**Uniquely Jesus**  July 23, 17

Mark 16, Part One

**Coffee/Question:**

What do you think makes a good detective?

**Feedback:**

A good detective is observant, and notices what others may miss seeing or hearing, and then asks pertinent questions as to what those details mean.

Our passage for today focuses on these three things:

Jesus died.

Jesus was buried.

Jesus rose.

Philip Yancey writes, *“The first Christians staked everything on the Resurrection,*

*so much so that the apostle Paul told the Christians at Corinth, ‘And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith.’*

*Those who discount the resurrection of Jesus tend to portray the disciples of Jesus in one of two ways: either as gullible rubes with a weakness for ghost stories, or as shrewd conspirators who conceived a resurrection plot to jump-start their new religion.*

*[But this is not the evidence presented by the Bible.] The Bible paints a distinctively different picture [of those early disciples and how they received the news of the resurrection.]”* The Jesus I Never Knew, p.211-212.

Listen carefully as I read the passage we’re going to study today.

There is great intentionality and specificity in the details recorded.

**Mark 15:40-16:8**.

There are three significant details we want to explore over the next couple of weeks.

1. The repeated mention of the women who had followed Jesus,

being present at Jesus’ death, burial and resurrection.

2. The actions of Joseph of Arimathea, who asked Pilate’s permission to take Jesus’ body off of the cross and then placed it in a tomb cut out of rock.

3. The message for the women from the young man who was in the empty tomb.

Today we’ll address the first detail - Mark’s repeated mention of Jesus’ female followers.

Mark specifically named three of the women – Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joseph, and Salome- 15:40, 47; 16:1.

In addition, Mark wrote that **many other women** were also present - 15:41.

Mark specifically tells us that on the day Jesus died, these women **SAW** four things.

**(1)** They **saw** Jesus die.

**(2)** They **saw** Joseph of Arimathea, take down the lifeless body of Jesus from the cross, and then wrap his body in linen cloth.

**(3)** They **saw** Joseph put the dead body of Jesus in a tomb.

**(4)** They **saw** Joseph roll a stone against the entrance of that tomb.

Then what?

Mark picks up his story on the first day of the week, after the Sabbath was over.

And here, he again, focuses in on Mary Magdalene, the other Mary and Salome.

These women, either on the evening of the day Jesus died and was buried, or at some point on the Sabbath, had talked together and made a plan to buy and prepare spices in order to properly bury Jesus - that is what is meant, when Mark said, they came to the tomb to anoint Jesus’ body.

On the way to the tomb, these women voiced to each other one important detail

they hadn’t thought about – who would roll the stone away from the entrance to the tomb? This was a serious oversight.

But when the women arrived at the tomb, there were three additional things they **SAW.**

-> They **saw** the stone, was rolled away – 16:4.

Did you catch how Mark described the stone in 16:4?

He said it was “very large.”

This is an important detail.

The stone was large enough that three women wouldn’t have been able to move it.

What did the women do when they saw the open tomb?

They didn’t stay outside; nor did they just peek in.

They also didn’t run away, guessing.... as to what or who, was or wasn’t in the tomb.

Take note of Mark’s emphasis on the fact that they “entered” the tomb – 16:5.

-> When they did, the women **saw** a young man who entrusted to them an important message concerning Jesus.

We’ll dig into the specifics of that message another week, but it is enough for us to know that this young man told the women, Jesus was alive!

-> The women also **saw** that the tomb was empty.

The dead body of Jesus was not there.

We need to ask our question again.

Why did Mark put such an emphasis on the presence of these women at the death and resurrection of Jesus?

Richard Bauckham says, “*[By doing so], Mark is letting us know that he is recording an historical account, and not writing a legend.”*

King’s Cross, p.214

This is important.

But how does providing the names of Mary Magdalene and the other Mary, and Salome, prove the details are historical?

Tim Keller writes, *“The repeated names of the women are source citations – we could call them footnotes.”* King’s Cross, p.214

When Mark wrote his gospel, these women were still alive.

Mark wanted his audience to know that the news about the resurrection of Jesus was based on the women’s eye-witness accounts.

There is something else very significant about this.

Today, both men and women can be witnesses in a court of law.

But in Jesus’ day, a woman couldn’t.

I’ve pasted into my teaching notes, which are posted on the website, an article by Margaret Manning Shull, who works with Ravi Zacharias International Ministries in Bellingham, Washington. Her article, which I quote from was published on March 29, 2016, and is entitled, Credible Witnesses.

