



Temple Baptist Church
Wilmington, North Carolina
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“The Rest of the Story”
Mark 16:1-8

If you had passed by that hill outside Jerusalem that Friday, you might have thought it was just another Roman execution of three common criminals. The hill was aptly named **Golgotha**—the **Place of a Skull** (Mark 14:22).¹ The crosses on which these three condemned men were dying would have stood by the side of the road that passed in front of the hill so *everyone* who passed by could see them. That’s how the Romans did things. You would have seen them hanging there, suspended between heaven and earth, exposed to the elements of nature and the ridicule of those who passed by or stopped to watch.

If you had looked more closely, you would have seen that the man on the middle cross was Jesus of Nazareth—that fine young man in His early thirties who’d been traveling around Galilee and Judea for the past three years, helping, healing, and offering hope to sinners and outcasts and hurting people, and teaching people about the kingdom of God. You would have seen a placard above His head declaring the charge for which He was being crucified: **THE KING OF THE JEWS** (Mark 15:26).

You might have thought to yourself, “What a tragic way for this man’s life to end!” After all, He hadn’t hurt anybody. Oh, sure, He had set the religious leaders off time and again, and sometimes—most of the time—His teachings sounded strange. But all He had done was good as He helped and healed people everywhere He went.

Yet here He was, dying on a cross between two thieves like a common criminal.

Now the Romans didn’t invent crucifixion, but they took its use to a new level. In an otherwise orderly society, this was *state-implemented terrorism!*

Crucifixion was the most painful, most excruciating, most humiliating means of execution possible in the ancient world. This kind of death usually took a full day at the very minimum; it could take as long as five or six days, depending on the condition of the prisoner. It was slow and agonizing, and death usually came not so much from loss of blood, though much was lost, but as a result of exposure to the elements, or infection, or suffocation from sheer exhaustion when the condemned just couldn’t push himself up enough to get his breath anymore.

As you watched this sad spectacle, you might have thought to yourself that Jesus had come to a bitterly tragic end, that His life and ministry had been for naught, that evil had won again . . . But with apologies to the late Paul Harvey, the great radio commentator, you wouldn’t have known “*the rest of the story.*”

The story . . .

The Gospel writer Mark started his account of the story of Jesus very abruptly: **The beginning of the gospel Jesus Christ, the Son of God** (Mark 1:1). Then in rapid-fire fashion he proceeded to tell about Jesus’ ministry of authoritative teaching and preaching about the kingdom of God, and

His mighty acts of mercy and healing that demonstrated that God's reign had come near in Him.

By His deeds and by His teaching, Jesus showed who He was and what He was about, what He came to do. But His disciples never got a handle on it.

When the Twelve concluded and confessed that Jesus was the Christ, the expected Messiah, Jesus' teachings took what was to them a strange turn. He began to tell them, not once or even twice, but *three times*, that He (**the Son of Man**) would go up to Jerusalem, be rejected by the religious leaders, and be killed; but after three days, He would rise again. What was more, He told them that if they wanted to follow Him, they had to deny themselves, take up their cross, and then follow Him, understanding that those who tried to save their lives would ultimately lose them, while those who lost their lives for Him would ultimately save them.

Things happened just as Jesus said they would. He and His followers went to Jerusalem for Passover, and there Judas, one of His twelve disciples, betrayed Him to the religious leaders. They came to Gethsemane where Jesus was praying, arrested Him, and gave Him a hasty, illegal mockery of a trial before the Jewish council, the Sanhedrin. They convicted Him of blasphemy on the testimony of false witnesses, and condemned Him to die.

Since they didn't have the legal authority to execute Him, they took Him to the Roman proconsul, Pontius Pilate, accusing Him not of blasphemy, but of sedition against Rome. Reluctantly, after several attempts to free Jesus, Pilate gave sentence to crucify Him. The soldiers scourged Him, beating Him mercilessly. They mocked Him, putting a purple robe and a crown of thorns on Him. Then they put His own clothes back on Him and led Him off to crucify Him. Ordinarily the condemned prisoner would carry the crossbeam, which weighed from 75 to 125 pounds, to the place of execution. They had beaten Jesus so badly that He had trouble carrying His cross, so they pulled Simon of Cyrene off the street and forced him to carry it.

