

In His Joy

Jonathan K. Dodson | Mark 16:1-8 | May 5, 2019

We're looking at the end of each Gospel to soak in Jesus's instructions for mission. In Mark 16 the narrative is arranged around the empty tomb: approaching the tomb, entering the tomb, fleeing the tomb.

Approaching the Tomb

A video of a so-called resurrection circulated a few weeks before Easter. In it, an African pastor, surrounded by a crowd of people, reaches into an open casket and touches a corpse in prayer. A couple seconds later, the dead man sits up with his mouth hanging wide open. Internet memes erupted in mockery. I'll admit, it looked like a hoax. What makes the account of Jesus's resurrection any different? Has Mark written this account to pull the wool over our eyes? Consider some of the details. He's written this in plain sight. It's a public document, and yet no 1st C witness contests his account. In it he includes details that can be fact-checked: time of the women's departure, their purchase of spices at a local market—events that could easily be disproven. Then, he uses women as witnesses. In Jewish patriarchal culture, women were not considered reliable witnesses, rarely relied upon in court. Yet, Mark makes them the *first* witnesses of the resurrection! And think about *these* women. They were particularly suspect. *Mary Magdalene* was a social outcast, demon-possessed before she met Jesus. *Mary the mother of Jesus*, had a vested interest in her son's legacy. And *Salome*, mother of James and John, asked Jesus for her two boys sit on his right and left. Power hungry? These three women—easily dismissed as crazy, vested, and power hungry—aren't the most reliable sources for your grand deceit. If Mark is spinning a tall tale, he's doing an awful job of pulling the wool over our eyes. Contestable historical detail, female testimony, women of questionable character to establish an eye-witness account. So why believe it? Because there's absolutely no reason to make *this story* up. It bears no marks of fabrication, contains no outlandish details, and went uncontested by eye witnesses the entire first century. **The only reason Mark would risk reporting the story like this is if it's true!** Just the facts. Now if this doesn't convince you, you should want to be convinced. You should want this to be true—to live in an open system, where the supernatural is possible, where God can intervene, Christ can be raised to deal

with death, guilt, shame. A God who so identifies with us he embraces death and rises as a trailer of a new world to come. If you don't believe it, you should want to believe it. If you do believe it, then you should be proving it in kindness, service, mercy, justice, evangelism. We should be a trailer of the world to come. That's the skeptical approach. The devotional approach: [When the Sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him \(1\)](#). Why are they here? To anoint the body. Typical burial practice, but the wrinkle is Jesus was already anointed with 75 pounds of spices (Jn 19:39). So why *more* anointing? It's costly, extraneous. Some say to help with the stench, but the body was tucked away in cool, stone tomb with a massive rock covering the entrance. The text says they departed "[very early on the first day.](#)" The word is "exceedingly" early. Ever stay up all night to get tickets to a show, can't sleep because you're so excited about a trip? These women were on their tiptoes for first light. As soon as it hit, they were off to anoint their Lord. The text says they go to anoint *him* (not the body). This is personal, *devotional*. Another way to approach the empty tomb, to be so moved by Christ's sacrifice and triumph for you, you run to him each morning; your faith is *personal*.

Entering the Tomb

[Entering the tomb, they see a young man sitting on the right, dressed in a white robe, and they were alarmed \(5\)](#). Pretty non-descript, especially in comparison to Matthew's account. where there's a descent from heaven, a violent earthquake, lightening-crackling angel. But here we have none of that. The angel is described as a young man. Christ is referred to as Jesus of Nazareth. Why? It's not that any of that supernatural stuff didn't happen. Mark is drawing our attention to something else. What is it? The **metaphysical become mundane**. God one of us: tasted suffering, heartache, death. He is in touch with the human condition. The angel says, "[You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified \(6\)](#). Why Jesus of Nazareth not Son of God? This is how these women came to know Jesus, as a flesh and blood, a man from the village. The Jesus who was held by Mary *as a baby*. The man who touched Mary Magdalene with a love so powerful it drove away her demons, banished her shame. My aunt has struggled with shame her whole life. Bitter divorce in the 70s, developed mental illness, does things out of her control, and then on top of that both of her kidneys shut down as a result of the medication she was taking. Then I heard she needed a kidney

