of Jesus, or find the right tomb where He was laid. There *is* the theory that the women went to the *wrong* tomb; that's a silly one. Forever, the testimony stands: The Tomb Is Empty! That's true of Jesus. That's not true of anyone else—not the leader of any other religion anywhere. So, we see that The Tomb Is Empty.

Next, Verses 5 through 7: An Angel Announced the Resurrection. This is Mark's second line of evidence—the announcement of the angel. Verse 5—"Entering the tomb"—that's why the stone had to be removed: so they could get in—"they saw a young man sitting at the right, wearing a white robe; and they were amazed." Tombs like this have been found in many places in Israel. There's the famous "Garden Tomb" that you will almost certainly be taken to, if you go and tour Jerusalem. It was a tomb like that—probably not *the one*, but it's a great visual aid. They have that center chamber, where a person or two or three can stand, and then the niches where the bodies are laid. And like I said: when it's only the bones, they take them away and put them in an ossuary and bury them.

Well, by the time the women come in, apparently the angel has gone to the "Settings" button and he has turned down the brightness control on his appearance, after the miraculous earthquake and sending the soldiers into their coma. He is still amazing, but at this time, he doesn't appear like lightning. Luke tells us there were two angels in the tomb; Matthew and Mark focus on just one; that's not a contradiction—only one of them spoke, so just because there was one sitting at the right doesn't mean there wasn't another one sitting at the left; no contradiction there.

Next, Verse 6—"And he said to them, 'Do not be amazed; you are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who has been crucified. He has risen; He is not here; behold, here is the place where they laid Him.' "

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One of those explanations by skeptics who try to dismiss the record of the Resurrection: this is one of many theories, but they say that the women got confused and they went to the wrong tomb. Well, that's completely absurd. Even if it *was* true that the women who *first* went there got the wrong tomb, somebody would have found the right one. We have here, though, the testimony of an angel, sent from God, about who it was who was in that tomb. "Look! See this place where He was laid!"—and he announced that He rose from the dead. Jesus's Resurrection is right at the *center* of Christian faith (Rom. 10:9; 1 Cor. 15:14, 17-18).

And by the way: it's the *only plausible explanation* for the empty tomb! Even the Jewish leaders—who did not deny the reality of the empty tomb, but concocted that story about the disciples stealing Jesus's body, like we read in Matthew 28—they could not come up with *anything better* than that! The idea that the fearful, scattered, doubting, intimidated, grief-stricken disciples had come and overpowered the Roman soldiers and stole Jesus's body is *absurd!* Well, we're not told that they overpowered them; the soldiers said they did it while they were asleep. How does a troop of soldiers do on staying awake when they're on guard? That's a pretty big deal. That's even more preposterous! Surely, if the soldiers *were* sleeping when these disciples came and they moved that gigantic stone, they would have awakened at least one soldier. And by the way, it's rather obvious: Do you realize that the soldiers came and described *exactly* what happened while they were *unconscious*? There's a problem with that! You don't know what happens around you when you're asleep.

Well, the message from the angel was pretty simple. Verses 6 and 7—"Behold, here is the place where they laid Him. But go, tell His disciples and Peter, 'He is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see Him, just as He told you.'" There's a special little touch that Mark described as: "Go tell His disciples *and Peter*." Remember: Peter was Mark's friend, and Peter was probably Mark's source for the material in this Gospel. Peter had a *very* special relationship with Jesus; he was the closest one to the Lord, of the inner three. Peter's fall was spectacular when he denied the Lord on the night of His betrayal and trial. His humiliation was profound, so the angel, speaking on orders from God, makes sure that Peter gets singled out to be included. Just in case you don't know how Jesus restored Peter, flip over to John 21 and you can read that on your own time.

The instruction for the disciples was: "He's not here; He's risen. Now, ladies, I want you to go tell the disciples and Peter: 'Go to Galilee'"—this happens in Jerusalem, the Crucifixion and Resurrection; Galilee was about 75 miles to the north, and it's where Jesus spent most of His time, and where Peter and Andrew and James and John and all those guys were from, anyway—"Go to Galilee, and Jesus will meet them there." Well, they didn't exactly hightail it to Galilee; they *eventually* got there, but they didn't go that day. But in His grace, Jesus met them in Jerusalem more than once, starting the night of this day that's recorded here. And then He did eventually meet with them in Galilee—and by the way, that's where Peter was restored.

So, Mark Chapter 16, Verses 1 through 8. The Tomb Is Empty—one evidence for the Resurrection; An Angel Announced It—another evidence for the Resurrection; and Thirdly: The Women Were Astonished.

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The end of Mark's Gospel is *perfect* for the way Mark wrote Mark's Gospel. This is the shortest of the four records of Jesus's life; it has the shortest ending. He wrote his whole Gospel with this sense of urgency; remember, we saw many times: one of Mark's favorite words is: "Immediately...immediately...immediately." And so Mark ends his book just as you would expect—kind of, well...*immediately!* Now, your composition professor would tell you, if you turned in a manuscript like the Book of Mark, "Well, this needs an epilogue! This needs a more rounded conclusion."