“As it happens every Easter season, various scholars and skeptics weigh in on whether or not Jesus was actually raised from the dead.

Bart Ehrman’s latest book, *How Jesus Became God,* is a case in point.

Writing as a historian, he questions many of the gospel remembrances of the events surrounding the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus.

His conclusion is that the gospels are not reliable, historical witnesses.

But is this really the case?

A careful reading of the four evangelists’ remembrances of the resurrection does indeed reveal many different emphases and details.

**The Gospel of Matthew**, for example, tells us that a great earthquake occurred as an angel of the Lord descended and came and rolled away the stone and sat upon it.

**The Gospel of Mark**, on the other hand, tells us of a young man, in the tomb, who sat at the right, wearing a white robe who announced Jesus’ resurrection.

**The Gospel of Luke** tells us that two men suddenly stood near the women in dazzling apparel.

**The Gospel of John** reports the discovery of the linen wrappings abandoned in the empty tomb.

There are many other differences in the retelling of the resurrection appearances of Jesus.

If, as some suggest, the disciples made up the story of the resurrection, wouldn’t their story have been seamless?

“Since the Gospels were written several decades after the events, the authors had plenty of time to straighten out such discrepancies - unless, of course,” as Philip Yancey says, “they were not concocting a legend, but recording the plain facts.”

The Jesus I Never Knew, p.212.

No two people report exactly the same details about any event or happening!

There is one feature, though, that is the same in all four gospel testimonies:

the resurrection announcement was made first to the women who followed Jesus. (Matthew 28:1; Mark 16:1; Luke 23:55-24:5; John 20:1)

Many reasons have been put forward as to why that was the case.

-> Did Jesus appear to them first, because they stayed with Jesus through the crucifixion?

-> Or were they witnesses by default, because, women traditionally carried out the burial rituals in first century Judaism?

-> Or was this Jesus’ way of elevating the status for women of the first century and for women in general?

All of these are plausible, historical reasons.

But there is an *apologetic* reason why women were the first witnesses.

Sidenote:

*“The word ‘apologetics’ first appears in the New Testament in 1 Peter 3:15 where the apostle Peter addressed early Christians in Asia Minor (a Roman province) who were suffering persecution because of their faith in Christ.*

*Peter wrote: “… in your hearts honor Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer, [an* ***apologia;*** *a defense] to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect.” 1 Peter 3:14-15.*

*From these verses, we learn that there are two parts to Christian apologetics:*

*(1) the objective reasons and evidence that Christianity is true (that is, that it corresponds to reality) and,*

*(2) the communication of these truths to those who don’t yet know Jesus.*

*[The earliest believers appealed]... primarily to the Old Testament and to Jesus’ bodily resurrection as the proof of and reason for believing in Christ.”*

http://crossexamined.org/christian-apologetics/

How was the announcement of Jesus’ resurrection to these women an apologetic (a reason) that proved the resurrection really happened?

Josephus, the first century Jewish historian, wrote: *“But let not the testimony of women be admitted, on account of the levity and boldness of their sex…since it is probable that they may not speak truth, either out of hope of gain, or fear of punishment.”*

Josephus, Antiquities of the Jews, 4.8.15.

According to Josephus, in Jesus’ day, a woman’s testimony was considered to be “not credible.”

Anglican priest and physicist John Polkinghorne writes: *“Perhaps the strongest reason for taking the stories of the empty tomb absolutely seriously, lies in the fact that it is women who play the leading role. It would have been very unlikely for anyone in the ancient world who was concocting a story to assign the principal part to women, since, in those times, they were not considered capable of being reliable witnesses in a court of law.” John Polkinghorne,*Exploring Reality: The Intertwining of Science and Religion*(New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 86-87.*

The fact that women, were the first eyewitnesses, offers very strong historical [and apologetic] evidence for the testimony that Jesus was resurrected from the dead...

http://rzim.org/a-slice-of-infinity/credible-witnesses/

Let me say it again, as clearly as I can.

If Mark was inventing the story of Jesus’ resurrection, or was collaborating with others to do so, the worst thing Mark could have done was to include the details he did, about these women being eyewitnesses to the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus.

Tim Keller says, *“The only possible reason for the presence of women in these accounts is that they really were present and reported what they saw. The stone had been rolled away, the tomb was empty, and an angel had declared that Jesus is risen.”* King’s Cross, p.217

Let’s come back to why the women were going to the tomb?

All of us know that death is irreversible.

This is what is so crushing when someone we love dies - no matter how old or young they are.

