

# Death Is No More

by Mark Jarvinen

## INTRODUCTION

Charles Dickens' historical novel, **A Tale of Two Cities**, begins with the oft quoted phrase, "***It was the best of times, it was the worst of times.***" This aptly describes the final week of Jesus' earthly ministry as well. From the soaring heights of Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem on the back of a donkey, with palm branches strewn along the roadway and the crowd cheering and shouting Hosanna to the King, to His cryptic Passover meal with his disciples, His suffering and betrayal at Gethsemane, his subsequent arrest and the scattering of his disciples, to Peter's denial, and finally by Friday of that week, his cruel crucifixion; the heights of hopefulness had succumbed to the confusing depths of despair. Those who had followed Jesus so closely couldn't even gather the courage to ask for his body in order to bury him. It was **Joseph of Arimathea** and **Nicodemus**, both members of the Jewish Sanhedrin, who had hearts for God's Kingdom and had become followers from afar, who now risked their status among the Jews by petitioning Pilate for Jesus' body, in order to bury him in Joseph's family tomb, sealing it with a great stone. A group of women felt guilt-ridden because they had failed to show the proper respect for the body of their beloved master. They knew they had to finish the task. They waited until the evening after the Sabbath and purchased the needed spices, waiting until the morning of Sunday, the first day of the week, to go out to the tomb where Jesus' body had been lain. We don't know exactly how many

women were in the group, but Mark's gospel mentions three - including **Mary Magdalene**, **Salome**, (Sa-lu'-may) the wife of Zebedee, and the mother of James and John, and **another Mary**, the mother of a different James. This leads us into today's Easter text from **Mark 16:1-8**, entitled, ***The Resurrection***.

**16** *When the Sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him. <sup>2</sup> And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb. <sup>3</sup> And they were saying to one another, "Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance of the tomb?" <sup>4</sup> And looking up, they saw that the stone had been rolled back—it was very large. <sup>5</sup> And entering the tomb, they saw a young man sitting on the right side, dressed in a white robe, and they were alarmed. <sup>6</sup> And he said to them, "Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has risen; he is not here. See the place where they laid him. <sup>7</sup> But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going before you to Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you." <sup>8</sup> And they went out and fled from the tomb, for trembling and astonishment had seized them, and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid. (Mark 16:1-8)*

## **THE WOMEN'S PROBLEM & OURS**

We read in the text that the women started toward the tomb of Jesus ***"very early on the first day of the week,"*** just after sunrise. Along the way, the two Mary's remembered that they had seen **Joseph of Arimathea** roll a very large stone in front of the entrance to the tomb on Friday, after Jesus' body had been placed inside **(Mark 15:46)** . Not knowing that an angel of the Lord would roll away the stone before their arrival, their pressing question, as they made their way to the tomb that morning was ***"Who will roll the stone away from the entrance of the tomb?"*** With everything that had happened, in uncharacteristic fashion, the women hadn't made a

plan. How will they gain entrance for their all-important task of anointing Jesus' body?

It's not that their concern wasn't real. The women understood that they lacked the physical strength to move the large stone. **It's ironic, though, that while these women wondered how they would get into the tomb, we have no such problem.** Every day we read somebody's obituary. On Wednesday, in addition to attending the funeral, in Rochester, of **Ken Narvesen**, a colleague in ministry, I received two obituaries by email. The first was from my sister, whose brother-in-law, **Howie Halberg**, one of the "twin towers" of the 1968 high school championship basketball team from my home-town, died of complications after a heart-attack. Later that day, Katy Jonas, the administrator of the Eagan Police Department, informed the Chaplains that **Marie DesLauriers**, the wife of Eagan's first police chief, had passed away after a long illness. But it's not only older people whose health breaks down that pass away. There was a stretch of time while I served in PA that the clergy in town wondered who would be the next pastor among us to bury a teen from his congregation, during a string of tragic teenage deaths. **That said, we all understand that one day the obituary being read will be our own. Death is real. Ultimately, we have no difficulty getting into the grave. On the other hand, we fight to stay out of the grave.** Some of us exercise. We attempt to eat right. We find the best medical care available. Yet, in the end, we all lose the battle. Unlike the three women of our text, who wondered how they would get into the grave of Jesus, we wonder how we can stay out of the grave that awaits us.

## THE GOOD NEWS FOR ALL

When the women reached the tomb, they saw that the stone was already rolled away. Their immediate problem was solved for them in a way they had nothing to do with. What a relief! This was good news. Their way into the grave was taken care of. But even better news awaited them ... and us. The way into the grave was opened, but so was their way out ... and ours.

Listen again to vv. 5-6 of our text:

***<sup>5</sup> And entering the tomb, they saw a young man sitting on the right side, dressed in a white robe, and they were alarmed. <sup>6</sup> And he said to them, "Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has risen; he is not here. See the place where they laid him.***

Jesus, after his death on the cross, through which he took upon himself the sins of the world past, present, and future, had gone into the grave, but here, at the empty tomb, through angel witness the proclamation sounded forth: ***"He has risen; he is not here. See the place where they laid him."*** Jesus, in power, broke the bonds of death and came forth from the tomb, ALIVE! Neither death, nor the grave could hold him. He went into the tomb at the hands of men, but He came forth from it by the power of God, living and victorious.

Now are you ready for more good news? Listen to the words of the Apostle Paul in **Romans 6:3-4**

***<sup>3</sup> Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? <sup>4</sup> We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.***

**What does this mean for us? Simply that death is no more.** Jesus, though He died, now lives. Therefore, all who are now baptized into Christ and have become identified with Jesus in his death, by faith, are also identified with Jesus in his resurrection life. It comes down to this: **If we have been united with him in a death like his; we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.** Life eternal is the destiny of all who come to faith in Jesus Christ.

### **AN ADDITIONAL IMPLICATION FOR US**

In addition to the promise of **NO MORE DEATH**, i.e. eternal life, there are additional implications in the here and now, the most important of which is **HOPE**. The vicissitudes of daily life, with its trials and tragedies have a way of killing our dreams, but the resurrection of Jesus has a way of bringing them back to life. **What is hope?** It's more than wishful thinking – “I hope it's done snowing for this season.” Given the forecast, that might just be naïve optimism. “I hope this sermon won't go on much longer.” You just might get your wish on that one. But real, Biblical hope is **“a desire with the expectation of fulfillment,”** or, as past CLB president, Robert Overgaard, would often say, **“Hope is the glad expectation of good things to come.”**

Hope is more than a word. Quite frankly, without it, we die. **Dr. Victor Frankl**, a well-known Austrian psychiatrist, neurologist, and Holocaust survivor noticed that many prisoners in the Nazi concentration camps died just after Christmas. They were hoping they would be released by Christmas, but when they weren't, they

gave up. He learned that as long as prisoners had something to live for, a reason to press on, they could endure just about anything. But once they lost hope, they quickly died. In other words, **hope needs a reason** – something or someone that is wise enough, strong enough, and good enough, to get us to a better place. **For Christians, hope is wrapped up in the person and work of Jesus Christ.** Because He lives, we can find joy, beauty, forgiveness, healing, purpose, restoration, and the reality of God's presence each day. **In short, there's hope in Jesus.** The resurrection of Christ proves that he is stronger than any setback, any failure, any loss, any disappointment, and any fear, all because Jesus has won the most decisive battle of all.

**Through the resurrection of Jesus, death is no more!  
Jesus Christ is the death of Death! Let us rejoice and be glad!  
A-men.**