

Stones that Keep Us From Coming to Jesus

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I) Mark 16:1-4

II) Introduction

A) *Who are you?*

- 1) Let me ask, what kind of person are you?
 - (a) *Are you the kind of person who has life by the neck? No matter what challenge, obstacle, or threat you encounter you are the kind of person who grabs it by the neck and doesn't let go until you get your way.*
 - (b) *Or are you the kind of person that life has you all tied up in knots? You see a dark cloud in every silver lining. You see your cup is half empty even when your cup is completely full. You even fail at failing.*
- 2) How about this?
 - (a) *Are you the the kind of person who notices and appreciates the little things in life.*
 - (b) *Or are you the the kind of person who tends to ignore, what to everyone else in the room knows is there. Issues or problems that are very big and very obvious.*
- 3) Are you a visionary?
 - (a) *Do you see the possibilities in even the smallest glimmer of hope? Do you recognize a good opportunity long before other people around you see what could happen?*
 - (b) *Or are you blind sided by fate? No matter how hard you try to look toward the future, the truth just seems to be outside of your sights. It's as if life is playing a cruel joke on you.*
- 4) Are you a survivor?
 - (a) *Are you the kind of person who has the intuitive ability to stay on top of the world even in the most trying times and difficult circumstances?*
 - (b) *Or do you have trouble just keeping your head above water when life piles up around you.*
- 5) Are you living your life on the outside as young as you feel on the inside?
 - (a) *Not letting the years behind you squelch the joy and enthusiasm for today?*
- 6) Are you the kind of person who loves surprises?
 - (a) *Are you a person who can't wait to see what's around the next corner or under the next rock? Is part of the joy of life for you creating your own party?*
 - (b) *Or are you the kind of person who hates surprises? You like things to be predictable and without controversy. You plan your life to go a certain way and it really upsets you when someone or something messes with your plans.*

B) *I suspect*

- 1) Whatever kind of person you are, whatever scares you, or invigorates you, I want to invite you to take an Easter morning journey with me to find Jesus.

- 2) Whether you are here today as a scoundrel, a skeptic, or a saint. You are invited to come.
- 3) I suspect even though some of you came here to worship on Easter Sunday morning knowing that we would be talking about Jesus' resurrection from the dead and that he died for your sins. But you are a practical person – you have doubts and fears because that's the kind of person you are.
- 4) You really want to believe that Jesus is alive but there is something in the way. Something for you that is too big, too heavy, too overwhelming to move out of the way. Am I right?
- 5) If this describes you, you are not alone. As we read in Mark 16:1-4, Mary Magdalene, Mary the Mother of James and Salome felt the same way on that Easter Sunday morning.

c) Mark 16:1-4

- 1) 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?"
- 2) 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.

D) Stones

- 1) I would like us to take a few minutes to look back at some people who struggled in their own belief in Jesus. We will do this by identifying 5 stones that kept people from coming to Jesus. My hope is that you will recognize characteristics of stones that may be in your way.

III) Stones

A) 1. Stone of entitlement

- 1) Have you ever considered that Jesus died on the cross for the very people who put him there? The Jewish religious leaders had everything to lose - status, power, respect and wealth. What they didn't realize is that they could have come to Jesus but they just could not get past their sense of entitlement. Jesus saw right through them.
- 2) Matthew 3:7,8
 - (a) *[Jesus] said to them: "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? ⁸ Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. ⁹ And do not think you can say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham.*
- 3) I have never been there but I have heard that the landscape of the Holy Land is practically nothing but rocks. So many rocks in fact, that it is a miracle that anyone can farm. When Jesus squared off with the religious leaders, they were surrounded by rocks.

- (a) We have Abraham as our Father, was their attitude. We are entitled to everything that was promised to our ancestors. We are the rightful heirs, the good guys, the people God has chosen for reward.*
- 4) The first stone that keeps people from coming to Jesus is the Stone of entitlement. As Jesus told the religious leaders that day, nobody is entitled, nobody has earned God's favor because of their lineage, race, education, economic or political status. Then he motioned with his hand across the rocky landscape. Don't you know that God can transform these rocks into his children if he wanted to?
 - 5) You will never have a life changing encounter with Jesus if you think that you are already entitled to go to heaven. It doesn't matter that you come from a good family, have been a good person, know the religious talk and do the religious thing.
 - 6) Entitlement is an unmovable stone that will keep you from coming to Jesus as it was for the religious leaders in Jesus' day.

