

# A Sermon for DaySpring Baptist Church

By Burt L. Burleson

## “Making a Good Ending”

Mark 16: 1-8

April 16, 2006

Well, this is it. This is what it all comes down to. On Easter Sunday morning Jesus got up. And he got up, not in some metaphorical sense or simply in the hearts of his followers; I mean, he got up.

He was dead...

The body that they'd touched and seen and handled, had no life in it...

no blood coursing the veins...

no air in the lungs...

no activity in the brain.

Dead by anyone's definition.

And then there was... activity and air and life... and a body... a new body but still a body... with a different and finer energy... a lightness to it and about it... **“Material,”** as Paul said, **“That had put on the immaterial.”** That's the way Jesus was on that first Sunday... as one raised up... and transformed.

And that's what we've been saying and singing all morning and believing for centuries.

It's not an easy thing to believe, though. And it's okay to say that out loud, right here in church. In fact, all the gospel accounts seem to make that one of the most important things to make sure we get and understand... **NO ONE FINDS THIS EASY TO BELIEVE.** No one... not a single person gets it on the first try.

This isn't reasonable. Dead people don't walk around... but that's the claim of the Christian faith.

That He did and we will.

And if you're here this morning and that's hard... we understand. This one will just have to grow on you like it did his first followers.

Wherever you are with this story, it's going to have to get inside you, like it did his first followers.

Getting to hope... may take time like it did for his first followers.

It was that way for all of them.

Here in Mark, it was three women. And they head to the tomb just as soon as they can on Sunday. The Sabbath is over... they can buy what they need and go where they want... And you know where they want to go. They have to be there and do this.

And Mark's way of telling the story of resurrection is like every story he tells. It's all about the verbs..

**“They bought...”**

**“They go... they made their way...”**

The stone had been... **“rolled away.”**

**“He is risen”**

**“See the place”**

**“Go and tell.”**

It just moves... boom, boom, boom... **“Go and tell.”**

And... they don't... go and tell.

We didn't read the whole passage earlier. This angel, probably looking a lot like you or me... no wings... just a person with a lighter feel.

Remember, you're just a little lower than the angels.

This guy in white gives them a direct order. **“Go tell my disciples that he has gone ahead of them into Galilee and that they are to meet him there.”**

And they don't go... and here is the last line of Mark's gospel. This is the way it ends. I know there are other verses in your Bible... but Mark didn't write them... Here's the last thing Mark wrote.

**“Trembling and bewildered, the women went out and fled from the tomb. They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid.” The End.**

Told you this wasn't easy to get. They see an empty tomb and hear someone pretty heavenly-looking saying “He's alive.” And they get real scared and they went home and said nothing to anyone. The End... roll the credits.

There are some other verses there, but they were added. The oldest manuscripts don't have them... the Church Fathers don't mention them. The Greek, the writing style, is different. They were added.

Mark ended it this way. **They were too scared to say a thing.**

And along the way, the church said, **“Bad ending. That's terrible.”** And they took some information from some other gospels and added it on because this seemed like such a bad ending.

**“Here... we'll fix this... silly ole' Mark must have run out of papyrus or something.”** So they added a few things... a few other sightings of Jesus... a great commission. Even threw in some lines about snake handling. (That's always a great way to end a gospel)

They thought Mark needed a little tweaking.

It's kind of like those artists who came along after Michelangelo and painted clothes on the naked figures in the Sistine Chapel. **“Dude forgot something. We'll fix that.”** (David Garland)

That's what happened... this was a little embarrassing... a little hard and so they brushed in something they thought made it easier. It's tempting.

In fact, other gospels, some that didn't make it into the cannon... they apparently have different post-resurrection stories. Jesus doesn't appear to followers... and women. Remember, women weren't allowed even to testify in court. And who would believe someone who was already a believer? (Garland)

No... in these other gospel accounts (that didn't make it into our Bible)... Jesus appears to folks who weren't followers. ... Doing a little PR... a little spin for the gospel. In those gospels it's more like, **“Hey Pilate, how you like me now?”**

Not in Mark... nope... three women go see an empty tomb (and remember, the stone was rolled away for them to go in, not for him to get out.)

Three women go see...

hear from someone in a robe that he's alive  
and they go away and say nothing.

Mark knows this is hard.

And he knows he can't finish this story for you. Jesus can't do the work of faith for you and the women can't resolve the challenge of this. You have to finish the story. It's your story. He's alive... how's it going to end for you?

What ending will you make?

The ladies, Mark wrote, told no one.

Only in our imaginations (and with a little help from the other gospel writers), we know that somehow they got past their fears and eventually said something.

**“He is risen...”** is what they said.

And they became bold witnesses, even to the ends of the earth. And that's a pretty good ending for Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome.

How's it going to end for you?

It's hard to know... Some of you will hear us sing and say "he's risen"... and you'll leave and the gospel ending will be... **"They were so stuck in their minds and in rationality that they never really made a leap of faith."** The End.

Or... **"They heard that Jesus was risen but they got back into life and into the cares of life and all that overwhelmed them and they never really were able to live from the joy of this day. Just wasn't very real to them."** The End.

Or... **"They heard the church's belief that Jesus was risen... but they were too busy climbing a ladder and making a name for themselves to explore it and so it never really changed them."** The End.

Or... **"They said the litany with enthusiasm, 'He is risen.' And then they spent all their time arguing with folks about the literal details of the story so that it never really became their story and a deeper truth about their hearts and lives. It was only a doctrine to fight about."** The End.

Or... **"They were in too much pain to get to hope."** The End.

Or... **"They were too buried in the tomb of their own small existence."** The End.  
Roll the credits.

All of these are bad endings... they are not worthy of this great story. How's it going to end for you? It wants resolution.

Every tomb an empty tomb is your invitation to wrestle. Remember... that's what Israel means. The one who wrestles. Implicit in the name... in the story... is the notion that we wrestle with God.

We're always invited to participate in resolving the story.

How will it end?

And maybe you can't say today... maybe none of us can. But we can get up and go see and get on the journey.

The angel at the tomb told them, **"He is going ahead of you."** He is... The Risen Lord is out ahead of you... preparing something for you... hoping you'll join him in Life.

He is out ahead of you... But you've got to make the trip to see him... according to Mark.

People don't believe because... none of us do because...

A tomb was empty...

Or because a guy in a robe said so...

Or because a preacher proclaims it...

Or because the Church puts it in a creed.

That may get us started and make us curious and lead us onto a path but that's not why we believe. In the end, we believe because we risked the journey, and along the way, we have met the living Lord. **"Go to Galilee; there you will see him."**

And as that happens...

when that happens...

we're going to make some wonderful endings to this resurrection story.

Endings that aren't limited to our fears and our egos and our busyness or shallowness or pain. The endings we make will be made because we've met the Living Christ... They will flow from the depth and joy of that great reality and we'll make endings worthy of this story. Amen.