

“Who Will Roll the Stone Away?”

I. A Question Asked by Humans

II. A Question Answered by God

*<sup>1</sup>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. <sup>2</sup>Very early on the first day of the week, just after sunrise, they were on their way to the tomb <sup>3</sup>and they asked each other, “Who will roll the stone away from the entrance of the tomb?”*

*<sup>4</sup>But when they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had been rolled away. <sup>5</sup>As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man dressed in a white robe sitting on the right side, and they were alarmed.*

*<sup>6</sup>“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. <sup>7</sup>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.’”*

*<sup>8</sup>Trembling and bewildered, the women went out and fled from the tomb. They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid.*

Of all the festivals of the church year, there is nothing quite like Easter. Isn't that right? I mean, Christmas is cool, celebrating the birth of our Savior, singing *Silent Night* by candlelight. And Good Friday is meaningful as we relive Jesus’ final hours and wait in darkness for the rending of the tomb door. But Easter morning, celebrating that the one who was dead is now alive, victorious over the grave—this is the pinnacle of the Christian church year, with sights and sounds and even smells befitting such a grand occasion. I mean, to see the chancel beautifully decorated, to hear those favorite Easter hymns, with the instruments playing, to smell the Easter lilies wafting through the air. I don't know about you, but I think Easter is the best day of the year. In fact, in light of what this day means for all mankind, you might say that Easter is the greatest day in the history of the world.

And yet you realize, as great as this day is for us who are gathered here in the year of our Lord 2026, the fact is, on the very first Easter morning, for the women who are headed out to the tomb, Easter was not a day of celebration. It was a day of mourning. They were trying to make sense out of what had just happened to Jesus. And they had on their minds, one question, namely,

“Who will roll the stone away?”

In our study of God's word today, we're going to see that that is a question asked by more than just the women on the way to the tomb. That's a question that we all find ourselves asking in one form or another. In fact, you might say that is:

I. A question asked by humans, and

II. A question answered by God.

Now, just for a moment, I want you to put yourself in the sandals of those women on Easter morning. Imagine what they were going through. They were all eyewitnesses of Jesus’ crucifixion. Scripture says that they watched from a distance as Jesus’ life slowly ebbed away. And who would have expected that? Here Jesus, the eternal Son of God, the one who, 5 days

earlier, rode into town in a triumphal process—and now he’s dead?!? Dead by a crucifixion? And what’s worse, these women weren't even able to give Jesus a decent burial. You maybe remember that according to Jewish custom, the Sabbath day began at 6:00 p.m. on Friday. From that point on, the Jews were not allowed to do any work. That's why the Jewish leaders had requested that Pilate have the legs of those being crucified broken, to hasten their death, so that their bodies wouldn't be hanging on the cross over the Sabbath. But of course, when the soldiers came to break Jesus legs, they were surprised to learn that he was already dead, not because Jesus was weaker than the other men, but rather, because Jesus died when he decided it was time to die, when his work was finished. But there was not a lot of time between the moment Jesus died, and the moment the Jews had to stop preparing his body for burial. That's why Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus had to hastily wrap up Jesus’ body in linen cloths and lay it, at least temporarily, in a tomb, which happened to be near where Jesus was crucified. Mark adds this additional note, *Then (Joseph) rolled a stone against the entrance of the tomb. Mark also tells us, Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joseph saw where he was laid. (Mark 15:46-47).*

And that's where our text for today picks up. Notice how Mark lays out the timeline. Mark writes, *When the Sabbath was over (technically, that would be 6:00 p.m. on Saturday evening), Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Salome bought spices so that they might go and anoint Jesus body.* In other words, as soon as the shops opened up on Saturday evening, these women went and purchased the materials they would need to embalm Jesus’ body.

But by the time they are done gathering their supplies, it's probably well after dark. So they turned in for the night. Did they sleep well that night? I’ll bet they didn’t. Tossing and turning, playing over and over in their head the events of that day, thinking about how the one they thought was the Messiah was now dead. No wonder they were all up before the crack of dawn. Probably couldn’t sleep! But when they finally started on the road to the tomb, they had something else on their minds. Mark tells us, *Very early on the first day of the week (in other words early Sunday morning), just after sunrise, they were on their way to the tomb and they asked each other, “Who will roll the stone away from the entrance to the tomb? (Mark 16:2-3)*

On the one hand, you can certainly see why they would be concerned about that stone. Back in Jesus’ day, such a stone likely weighed thousands of pounds. It was typically placed on a bit of an incline so that it could be rolled down hill into a slot in the ground, where it could not be moved, at least not by 2 or 3 women. It's no wonder the women were asking themselves, “Who is going to roll the stone away?”

On the other hand, that stone was not really their biggest problem. Think about it. If Jesus of Nazareth, the one they thought was the sinless Son of God, the one they were counting on to rescue them from the eternal punishment that their sins deserve, if Jesus, the one they had put their hope in to take them to heaven someday, if he's lying dead in a grave, what hope do these women have? If Jesus is dead, then in the big scheme of things, these women have a problem a lot bigger than a stone at the entrance of a tomb. And yet, at this moment in time, they are not thinking about the big picture. They're focused on the stone right in front of them.

