

Mark 16: 1-14; “Who Will Roll Away the Stone?”, An Easter Sermon
delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on April 17th, 2022,
in the Afternoon Worship Service.

I believe that God works all things according to the counsel of His will. I believe that He ordains the timing, the order, and the outcome of all events in perfect righteousness. O, He is not responsible for the sins of men, or their unbelief, but He is very much concerned with the strength of His people’s faith. He is very concerned that our faith not be weak, but that it would be strong and steadfast. To this end, God providentially ordered the way that events came to pass on that Easter morning when Christ arose. It was all arranged so that the disciple’s faith might be strengthened and built by Christ’s rising from the dead.

These women who came looking for Jesus on that resurrection morn did not realize that He had risen from the dead. Indeed, their faith was hindered from believing it. And so, this afternoon I would like to speak to you about 4 things that hindered them, that may also hinder you from finding the Risen living Christ in your experience and service as a Christian. You will find, if you will address these hinderances, that your experience of Christ will become much more real and your faith in Him and your walk with Him will be strengthened in many ways.

1st of all – There was the hindrance of practical questions.

You would have thought, Biblically speaking, that the Lord Jesus would have revealed Himself as resurrected, to the apostles first, and then to the other disciples, and then to the women later. Why didn’t it happen that way? Well, we need to take notice of the fact that it was to a woman, Mary Magdalene, that Christ appeared first. This shows us a very important principle of truth which we need to pay attention to. It is this. In terms of the spiritual privileges accorded to God’s saints, women are not at all inferior to men, and they are not at all to be seen as second-class citizens in the kingdom of God. In Christ Jesus, Paul says in Galatians 3: 28 – “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”

Just because a woman is a woman, does not mean that God does not have something to tell us, or to teach us men, through her. In this case, these women who are mentioned were in the path of humble service to their Master and Lord. So when they received a revelation of the truth of Christ’s resurrection, they were faithful to go and tell the Christ’s disciples what they had seen and heard, and what they had been told by the angel. And yet, we find that the apostles and disciples did not believe any of them. I think that this shows us something about the revelation of truth which perhaps we all need to learn. In terms of what Christ reveals of Himself in the personal revelation of spiritual truth, women may actually, at some places and some times, be ahead of men.

Sometimes women have been given greater understanding about certain spiritual truths and realities; and yet, as we know from the further revelation of the letters of Paul, women are not to teach and exercise authority in the church; they are to remain silent. The apostle even says that it is a shame for women to speak in the church in 1st Corinthians 14: 35. But from what we read here, there are times and places, according to this passage, where they should, and they really must, tell what they have seen and heard and know, spiritually speaking, so that the faith of people around them; even men in authority, can be strengthened.

And to add to this, we can say, that when they come to share spiritual things, if they are in submission to Christ and His Word, they should also be believed. It was very early in the morning, on the first day of the week, that these 3 women came to the tomb. Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices that they might come and anoint the body of Jesus. They knew that Jesus had been buried in Joseph of Arimathea’s tomb. They knew it had a large stone rolled in front of the door. They were practical ladies; they were thinking ahead. And so it

says that they said among themselves, “Who will roll the stone away from the door for us?” They knew that they could not do it themselves. Practical questions like this can be a hindrance to your faith in this way; that you might not go on to try to do and to accomplish many things for Christ. You might not go on to do them, because those things simply look too difficult for you to even try.

Yes, it is good for you to know yourself and to know your limits; but do you know the limits of a Risen Christ? There are none. They looked up, the text says, and then they had their answer. The stone was already rolled away. They had come there that morning to minister to their Lord Jesus who they fully believed was still dead. But if they had had practical faith in exercise that morning, they never would have come to the tomb in clothes of mourning, and bearing their spices. It was indeed a very powerful show of their love for him, but a very weak show of their faith.

They had been told a number of times in His teaching to them that He would rise from the dead, but now they had come to the tomb expecting to find a lifeless body. They found the answer to their unbelief in the stone having been rolled away. The practical question was answered. They did not need anybody to roll away the stone because Christ was risen! There are many practical questions which will be answered in our Christian life if we will but look up; and remember, and believe, that our Jesus is risen from the dead. We, as believers, tend to forget that He is risen from the dead and so we ask many practical questions such as: Who will help me with the thoughts of my troubled heart? My heart feels so tired and dead inside. Who will lift me up from my discouragement and depression? Who will give me the strength to go on, and the strength to glorify my God in my service to Christ?

