

Mark 16:1-8

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[0 : 0 0] Are you a man with a message? Are you a woman with a message? If you are, what is your message?

As believers, we are all men and women with a message. But where does the message come from? What is the message? How is it to be delivered? Do people listen to our message? Do they believe the message? Are we successful or effective in transmitting our message? I want us to reflect on these questions in the light of a passage and personality that we might not immediately turn to for insights or lessons in the matter of fulfilling our task of delivering a message as men and women with a message. The passage in Mark's account of the resurrection records or describes for us a man with a message. And this man is, in Mark's words, presented to us as a young man, a young man dressed in a white robe. We're going to think about this. We're going to think about this young man, this young man with a message. And we're going to do so from four angles or perspectives. We're going to think about the source of the message that he was delivering. We're going to give some thought to the audience who his hearers were. We're going to give particular attention and detain ourselves a little bit longer on the content of the message that he was delivering. And then finally, we're just going to notice more briefly the impact of his message. And as I say, as we do so, I hope that we can draw some lessons from that. First of all, I want us to think about the source of his message. And in order for us to establish the source of his message, we need to identify who he is. Here Mark is very economical.

In his use of words and chooses not to give us a detailed description, he simply presents us with this young man dressed in a white robe. Now, I think maybe the white robe maybe gives us a little bit of a clue as to who he might be. Certainly, the reaction of the women would suggest that he wasn't just an ordinary young man, but there was something extraordinary or different about him. And so, even in the account that we've read, there are some clues that might help us identify him, but we don't really need to spend too much time looking for clues in Mark's account because Matthew, in his account, identifies this man with greater clarity. He describes him as an angel of the Lord. As no doubt you will have noticed yourselves in reading the accounts of the resurrection, two of the evangelists speak of two angels, two speak of one. They're complementary accounts of the same events. But as I say, Matthew does identify this young man as an angel. Now, who were the angels or what were angels? Well, the very meaning of the word angel is messenger. So, they were messengers of God. They were those who had been given a task of delivering a message from God. That is all the more emphasized when Matthew speaks of where the angel had come from.

In that same verse where he identifies the young man as an angel of the Lord, he goes on to say that he had come down from heaven. We find that in Matthew chapter 28 and verse 2. So, this is a messenger of God.

He's come from heaven, and so clearly his message has as its source heaven itself. His message is a message from God.

[4 : 45] Now, we might just pause for a moment and ask, well, okay, that's fine, but how does that apply to the likes of you and me? I don't imagine many of us here this morning match the profile of this messenger or young man? Young men, well, there's a few young men present up to there. Some of you match in white robes. I don't think so. I hope not. So, feel free, you know, you can come dressed as you please. But I don't think there's many young men in white robes this morning. And as for angels, well, I'm pretty sure none of you are angels. Forgive me for that presumption in terms of knowing who you are, but I would be surprised. However, we are all messengers as believers, as disciples of Jesus Christ. We are all messengers. We all have a message from God. We have a heavenly message that we have been given the task of sharing with others. And being conscious of that fact that in that sense, we have something very much in common with this young man, this angel from heaven. And knowing that the message that we bear, the message that we transmit is God's message should instill in us a sense of dignity, that God would so consider us as to be those entrusted with His message for the world. That grants to us a real sense of dignity. But I hope it also grants to us a real sense of responsibility that we are to fulfill the task that God has given us. And I think also it should give us a real sense of confidence. And here I think especially in the sense of confidence in the message. The message that we deliver is God's message. It bears the seal of heaven. It is altogether true, altogether good, altogether trustworthy. And so, we declare it, we share it with that sense of confidence in the message that we are to deliver. That much can be said about the source of the message.