transplant. I thought if I can give her some kind of relief from her burdensome life, I'll do it. So I went through the rigorous matching process, preparation, and surgery. When she woke up she had my life inside of her. Things aren't perfect, but she has a much better life. But you know what's even better? Jesus gave her, not a kidney, but his whole dang life. His heart, mind, and soul to remove her shame, to forgive her sin, to one day make her new entirely, and he did it for you too. That's why the angel said, You seek Jesus who was *crucified*. Why did a God of inordinate power choose to suffer an ordinary crucifixion? Metaphysical to become mundane? Because he knew the shamed, the crazy, the proud, the immoral, the godless have to be put to death before they can come to life. See, to enjoy Jesus's healing touch, you have to enter a place of death. It's not enough to look into the tomb; you have to enter the tomb. You can't just agree with resurrection; you have to agree to die. What do you need to take into the tomb? What's hold you back from running to him in utter devotion? Enter the tomb and put it to death with Christ, and you'll hear the angel say, **He has risen; he is not here.** The supernatural becomes mundane, but **the mundane becomes metaphysical.** The shamed are welcomed, the unlovely loved, the sinner forgiven, the dead raised! Resurrection breaks open a fountain of hope in this world. New things start pouring out. Kidneys don't just get transplanted; they get regenerated. Bodies don't just die; they rise. Sinners aren't just tolerated; they're loved! The lame walk, the blind see, the poor lifted up, and women are *held up* as credible witnesses to the resurrection of Jesus. Here's why you should respond devotionally not skeptically. Jesus puts metaphysical in the mundane, and its what his church should look like. Supernatural in the mundane. Attending the poor, comforting the sick, advocating for justice, advertising CHRIST IS RISEN to the world!

Fleeing the Tomb

Approaching the tomb, entering the tomb, now fleeing the tomb. After announcing Jesus has risen, the angel says, "**Go tell the disciples Jesus is going before you to Galilee.**" What did they do? Make excuses, nobody will believe us. Memorialize the tomb, stuck in the past? No they let the metaphysical transform the mundane. *They went.* They didn't amble home; they *fled* from the tomb! There was an explosiveness to their obedience, an urgency to their witness, an overriding priority in their lives. How about you? What's the overriding priority

of your life? Christ in creation, metaphysical in mundane? Why should it be *personal*, powerful? Because **trembling and astonishment had seized them** (8). These words mean to quake and experience ecstasy: *utter joy*. They risk scorn, rejection, harm fleeing the tomb to bear witness. Why *for utter joy*. So should we. The joy of Christ should compel us to be a trailer of the world to come, witness to the hope of resurrection. I don't feel that joy; in fact, I struggle. How do I get utter joy? Approach the tomb: get on your tiptoes each morning and say, *Satisfy me in the morning with your lovingkindness that I may shout for joy*. Enter the tomb: Exchange temporal happiness for lasting joy. Put your lesser joys to death, the things you flee to for happiness (success, recognition, entertainment, knowledge, justice, evangelism, family, friends). Replace happiness with joy. Flee the tomb: act on your beliefs. The women flee death because they have found life. They don't just agree that he is risen; they act like he is risen. Tell the disciples, and the rest is history. They acted on their beliefs. Will you? Will you be a trailer of the things to come? Will you not just enter the tomb but flee the tomb for JOY? This is why Mark ends so abruptly, mentioning they spoke to no one on the way. It's a cliffhanger. Who else will go? Who will tell? Who will *show*—the metaphysical become mundane: Jesus of Nazareth crucified, and the mundane become metaphysical: Son of Man risen, reigning, and will return!