

The Gospel According to Mark - Who Will Roll Away the Stone?

April 21, 2019

Who Will Roll Away the Stone? Mark 16:1-8

"His body bound and drenched in tearsThey laid Him down in Joseph's tombThe entrance sealed by heavy stone, Messiah still and all alone"

Can you imagine how the followers of Jesus felt? Especially the disciples! They had left everything to follow Jesus, their homes, their businesses, and spent considerable time away from family for the three years of Jesus' earthly ministry. Now Jesus is dead and buried in a tomb sealed with a heavy stone. How were they going to face the ridicule of family and friends for what seemed to be a misplaced and irresponsible faith in a now buried Savior? "So this is your Messiah, your King?" There was a heavy stone over the entrance of the tomb, but there was an equally heavy weight on the hearts of the followers of Jesus. Of course we know the rest of the story! We know someone rolled away the stone. But the question asked by the women who were going to tomb to anoint Jesus' body is still relevant today: Who will roll away the stone? Let's pray and ask God to help us understand how this question applies to our lives! Pray.

Let's read the first part of our text today. Mark 16:1-3

Mark 16:1 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.

Mark 16:2 Very early on the first day of the week, just after sunrise, they were on their way to the tomb

Mark 16:3 and they asked each other, "Who will roll the stone away from the entrance of the tomb?"

Why was this question such a big deal to the ladies? Well let's talk about the stone that was most problematic for the ladies...

The Stone of Inadequacy

The ladies didn't have the strength or authority to roll the stone away! It was a very large stone. In fact, not even the men would have had an easy time getting the stone rolled away. Evidently the stone was on a track that angled down and was rolled downward into place. This would have made it very difficult for anyone to push that stone back and up! Also, the stone had been sealed by the officials. Matthew's Gospel gives us some detail...

Mat 27:62 The next day, the one after Preparation Day, the chief priests and the Pharisees went to Pilate.
Mat 27:63 "Sir," they said, "we remember that while he was still alive that deceiver said, 'After three days I will rise again.'

Mat 27:64 So give the order for the tomb to be made secure until the third day. Otherwise, his disciples may come and steal the body and tell the people that he has been raised from the dead. This last deception will be worse than the first."

Mat 27:65 "Take a guard," Pilate answered. "Go, make the tomb as secure as you know how."

Mat 27:66 So they went and made the tomb secure by putting a seal on the stone and posting the guard.

So the tomb was sealed by a large heavy stone and then an official seal was attached and guards posted. The religious leaders responsible for Jesus' death were so concerned with Jesus' claims that He would rise again they wanted to make sure that didn't happen, or that some deception of resurrection didn't take place. But here's something they had not taken into consideration...

God was in charge of stone removal and had all the resources He needed to move a stone! Now here's how this applies to your life today...

Have you ever had an issue with the stone of inadequacy? Have you ever felt there were obstacles in your life that just seemed to big to overcome? Maybe today you feel that you just don't have the strength to move stones that are preventing you from experiencing the life God wants you to have. God knows how to remove any obstacle that stands between you and His will for your life! Paul the Apostle faced some personal obstacles in his life and here's the conversation God had with him...

2 Cor 12:9 But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness."

Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. 2 Cor 12:10 That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

"Wait a minute, Paul delighted in weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and in difficulties? That guy must have been insane!" Nope, not at all! Paul new the same power that resurrected Jesus from the grave after He had been insulted, persecuted and murdered, that same power was available to Paul in his life and Paul had seen God's power come through so many times! He got excited when there was another opportunity in his life for God to show up in a mighty way! What a difference it would make if we looked at our troubles and trusted God to remove the stone of inadequacy!

Okay, before we look at any other stones which need to be removed let me blow your mind with a different question and its answer...

Why was the stone rolled away?

Mark 16:4 But when they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had been rolled away. Mark 16:5 As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man dressed in a white robe sitting on the right side, and they were alarmed.

Mark 16:6 "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."

The stone was rolled away so the people could get in, not so Jesus could get out!

Evidently Jesus had already left the building! Matthew recounts it this way...

Mat 28:1 After the Sabbath, at dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb.

Mat 28:2 There was a violent earthquake, for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it.

Mat 28:3 His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were white as snow.

Mat 28:4 The guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men.

Mat 28:5 The angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified.

Mat 28:6 He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay.

Mat 28:7 Then go quickly and tell his disciples: 'He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him.' Now I have told you."

Jesus didn't need the stone to be rolled away so He could get out, the stone was rolled away so the ladies could get in! Mark says they were alarmed and the young man who talked with them told them not to be alarmed! Matthew says it was an angel of the Lord and he told them not to be afraid. Matthew also tells us the guards were so afraid of the angel of the Lord they shook and became like dead men. In other words, they fainted... out like a rock! Anybody ever deal with...

The Stone Of Fear

Mark 16:6 "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."

Mark 16:7 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."

Mark 16:8 Trembling and bewildered, the women went out and fled from the tomb. They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid.

Matthew's Gospel says this...

Mat 28:8 So the women hurried away from the tomb, afraid yet filled with joy, and ran to tell his disciples.