Let's move on and think about the audience for the message. Well, there in our passage, it's clear who the hearers were of this Easter message. In the first verse of chapter 16, we read, when the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome. They're the ones who make their way to the tomb. They're the ones who are to hear this message. There's two things that I want to say about this audience. But before I say the two things I want to say about them, let me go off on a little tangent and comment on the prominent place given by Mark to the women in his account of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. So, I just want to mention that, as I say, almost on the side. First of all, just to make clear that they are indeed given that prominent place. In verse 40 of the previous chapter, Mark very deliberately and explicitly identifies that these same three women mentioned in the resurrection account were present at the cross. There in verse 40 we read, among them were Mary Magdalene and Mary, the mother of James the younger and of Joseph and Salome. Then again, at the scene of the burial in verse 47 we read, Mary Magdalene and Mary, the mother of Joseph, saw where He was laid there at the burial. Two are mentioned, two of the three. And so, in this very deliberate and prominent way, they are identified as having been present at the cross, at the burial, and at the resurrection. Now, why this prominent place given to these women? Well, it's very clear that Mark intends them to serve as and to be seen as witnesses of historical events. When Mark wrote his gospel, these women could easily have been identified and spoken to. They would still have been alive. And if anybody had any questions as to the truthfulness of his account, it would have been a fairly straightforward thing for them to have looked at one of these women and say, well, well, what's the story? Is this true? Is this what you told Mark? Is this what really happened?

And so, Mark is clear and his intention is clear that he wants to make it evident to his readers that what he is presenting isn't just a nice story, but it is his account of a historical event or events that actually happened. So, that, as I say, in the passing is worth highlighting. Another thing related to that that we might just add, and it's possible that Mark wasn't particularly conscious of this, but the prominence of the women in his account give credibility to the account itself. As no doubt you've often heard stressed, in first-century Jerusalem, women were not considered reliable witnesses. And if you were making up a resurrection story, you would not have women as the key witnesses.

It's not so much a case of you couldn't make it up. You sometimes hear that about unlikely events. You couldn't make it up. In this case, it's more you wouldn't make it up. If you were making up the story, the last thing you would do would have women as the key witnesses. Now, we can lament the misogyny of first-century Jerusalem, but that gives added credibility to Mark's account. But these things I mentioned just in the passing. Concerning the hearers, this audience of the message, and I mentioned there are two things that I wanted to comment or to highlight. First of all, that these were devoted women. The audience were a group, a trio of three women devoted to Jesus. Now, this is clear from their mission on that morning, also from the question that they posed. First of all, their mission, their mission, we're told, was to anoint Jesus' body. We see that in verse 1. And they were going to do so with spices that they had bought on the Saturday evening at the close of the Sabbath. The purpose of this anointing was not so much part of an embalming process, but simply to perfume the body of Jesus, the corpse of Jesus. In fact, the word in Greek is familiar because it's familiar to us in terms of

English words, and that makes it very clear that that was the purpose. The spices were aromata, aromatic spices intended to perfume the body of the one they loved so dearly. Evidence of their devotion, but also the question that they pose somewhat obliquely points to their devotion. I refer to that question that they are asking among themselves on their way to the tomb. We read that in verse 2, who will roll the stone away from the entrance of the tomb? I say that it points to their devotion because the very fact that they have to pose the question indirectly reminds us that the men are absent. You see, had the men been present, it wouldn't have been a problem. If they had been going to the tomb accompanied by several of the disciples, strong, burly men, this wouldn't have been an issue. But it's precisely because the men are absent, cowering away in an upper room in Jerusalem that this is an issue.

[12 : 48] Who will roll away the stone? Now, we know in due course it didn't prove to be an issue. But the question also points to the devotion of the women, that they were there, they were heading to the tomb, unaccompanied by any of the male disciples. They were devoted, but they were also downcast. The women thought, we might even go further and say the women knew that Jesus was dead. Everything that they're doing confirms confirms that their conviction was that the one they were so devoted to was now dead.

They were grieving His death. And in this they were of one mind with the other absent disciples. Everybody knew Jesus was dead. So, this was an audience who did not believe that Jesus was alive.

Resurrection wasn't on their radar. Now, that's simply to identify a reality. It's to describe the situation. But I wonder if there is in that an application for us. We as the bearers, as the deliverers of a supernatural message from heaven ought not to be surprised by unbelief. Unbelief is the norm.

Belief is the exception. Unbelief is natural. Belief is supernatural. Tim Keller, who has a little book on Mark's Gospel, makes this very point in commenting on the resurrection account here in the Gospel. And he says this, You could even argue that the unbelief of many today is more to be expected, even more excusable.

The disciples, after all, had been repeatedly told by Jesus that He would rise from the dead. And yet, still, they don't believe. Still, it remains for them an inconceivable prospect. And so, what I would say to you as you go about delivering the message concerning Jesus and His death and His resurrection and your conviction that He is alive today, don't be surprised if for many your message is deemed unbelievable.