Dear troubled believer, Christ will help you, for He is risen from the dead. “If then you were raised with Christ, keep seeking those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God.” He was dead, but only for a short time. Now He is alive forevermore! Who will help me with my wandering, straying, and even sinful thoughts, you ask? Even now, when you ask Him, He will give you new and better thoughts to think, because He is risen. His Spirit will be working in this good way, in your heart and mind. The Lord sees you and He sympathizes with your weaknesses.

You say: Who will help me when I am going through trials and difficulties which seem to me to be too much to bear? Who will help me in the spiritual warfare that I am facing in trying to be faithful to Christ? It will be the risen, living Christ! Remember what the Apostle Peter said. “Casting all your cares upon Him, for He cares for you.” And remember what Paul said: “Be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His mighty power!” (Ephesians 6: 10) He can do this because He is risen from the dead. He has all authority in heaven and earth. And He says – Lo, I am with you always!

The apostle Paul had times like this. This is what he said in 2nd Timothy 2: 8: “Remember that Jesus Christ, of the seed of David, was raised from the dead according to my gospel, for which I suffer trouble as an evildoer, even to the point of chains; but the word of God is not chained.” “Therefore I endure all things for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory.” “For if we died with Him, we shall also live with Him, if we endure, we shall also reign with Him.” “If we deny Him, He also will deny us.” “If we are faithless, He remains faithful; He cannot deny Himself.” All this, my friends, is only true if Jesus Christ is risen from the dead. Let your practical questions come. But the risen Christ is with the person who believes in Him.

2nd – There was the hindrance of the fears that came to them.

These dear ladies had other practical questions that were coming to their minds. They wondered what had become of the body of their Lord Jesus. So, in verse 5 it says, “And entering the tomb, they saw a young man clothed in a long white robe sitting on the right side; and they were alarmed.” Becoming alarmed; not knowing what had happened to their beloved Lord; how

does this “young man” whom they met, address them? He simply says, “Do not be alarmed.” “You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified.” “He is risen!” “He is not here.” “See the place where they laid Him.” “But go, tell His disciples – and Peter—that He is going before you into Galilee; there you will see Him, as He said to you.”

“So they went out quickly and fled from the tomb, for they trembled and were amazed.” “And they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.” How does this angel address the fears of these women concerning the body of Jesus not being there and his being there in His place? He tells them of the Lord being raised from the dead. How do you address your fears, dear believer? Let it be by remembering that Jesus Christ is risen from the dead. Remember that Jesus has gone before you, and He intends to meet with you spiritually in your heart and mind, speaking to you through His blessed Word, in His own good time.

With this knowledge, calm your soul. He will deliver you from all your fears. And if this is not His will, to deliver you immediately; to deliver you from physical death and earthly cares, remember this truth; that because He is raised from the dead, He shall deliver you from every evil work and bring you to Himself. Because He is raised from the dead, He Himself will be with you by His Spirit’s power. These women were not delivered from their fear of this angel immediately, and so they just fled and said nothing to anyone. But all this was to change. They would become Christ’s witnesses in just a bit.

I hope that you see from this that fear will paralyze you and not let you do any good thing for Christ. Faith in Christ, raised from the dead, gives power to do good, and to witness. These ladies were asked to go and tell Christ’s disciples, and Peter, that He was going before them, but they fled from the tomb trembling for amazement. Their love for Jesus was great enough to bring them to the tomb to anoint a dead Jesus, but the word that He was raised from the dead alarmed them. And the presence of this angel really caused a wild racing of their hearts and emotions. They fled the tomb in fear.

But something wonderful happened to take away all their fear of the angel and his message. Matthew’s gospel records it for us. The more that they thought about the angel’s words, the more that their fear changed into the pure joy! This great truth of Jesus’ being alive was being revealed to them! He was alive! Let us see what the truth of Christ risen from the dead will do to change everything! Verse 8 of Matthew 28 says, “So they went out quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy, and ran to bring His disciples word.” “And as they went to tell His disciples, behold Jesus met them, saying, ‘Rejoice!’” “So they came and held Him by the feet and worshiped Him.” “Then Jesus said to them, ‘Do not be afraid.’”

