

Week of February 26-March 3

WHO MOVED THE STONE?

Scripture Reading: Read Mark Chapter 16

With today's devotional, we conclude our look at the gospel of Mark. Mark, like the other gospel writers, concludes his story of Jesus with the resurrection. The crucifixion was not the end. Death could not hold him back. Good Friday was followed by Resurrection Sunday!

Many skeptics through the years have tried to explain away the resurrection. Some have suggested that Jesus was not really dead when he was placed in the tomb so that in the cool air of cave he recovered. Others have suggested that the women visited the wrong tomb or that the disciples simply suffered from hallucinations because they so desperately wanted to believe in Jesus. Still others have proposed that someone stole the body. Do any of these suggestions pose serious challenges to the resurrection? Let's explore them.

The first one, often called the swoon theory, can be quickly dismissed. Jesus was indeed dead when he was placed in the tomb. The centurion overseeing the crucifixion confirms that fact. However, even if the theory were true, we would still have to overcome the hurdle of how Jesus, in his weakened condition, got up, stripped off the burial clothes and left them in the tomb, moved a stone weighing between one and two tons, overcame the guards, appeared to his disciples and convinced them that he was still alive.

The second proposal that the women visited the wrong tomb can also be dismissed. Once the disciples began to preach about the resurrection, all the religious leaders would have had to do was to lead a contingent of people to the actual tomb, reveal the body and that would have been the end of the Christian faith just as it was getting started. Plus, the women saw the tomb when Jesus was placed in it. They knew the location and returned to it after the sabbath. They didn't get the wrong tomb. It's just the stone was moved and Jesus' body was gone!

The third proposal, that the disciples experienced mass hallucinations, also falls flat for several reasons. Paul informs us in I Corinthians 15 that over 500 people had seen the risen Savior. It wasn't just one or two people but over 500. It wasn't just one appearance but over a period of 40 days. Finally, the appearance of Jesus wasn't to disciples who expected a resurrection but to folks who had lost hope and didn't expect anything. Remember, they were hiding in the upper room afraid that they would be next to be arrested and crucified. Not exactly the conditions for a mass hallucination.

So, what about the last proposal? Could someone have stolen the body? Who would be the chief suspects? Jewish leaders, Roman officials, Joseph of Arimathea, the disciples or the women? If it were the first two groups, what would have been the motive? Once the disciples began preaching the resurrection, they could have produced the body and that would have been the end of the church. They didn't so they didn't have the body. Joseph? Not hardly, unless he wanted to rent out his tomb as a tourist attraction. He could have advertised it as "slightly used" (just kidding, of course)! The women? They couldn't have moved the stone nor would they have challenged the guards. The disciples? As just noted, they didn't expect a resurrection. To suggest that they risked arrest, overpowered the guards, moved the stone, kidnapped the body and waited fifty days to preach that Jesus had been raised from the dead, and then die for what they knew for a fact was patently false, stretches the imagination into the absurd.

So, who moved the stone? We know it was moved because even Jesus' enemies admitted the tomb was empty according to Matthew 28. They tried to explain it away but, as we have seen, no explanation fits the facts. So, as Sherlock Holmes would say, "*When you have eliminated the impossible, whatever remains, however improbable, must be the truth.*" The truth? Jesus was raised from the dead!

Action Step & Prayer Focus: Read through the first few chapters of Acts and see how many times the disciples mention the resurrection in their preaching & celebrate Christ's resurrection.

Take-a-way: Our faith in the resurrection rests in fact and not on fable!