[15 : 25] Don't be discouraged. Don't be silenced. You just deliver the message. So, we can say that about the hearers of the message, but let's move on to what really is the heart of the matter, and that is the content of the message. And what we have here is what we could call, I think, reasonably, a gospel message from heaven. This is good news from God that the young man, the angel, delivers. The message is delivered through God's messengers, but it is God's message, and so we can draw lessons concerning God's character, God's concerns, God's priorities, and also His expectations of us as His messengers from the message that is delivered on this occasion.

And there are six things I want to draw to your attention. We won't dwell on any of them, but simply note them for you to maybe ponder on and draw something from. Six lessons concerning the content and delivery of this message. The first thing that strikes me is that we find in the messenger, and as a result, this is a reflection of the one who has sent him, we find a heartfelt concern and connection with the hearers of the message. What are the very first words of the messenger? Well, we find them there in verse 6. Don't be alarmed. Don't be afraid. You could say, well, that's not really the heart of the message. The heart of the message is coming in a moment. But even at the very beginning, in the very delivery of the message, you see in this young man a concern for the welfare of these women. He sees their state of mind. He sees their distraught state. He sees how downcast they are.

He sees how afraid they are, and he is concerned for them. And that is, that finds expression in the words that he addresses to them. Don't be alarmed. Don't be afraid. But as well as that concern, there's also a connection with them because the immediately following words we read there in verse 6, you are looking for Jesus the Nazarene. Now, you might say this is a very obvious point to make, but what that tells us is that this man, this angel knew these women. He knew what their concern was.

He knew what they were looking for. He knew their fears and their hopes, and he identifies them. You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene. These are not simply blank faces that he has to communicate a message from heaven to. These are women that he shows a concern for and establishes a connection with. I think even at that level, we can just pause a moment and see how that is applicable and is a lesson for us as messengers. As men and women with a message, we also need to have a concern for and seek a connection with our hearers. We are delivering a message, but we are not, if I could put it this way, we are not deliveroo cyclists who hand over the pizza and move on. You know, they are delivering something, but their only concern is to get it to its destination and move on to the next order. No concern for the ones receiving what is being commended, no connection with them. There doesn't need to be. That's not their task, but that's not us. We, as those who have to deliver a message, have to, with the angel, with this young man, have a concern for the hearer and seek to establish a connection with them. But the next thing I want to say, the second thing I think we can draw from this is to focus on the objective content of the gospel message. The message is about the person of Jesus, the Nazarene. You are looking for Jesus, the Nazarene. The message is all about Jesus, and the message is concerned with the historical events around which the story revolves. And what are they?

What are they saying? Well, the death. Notice what the angel says. You are looking for Jesus, the Nazarene, who was crucified. So, at the heart of the message, there is an acknowledgement of the death of Jesus. There is a recognition and there is a communication concerning the burial of Jesus. See the place where they laid him. And there is the communication of His resurrection. He has risen. His death, His burial, His resurrection form the very heart of the message, of the gospel message that the angel delivers. And as I was noticing that, it reminded me of what we were seeing last Sunday evening as we thought about what Paul identified as of first importance. In 1 Corinthians chapter 15 and verses 3 and 4, he identifies what he describes as of first importance. And what did Paul identify as of first importance? That Jesus died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, according to the Scriptures. These same objective historical events are what

[21 : 03] Paul describes as of first importance, and they're the very things that this messenger from God delivers as the content of his message to these women. Let me just highlight one of these three elements, the one that's most obvious given that the account is about the resurrection. There the angel declares that He has risen. The words translated, He has risen, and particularly the tense and the form of the verb could perhaps be more precisely rendered as He was raised. For those of you interested in grammar, the verb is passive in form. What the angel says is that Jesus was raised. And this isn't just a cosmetic quibble about words, but it stresses the consistent testimony of the New Testament that the resurrection is a work of the Father. The Father raised His Son from the dead.

Our message must always focus on the objective content of the Gospel story. Our job as messengers is not to make people feel good or to make them feel bad for that matter, but to tell the story, to tell it as it is. This is what happened. This is what I know about Jesus the Nazarene. This is the life that he lived. This is the death that he died, and he was raised from the dead by his father. The objective content of the message, but there is also another aspect here, and it maybe helpfully balances a focus on objective content. There is what we could call a personal call to discovery. You see, the young man, the angel, doesn't just relate the facts.

