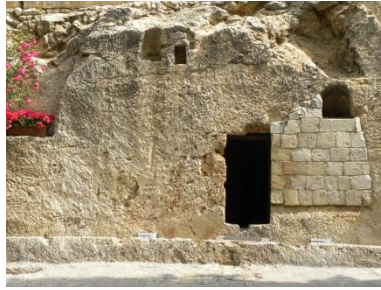


Mark 16:1-8 NIV
**"The empty tomb
and full hearts"**



"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. (2) Very early on the first day of the week, just after sunrise, they were on their way to the tomb (3) and they asked each other, 'Who will roll the stone away from the entrance of the tomb?' (4) But when they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had been rolled away.

"(5) As 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. (7) 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.'"

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

Nothing equals this Good News in *Mark* and the other Gospels.

Resurrection is the best news ever.
Yet this incredible story creates questions.

Imagine how the press or Hollywood would handle Jesus' resurrection.

For weeks you'd see previews and trailers.
"Watch for the most stupendous event in history."
"The Greatest Story Ever Told."

"The most fantastic, unbelievable happening!"
TV cameras would show the tomb from more angles than you'd see at the Super Bowl.
Clergy, coroners, pathologists, and psychiatrists would give "expert" analysis.
Major news anchors would all comment.

Because they lacked status or press badges, the women who came to anoint Jesus' body would have been turned away by officials.

If networks interviewed the women, they'd send them first to their makeup departments.
Hawkers of pennants, souvenirs, and relics would cram the streets.

They'd sell resurrection t-shirts and caps.
Many churches would claim: "He's our guy!"

As you likely know, *Bible* resurrection accounts contrast with modern advertising models.

Ancient writers didn't even use the biblical style.

Helmut Thielicke told how Gospel resurrection reports differ from other stories of the time.

Thielicke wrote of: "the indirect and discreet way in which the *Bible* indicates an event which cannot really be described in words."

Not one gospel writer approached the subject as a modern reporter might.

None described the resurrection.

No one tried to sensationalize the events.

You don't find media hype in the *New Testament* and there's little expert testimony.

Rather, first-hand witnesses of the resurrection seemed in a state of shock and disbelief.

As our text states:

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

The gospels voice the doubts and suspicions of those who brought and heard the first reports of Jesus' raising.

Luke's gospel tells of two followers of Jesus who encountered him while walking west.

On the way to the town of Emmaus that Sunday, they didn't recognize Jesus.

The two men heard some resurrection reports, but were still downcast.



Though mystery veiled Jesus' resurrection, *New Testament* authors didn't use persuasive methods.

You don't see high-pressure techniques attempting to convince skeptics of its truth.

Just the opposite, the Gospels included doubts and questions of those slow to accept and had trouble believing.

"Trembling and bewildered, the women went out and fled from the tomb."

Remember Thomas's doubts?

***New Testament* honesty makes the Good News accounts credible; believable.**

Note another difference between the *New Testament* and modern media.

Did you watch much news last week?

Even when there's good news, the media people report the down side of stories.

I noted the news headlines in Los Angeles for one week near Easter 1989.

- In LA, there were 18 gang related fatalities in that one week.
- A nine year old girl was abducted and her body stuffed into a trash can.
- A man was murdered at an automatic teller machine.
- An airplane crashed.



Was there good news that week?

Of course:

- Tens of thousands of aircraft took off and landed safely;
- Millions of school children went to school and came home unharmed;
- Many needy people received help.

You probably did good things for other folks last week.

Yet no reporters followed you and no TV cameras recorded your deeds.

If thousands of aircraft safely take-off and land every day, why do we so fix on the extreme few that don't succeed?

I don't want to demean the loss of those who die in aircraft accidents or bridge collapses.

I'm asking why we fixate so strongly on the failures, not the successes.

When a tragedy makes the news, we see the images again and again on TV.

Then we watch interviews, investigations, and inquests.

What do we gain by sifting and examining pieces of evidence frame by frame?

Why must we know every detail?

Here's what I think:

Suppose an evil force takes millions of lives.

Imagine that this force stalked, mocked you, and tried to catch you off-guard.

