Is There Any Hope?
Mark 16:1-8
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This is the 1,973rd Easter Sunday since the first one. Think how the world has changed.
A population of 25 million is today 6,215,090,567. Most of them drive on Central Expressway. The world would wait seventeen centuries to discover electricity; today's news is all about cloning, G3 wireless technology, and video streaming for interactive television on our computers. Whatever that means.
Futurologist Ian Pearson recently predicted that within four years we'll see emotionally interactive toys, and the first extinct organism brought back to life. University Park will become Jurassic Park. By 2025 there will be more robots than people. Then they can deal with all the dinosaurs.
More change has occurred in this century than all of human history combined.
But the more things change, the more they stay the same.
We are stealing television shows through digital technology, and music through online downloading. Recent news reports have documented the epidemic of online sermon theft by preachers. (Just so you know, you have no one to thank or blame for this message but me.)
But sin doesn't stay secret. Microsoft just admitted that its Windows XP software monitors what movies people watch on their computers, and tells Bill Gates. Big Brother is watching.
And since September 11, we've been living in a different world, and we don't like it.
If the Pentagon and World Trade Center were not safe, this building is not safe. If a suicide bomber would attack a Passover feast in Netanya, Israel this week, would someone attack an Easter service here?
If airplanes—the most closely monitored transportation in the world—are not safe, what is?
Years ago, a submarine was rammed and sank to the bottom of the ocean. Rescue divers, unable to open the hatch, heard the crew tapping on the metal hull in Morse Code, over and over, "Is there any hope?"
We're all tapping that message. Does Easter offer any hope to our world? To your life? The answer is up to you. Let me explain.
I. Either Easter is a lie …

Mark 16:8 says, "Trembling and bewildered, the women went out and fled from the tomb. They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid."

The New International Version contains this note next: "The earliest manuscripts and some other ancient witnesses do not have Mark 16:9-20." The reason is that they were not part of the original Gospel of Mark. They were written by the presbyter Ariston in the second century, as he combined facts from the other gospels and some new information.

Nearly all scholars, including the very conservative, believe that Mark's Gospel as we have it, ended with verse 8. Some think the rest has been lost, or he was prevented from writing it. Most believe that he meant the book to end here. That's what I think. God would never let even one word of his inspired Scriptures be lost to us. We have exactly the ending God intended for us.

Why does it end as it does? So we can finish the story. Because Easter is not done until we are done with it. Because we must each determine how the story ends for us.

And we have only two choices. Either Easter is a lie, or Jesus Christ is Lord. Let's examine the first choice, first.

The women left Easter "bewildered" by the message. So can we.

All they had was the angel's testimony and the empty tomb. All you have is the same. We're scientific, advanced, sophisticated people. We know that bodies don't rise from the dead.

So you can leave today bewildered, skeptical, doubting that Easter is anything more than a nice religious story, a fable, a pleasant myth. You can leave Easter this morning with your heart as empty as this tomb. Why not believe Easter is a lie?

Consider the evidence. First, Jesus' existence and death are facts of history. Roman and Jewish historians such as Tacitus, Thallus the Samaritan, Pliny the Younger, Seutonius, Mara bar Serapion, and Josephus all record the fact of Jesus' life. The Roman soldiers knew that he died. Blood loss, exhaustion, exposure, shock, and suffocation combined to end his life.

Then Nicodemus embalmed his corpse with 100 pounds of ointment in an airtight burial shroud.

And he was left for three days without air, food, or water. Even if he survived all that, he could not possibly have moved aside the massive stone sealing his tomb. His life and death are facts.

Second, his empty tomb is a fact of history.

The women did not go to the wrong tomb, for they watched him being buried. And the owner and the soldiers knew the right location.

They did not rob his corpse to pretend a resurrection. Verse 1 is clear: they came to anoint a dead body, not steal it. Grave robbing was a capital offense, so that such a theft would cost their lives. And those who later proclaimed the resurrection died for their "lie."

His tomb was empty that day. It still is.

Third, changed lives are a fact of history. A dozen followers have become two billion worshipping the risen Christ this Easter morning. All because of the first Easter morning.
On April 19, AD 29, an angel came to the grave of Jesus of Nazareth and flung its stone away. Not so Jesus could get out, for he was already gone. So we could get in. The massive stone was but a pebble compared to the Rock of Ages inside.

He is risen”—three words which changed their lives, and our world. If Easter were a lie, there would be no hope. But it's not. So there is.