John's Gospel tells us the disciples were also scarred! Jesus had been brutally crucified and they were concerned they were going to be next! John also helps us understand why Jesus didn't need the stone rolled away to get out. Check this out...

John 20:19 On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!"

John 20:20 After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.

John 20:21 Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you."

How about that? The doors were locked and yet Jesus came and stood among them! That's why I say Jesus didn't need the stone rolled away to get out of the tomb! The disciples were obviously already on edge and then Jesus just appears out of nowhere! They were scarred out of their minds, so Jesus quickly says to them, "Peace be with you!" I don't know about you, but there are certainly times in my life when I really need to hear Jesus say to my heart, "Peace be with you!" Or am I the only one in this room who deals with fear? Do you ever need to hear Jesus say the words, "Peace be with you!" What is it that robs you of real and lasting peace? What do you fear? Name your Fear? Fear of rejection, failure, loss. Fear of losing your health, financial hardship, fear for your children, fear of the future! Whatever it is, the writer of Hebrews gives us powerful words of encouragement...

Heb 13:5 . . . God has said, "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you."

Heb 13:6 So we say with confidence, "The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?"

In other words, the same power that raised Jesus from the dead is available to help you overcome all fear! The writer of Romans put it this way...

Rom 8:15 For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, "Abba, Father."

Rom 8:16 The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children.

Rom 8:17 Now if we are children, then we are heirs--heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.

Rom 8:18 I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.

Invite God to roll away that stone of fear in your life so you can live in His strength and power no matter your circumstances! Of course, for this to happen there's another stone that some in this room may need to have rolled away...

The Stone of Disbelief

Before Jesus appeared to the disciples they simply did not believe that He had really risen from the dead. In fact, when the ladies did what they were told to do and let the disciples know He was indeed alive, the disciples figured the ladies had lost their minds. Listen to Luke's telling of the story in his gospel account...

Luke 24:1 On the first day of the week, very early in the morning, the women took the spices they had prepared and went to the tomb.

Luke 24:2 They found the stone rolled away from the tomb,

Luke 24:3 but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus.

Luke 24:4 While they were wondering about this, suddenly two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning stood beside them.

(Mark only mentioned the one on the right side)

Luke 24:5 In their fright the women bowed down with their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, "Why do you look for the living among the dead?

Luke 24:6 He is not here; he has risen! Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee:

Luke 24:7 'The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.'"

Luke 24:8 Then they remembered his words.

Luke 24:9 When they came back from the tomb, they told all these things to the Eleven and to all the others.

Luke 24:10 It was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the others with them who told this to the apostles.

Luke 24:11 But they did not believe the women, because their words seemed to them like nonsense.

I'm thinking, nonsense? How many times did Jesus try to tell you guys this was going to happen. Were you not listening? Were you not paying attention? Were you so caught up in arguing about who was going to be the greatest in the kingdom that you missed the most important things Jesus was trying to communicate to you? Remember this passage from a few weeks ago? Mark 8:31-32a...

Mark 8:31 He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again. Mark 8:32 He spoke plainly about this...

I don't know how much more plainly you could get, but they just couldn't seem to roll away the stone of unbelief! I'm afraid, I can't really fault the disciples too much without being reminded of how many times I'm just like them. God's Word plainly tells me so much and yet how often do I still struggle with disbelief? Oh, if you ask me, of course I believe the Bible is God's Word, but when it's crunch time, do I put God's Word into practice? One of the things I love about God's Word is how it shows the human side of the disciples, who we esteem as great men of God and of faith! After hearing the women's report Peter...

Luke 24:12 ...got up and ran to the tomb. Bending over, he saw the strips of linen lying by themselves, and he went away, wondering to himself what had happened.

As we read earlier in John's Gospel, Jesus appeared to the disciples later that evening after He had risen that morning. He showed them He was really alive! However, one of the guys was not with them. Listen to John 20:24 and following...

John 20:24 Now Thomas (called Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came.

John 20:25 So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord!" But he said to them, "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe it."

Thomas wanted proof! Thomas got it!

John 20:26 A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!"

John 20:27 Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe."

John 20:28 Thomas said to him, "My Lord and my God!"

Thomas got more . . .

John 20:29 Then Jesus told him, "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

That's talking about you and me!!! Now I want to share something with those of you here today who are struggling with the stone of unbelief. Please just hear me out and I invite you to put your logical, human reasoning to work! Something convinced the disciples that Jesus had indeed risen from the dead! It had to be more than just a feeling or extreme grief causing them to see something that wasn't really there. Why do I say this? What I'm about to tell you is one of the most rational, logical and convincing proofs that Jesus rose from the dead! And what I'm about to tell you doesn't come from the Bible, but from various, independent, historical records and tradition. What historical tradition tells us, again, independent from Holy Scripture, about how the disciples died makes it difficult, if not impossible to believe the disciples perpetrated some kind of elaborate hoax about Jesus' resurrection. Here we go...history and tradition tells us that...

Peter was martyred for his faith by crucifixion, head down!

Andrew was martyred for his faith by crucifixion!

Matthew was martyred for his faith with a sword!

James, son of Alphaeus was martyred for his faith by crucifixion!

