

“Death Cannot Keep His Prey”
The Gospel According to Mark 16:1-8
February 24th, 2019

I’ve a question for you to consider. *How many people did Jesus raise from the dead during His earthly, physical ministry? Was it 2? Perhaps 3? More?*

When we studied the 5th chapter of Mark’s gospel account several months ago, we learned of one person Jesus raised from the dead. She was the 12 year old daughter of Jairus, a leader in the synagogue. The girl lay dead on her bed, Jesus went into her room, reached for her hand, and said to her, “Little girl, arise” – and she did! So that’s one.

In the 7th **Chapter of Luke’s gospel account**, we learn of another in the town called Nain. I’ll let Luke tell the story –

“As he approached the town gate, a dead person was being carried out—the only son of his mother, and she was a widow. And a large crowd from the town was with her...Then he went up and touched the (open coffin) they were carrying him in, and the bearers stood still. He said, “Young man, I say to you, get up!” The dead man sat up and began to talk, and Jesus gave him back to his mother.” (Portions of verses 12, 14 & 15)

So, that’s two people Jesus raised from the dead. In his gospel account, the Apostle John relates the story of his friend, Lazarus, who had been dead for 4 days by the time Jesus showed up at his house. This is from **John Chapter 11** (portions of verse 41, 43 & 44).

“...So they took away the stone..., he (Jesus) cried out with a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out.” The man who had died came out, his hands and feet bound with linen strips, and his face wrapped with a cloth...”

That’s 3 people Jesus raised from the dead. But, there’s one more – there are 4 people Jesus raised from the dead. *Any ideas who the fourth one is?* Himself. Jesus raised Himself from the dead! He says so Himself. This is **John 10:17b & 18a** - “...I lay down My life that I may take it again. No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again...”

Obviously, Jesus said those words before He laid His life down (died). The text before us this morning is what takes place a couple of days after Jesus died and He takes up His life again.

Mark 16:1-8:

Now when the Sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, Mary *the mother* of James, and Salome bought spices, that they might come and anoint Him. ²Very early in the morning, on the first *day* of the week, they came to the tomb when the sun had risen. ³And they said among themselves, “Who will roll away the stone from the door of the tomb for us?” ⁴But when they looked up, they saw that the stone had been rolled away—for it was very large. ⁵And entering the tomb, they saw a young man clothed in a long white robe sitting on the right side; and they were alarmed.

⁶ But he said to them, “Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He is risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid Him. ⁷ But go, tell His disciples—and Peter—that He is going before you into Galilee; there you will see Him, as He said to you.”

⁸ So they went out quickly and fled from the tomb, for they trembled and were amazed. And they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.”

With the Sabbath behind, we see the three women we met in chapter 15 last Sunday. They were walking to Jesus’ tomb for the purpose of anointing his dead body with burial spices, which were intended to help control the smell of the body’s decomposition. “Jesus, they may have thought, had already been dead for some 40 hours and would have begun to smell.” (Card, *Mark: The Gospel of Passion*, 188) Surely, these women were expecting to find a dead body when they arrived at the tomb.

Though it was “very early in the morning”, “the sun had arisen.” As the ladies neared Jesus’ tomb, they wondered aloud who would remove the large stone covering the entryway to the tomb. This is yet another indicator that they were expecting to visit a gravesite containing Jesus’ cadaver.

What’s peculiar about that is on three different occasions, Jesus clearly taught His disciples that they would be going to Jerusalem and He would be arrested, executed and rise again from the dead:

* **Mark 8:31** – “And (Jesus) began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again.”

* **Mark 9:31** – “For (Jesus) taught His disciples and said to them, “The Son of Man is being betrayed into the hands of men, and they will kill Him. And after He is killed, He will rise the third day.”

* **Mark 10:33-34** - “Behold...the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and to the scribes; and they will condemn Him to death and deliver Him to the Gentiles; and they will mock Him, and scourge Him, and spit on Him, and kill Him. And the third day He will rise again.”

Things begin to get interesting, and pick up speed with verses 4 and 5, “But when they looked up, they saw that the stone had been rolled away – for it was very large. ⁵ And entering the tomb, they saw a young man clothed in a long white robe sitting on the right side; and they were alarmed.”

I find it remarkable as we look for the action words in the verses before us this morning. Note the adverbs depicting the reaction of Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome upon entering the open tomb and seeing an angel – verse 5 “they were alarmed.” Then jump down to verse 8, after the angel spoke to them, we see “they trembled and were amazed.” Further, they didn’t say anything to anyone else because “they were afraid.”

So, they were alarmed, trembled, amazed, and afraid. Interestingly, these ladies weren’t alarmed when they saw the large stone covering the entrance to the tomb had been moved.

And, then, to enter Jesus' burial place, we don't have any indication they were reluctant, scared, or nervous. They appear to arrive and go straight into the tomb without reservation! *Wouldn't you be even the least bit suspicious or cautious? Can you imagine coming upon an open grave when you were expecting a mound of dirt covering the casket and vault?*

What alarmed them was the heavenly being clothed in a long white robe speaking to them – “an angel of the LORD” according to **Matthew 28:2**. Angels, as heavenly beings, are intimidating – nearly every time an angel appears to someone in Scripture, their first words to the humans is “do not be afraid” or “do not be alarmed.”