...or Jesus Christ is Lord

And if Easter is true, then Jesus Christ is Lord. He was and is the only person in human history to rise from the dead to eternal life. Even Lazarus died again. But not Jesus. His tomb is still empty. Because Jesus Christ is Lord. And so there's hope for us.

There's hope for your soul, for you can know his saving love personally.

"You will see him," they were promised. And they did. 500 of them. Not a ghost or illusion; 500 people don't have the same hallucination. Mary clapped his feet; he later made breakfast for them. This is not Halloween but Easter.

They met him in Jerusalem and in Galilee. You can meet him in Dallas. No matter your sins and failures. The angel said, "tell his disciples and Peter, 'He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him'" (v. 7). "His disciples." Not his "failures" or his "cowards," though they were. Peter, though he had denied him three times. But they were still his, because of his gracious love for them. The same gracious love he feels for you today.

Simply ask him to forgive your mistakes and failures, and be your Lord. And he will. You can meet him personally, this morning. There's hope for your soul, because Easter is true and Jesus is Lord.

And there's hope for your life, for you can share his saving love with someone else. Easter will give your life purpose, meaning, and eternal significance. As only it can.

Our Lord intentionally chose these women to be his first evangelists, the first to carry his hope to their hopeless world. In a world which viewed women as possessions, not people. A culture which saw peasants as pitiful, not powerful. But they started it all.

You can continue it. Your gifts and abilities, possessions and relationships are a means to the end of loving and serving Jesus. Nothing you will do this week will stand the test of time. Grades will be forgotten, possessions will belong to someone else, status will fade. But if you influence someone for Jesus, his or her soul will forever be different because of you.

There's hope for your life, because Easter is true and Jesus is Lord.

See it this way. A basketball in my hands is worth about $19; in Michael Jordan's it's worth $33 million. A baseball in my hands is worth $6; in Randy Johnson's hands, it's worth $13 million a year. A golf club in my hands is virtually useless; in Tiger Woods’, it's worth $30 million a year. Your value depends on whose you are.

Billy Graham says it this way: "God made you and me, and he alone knows how to run your life and mine. We could make a complete wreck of our lives without Christ. When he is at the controls, all goes well. Without him, we can do nothing."

Only the Lord Jesus can give your life true significance. So yield it to him. Put him at the controls. Don't just give him Easter Sunday. Worship him every week. Give him every day. And you'll find hope for your life, every day.

When I was in high school, my career ambitions were to be a professional trumpet player or tennis player. I still have the trumpet I played in high school, and I can still
play it for about five minutes, then my lip is gone. I have to choose between warming up
and playing. Today it sits in a closet, because the trumpet wasn't God's plan for my life.
I still have the tennis racket my college mentor used when we played together. I've
long since lost mine, but I cherish his. It sits on a shelf in my study, because tennis wasn't
God's plan for my life.
Do you know God's plan for yours? Either Easter is a lie, or Jesus Christ is Lord. Is
he your Lord?

Conclusion
Mark left the ending of Easter to us. So, is there any hope for our world? For your
life? The answer is up to you, right now.
Think of the difference a day can make. One day you're a student, then you graduate.
One day you're unemployed, then you find your life's work. One day you have no one in
your life, then you meet the person you will love for the rest of your life. One day all
hope is gone, then there is Easter. Will this be your day?
On September 11, Todd Beamer was a passenger on United Airlines Flight 93.
Terrorists herded the passengers to the back of the jet. Todd called the GTE Customer
Center in Oakbrook, Illinois and told supervisor Lisa Jefferson about the hijacking. He
told her that he and some others were planning to jump the terrorists. And then he asked
her to pray with him.
Together they prayed the Lord's Prayer. Todd added, "Jesus, help me." Then he and
his fellow passengers recited the 23rd Psalm. Then came his famous last words: "Are you
guys ready? Let's roll."
We know from the cockpit voice recorder that Beamer and the other passengers
wrestled with the hijackers and forced the plane to crash, killing themselves but foiling
the terrorists' plan to fly Flight 93 into the Capitol or the White House.
Todd Beamer now has a permanent place as one of the heroes of American history.
And even more important, his life and faith have moved and inspired millions of others.
Because the risen Christ was his Lord, Todd sought his will for his life on September 11.
He then gave his life to obey his Lord.
Jesus hasn't asked us to die for him. But he has asked us to live for him. Because only
then is there hope for our souls, hope for our lives, hope for our world.
Either Easter is a lie, or Jesus Christ is Lord. Is he your Lord? If he is, put your life in
his hands today. Give him control of your purpose.
Then listen as he says, "Let's roll."