But your composition professor is not the Holy Spirit, not the One who guided Mark's every word and gave it to us just like this: Mark 16, Verse 8—"They went out and fled from the tomb"—Remember: they had gone inside, they had been shown where He was laid, and they had been told to go—"for trembling and astonishment had gripped them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid." That's a *powerful* verse, and the words there are very dramatic. The verbs in that verse paint quite a picture.

Let me take a stab at a combination of a very literal translation of the words as they are in the Greek, and the picture that it paints. It would go something like this: "Having exited"—in other words, they *scurried* out from the tomb—"they were fleeing from the tomb because they were quaking and in ecstasy; and they weren't talking to each other because they were fearing God." This ends with these women absolutely *amazed* and *astounded*, and look: they *understood* now, and they were *completely* blown away! They couldn't *think* of anything to say to each other; they were shaking, they were trembling, and their minds were in a place they had never possibly considered.

We know that there is more to the story than what we have here in Verse 8. The women *did* go and tell the disciples that He had risen. We know that Peter and John came running. We know that word spread quickly. We know that, that night, Jesus appeared to them in person. Over 20 years later, the Apostle Paul was given this revelation to give us a bit of post-lude to the Gospels, over in First Corinthians Chapter 15, Verses 4 through 8—"He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and...He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve"—that was that night; He appeared to all but one of them, and then later, He included Thomas. "After that He appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom remain until now"—which would have been about the year 55 or 57 A.D.—"but some have fallen asleep; then He appeared to James, then to all the apostles; and last of all, as to one untimely born, He appeared to me also." That appearance to Paul not until all the way up into Acts Chapter 9, but He appeared to those eleven; He obviously appeared to all of them before they had chosen Matthias in Acts Chapter 1.

This Gospel of Mark is a marvelous work of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit bore along, carried along, guided along the human author, just as He did for every word of the Bible; that process is described in Second Peter Chapter 1. This book ends with people quaking and in ecstasy, and *completely* wrapped up in the reverent fear of God. That's the *right place* for this book to end. Think about how it started: The first sentence of the book is also what we call the first verse of the book, and it stands like a title or a heading over the book that tells us the purpose of the book: Mark 1:1—"The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God."

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What Mark is doing is telling you: "This is a book about good news, and I want to tell you how it all got started with Jesus." The word "gospel"—"good news," *euangelion*; our word "evangelism" and "evangelize" comes from it—the word was understood in the Greek and Roman world; the *euangelion* was always the announcement of something good—the "good news"—usually associated with the arrival or the presence of a king or a general, and especially after winning a victory. Mark says, "I'm going to tell you about the life of Jesus; that's the *beginning* of the great news about Jesus." This picture is now complete, and now we understand: The evidence is in! He *is* the Son of God—and that evidence is completed when the ultimate act of His First Coming is completed, and that act is: the Resurrection (Rom. 1:4). You *don't have* the "good news of Jesus" without the Resurrection.

An interesting phenomenon through the Gospel of Mark is that, from the beginning of that book up until Chapter 15, the only ones who ever make the proclamation that Jesus is the Son of God, in the Book of Mark, are demons; they get unmasked when Jesus is around—they panic and flip out and call Him who He really is (e.g. Mk. 1:23-24). It is only demons, that is, all the way up until Chapter 15, at the Crucifixion. Piecing together the Gospels, we know it came right after Jesus cried out: "It is finished!" (Jn. 19:30)—one Greek word: *tetelestai*, "it is finished"—and then, He voluntarily breathed His final breath and gave up His life. We saw this at that moment in Mark Chapter 15, Verse 39—"When the centurion, who was standing right in front of Him, saw the way He breathed His last, he said, 'Truly this man was the Son of God!'"

He *knew* He had been called that (e.g. Matt. 27:40, 43; cf. Jn. 19:7). There was the placard over the Cross that said, "This is Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews" (cf. Ps. 2:6-7). They knew that He had been accused of the blasphemy of claiming to be God (Jn. 5:18; 10:33). And now, these women—and the disciples that they were on their way to tell—they came to the understanding on Resurrection Day. They now know *for sure*, beyond a shadow of doubt: this Man truly is the Son of God. We should expect nothing less of them.

So the question of the day is: How about you? We are 82 messages into this; we're not dealing with "the *beginning* of the gospel of Jesus Christ," we're dealing with *the gospel* of Jesus Christ! He has brought us through the end of the Old Covenant (Heb. 8:6-13). He has brought us through the end of the Mosaic Law (Gal. 3:24). Jesus, on the day that He shed His blood for our sins, accomplished opening up the access to God, and He demonstrated that by ripping the veil of the temple in two (Matt. 27:51), from top to bottom, so that now *everyone* could see into the "Holy of Holies" (Heb. 9:3; cf. 10:19-20). Marsha asked me a question the other day: "What did the chief priests do about *that?*" I imagine there was a pretty hurried reclamation project to go *fix that veil!* We don't know, but it was a profound symbol.

