

## Lesson 6: The Resurrection

Key Concept: The Resurrection

Bible Study: Mark 16

### Bible Study

Recap: Last week, we talked about the question of how certain we are that God will accept us into heaven. We then considered how the cross relates to this question and looked at the different responses that people have to the cross. But, the reality is that all of this hangs on the resurrection. See, if Jesus was just another man and died like everybody else, then He can't help us deal with our ultimate enemy of death that comes as a result of our sin.

The resurrection, however, means that Christ conquered the enemy of death and that it has no hold over Him. This is great news because that means if you're in Christ and His Spirit is alive in you, then neither sin nor death has ultimate sway over you. So, all this hinges on the resurrection.

#### Mark 16

Now, let's look at the account of the resurrection in Mark and see how credible you think this is. About thirty-six hours after watching Jesus die, the women return to the tomb, expecting to find a corpse. They don't even think that they will be able to get to His body because they know that a huge stone has been laid across the entrance to the tomb. Yet, in this passage, the women are subjected to three shocks of escalating intensity. **Mark 16:4-8.**

1. **Shock #1: the stone rolled away.** The first shock comes in verse 4: "But when they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had been rolled away." In the original Greek, this phrase literally means "hurled out." There is no need for them to worry about the stone because divine power has dealt with it.
2. **Shock #2: an angel.** Then, comes the second shock as they go inside the tomb. Verse 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." The man (which Matthew 28:2 confirms is an angel) affirms the reality of what is happening in verse 6: "Don't be alarmed," he said. "You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified." He was really buried here; you don't have the wrong address. The fact is that Jesus simply isn't here anymore.

3. **Shock #3:** But the third shock will change the women's lives forever. The young man in the empty tomb tells them the reason why Jesus' body is not there. Verse 6: "**He has risen!**" Divine power has not only flung the stone away - it has also raised a body to life. This is supernatural. The tomb was empty because Jesus isn't dead anymore. He is alive.

So, how do the women react to this staggering news? Verse 8 says: "Trembling and bewildered, the women went out and fled from the tomb. They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid." Now, I want you to take a few minutes with me and think about the evidence that we have just read and ask, "Did the Resurrection happen historically?"

If you answer this question based upon the evidence in front of you in this passage, then you must remember that this is eyewitness evidence. In a court of law, the presence of eyewitness testimony is enough to sway the jury. It is the most powerful evidence to produce. And, that is what we have.

Mark and all of the gospels were written as eyewitness testimony, meaning that they were written by people who saw the events themselves or talked to the ones who did. Today, we're going to consider the eyewitness evidence presented here.

### **Legal Proof vs. Scientific Proof**

In considering the eyewitness evidence, we're asking for legal proof, not scientific proof. Legal proof asks the question, "Did an event happen in the past?" Scientific proof, on the other hand, asks a different question. Scientific proof asks, "Can an event happen again in the future?" Whereas science asks if it is repeatable, law asks if it happened at all. Therefore, keep in mind that with the Resurrection, we're asking whether or not it happened by legal standards of proof.

### **Examining Eyewitness Evidence**

In examining the strength of eyewitness testimony in a court of law, certain tests are considered:

#### **1. The Cover-Up Test**

Is an eyewitness covering up something by not telling parts of the story? One thing that strengthens eyewitness testimony is if it passes the cover-up test. If an eyewitness covers up certain things, then his testimony loses credibility, but if the eyewitness shares information that could be seen as damaging to the case, then his testimony gains credibility. In Mark's case, his eyewitness account becomes more credible as he shares the following damaging facts:

**\*Mark presents trembling, forgetful women who tell no one**

Jesus had told them repeatedly that he would suffer, die and rise again.

Three examples of this come in Mark 8, 9, and 10 where He shared, "The Son of Man must be killed and after three days rise again" (Mk. 8:31); "They will kill Him and after three days He will rise" (Mk. 9:31); "The Gentiles will mock Him and spit on

Him, flog Him and kill Him. Three days later He will rise” (Mk. 10:34). He kept sharing that His death and resurrection were at the center of the story, and yet, the first people to discover His resurrection have either totally forgotten that it was going to occur or they just didn’t believe it would really happen. Moreover, they leave trembling and decide not to tell anyone—not exactly the best way to get the word out on a new movement.

**\*Mark presents women:** Consider the credibility of the witnesses Mark presents. In the first century when Mark was writing, women weren’t allowed to testify in a court of law. Their testimony was inadmissible. If Mark was going to make this story up to persuade other people, then he wouldn’t have had women play this part. He would have had the most credible men in the community validate that this actually happened—not a bunch of women whose testimony wasn’t even valid.

## **2. The Bias Test**

Another important test to consider is the bias test. Without question, these eyewitnesses writing the gospel accounts were followers of Jesus and deeply loved Him, as were many of the eyewitnesses to the Resurrection (though certainly not all). It is important to remember this, however: the only thing they had to gain in supporting a Resurrection theory was their own death. And, this is exactly what happened to every single disciple (save John, who was exiled)—they were murdered for believing in and supporting the Resurrection. As Blaise Pascal says, “I tend to believe those witnesses that get their throats cut.”

Therefore, with the death penalty on the line (the most powerful of incentives to come clean), there is simply no way to reasonably believe that a multi-party conspiracy theory with over 500 witnesses would have held together if they were all trying to fabricate this sighting of the Resurrection (that really didn’t happen). One, or most likely all, would have caved in and admitted that it was a hoax, but, to the contrary, they all went to their graves asserting the truth of the Resurrection.