That's what this angel says to Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of Joses, and Salome as they enter the tomb. We see that in verse 6. To help them do that, the angel explains to them what they are having difficulty processing – **Jesus was not there! He was not dead!** Not only was Jesus' body not in the tomb, He wasn't even dead! He had risen!

The angel instructs the ladies to go and tell the other disciples what they had seen, including Peter. They were also to go to Galilee where they would see the risen Jesus. In obedience to the heavenly being speaking to them, the ladies do a u-turn and rush out of the tomb.

We shouldn't miss this. In specifically mentioning Peter, who had denied Jesus three times, on the occasion when Jesus could have benefitted from Peter's presence the most, the angel is showing there is nothing we can do to lose our place with Jesus, if He has come to claim us as His own. Peter would be restored to Jesus because of Jesus' great forgiveness and grace.

In 1968 a Mrs. Emma Smith was buried alive. She was 38 years old and wanted to set a world record for staying underground. Mrs. Smith had three young children, enough to keep any mother alert and going. But somehow this woman from Nottinghamshire, England, felt an urge to do something unusual - something that no one had ever done before.

So, a hole was dug into the ground. An 8-foot long coffin, with Emma in it, was lowered into the hole. One hundred tons of dirt covered both the coffin and Emma Smith.

The coffin Emma Smith was interred in was not an ordinary coffin. It was long enough so that Emma could move around. It had electric lights and heating. Also, from its buried position, a pipe ran to the surface providing food and drink. A closed circuit TV allowed nurses to keep a constant watch to make sure the living 'corpse' was alright. Emma even had a radio telephone so that she could speak to her family. When she was bored, Emma wrote letters and knitted sweaters.

After 101 days in her coffin, Emma Smith was exhumed (dug up). She climbed out of her box with a smile on her face. She felt she had accomplished something unique and was proud. Someday, however, she will be put back into a coffin, and at that time her eyes will be shut permanently.

On Good Friday, Jesus lay down His life to the grave and, in so doing, He conquered death. He entered the grave of His own free will. He did not do it to impress other people; He did not do

it out of a sense of adventure. No, He did it because He loved the people He came to earth to save, and He endeavored to free them from the bonds of death.

Jesus' resurrection from the dead is no fiction. It is historical fact, verifiable truth straight from God Himself who will not lie (because He cannot lie!). "The tombs of Mohammed or Buddha or Confucius are occupied, but the tomb of Christ is empty to this day." (Kennedy, *Why I Believe*, 105)

Walt Wangerin wrote a parable called, "The Ragman." It goes something like this:

One Friday morning I noticed a young man walking the alleys of our city. He was pulling an old cart filled with clothes bright and new, and he was calling in a clear voice: 'Rags!' 'Rags! New rags for old!'

Soon the ragman saw a woman sitting on her back porch. She was sobbing into a handkerchief, shedding a thousand tears. Her heart was breaking. The Ragman stopped his cart. Quietly, he walked to the woman, 'Give me your rag,' he said gently, 'and I'll give you another.' He slipped the handkerchief from her eyes and gave her a new cloth. Then, as he began to pull his cart again, the Ragman did a strange thing: he put her stained handkerchief to his own face; and then he began to weep, to sob as grievously as she had done, his shoulders shaking.

In a little while, the Ragman came upon a girl whose head was wrapped in a bandage. Blood soaked her bandage. Now the Ragman looked upon this child with pity, and he drew a lovely yellow bonnet from his cart. 'Give me your rag,' he said, 'and I'll give you mine.' The child could only gaze at him while he removed the bandage, and tied it to his own head. The bonnet he set on hers. Incredibly, with the bandage went the wound! Against his brow it ran a darker blood -- his own!

'Rags! Rags! I take old rags!' cried the sobbing, bleeding Ragman. 'Are you going to work?' he asked a man who leaned against a telephone pole. The man shook his head. The Ragman pressed him: 'Do you have a job?' 'Are you crazy?' sneered the other. He pulled away from the pole, revealing the right sleeve of his jacket -- flat, the cuff stuffed into the pocket. He had no arm.

'Give me your jacket, and I'll give you mine,' said the Ragman. The one-armed man took off his jacket. So did the Ragman -- and I trembled at what I saw: the Ragman's arm stayed in its sleeve, and when the other put it on, he had two good arms; but the Ragman had only one. 'Go to work,' he said.

The Ragman then came to a landfill. He climbed a hill. With tormented labor he cleared a little space on that hill. Then He lay down. He pillowed his head on a handkerchief and a jacket. And he died.

Oh, how I cried to witness that death! I slumped in a junked car and wailed -- because I had come to love the Ragman. I sobbed myself to sleep. I slept through Friday night and Saturday and its night, too. But then, on Sunday morning, I was wakened by light. I saw the Ragman folding the blanket most carefully, a scar on his forehead, but alive! There was no sign of sorrow or age, and all the rags that he had gathered shined for cleanliness.

I walked up to the Ragman. Then I said to him with dear yearning in my voice: 'Dress me.' He dressed me. He took my old rags, and He put new rags on me! The Ragman, the Christ!

The resurrection is the centerpiece of the Christian faith. With it everything stands or falls. If you are a believer in Christ, do as Jesus' disciples did here – encourage one another as spiritual brothers and sisters. Declare the Lord is risen from the dead!

If you are a backslider, like Peter was, then come home to Jesus. Draw near to Him, and He will draw near to you.

If you are not a Christian, then you need to go to the Ragman and say to Him, "Dress me! Give me new rags. Trust Him to do that today!"