So, the Easter question stands today—*every* Lord's Day—*every day*, for that matter. The question is: Do you believe in Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God?

We need to end with Paul's words. I jumped into First Corinthians Chapter 15 earlier, talking about all to whom Jesus appeared (vss. 5-8), but look what builds up to that: First Corinthians 15:1 through 4—"Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you"—during that year and a half that he was in Corinth—"which also you received, in which also you

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stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received"—and when did he receive it? When the risen Christ appeared to Him on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:1-6; cf. Gal. 1:11-17)—"that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures."

The Resurrection of Jesus Christ is the pivot; it's the turning point of all history, for all of mankind. The reason the Church of Jesus Christ has always met on Sunday is the same reason that, on one of those 52 Sundays per year, we've developed the tradition of devoting ourselves to the Resurrection. *Nothing* is more important than this! That's why we also read earlier, from First Corinthians 15:14—"If Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is vain, your faith also is vain." To celebrate what we call Easter, to celebrate Resurrection Sunday—unless the Resurrection of Jesus *happened* as the Bible says it did—it's *vanity!* It's *wasted time!* It's useless.

It's really popular to say, "Just believe"—but you *can't* "just believe." "Believe"—faith—needs an object. You have to believe *something* (Mk. 1:15; Jn. 5:39). Ultimately, you have to believe *someone* (Jn. 14:1; 1 Jn. 5:10). The record is quite clear, what it is you need to believe. You need to call out to God; you need to declare your trust in what He did for you through Jesus Christ (Rom. 4:25; 5:9; 8:1, 32-34; cf. Acts 13:39).

A way to summarize the whole message in one sentence: Romans Chapter 6, Verse 23—"For the wages of sin is death"—we all know that we're sinners (Ecc. 7:20; Jas. 3:2), and we all know what "wages" are; wages are what you earn, wages are what you are owed, wages are that which must be paid (Rom. 4:4). Well, because of our sin, the wage that we deserve is "death" (cf. Ezek. 18:4). So, "the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." A "free gift" is *exactly* the opposite of a wage.

So, the Easter question is: Have you received the free gift? You don't receive it by going through a ritual (Is. 29:13-14). You don't receive it by doing some sort of work (Rom. 4:5). You receive it by faith. It's all wrapped up in the person of Jesus Christ—who *is* the "Son of God" (Lk. 22:70), who *is* "the Messiah" (Matt. 1:1, 16; Jn. 4:25-26), who *is* the "Anointed" One (Ps. 2:2; Lk. 4:18; Ac. 4:27), who *did* die "for our sins" (1 Cor. 15:3); He "bore" them "on the cross" (1 Pet. 2:24), "He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Cor. 5:21)—and you cry out and say, "Give me the free gift" (cf. Acts 2:21).

How do you do it? Well, let's look at another famous set of words from the New Testament: Romans 10:9 and 10. You can read it in the context, because you can tell we're picking it up in the middle of a sentence; here he is talking about "the word" which must be believed, what truth must you believe. Well, the Apostle Paul says this: "If you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation."

Sermon Title: Trembling and Astonished
Scripture Text: Mark 16:1-8

Speaker: Jim Harris
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That's the free gift! It's a package deal: You confess who Jesus is—"confess" means "to say the same thing"—you proclaim what the Bible says about Jesus (Ac. 2:36; 2 Tim. 3:15), you "confess that Jesus Christ is Lord" (Phil. 2:11), and you "believe"—that means you put your "trust" in Him (Ps. 84:12; cf. Prov. 3:5; 16:20; Is. 12:2; Rom. 4:20-22)—you "confess" and you "believe," and that results in "righteousness" and "salvation"—"righteousness" meaning: you are declared righteous "in Christ" (Phil. 3:9), not because you *are* righteous, but because *His* "righteousness" is "credited" to your account (Rom. 4:3), and you receive salvation. You are no longer "dead in your trespasses and sins" (Eph. 2:1). That's the gospel of Jesus Christ.

I realize you might be a little bit baffled by the fact that several times today, I've talked about "the end of Mark's gospel," and we stopped at Verse 8. You probably look at your Bible, and you see about a half page *more* after Mark 16, Verse 8. What's *that* about? Well, you need to meet me right here again next Lord's Day, and that's what we will talk about, as we put a ribbon on our studies in the Gospel of Mark.

But, what about the Easter question? Do you believe? Have you received the free gift?

Let's pray:

Our Father, thank You for the life and the death of Your Son. Thank You for all that is ours in Him. Father, I'm just standing here talking to the air and looking at a camera, and I have no idea what eyes are watching; I have no idea the condition of any heart of anyone who is observing this, and yet—I know You know each and every one. Please, if anyone in the hearing of my voice today has not yet confessed and believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, may this be the day that You grant them new life. Thank You for the risen Savior, in whose name we pray. Amen.