Tell me, can you relate? Are there times when you and I find ourselves fretting over, if not being consumed by, that thing that is demanding all of our attention, the obstacle that is standing in the way of what we want, the dilemma that we just can't seem to solve, the stone that's too heavy to budge? Tell me, as you look at your life, what are the stones that you are trying to push out of the way?

Maybe, you or someone you know has received a really tough medical diagnosis

recently. It's just kind of stopped you in your tracks. You don't know how you are doing to deal with it. Who's going to roll that stone away? Or maybe you've recently experienced the loss of a loved one. And you're thinking, "How am I going to get through this? Who's going to roll the stone away?" Or maybe it's a financial crisis you're going through. You're trying to get out from under this mountain of debt; you're just stuck. Who's going to roll the stone away? Or maybe you're in a relationship that's gotten more and more difficult. One sin after another, when left unconfessed or unforgiven has built this wall between you and that other person. Who is going to roll away that stone? Or maybe what you are dealing with is a relentless anxiousness about the future. What kind of world will your children or your grandchildren face? Maybe your stone is a particular sin that you just can't seem to shake. You swear you'll never do it again and there you go again, and the guilt and shame weighs heavy on your heart. Who will roll away that stone?

Just like the women on Easter morning, it's easy to kind of focus on the problem right in front of us, the one that keeps us up at night—all the while missing the much bigger problem we have. The fact is, our biggest problem is not our health, or our finances, or our relationships, or really anything else that happens in life. Our biggest problem is what happens at the end of life. Our biggest problem is that we're going to stand before a holy, righteous, judge who knows everything we've ever done. A God who sets the standards for earning a spot in heaven, and it's, "*Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.*" (Matthew 5:48). And again, "*Whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it.*" (James 2:10) Yikes! There's the real problem for you, for me, and for the women on Easter morning. The problem is not the stone that blocked the entrance to the tomb. The problem is the sin that blocks the entrance to heaven! The question is who's going to roll away that stone? The answer? God will. In fact, he already has. When it comes to the question, "Who will roll the stone away?", we see that is: I. A question asked by humans, but also: II. A question answered by God.

Isn't that the truth? When the women arrived at the tomb on Easter morning, what did they find? Mark tells us, *When they looked up, they saw that stone, which was very large, had been rolled away.* (Mark 16:4) Matthew adds that *there was a violent earthquake, for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it.* (Matthew 28:2)

That stone that those women were all stressed out about? God took care of it. He had his angel roll it away. But here is the important thing. God rolled the stone away, not to give women access to a dead body so that they could finish their burial preparations. No, God rolled the stone away so that they could see that there was no body that needed to be embalmed. Why not? Because Jesus had risen from the grave. How did the angel put it? "*You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him.*" (Mark 16:6)

With those words, the angel was announcing that God had taken care of the women's greatest problem. By raising Jesus from the dead, God the Father was announcing that he had accepted Jesus' payment for the sins of the world. How does St Paul put it in Romans chapter 4:25? *Jesus was delivered over to death for our sins and raised to life for our justification.* In other words, through Jesus' life, death and resurrection, God declared a world full of sinners not guilty in his eyes. In so doing, God solved the world's biggest problem. In fact, in light of what God did for all mankind pm Easter morning, do you think those women one day looked back and thought to themselves, "To think we were worried about who is going to roll the stone away? Ha! I guess God took care of that—and so much more!"

My friends, isn't the same thing true for you and me today? We've all been confronted by a lot of different stones, obstacles we've faced, burdens we've had to carry. And they were all real, just like the stone at the entrance to the tomb was real. But Easter allows us to step back and consider the big picture. On Easter morning, Jesus accomplished what was humanly impossible. He brought himself back to life. He defeated death. And in so doing, he turned the death of believers into nothing less than the passageway into heaven.

Isn't that what Easter is all about? You might say that Easter is the day when God rolled away the big stone, so that we don't have to worry about the little stones in life. Let me give you an example of that. When my mom was in the process of dying, it was hard on everyone. It was hard on mom because Satan was tormenting her with thoughts and fears that she couldn't get out of her head. It was hard on the rest of us, as we realized how much we were going to miss having her in our lives and in the lives of our children and grandchildren. For a while it was like this stone was weighing heavy on our hearts. And then the day came when Mom breathed her last breath. And suddenly we could honestly say, "It's okay. It's all good." Why could we say that? Because of Easter. God rolled the stone away. He let those women into the tomb see that death is not the end for those who believe in Jesus. Easter means that a hard day in the life of four Raasch boys was the best day in the life of our mother.

My friends, the next time you find yourself lying awake at night wondering, "Who's going to fix this problem? Who is going to make this right? Who's going to roll the stone away?" Think back to Easter. Those women were fretting about something that God had already taken care of. God had done much more than roll away the stone. He had raised Jesus from the dead. Not just for their benefit but for yours too. The next time you wonder whether God has what it takes to fix your problem, look again to that empty tomb. If God has already defeated death itself on your behalf, you can be sure there is nothing else that God can't or won't do for your eternal good. Of this you can be sure, because... "Christ is risen!". He is risen indeed! Hallelujah! Amen.