Notice what he goes on to say. Don't be alarmed. You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene who was crucified. He is risen. He is not here. And then he says this, see the place where they laid him.

See the place. He's inviting them to discover that the facts that he is presenting, that he claims to be true, can be discovered for themselves. They can confirm what he is saying. There is this invitation to personal discovery, to go into the tomb, to see with their own eyes, to discover for themselves the truth of what he is declaring. Just as a kind of anecdotal aside, I wonder if you've ever wondered why God sent an angel to remove the stone. And again, the detail that we have, or the knowledge that we have, that the angel also performed that function, well, we're grateful to Matthew's account where it states explicitly that the angel who came from heaven moved the stone. Why did he do so? I think, and maybe some of you have thought through this more carefully than I have, but I think some of us just unthinkingly imagine, well, the stone was moved so that Jesus could get out of the tomb. But that's not the reason why the stone was moved. The stone wasn't moved for the benefit of Jesus. It was moved for the benefit of the women so that the women could go in, not so that Jesus could get out.

Again, if you read Matthew's account, it's clear that at the moment that the stone is removed by the angel, Jesus has already been raised from the dead. And so, God is concerned for the women to discover for themselves. Hence, the stone is removed. Hence, the messenger invites these women to this experience, if you wish, of personal discovery. And there I think there is also a lesson for us. Our focus, and perhaps in our theological tradition or church tradition, we stress that the objective content of the good news, the facts concerning Jesus, and that is important. But that objective content has to go hand in hand with a personal call to discovery. In that same connection, you know, the words that came to my mind are the invitation, the biblical invitation that comes to my mind are the words, oh, taste and see that God is good. You know, we can describe the goodness of God hour upon hour, but ultimately, men and women, boys and girls will be persuaded when they taste His goodness for themselves. And even in this Easter gospel message, there is this invitation, this call to discovery. But then there's also a clear commission to tell others. And here it's so evident that it doesn't really require us to dwell on it. But there you notice in what the young man, the angel goes on to say in verse 7, but go tell His disciples and Peter, go tell. The women are not only to listen to the message, they are to then go and tell others the message. And as I say, the application for us is so evident that I leave it to yourselves to feel the weight of it, a clear commission to tell others. But a penultimate detail here in terms of the content of the message or the delivery of the message is what I'm calling a beautiful detail for the encouragement of failures. There in verse 7, notice what the angel says, but go tell His disciples and Peter.

[27:10] And very much focusing on what seems to be an unnecessary detail where the angel explicitly says that the women are to tell the disciples and Peter. Well, Peter was one of the disciples. Why the need to mention Peter by name? It seems redundant in a message that is so precise, that is so economical in the use of words. Why specifically mention and Peter? Well, it has nothing to do with the prominence of Peter among the disciples, but rather it has everything to do with his denial of Jesus. That is why Peter is mentioned by name. You see, the question that Peter might have had in his mind, and indeed not only Peter but others, is there still a place for Peter to hear the good news, to meet the one he so shamefully denied. And the answer from heaven is a resounding yes. Peter is to be told also. Peter is to hear the good news. Peter is also to be invited to meet with the risen Jesus.

I wonder how God transmits to angels the message that they are to tell, just in terms of the mechanics of it. How does it work? Well, I don't know. I don't know if angels like us are prone to forget.

Maybe angels have a very vivid memory. I don't know. But I reckon that on this detail, God was very insistent. As he commissioned his angel, he said, now don't forget, don't forget to add and Peter. That's important.

Don't imagine that that's just a detail. No, you must say that. And Peter. And of course, this speaks so powerfully and movingly of the restoring grace of God. This speaks of his love for those who fall short and fail. There is hope for us all. I don't know how you consider yourself as a messenger of God. Maybe you think of yourself as a pretty useless messenger. Maybe you are a useless messenger. Maybe you think that you are marked by a consistent mediocrity in the matter of being a messenger for God. Well, here God has a message for you when he says these two words, even though it's not your name, and Peter. Peter, you also are included. You also are still in my plans.

