

## Easter 2015 – Mark 16:1-8 – Certain Hope of Escape

*1 When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices so that they might go to anoint Jesus' body. 2 Very early on the first day of the week, just after sunrise, they were on their way to the tomb 3 and they asked each other, "Who will roll the stone away from the entrance of the tomb?" 4 But when they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had been rolled away. 5 As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man dressed in a white robe sitting on the right side, and they were alarmed. 6 "Don't be alarmed," he said. "You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him. 7 But go, tell his disciples and Peter, 'He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.' " 8 Trembling and bewildered, the women went out and fled from the tomb. They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid.*

Christ is Risen! **He is Risen Indeed!** Alleluia!

A survey recently posed the question: "Why don't you go to church?" The top response: "There is no value in it."

The events of Easter morning certainly make the case for the value found here, in the Bible's message.

But I would also argue that the spiritual state of our world points to the value of the message found here today. In fact, I would suggest that there's a serious case of escapism going on in that survey response. What do I mean?

Check out how people are feeling. A woman's thoughts pour out on her blog:

"Change is inevitable, impermanence is one of the only things we can count on . . . there's nothing stable to hold on to. . . The world isn't a safe place and really bad things happen, and I can't stop many of those bad things from happening, no matter how careful, diligent, or perfect I am, no matter how hard I work or try. No matter how much we love someone, they will eventually die, we will be separated. All of our plans and insurance and hope can't save us. Sometimes the truth of this paralyzes me, makes me so afraid that I am stuck, helpless."

[[thousandshadesofgray.com/2012/07/](http://thousandshadesofgray.com/2012/07/)]

Yes, change, impermanence, really bad things and eventually death all characterize life in our world. There is **no escape** - death comes to all - it's hopeless, **if** you don't have this message (the Bible).

The Washington Times printed one man's feelings during the winter of 2013:

"Death is inevitable... we lose loved ones and friends, eventually having to confront death for ourselves. . . it has hurt, it's been a source of both sorrow and anxiety... we're reminded over and over again of the permanency of death. . . Anxiety has been a constant companion... the [never-ending winter] combined with the deaths instilling a bleakness that has left me seeking solace."

[Religion & Dying, Mar.24,2013]

His future is: “inconsolably frightening,” in his own words. Then comes this “twist” from his pen. **As if to escape** all that reality, he wrote:

“In the meantime, I’ll bank on trying to make the most of this life as I can, to leave it a little better than I found it, and to try and help more than I hurt.”

He can put in the proverbial “bank” all his accomplishments and efforts, but will that help him when he faces death? The Bible explains the truth: *“When he dies, his hope perishes; all he expected from his power comes to nothing”* (Proverbs 11:7).

Desolate musings don’t just come from old folks. What is the outlook of 18 and 19 year olds today? A survey of college freshmen in America, which has been conducted annually for 49 years, was recently released. The emotional state of America’s young people has caused some to voice concern. There is a dramatic increase over just the last 5 years of those who have frequently “felt depressed,” as well as those who have “felt overwhelmed.”

Younger people might not think about death as often; but life still brings confusion, pain, fear, stress, pressure. They see the news. Some of them have lived it. So many lives are torn up and shattered by forces of sin at work in our world. And eventually, death arrives in all our lives.

So how do people handle this? Many try to escape death. They bury themselves in their studies or their work – seeking to find fulfillment in success. Others build up layers of security – savings, investments, insurance, etc. – seeking to find stability. Others note the hopelessness of life, shrug their shoulders and say, “Let’s get in as much fun as we can: eat, drink and be merry, for soon we die!”

People often crowd their minds and lives with anything BUT preparing for death. Then it rises up to stare them in the face. A song lyric voices:

“We fled the scene in hopes of escaping this all... but hope can’t save the dead.”

The refrain goes on and on: “Hope can’t save the dead.”

Who can save the dead? The Bible tells us. Jesus.

But how do I know? Christ is Risen! ***He is Risen Indeed!***

Why is that so important? Out of all the religious figures or philosophies this world has turned to for rescue - He is the Only One who deserves the trust placed in Him. The ultimate proof? He is the Only One who died and rose from the dead.

But, why, then, do so many people claim “there is no value” found here [Bible]?

Pastor Robert Fleishman (director of Christian Life Resources) recently offered this:

You see, the Easter message of life in the face of death is just too far "out there" for a sinful world to accept. Even much of the "religious programming" that you see during Lent and Easter may talk about God, Christ and the Bible but rarely demonstrates any comprehension of what it all means.

The message of the cross is foolishness to a sinful world. For that reason depictions of Jesus by the mainstream media are devoid of His divinity, majesty and miracles. Instead, time & time again Jesus is depicted merely as a good man."