Philip was martyred for his faith by crucifixion!

Simon was martyred for his faith by crucifixion!

Thaddaeus was martyred for his faith by arrows!

James, brother of Jesus was martyred for his faith by stoning according to Josephus, a Jewish historian.

Thomas was martyred for his faith by a spear thrust!

Bartholomew was martyred for his faith by crucifixion!

And the only one we find record of his martyrdom in the Bible is James, son of Zebedee who was martyred for his faith with a sword at the direction of King Herod!

Now, do you really think this many men would die for a lie they knew to be a lie? Oh, people die for lies all the time, but they believe the lies to be truth! Only a person with serious mental delusions or the worse case of self pride, would die for a lie they knew to be a lie! For this many men to be willing to die rather than deny the truth of what they had witnessed in the resurrected Jesus, should help roll away the stone of unbelief for any logical, rational thinking individual! Ironically, some people recognize the plausibility of the resurrection, but to accept it's reality would necessitate an acceptance of the message of the resurrected One and that would not be convenient to their chosen lifestyles and so, some will, for that reason, not allow the stone of unbelief to be rolled away!

Okay, I know it's hard to believe, but we're down to the last two stones that need to be rolled away. I'm sure there's many more we could have talked about today, but time doesn't permit. Here's one of the heaviest stones known to humankind...

The Stone of Guilt

Mark 14:27 "You will all fall away," Jesus told them, "for it is written: "'I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered.'

Mark 14:28 But after I have risen, I will go ahead of you into Galilee."

Mark 14:29 Peter declared, "Even if all fall away, I will not."

Mark 14:30 "I tell you the truth," Jesus answered, "today--yes, tonight--before the rooster crows twice you yourself will disown me three times."

Mark 14:31 But Peter insisted emphatically, "Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you." And all the others said the same.

Of course, we all know the rest of the story. They all did fall away and Peter actually denied even knowing Jesus, not once but three times! After Jesus had been arrested, Peter was watching the proceedings. Listen to what happens the third time he is confronted with being a follower of Jesus...

Mark 14:70 ...After a little while, those standing near said to Peter, "Surely you are one of them, for you are a Galilean."

Mark 14:71 He began to call down curses on himself, and he swore to them, "I don't know this man you're talking about."

Mark 14:72 Immediately the rooster crowed the second time. Then Peter remembered the word Jesus had spoken to him: "Before the rooster crows twice you will disown me three times." And he broke down and wept.

And did you know that Luke adds this very telling detail to that last denial...

Luke 22:61 The Lord turned and looked straight at Peter.

Can you imagine the guilt Peter felt as he makes eye contact with Jesus? How bold Peter had been in his earlier confessions, but now, he's broken. The once proud and mighty Simon Peter brakes down and weeps! Why? I think partly because of the look Jesus gave him. It was not a look of anger, but of disappointment! It was not a look of disgust, but one of sorrow! It was not a look of condemnation, but one of forgiveness! It was not a look of bitterness, but a look of deep, deep love! For this, Peter wept bitterly! But here's what we all need to know today! God is the God of second chances! Amen! And third and forth! Jesus gave Peter the opportunity to be restored. One of the last times Jesus saw the disciples before ascending back to heaven was on the shores of the Sea of Galilee. They were having a little fish cookout. Check this out...

John 21:15 When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you truly love me more than these?" "Yes, Lord," he said, "you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Feed my lambs."

John 21:16 Again Jesus said, "Simon son of John, do you truly love me?" He answered, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Take care of my sheep."

John 21:17 The third time he said to him, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, "Do you love me?" He said, "Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Feed my sheep..."

Some folks hesitate to come to church for fear that God might look at them with anger, disgust, condemnation, or bitterness, but I'm here to tell you that no matter what you've done, if you are willing to cry out to Him for forgiveness, you can be restored! Here's God's promise...

Rom 8:1 Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus,

Rom 8:2 because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death.

And that takes us to the last stone...

The Stone of Death

Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians...

1 Cor 15:51 Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed--

1 Cor 15:52 in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed.

1 Cor 15:53 For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality.

1 Cor 15:54 When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: "Death has been swallowed up in victory."

1 Cor 15:55 "Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?"

1 Cor 15:56 The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law.

1 Cor 15:57 But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

1 Cor 15:58 Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.

In other words, we've been invited to join God in the stone removal business!

The life you live as you follow Christ could be the very thing that helps remove the stone of disbelief from a lost person's life! As people see you relying on Christ through the good times and the bad times, you could help remove the stone of inadequacy from their lives! So many people feel inadequate, but Jesus could be there for them if they would only let Him! The way you overcome your fears could be the very inspiration for someone else to let Jesus roll the stone of fear from their hearts! It could, not only change their life, but save their life! And the way you allow Jesus to give you forgiveness and freedom from guilt could help someone else realize they can be forgiven too and the very heavy and debilitating stone of guilt could be rolled away in their lives! In fact, Jesus said this...

Mat 5:16 In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.

And when you do this, you could be, quite literally, rolling away the stone of death for someone as they accept the eternal life Jesus died to give them which rolls away the stone of death forever!

Let's pray!