## **3. The Corroboration Test**

Corroborating evidence is evidence that strengthens or adds to already existing evidence. The strength of Mark’s eyewitness evidence is corroborated, or strengthened, by the sheer number of eyewitnesses. The Gospels alone tell us of 10 separate instances where Jesus is seen after His death, at different times and in different places, to different people. In 1 Corinthians 15:6, Paul tells us that over five hundred people saw Jesus at one time, most of whom were still living when Paul was writing. So Paul was saying to his readers, “If you don’t believe me, go and talk to the eyewitnesses. I’ve checked myself and more than 250 of them are still alive and will confirm the truth of what I’m saying.”

In a court of law, this would have been an open and shut case. If an attorney could trot out over 250 eyewitnesses who all said they saw the same thing, then the event would be taken as fact. This is one of the central reasons why Christianity spread like wildfire in the first few centuries. It went from 12 men following Jesus to roughly 40

million Christians by 300 AD. Why? Because people went and asked the eyewitnesses and they all confirmed it. “I saw Him. It is true.”

And, remember this wasn't a global world in the era of the internet. This was a very small community where everyone knew everyone (think *Mayberry* on the *Andy Griffith* show). So the strength of the corroboration evidence here is powerful, or to use legal terms, seems beyond a reasonable doubt.

### **Examining the Sociological Evidence**

Rodney Starks, a sociologist, notes the remarkable growth in Christianity in the first 4 centuries in his book called *The Rise of Christianity*. According to Starks, Christianity went from a group of 12 disciples to over 33 million people and 56% of the Roman Empire by the year 350 A.D. From a sociological perspective, this is stunning growth.

As a skeptic, one way to explain this is to say, “Well, in the ancient world, people were simpler and more open to supernatural things (like a Resurrection) because they didn't think as scientifically as we do now.” C.S. Lewis, as an atheist, thought this way until he realized his own chronological snobbery in thinking that people of a previous age are by necessity less sophisticated in their thinking. In fact, N.T. Wright correctly points out that the people of the first century were actually more intellectually set against the Resurrection than people of the modern era, primarily because (1) Jews thought a Resurrection occurred at the end of human history and (2) Greeks and Romans thought the body was bad, meaning that a physical resurrection would be a bad thing. Therefore, what is so remarkable about the rapid growth of Christianity from a sociological perspective is that this unprecedented growth happened in an intellectual climate that had no possibility for a physical resurrection. Why? According to Starks and N.T. Wright, the only logical explanation is because the eyewitness evidence was convincing beyond a reasonable doubt.

### **Transformational Evidence**

Still, often times the most compelling evidence is how Jesus is continually transforming lives.

**Coaching Point: Tell your friend one or more stories of life transformation, starting with your own.**

### **Conclusion**

The evidence for the resurrection is beyond a reasonable doubt. And, here is the great news as expressed in John 11: 25-26: “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in Me will never die.” And I Corinthians 15:20 says, “Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man.” He was just the firstfruit of the Resurrection. If you trust in Him, He will resurrect you, as well. Death will no longer have the last word.

**Coaching Point:** If your friend is not yet ready to follow Jesus, then suggest reading through (1) *The Case for Christ* by Lee Strobel OR (2) *The Reason for God* by Tim Keller.

### Discussion Questions

1. Read Mark 16:4-8. Describe the 3 shocks that the women experience.
2. What is the difference between legal proof and scientific proof? Why should the resurrection be judged by legal proof instead of scientific proof?
3. How does the historical evidence for the resurrection stand up to the Cover-Up test?
4. How does the historical evidence for the resurrection stand up to the Bias test?
5. How does the historical evidence for the resurrection stand up to the Corroboration test?
6. In your own words, describe the sociological evidence for the resurrection.
7. Describe the transformational evidence for the resurrection by sharing how Jesus has transformed and is transforming your life.

## Lesson 6 One Page—The Resurrection

1. Mark 15:40-16:8 (pg. 1010)—Everything hinges on the Resurrection
  - A. 3 Shocks
    1. Stone Rolled Away
    2. Angel Present
    3. He has Risen
  - B. Women's Reactions
    1. Trembling, told nobody
2. Legal Proof vs. Scientific Proof
3. Examining the Strength of the Eye Witness Testimony
  - A. Cover-Up Test
    1. Trembling, forgetful women
    2. Women
  - B. Bias Test
    1. Only incentive: death
    2. All disciples (save John, who was exiled) were killed
    3. Pascal
    4. Multi-party conspiracies don't hold up
  - C. Corroboration Test
    1. Specific names of eyewitnesses
      - (1) 10 people at different times and places in gospels alone
      - (2) I Corinthians 15—500 witnesses
      - (3) Like being in a court of law and bringing up 500 eyewitnesses
      - (4) Not global world—Mayberry
4. Examining the Sociological Evidence
  - A. 12 men to 33 million by 350 AD (Starks)
  - B. Skeptics (Ancients were simpler, more prone)
    1. C.S. Lewis=chronological snobbery
      - a. Yet nobody had category for resurrection
        - (1) Jews: End of Time
        - (2) Greeks & Romans: Body Bad, Soul good
5. Transformational Evidence
  1. Share your story
6. Conclusions
  1. Evidence beyond a reasonable doubt
  2. His resurrection will be ours: no fear of death
    - a. John 11: 25-26 (pg 1063)
    - b. 1 Corinthians 15: 20 (pg. 1139)
7. Recommend Case for Christ or Reason for God if your friend isn't ready to follow Jesus