c) 2. Stone of false security

- 1) Construction of the Jewish Temple that Herod the Great built began in the year 19 BC in Jerusalem. The historian Josephus said that it took 10,000 workers and was not completed until 63 AD. It was the most beautiful and ambitious building project in the world.
- 2) For the Jews it was a source of pride and security. Some of the massive lime stones quarried from Mount Moriah were 30 feet long, and 13 feet thick. There was no need for mortar in the walls because nothing in the world at the time could penetrate or topple the walls the way they were built.
- 3) When talking to his disciples about the future he pointed up to the massive stones in the Temple wall.
- 4) Matthew 24:2
 - (a) *"Do you see all these things?" he asked. "Truly I tell you, not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down."*
- 5) The second stone that keeps us from Jesus are stones of false security. It was unthinkable to everyone in Jesus' day that Jerusalem could ever be destroyed. It was unthinkable that the formidable walls of Jewish society would crumble but it did with the destruction the temple.
 - (a) *In 70 AD Jerusalem fell and the Temple was destroyed.*
- 6) False security keeps us from Jesus because, like the people in Jesus' day, we hide behind and lean against things that are not eternal.
- 7) People who put their trust in stones of false security are
 - (a) *More concerned about money, jobs, and retirement than they are with righteousness.*
 - (b) *The are more worried about their health than they are the state of their soul.*
- 8) Is the stone of false security keeping you from Jesus?

d) 3. Stone of guilt

- 1) The self righteous crowd dragged the woman from her dark place of sin out into the light where everyone knew what she had done. In her shame she was brought to Jesus to pronounce her sentence, death by stoning. Her guilt was certain, the stones were in the people's hands, all they needed to hear was the word from Jesus.
- 2) John 8:7,8
 - (a) *When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, "Let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her." ⁸ Again he stooped down and wrote on the ground. At this, those who heard began to go away one at a time, the older ones first, until only Jesus was left, with the woman still standing there.*
- 3) The third stone that keeps us from Jesus are stones of guilt. The people holding these stones are not only willing to throw them at others who are dragged into the light of truth, but when their own guilt is exposed, they see no option but to walk away from Jesus rather than toward him.

- 4) The stones of guilt are not giant formidable stones like that of entitlement or false security but their power to keep us from Jesus is potent and lethal.
- 5) You may be here this morning feeling like the guilt of your sin is completely exposed and in your shame, you would just as soon be stoned than to face Jesus. It may be that your guilt is so profound that you would throw rocks at yourself if you could.
- 6) Are you holding stones of guilt that keep you from Jesus?

E) 4. Stone of pride

- 1) In 1961, William Albright a biblical archeologist, made a fascinating discovery when he uncovered a large stone in the tower of Antonia which used to be the military headquarters in Jerusalem. Engraved on the stone were the words, "Pontius Pilate Prefect of Judea."
- 2) What Albright had discovered was the Stone Pavement mentioned in John 19:13
 - (a) *When Pilate heard this, he brought Jesus out and sat down on the judge's seat at a place known as the Stone Pavement (which in Aramaic is Gabbatha).*
- 3) Pilate was not a very likeable figure in the story of Jesus' crucifixion. He was not a man of wisdom or backbone. He relished his title and as he took the judgment seat at the stone pavement, we see that he was more concerned about keeping up appearances with Herod than he was about doing the right thing.
- 4) Like Pilate, we sit on the forth stone that keeps us from Jesus - the stone of pride, the need to keep up appearances. You may be thinking, "O come on, if I was sitting in Pilate's seat of judgment I would have seen Jesus innocence and prevented the injustice." Unfortunately, pride blinds justice.
 - (a) *The truth is that Jesus innocently stands in our Gabbatha, our Stone Pavement, everyday. Like Pilate we may rhetorically ask, "What is truth?" when the Way, Truth and Life is standing right in front of us but we are too proud to recognize him.*
- 5) Is the stone of pride keeping you from coming to Jesus?