And as we think of ourselves, as we hear the message, as we deliver the message, we certainly ought not to be more demanding than God. As we deliver the good news, we are to do so with a settled conviction that this is good news for all, including and especially for those who stumble and fall and fail.

[30 : 13] In this message, there is this beautiful detail for the encouragement of failures. Then a final aspect of the message that I just want to draw to your attention. It is, we might describe it as a timely reminder of the promise and presence of Jesus. Because it goes on, the angel goes on, 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. And so, the angels remind the women of a promise that Jesus had already made, and in so doing, assure the women, assure the disciples who will in due course hear this message that Jesus not only is to fulfill his promise, but that his presence will accompany them.

And this promise, in its essence, holds for us today. Jesus continues to go both before us and accompany us as we bear and deliver our message from heaven concerning himself, concerning Jesus, the Nazarene. But then a final thing that we want to just notice, and that is the impact of the message. So, we've thought about the source of the message. It's a message from God, from heaven. We thought about the audience, these women, the significance of their presence, and the manner in which the message is delivered to them. We thought perhaps a little bit more about the message itself and the content of it. But finally, the impact of the message. Now, we're talking an angel here. You would have thought that if you're looking for a pretty proficient messenger, you're not going to get better than an angel. You know, that's their reason for being. It's in their DNA. I don't know if angels have DNA, but if they do, it's in their DNA. They're messengers. You know, that's why God created them.

Surely, they're good at their job. If anybody's good at delivering a message, it's got to be an angel. And yet, what is the impact of the message? How successful was the angel as a messenger? Well, I think you can only describe this poor angel and this young man in a white robe as an abject failure.

Because notice, you know, why I say that, why I come to that conclusion. What were the very first things that he said to the women? Remember? Don't be alarmed. Well, that worked out well, didn't it?

Oh, suddenly they're not alarmed. No, they're still alarmed. They're still afraid. It's very clear that the words, don't be alarmed, have very little impact on them. Just as afraid as they'd been before, maybe more so. Well, what about the rest of the message? He has risen. Well, did his audience buy that? Well, certainly not immediately. And then what about the final part of his message? Go tell the disciples. And there we don't need to speculate. It's there in black and white. What are we told in verse 8 about how the women responded to the message, go tell? They said nothing to anyone.

[33 : 21] That didn't work very well. So, here we have this messenger from heaven, this messenger from God, and he is, by any reasonable consideration, an abject failure. Certainly at this point, that is what appears to be true. Which rather leads us to think, well, why was that? What's missing? Or maybe the question rather is who was missing? What was missing has become clear as we draw together the other accounts of the resurrection that Mark, for reasons that no doubt he had, chooses to not include in his account. What is clear that was missing at this point, what was necessary was an encounter with Jesus.

The women needed to have an encounter with the risen Jesus. And as I say, we're indebted to Matthew, for this crucial element of the story. We read in Matthew chapter 28 and verses 9 and 10, suddenly Jesus met them. They've had the message. They've heard the message. But now we're told, suddenly Jesus met them. Greetings, he said. They came to him, clasped his feet, and worshiped him.

Then Jesus said to them, do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee. There they will see me. And now things change. Now their fears begin to be dispelled. Now they believe that Jesus is alive.

Now they do go and speak and tell Jesus' disciples the message that they had been given to transmit.

You see, it's not the empty tomb that convicts and convinces, but the risen Jesus. It's the risen Jesus who persuades. It's the risen Jesus who brings these women to the place of faith and worship and service.

[35 : 19] And so as we as messengers of God, as we who transmit a message from heaven, as we do so, we do so in the conviction that the effectiveness of the message is entirely dependent on the presence by His Spirit of the risen Jesus. Convicting and convincing and using our words and applying them to the hearts and minds of our hearers. May God grant that presence of Jesus by His Spirit as we are here and transmit the good news.

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we do thank you for the Bible. We thank you for your Word. We thank you for the account of the resurrection of Jesus. We thank you that we have come to that place of conviction, that these things happened, that Jesus did indeed die in our place according to the Scriptures, and that He was raised from the dead according to the Scriptures, and that He is alive today, that even now as we pray, He is seated at your right hand interceding for us. We thank you for the privilege that is given to us to be messengers of God, and we pray that we might learn something from this young man in a white robe regarding this task that we have been given. And we pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.