The long process of grief, which everyone faces, when they lose someone, is the process of learning how to live... without... the one who has gone.

Even though Jesus had told his disciples, again and again, that he would rise from the dead after three days, not one of them, came to his tomb on that first day of the week, with the expectation they would see him.

Yes, the women came to his tomb.

But what did they come with?

They came with spices ...with which they planned to anoint Jesus’ **dead** body.

They’d seen Jesus breathe his last.

They’d watched the Roman soldier jam a spear into his side.

They’d witnessed Joseph of Arimathea take down Jesus’ body off of the cross.

They’d followed Joseph and whoever helped him, as they carried the body of Jesus to the tomb.

And the Roman centurion, whose job was to certify that a prisoner condemned to death had died, confirmed to Pilate, what these women had seen with their own eyes.

Jesus was dead.

There was no conspiracy on the part of the women to invent a story that he had risen.

The only conspiracy that happened was directed by the religious leaders - as they invented a story to explain the empty tomb. See Matthew 28.

**Point of connection to our lives.**

1. Christianity is news.

It’s news of the most surprising, momentous, earth-shattering event in history.

This was the case with the birth of Jesus.

The angel told the shepherds, *“I bring you* ***good news****....today in the town of David the Savior has been born to you - he is the Messiah, the Lord.”* Luke 2:10-11.

It was the same with Jesus’ life, death and resurrection.

What did the early believers in Jerusalem talk about?

Acts 5:42: “*Day after day, in the temple courts and from house to house, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the* ***good news*** *that Jesus is the Messiah.”*

The apostle Paul, after he encountered the risen Lord Jesus, went out on a number of missionary journeys, and *“preach[ed] the* ***good news*** *about Jesus and the resurrection.”* Acts 17:18.

Last month, on June 6, we commemorated D-Day which happened in 1944.

D-Day was an historical event.

Many people, each year, remember 9/11.

9/11 was also an historical event.

There may be some who say, “I don’t believe” those events happened.

And your response would be?

But it did.

D-Day and 9/11 are not ideas or philosophies – they are historical incidents that changed the course of history.

It is the same with the birth, death and resurrection of Jesus.

These are not the key points of some philosophy or the musings of an ancient writer.

They are not fictional.

They are something that happened… at a specific place, on a specific day, in a specific year.

And the implications of these historical events are life changing.

From those early days, in every generation, this good news regarding Jesus, has been shared and passed on.

When a person hears this good news and God’s Spirit convinces them it is true, and they believe that Jesus is God the Savior, and that he took on himself our sin, and that three days after his death he rose from the dead, God’s Spirit does something remarkable within a person.

All of us are born physically alive, but spiritually dead.

However, when a person believes in and receives Jesus into their lives, God’s resurrection power, which raised Jesus from the dead, works, to birth within them a new nature, which is alive to God.

The power of that long-ago event is still operative in our world.

Just as God the Father brought to life the dead body of Jesus, so God the Father brings to life the dead spirits of those who trust in Jesus; with this promise – when Jesus returns, God’s resurrection power will transform our physical bodies in the same way that it transformed Jesus’.

1. Margaret Manning says, “In the biblical narrative, God chooses those we might be tempted to overlook or ignore—those who were the last and the least in their society—to bear witness to the great work of God.”

http://rzim.org/a-slice-of-infinity/credible-witnesses/

You and I, who follow Jesus, had someone share this good news with us, which was first told to three women.

Do you remember who that someone was?

It now falls to you and I to do the same.

Just as God pursued after you and made himself known to you, God chooses you for this task.

You may not feel qualified; or competent, or worthy.

But the Holy Spirit in you, is – our competency is in him – 2 Corinthians 3:5.

At its simplest – you share the news and trust the Holy Spirit to open the hearts of people to understand and believe.

That is what happened with the testimony of the women.

1. God’s ways are different than ours; and his wisdom far above ours.

The lie of the serpent was a spiritual poison that essentially said God could not be trusted; that his ways were not good.

Sinclair Ferguson said, “This lie has entered the bloodstream of the human race as the default heart condition.” Preaching, Tim Keller, p.53.

What did God do to rescue us?

Something no one envisioned.

Dorothy Sayer says this:

*“God did not abolish the fact of evil: he transformed it.*

*He did not stop the crucifixion: he rose from the dead.”*

As we walk with Jesus, we learn experientially, (a) that God often does things differently than we would do, and (b) that God is trustworthy, even if we don’t see it right away.