F) 5. Stone of hopelessness

- 1) Early on Easter Sunday morning the women took burial spices and started out for Jesus' tomb. This was not a pleasant journey. The darkness that covered the earth also covered their hearts. Without Jesus, all hope was gone.
- 2) They knew the way to the tomb because they saw Joseph of Aramathia and Nicodemus put the body there. But they didn't know, however, how they were going to move the big stone that covered the entrance.
 - (a) *...and they asked each other, "Who will roll the stone away from the entrance of the tomb?"*
- 3) There are no more formidable stones that prevent a person from coming to Jesus than the fifth stone - the stone of hopelessness. Perhaps you have come this morning with a sense of hopelessness like the women who made their way to Jesus tomb that morning.

- (a) *They went through the motions of life to see Jesus but they were without hope.*
- (b) *The stone in front of the tomb was the least of their worries. How were they going to go on without the hope that Jesus brought? After they anointed the body, then what?*

4) Is the stone of hopelessness keeping you from Jesus?

IV) Jesus comes

A) Stones

- 1) You may have come this morning fearing that any of these 5 stones are keeping you from coming to Jesus.
 - (a) *1. Stone of entitlement*
 - (b) *2. Stone of false security*
 - (c) *3. Stone of guilt*
 - (d) *4. Stone of pride or*
 - (e) *5. Stone of hopelessness*
- 2) Here is the good news, the really good news! This is where the power of the resurrection gets intimately personal.
- 3) No matter what sins you've committed, or how screwed up your thinking may be; no matter how distorted your motives or twisted your values, **there is nothing that prevents the risen Christ from coming to you.**
- 4) Jesus walks right through them all.
 - (a) *The heavy stone could not keep him captive in the tomb.*
 - (b) *Pilate's official seal tomb on the tomb had no power over him.*
 - (c) *The soldiers posted in front of the tomb couldn't stop him either.*
 - (d) *There is not a stone that can keep Jesus from coming to you.*
- 5) Think about it, the only reason that the stone was rolled away was so that the witnesses could see for themselves that the tomb was empty. For Peter and John when they ran into the empty tomb, they believed that Jesus was alive.
- 6) Jesus comes to you in your darkest fear, pain, disappointment, immobility, depravity, doubt, incapacity or grief. He doesn't have to do anything but say your name like he did to Mary Magdalene on Easter morning. When she heard her name she believed that Jesus was alive.
- 7) Jesus meets you face to face in your deepest doubts and scholarly argument. For Doubting Thomas, when he was able to actually touched the scars of Jesus crucifixion, then he believed that Jesus was alive.
- 8) In spite of your fear of any stone in your life that you think will keep you from God, the risen Jesus comes to you this morning so that you too will believe that Jesus is alive!
- 9) The Apostle Paul said it best in Romans 8:38-39, **Please read this out loud with me.**

(a) For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

v) Conclusion

A) Bow your heads with me

- 1) There may be lots of reasons why you may think that there is no way you will have a living encounter with Jesus this morning because there is something in the way. Something that is too big, too heavy, too overwhelming for you to move to find Jesus.
(a) The truth is, Jesus stands beside you right now. Whatever stones you thought that you would have to move or remove are as vapor to God.
- 2) Open your heart to the living Christ. Be healed, be renewed, be transformed, be raised from the deadness of your sin. Jesus is with you, is to listen for him to say your name so that you will believe he is alive.

vi) Prayer

- 1) Lord Jesus, there is no barrier to you coming to meet us. We may have come this morning expecting to have to quarry the stones that we know separate us you. But nothing stands in your way, nothing. We bow our hearts before you now, risen Lord, and invite you to meet us. Reveal yourself to us, your thoughts, your will and your way.
- 2) Where there is sin to deal with it in our lives, be our garbage collector. Where there is brokenness and pain, be our healer. Where there is confusion, be our guide. Where there is grief, our comforter. Where there is loneliness, our friend.
- 3) We pray this in the name of the Jesus, the first and the last, the Lord of all, Amen.

vii) Hallelujah Chorus

- 1) This morning we celebrate Easter with a Hallelujah! And so, I would like to invite anyone who would like sing Handel's Hallelujah Chorus from Messiah to join the choir on the platform. We have copies of the music for you. Even if you've never sung this great piece and have always wanted to, come on up.

viii) Easter Celebration Choir - Hallelujah Chorus

ix) Benediction

- 1) You came expecting a stone covered tomb but leave having encountered the living Christ. All there is left to say is, Hallelujah! Go now as Easter people in the name of the Father, Son and Holy spirit. He is risen! He is risen! He is risen! Amen.