You'd want to know all about this stalker—his haunts, his tricks, and his identity.

You don't want to be his next victim.

That explains the long, expensive investigations.

We hope that some agency or force can eliminate sudden, unexpected death.

We watch the news to keep a wary eye on the enemy—we want to know where he is.

We try to keep wary eyes on the enemy's location and his methods.

So we watch the morning news, the noon news, the evening news, and the 10 PM news.

Despite our best efforts, the enemy's uncanny ability keeps surprising us.

Lock the doors and he crawls through a window.

Shut the windows and he seeps through cracks.

He uses faulty aircraft engines, unsealed hatch doors, and bridge collapses.

He panics inexperienced young people and wizened adults.

The Roman philosopher Horace wrote 2000 years ago: "Pale death, with impartial foot strikes at poor men's hovels and the towers of kings."

We try to scorn mortality and laugh at it.

At night, a man taking shortcut through a cemetery fell into an open grave. He tried to crawl up the sides, but failed. He yelled and screamed, but got no response. He didn't know the same thing happened earlier to another guy, who'd been watching silently from the other end of the grave. The first guy in thought he'd save the newcomer more frustration. He tapped the new man on the shoulder and said to him, "Friend, you can't get out of here." But he did.



Is it possible that Jesus sits here beside us today, and sits beside us as we soak up the bad news every day, but we don't recognize him?

Jesus asked the two men: "What are you discussing together as you walk along?" They stood still, their faces downcast. ⁽¹⁸⁾ One of them, named Cleopas, asked him, 'Are you only a visitor to Jerusalem and do not know the things that have happened there in these days?' 'What things?' he asked. . ."

Are you from Mars? Didn't you the news? Jesus "said. . ., 'How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken.'"¹

The greatest event in all history occurred.

Those guys were still dwelling on the bad news.

Nothing equals the resurrection message.

- When Jesus arose that Sunday morning almost 2000 years ago, he broke death's stranglehold.
- Jesus killed death.
- **We don't have to live in dread and fear.**
- **Jesus said:** "Believe in God. Believe also in me. In my father's house are many rooms. And I'm on my way to prepare a place for you."
If we believe in Jesus, death is dead.

¹ Luke 24:17- 19, 25 NIV

Easter Sunday, 1973. Uganda was under absolute dictator Idi Amin. Kefa Sempangi was a minister in that tortured land.

Five men followed him into a small building and closed the door behind them. Sempangi turned around to find five rifles pointed at his face. He . . . immediately recognized the men as the secret police of the State Research Bureau—Idi Amin's assassins. "We are going to kill you," said the leader. "If you have something to say, say it before you die."

Sempangi stood there feeling himself lose control. He thought of his wife and child and began to shake. Somehow he managed to speak. "I do not need to plead my own case," he said. "I am a dead man already. My life is dead and hidden in Christ. It is your lives that are in danger. You are dead in your sins. I will pray to God that after you have killed me, He will spare you from eternal destruction."

The leader looked at him with curiosity . . . lowered his gun and ordered the others to do the same. "Will you pray *for us now?*" the leader of the assassins asked. Though fearing . . . a trick, Sempangi asked them all to bow heads.

"Father in heaven," he prayed, "you, who have forgiven men in the past, forgive these men also. Do not let them perish in their sins but bring them unto yourself."

Sempangi lifted his head, waiting *for* the men to pull the triggers. But then he noticed their faces. Gone was the hate and rage. The leader spoke: "You have helped us," he said, "and we will help you. We will speak to the rest *of* our company and they will leave you alone. Do not fear *for* your life. It is in our hands and you will be protected."²

If Christ was raised *from* the dead, we can forgive our enemies as Sempangi did.

We enjoy life and face our gravest fears.

By His grace, God will raise us on the last day.

Two simple words describe the event that changed the world forever: Christ lives!

You can live, too, by believing and obeying him.

For believers in Christ, the resurrection isn't an annual spring celebration.

Each week as they gather around the Lord's Table, they "proclaim the Lord's death until he comes again," **1 Corinthians 11: 26.**

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² WEAVINGS, Vol. III, No.3, (May/June 1988), pp. 33-36