Philip Yancey writes*, “In one sense nothing had changed after Jesus rose from the dead: Rome still occupied Palestine; the religious leaders still [were opposed to Jesus; to all appearances] death and evil still reigned. However, gradually, the shock [of what had happened] gave way to [great] joy. If God could do that....” [if the irreversible could be reversed, then everything Jesus said is true and with God there is no impossible].* The Jesus I Never Knew, p.220.

If God could raise Jesus from the dead...what can he do in your life? what could he do with us in this town????

**The Blessing**

1 Thessalonians 5:9-11.

[God appointed us] to receive salvation

through our Lord Jesus Christ.

He died for us so that,

whether we are awake or asleep,

we may live together with him.

Therefore, encourage one another

and build each other up,

just as in fact you are doing.

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**Jesus and the Role of Women, by [Zhava Glaser](https://jewsforjesus.org/articles/?authors=zhava-glaser) | Jun 1, 1988**

“Jesus was a revolutionary. His actions elicited surprising reactions from his contemporaries in all facets of life. He was not afraid to challenge the status quo and reestablish Scriptural precedents. But without a knowledge of the rabbinic attitudes that prevailed in Jesus’ day, the uniqueness of our Lord’s behavior escapes us.

Take, for example, Jesus’ dealings with women. By publicly including women in his ministry, Jesus shattered the prejudicial customs of his day. Why was it unusual for Jesus to speak with women? Nothing in the Mosaic Law prevented men and women from conversing with one another! Yet the society of Jesus’ day, with custom dictated by rabbinic Judaism, differed strikingly from the Old Testament social order.

**Women were held in high regard in Old Testament times**

The social condition of women in the first century had been radically altered from that of early Old Testament women. In earlier times women participated in every aspect of community life except the Temple priesthood. Women freely engaged in commerce and real estate ([**Prov. 31**](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Prov.%2031)), as well as in manual labor ([**Ex. 35:25**](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Exod.%2035.25); [**Ruth 2:7**](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ruth%202.7); [**1 Sam. 8:13**](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1%20Sam.%208.13)).

They were not excluded from Temple worship. Women played music in the sanctuary ([**Ps. 68:25**](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps.%2068.25)), prayed there ([**1 Sam 1:12**](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1%20Sam%201.12)), sang and danced with men in religious processions ([**2 Sam 6:19**](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2%20Sam%206.19), [**22**](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2%20Sam%206.22)).

Women were included when God instituted the Mosaic covenant ([**Deut. 29:11**](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Deut.%2029.11)), and were present when Joshua read the Torah to Israel. Their presence was not just an option; they were required to be present for the public reading of the Scriptures on the Feast of Tabernacles ([**Deut. 31:12**](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Deut.%2031.12)).

Nor were women limited to private roles back then. Several exercised leadership roles over Israel. Miriam led the women of Israel in worship ([**Ex. 15:20-21**](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Exod.%2015.20-21)); Deborah was a judge and a prophetess ([**Judges 4:4**](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Judg%204.4)); and Huldah also was a prophetess, whom King Josiah consulted instead of Jeremiah, her contemporary ([**2 Kings 22:14-20**](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2%20Kings%2022.14-20)).

Women were held in high regard in Old Testament times. In [**Gen. 21:12**](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Gen.%2021.12) we read that God told Abraham to listen to his wife. [**Proverbs 18:22**](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Prov%2018.22) tells us that he who finds a wife finds a good thing and [**Proverbs 19:14**](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Prov%2019.14) says that an intelligent wife is a gift from God.

Wise women also found their way into the pages of the Bible: Abigail’s wisdom and valor so touched King David that she became his wife ([**1 Sam. 25:23-42**](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1%20Sam.%2025.23-42)); and the wise woman of Tekoa was sent to persuade David to lift the ban on his son Absalom ([**2 Sam. 14**](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2%20Sam.%2014)).

**By New Testament times, women’s rights had declined**

By the time of Christ, however, the role of women had drastically changed for the worse. In theory, women were held in high regard by first-century Jewish society, but in practice, this was not always true. The concept of *tzenuah*, or the private role of the woman, was based on [**Psalm 45:13**](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps%2045.13): The king’s daughter is all glorious within.…” While a man’s primary responsibility was seen as public, a woman’s life was confined almost entirely within the private family sphere.

Women were not allowed to testify in court. In effect, this categorized them with Gentiles, minors, deaf-mutes and “undesirables” such as gamblers, the insane, usurers, and pigeon-racers, who were also denied that privilege. (On the other hand, a king could not bear witness in court, nor could the Messiah, which somewhat lessens the stigma of that restriction.)