When they got to Golgotha, they offered Him wine mixed with myrrh to dull the pain as they nailed Him to the cross, but He refused it. When they had crucified Him, they gambled for His clothes.

By now it was about 9:00 in the morning. He hung there throughout the day with two criminals, one on His right and one on His left. People passing by hurled insults at Him, the chief priests and the scribes mocked Him, and even the two being crucified with Him insulted Him.

At noon, the sky darkened, and the darkness continued until 3:00 in the afternoon. Just at that time,

Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?" which is translated, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" (Mark 15:34)

He was praying Psalm 22. And then, like a common criminal, God's Son died on a cross.

During Jesus' life, his followers saw Him as the Christ, the promised Messiah, and confessed accordingly. But Jesus never would accept their confession without qualifying it.

Now, Judas Iscariot—one of His twelve disciples—had betrayed Him, and the other eleven had deserted Him. Only some of the women who had followed Him were at the cross when He died. They watched Joseph of Arimathea take His body off the cross, wrap it in linen, lay it in a tomb, and roll a stone against the entrance.

It seemed that it was all over. All their hopes were shattered. The one they had followed and hung their hopes on was dead—and not just *dead*, but *executed as a criminal*, dying the most despicable death.

It seemed everything had come to a most tragic end. The darkness of their disappointment was much deeper than that of the night that had hastened His burial.

The rest of the story . . .

If this were the end, it would be the most tragic of tragedies—a blameless man, a perfect man, falsely accused, convicted, and brutally executed. *But it wasn't.*

On the third day afterwards by Jewish reckoning, the first day of the week, those women who had watched His burial (Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome) brought spices that they had bought the night before when the shops opened briefly after the end of the Sabbath at sunset. They were concerned that with the haste of the burial, Jesus' body hadn't been properly anointed to mask the odor of decomposition that would soon set in. So they came to the tomb very early, just after sunrise, wondering to each other on the way who would roll the stone away from the tomb's entrance.

As they came near, they looked up and saw that the large stone had already been rolled away. They entered the tomb and saw a young man dressed in a white robe sitting on the right, probably on the ledge where Jesus' body had been laid. Needless to say, they were alarmed!

Who knows what they might have been thinking? Where was Jesus' body? Had somebody stolen or moved it for some reason?

The young man told them, **“Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He is risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid Him”** (16:6). Then he instructed them to go tell Jesus' disciples and Peter that Jesus was going ahead of them into Galilee, and that they would see him there.

It didn't end with His death! He had risen! The angel assured them of it, and told them to go tell it!

What a word of hope! What a word of victory! Jesus' story didn't end with the cross; it continued in the victory of His resurrection. The devil had done his worst, but Jesus had risen in victory!

Because that's true, we can be sure that *no matter what happens, our story isn't over, because we will triumph through Jesus' resurrection!*

Just like Mark's original audience—probably the church in Rome at a time when they were facing the possibility of persecution and even death for their faith—we can take confidence in times of trial. The cross wasn't the end! The triumph of Easter came! If our faith is in the risen Lord who met death face to face and conquered it, there's nothing we can't deal with through His help! He triumphed, and through faith in Him, we'll ultimately triumph, too!

Someone has described it as being like World War II. When the Allies landed at Normandy on D-Day, June 6, 1944, victory began. The victor there would eventually win the war. There'd be more battles. But when the Allies won Normandy, they had won the war in Europe!

Jesus has won the war with Satan, sin, and death by His death on the cross and His resurrection. We're still fighting some battles, some of them very serious.

But because He has risen, we can be sure that the ultimate outcome is victory! We can be sure that *no matter what happens, we will triumph through Jesus' resurrection victory!*

The cross wasn't the end! The triumph of Easter came! And what's more, He ascended back to the Father and will one day come in glory to raise the dead, judge the world, and set everything right in new heavens and a new earth where righteousness dwells.

If our faith is in the risen Lord Jesus who met death face to face and conquered it, then

there's nothing we can't deal with through His power and help! He won, and as we trust Him to the utmost and to the end, we will too as we share in His victory!

And now you know . . . *the rest of the story.*

†MEG

¹ Scripture taken from the New King James Version.