See how immediately the risen Christ changed everything for them. The reality of it took away their fears. And it let them become message bearers for Christ. It is Christ who strengthens us to be His witnesses. The Apostle Paul said later in his life, in 2nd Timothy 4: 17, “But the Lord stood with me and strengthened me, so that the message might be preached fully through me, and that all the Gentiles might hear.” “Also I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion.” “And the Lord will deliver me from every evil work and preserve me for His heavenly kingdom.” How could Paul bear up under these great oppositions? It was because Jesus was risen from the dead and He was giving him this spiritual wisdom and strength. By the power and wisdom of the risen Christ, the most practical questions of how we can do anything for Christ are answered. Remember this, and act upon it my brethren. This truth when believed will bring you joy, even though it at first might alarm you. See how these women were changed in a matter of moments from alarm to joy. The risen Christ can do this.

3rd – There was the hindrance of grief in the apostle’s minds and hearts.

Look at verse 9 – “Now when He rose early on the first day of the week, He appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom He had cast seven demons.” “She went and told those who had been with Him, as they mourned and wept.” “And when they heard that He was alive and had

been seen by her, they did not believe.” “After that, He appeared in another form to two of them as they walked and went into the country.” “And they went and told it to the rest, but they did not believe them either.”

You and I need to see the power that a sorrowing grieving spirit has upon those who allow themselves to be affected by it. These men refused to believe not only the witness of the women, but also the witness of the two men who had seen the Risen Christ on the road to Emmaus. See the power of sadness and grief to wound the spirit of a person to the place where faith is not seen as the answer. If Christ is not risen, we are of all men most to be pitied. Where can lasting hope and eternal comfort be found except in this blessed truth that Christ is alive from the dead. Proverbs 18: 14 says, “The spirit of a man will sustain him in sickness, but a wounded spirit (or a broken spirit) who can bear?”

These men could not afford, they thought, to believe something that might not be true. They were wounded and broken in their hearts. They refused the encouragements that the others brought to them to believe. What a strange thing this was that morning; the apostles weeping, and the angels and the women rejoicing! None of us should allow our grief to overwhelm the witness of others to us, testifying of the greatness of the grace of the Risen Christ which has come to them, which has made them glad. He can make you glad once again, too, after you have suffered loss. He knows how to restore your soul. He knows how to give you new hope and new labors for Him. Christ and the Father know how to give good things to their children.

Do not refuse to receive comfort and encouragement, and even instruction, in sad times when your spirit is wounded. Jesus is alive! He is seated at the right hand of the Father, and nothing shall separate you from His love and care. Cast all your cares upon Him, for He cares for you. Since Christ is raised from the dead you can hope in Him continually, and boast in Him all the day long. Nothing is too difficult for Him. When you find unbelief laying hold of you, you must look for yourself and see that Christ is risen. He is the author and perfecter of your faith. The Apostles had not lost Him at all. And neither will any believing heart ever lose Him. But the only truth that will take away your all your sorrow and dry your tears, is that Christ is risen from the dead.

4th – There was the hindrance of unbelief and hardness of heart.

Verse 14 says, “Then He appeared to the eleven as they sat at the table; and He rebuked their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they did not believe those who had seen Him after He had risen.” We do not have the exact words of Jesus’ rebuke recorded for us here, but we need to take notice of the fact that He rebuked them for these two things; unbelief and hardness of heart. We have seen that these things are the most destructive things to the believer’s usefulness to Christ. How can Christ use us in His service when these things are prevailing in our spirit? When in times of our greatest grief, and sorrow and loss, you and I must learn to look up, and to see that the stone has been rolled away. Christ is Risen!

We have a sure hope of help and heaven every day of our lives. In every situation we can rejoice! Christ is watching and He cares for you very deeply. He has gone before you into heaven. His mighty power is exercised over everything and every person in heaven and earth. His love toward all those trusting in Him will never allow you to be separated from Him. If you are still alive, there is a reason for it. You are alive to glorify Him here upon the earth until the time that He will call you to Himself. The rebuke that Christ gave these Apostles and disciples was for their good. For He had much profitable work for them yet to do.

In verse 15 of our text, immediately after He rebukes them, He says to them – “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.” And so, I want you to see that the Risen Christ proved His power and His love and His grace to them in their day. Will He not do the same with you? “You seek Jesus of Nazareth who was crucified.” “He is risen!”