Customarily, even a woman of stature could not engage in commerce and would rarely be seen outside her home. Only a woman in dire economic straits, who was forced to become the family breadwinner, could engage in her own small trade.

If a woman was ever in the streets, she was to be heavily veiled and was prohibited from conversing with men. “It is the way of a woman to stay at home and it is the way of a man to go out into the marketplace” (Bereshit Rabbah 18:1; cf. Taanit 23b).

In Talmudic times, respectable women were expected to stay within the confines of the home. The terminology for a prostitute was “one who goes abroad.”

The woman of the first century did not even do her own shopping, except possibly to go out, accompanied by a slave, to buy material which she would use to construct her own clothing at home!

The women with whom Jesus spoke were very likely illiterate, since the rabbis did not consider it incumbent upon women to learn to read in order to study the Scriptures. Based on the passage in [**Deut. 4:9**](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Deut.%204.9), “teach them to thy sons,” the rabbis declared women to be exempt from the commandment to learn the Law of Moses. Indeed, the Talmud says, “It is foolishness to teach Torah to your daughter” (Sotah 20a).

Women were separated from men in private, public and religious life. They could go to the Temple, but could not venture beyond the confines of the Women’s Court (there was no such court found in the Biblical descriptions of Solomon’s Temple).

Women were not allowed to participate in public prayer at the Temple, although they were encouraged to have private prayer lives at home.

The few rights of a woman included her right to go to the House of Study to hear a sermon or pray (Vayikra Rabbah, Sotah 22a). Also, it was her basic right to attend a wedding feast or a house of mourning, or to visit her relatives (Mishnah Ketubot 7:5).

What brought about this drastic change from the esteem women had in Biblical times to their near exclusion from society by the first century? Very likely this degraded view of a woman’s role was imported from Greek thought. The similarities between the Hellenistic and Talmudic views of women are remarkable! Through the influence of their heathen neighbors the rabbis slowly relegated women to their first-century seclusion.

**Jesus was a revolutionary in his regard for women**

Jesus shattered this darkness by offering his teachings freely to anyone who would listen—whether they were women or men! We see him directly talking with women on numerous occasions. The woman at the well is perhaps the best known of these. We sense the astounded reactions of the disciples that their teacher should be seen talking with a woman.

They “marvelled that he talked with the woman. Yet no one said, ‘What do you want?’ or, ‘Why are you talking with her?'” ([**John 4:27**](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John%204.27))

In Luke, we see Jesus publicly associating with women. Some were women of high standing in society, some were women of ill repute; and some even had been possessed by demons. One of these—Mary Magdalene, who in great thankfulness was with him until the moment he died—was the first person to whom he appeared after his resurrection.

In [**Matthew 15:22-28**](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt%2015.22-28), Jesus spoke with a Canaanite woman. The disciples urged him to send her away, for it was improper for a teacher to speak with a woman, and a foreign one at that! At first, Jesus did not answer her plea for help. But, as she prevailed upon him with her great need and even greater faith, he had mercy on her and granted her request.

Time after time in the Gospels, we see Jesus offering his teachings, healing and forgiveness to women as well as men. Often it was the women who were the most appreciative of his ministry. Indeed, the first proclaimer of Jesus to the Jewish people was a woman—Anna in the Temple (**[Lk. 2:36-38](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Luke.%202.36-38" \t "_blank)**). A woman washed the Savior’s feet (**[Lk. 7:37-38](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Luke.%207.37-38" \t "_blank)**) and anointed him for his burial ([**Mk. 14:3**](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Mark.%2014.3)). It was women who were with him at the cross until the end ([**Mk. 15:47**](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Mark.%2015.47)), and women who were the first to come to the tomb ([**Jn. 20:1**](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John.%2020.1)) and proclaim his resurrection ([**Mt. 28:8**](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt.%2028.8)).

Jesus’ New Testament followers continued to follow in his footsteps, including women in their gatherings ([**Acts 1:14**](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts%201.14)) and counting them as co-laborers for Christ ([**Romans 16:3**](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom.%2016.3)). This was only fitting, for Jesus the Messiah, in his love, shattered the restricted status of women in the rabbinic times in which he lived. Because of him, *all* individuals, Jew or Greek, slave or free, *male or female*, can be one in Christ and enjoy unequalled freedom as children of God!”

https://jewsforjesus.org/publications/newsletter/newsletter-jun-1988/jesus-and-the-role-of-women/