Sunday School Commentary Lesson

By

Dr. Jason Thrower

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Resurrection Faith, Mark 16:1-8

In 100 Mediations on Hope by Wayne Lamb he writes: "In the midst of a storm, a little bird was clinging to the limb of a tree, seemingly calm and unafraid. As the wind tore at the limbs of the tree, the bird continued to look the storm in the face, as if to say, 'Shake me off; I still have wings.'"

Because of Christ's resurrection, each Christian can look the experience of death in the face and confidently say, "Shake me off; I still have wings. I'll live anyway." How strong is our faith in Jesus? John Wesley believed that our people (Methodists) die well. We can live and die well by having a resurrection faith. "And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith." (1 Corinthians 15:14)

Commentary Lesson

There is a rough realism about Mark's Gospel. Jesus died wondering if God had forsaken him (15:34), and the women who heard the good news about resurrection "fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid" (16:8). That's the end. It is abrupt and suggests it is unfinished. What are we to make of this? Our text Mark 16:1-8 is the real ending of Mark. I know of no commentaries that would suggest otherwise. Mark 16:9-20 is usually called "the longer ending of Mark." It was probably added early in the second century. I can remember, first hearing in seminary about the true ending of Mark being 16:8. It bothered me, growing up holding a firm belief of the authority of Scripture. Teachers of mine helped me to see how the Bible was written, assembled, and handed down to us through the hands of numerous translators. Mark did not write it 16:9-20; we don't know who did. However, the ending of Mark does not confuse Mark's meaning. "He has been raised; he is not here." The resurrection of Jesus is the point that changes everything.

We know how modern funerals take place. But the death of Jesus took place a long time ago and in a very different culture. "When the sabbath was over" (16:1a). That would be Saturday at sundown. Notice how the nearest followers of Jesus still observed Jewish law. "Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James and Salome" (16:1b). These two women were among the inner circle of Jesus' followers. They are named twice because their story is bedrock to confirmation of the resurrection (15:47, 16:1b).

The "original spice girls" brought spices to Jesus' tomb to anoint his dead, smelly body. It wasn't faith that brought them there on the first day of week. It was a since of duty and deep love for Jesus that motivated them to perform this service for their master. Their chief concern was how would they get inside the tomb. Tombs in those days were sealed with a large stone
over the mouth of the entrance. It would have been much too large for them to move. The stone was moved when they arrived. Why do you think the stone was moved? It wasn't moved so Jesus could get out. The death conquerer could have moved it. But I believe that the stone was moved so the grieving women could come inside the tomb and see for themselves. He was no longer there!

Jesus had predicted he would rise from the dead after three days (Mark 8:31), but strangely this message was lost on those who followed him most closely. They were trapped in the moment, and their minds could not take in the idea of resurrection. When Jesus died on the cross, there is not a shrewd of evidence that the men who would later be apostles ever expected to see Jesus again. Like the women who went to the tomb on Sunday, they thought Jesus dead and buried.

Contrast this despairing, defeated state of mind with the book of Acts. The same people who had no hope were abounding in hope. The same people who were afraid were suddenly faithful and fearless. The transformation is remarkable! How are we explain the change in the people close to Jesus? How are we to explain the rise of the church? How are we to explain the energy required to cause Christianity to overcome the pagan religions that cluttered the Roman world? Resurrection faith. Faith in the resurrection of Christ changed everything! The question is - has resurrection faith in Jesus changed everything for us?

Contact Jason - throwerjason@yahoo.com