Dear friends – view Jesus as more than just a historic figure. He is much more than that. You see, there's a larger, more sinister problem here in this world than what was mentioned in the articles and blogs I read. It doesn't surprise me that it wasn't mentioned. It isn't a pleasant sight. It is the ROOT of all sorrow, anxiety, hopelessness, despair: Sin. The problem is personal. My sin. Your sin. Perhaps the reason people don't want to get too close to Jesus is because we have to look at the painful truth about ourselves. And it isn't pretty. It means admitting everything that's wrong with me. So, instead, many simply try to escape from God. They claim this [Bible] has no relevance or no value, and they do what they want with the 70 plus hopeless years they exist here. But what, in the end, is going to happen to them for an eternity?

God is a holy God – He is bound to His justice. Sin deserves death. Sin deserves the punishment of eternal death – hell.

But God is Love. There is no greater love than that which exists in the heart of God. He loved us so deeply, He gave us the One Way out of the pit of despair: hell. There is only One way out of an eternity of hopelessness. That Way would have to be faithful to His justice and faithful to His love. The very same day that the first sin unleashed a maelstrom of evil upon our world, He shared His Way to save us from the consequences of our sin. Through the ages that followed, He foretold prophecies detailing His plan. Prophecy that **He** would come. Prophecy that **He** would save. Prophecies that Jesus completed with 100% accuracy.

Did you catch that? God himself came to save us from our sin. The Way He did this is absolutely incredible. God the Son took on human flesh, lived in our world, lived in our place. He shouldered our sin and suffered Hell FOR US – let those words sink in! – He suffered Hell FOR US, so we would never have to! Jesus, fully God and fully human, is the only Way to be free from sin & hell. God had to die so we could live forever. That's love – incredible love – like this world has never seen before or since!

God died. But God's not dead. Jesus wielded his power as God - power to bend open the jaws of death, and returned out of his own grave. "He was delivered over to death for our sins, and was raised to life so that God can declare us not guilty, forgiven and made right with Him" (Romans 4:24-25).

Hope lives for us, because He is alive. Hundreds saw him. The eyewitness testimony to Jesus' resurrection was offered from hundreds of people over the next several decades. The hope spread quickly. First thousands believed God's truth. Soon counting was hopeless. A stream of people ever since has come to "anchor" their hope in Him (Hebrews 6:19)... people from all over the world, just as God foretold: "In his name the nations will put their hope" (Matthew 12:21).

Friends, Jesus is the Living God, back from death. Trust that He took your sin and suffered its hell sentence, on the way to his grave. Trust He rose to life. He brings living hope to all who believe in him (1 Peter 1:3-5) - sure hope (Hebrews 11) – certain hope. Those who believe in him live, even

though we die – he takes us to life with him forever (John 11:25). Those who do not believe in Him die: they remain stuck in their sins, to suffer the consequences forever.

Value in this message (the Bible)? Yes! Where you'll spend eternity is at stake. Ultimately you cannot avoid the issues of sin and death. But there is a certain hope of escape from your sin and your death. Trust in the only One who has power to free you – to rescue you and raise you – out of their otherwise unbreakable grip.

The story is told of a woman who was in prison and wanted to be free. She came up with a plan. She befriended the man who served as the jail undertaker. Any time someone in the prison would die, a bell would toll. The casket would be taken the next morning to the cemetery outside the prison, where the undertaker would be left to finish the burial. Her plan was simple. Next time the bell rings, she would sneak down where the casket was placed, climb in, be buried the next day with whoever had died. And the undertaker would dig her right up after everyone else left. Sometime later the bell rang. She got in the casket, when all was dark. Next morning, the casket was taken out – was buried. As she waited, expecting it would be a short while till the others left and the undertaker could dig her up, she got to wondering who had died. She maneuvered to get a match she had in her pocket. She managed to strike it. And the face she saw was the face of the undertaker. And the lesson is...

If you're placing your Hope of rescue in someone who is dead, how much chance of escape do you have? How is your "rescuer" going to be able to free you, if he has no power over death himself? He can't.

Jesus can. Jesus was dead and buried, but he broke out. You will be buried one day (unless Jesus returns first). But don't be frightened. Remember, your rescuer once lay buried too, but He broke out alive after death, leaving the door (providing the exit path) through which you'll one day exit to life with him.

I shared that story, and its lesson, with several people whom I had asked my pre-Easter survey in the mall food court. It reminded one woman of a saying that evidently is common in prisons: "every time you hear the keys drop, someone is getting set free." Can you see the scene? The one holding the keys outside the bars reaches through, turns over his hand, and the keys land in the hand of the one held in by the bars. The prisoner is free – the key to freedom has been given to him.

Jesus holds the keys of death & hell. The bars of sin held us – the chain & lock of sin wrapped us up and enslaved us... Jesus unlocks us, frees us. And he will open our graves on the Last Day. And body and soul reunited, all believers in him will enjoy eternal life. Don't let anyone mislead you. Don't let any force in this world deceive you into thinking "this message has no value." Don't let any false hope cause you to pull away from Jesus and let the freedom he offers slip through your fingers. There is only One Way to be free from sin; only One in whom to place your trust to get you out of the grave, to be raised to eternal life. Put your hope in Jesus Christ, for such hope is certain. How do we know? Christ is Risen! **He Is Risen Indeed!** Alleluia!