

Mark Part 14

What you believe determines how you live.

1. Jesus' body was stolen.

- *Matthew 28:1-15*

People will sometimes die for what they think is true, but they won't die for what they know to be a lie.

- FALSE

2. The women went to the wrong tomb.

- FALSE

3. Jesus' resurrection was a hallucination.

- FALSE

4. Jesus is ALIVE is true because:

- *Mark 8:31, 9:30-32, 10:33-34, 14:28; Matthew 27:62-64; 1 Corinthians 15:3-8; Acts 2:22-32; John 20:27-29, 14:23; Mark 12:29-31*

- Jesus predicted it.

- Eyewitnesses saw it.

- History supports it.

All other religious leaders were powerless in death, proving their humanity. Jesus had power over death, proving His divinity.

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West Valley Church
9/13/2026
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The Gospel of Mark

Did Jesus Rise from the Dead?

Mark 14:1-16:8

Today we are finishing our summer-long series in the Gospel of Mark. All summer we've been reading together in advance of that Sunday's sermon, and hopefully you've read Mark chapters 14-16. You've heard sermons from Pastor Casey, myself, Pastor Div and Pastor Jim Beattie.

So here we are on the last passage from Mark's gospel, and if you read it you know it's about Jesus' arrest, trial, crucifixion, burial, and resurrection. The entire Gospel has been leading to this.

In fact, some scholars say that the Gospel is these three chapters, and that the first thirteen chapters were an extended introduction! Of course *all* of it is God's Word, but without what happens in these three chapters, there would be no Gospel; it all leads up to this! In chapter two Jesus alluded to "that day," (2:20), then the plots against Jesus began almost from the start in chapter 3 (3:6), then came Jesus' clear predictions about his suffering and death (8:31, 9:31, 10:33) it has all driven the story forward to where we are today. I sure hope you read these three chapters ahead of time, because you'll need the context for what we look at today.

So let me start this today by saying this...

What you believe determines how you live.

What you believe to be true determines how you behave in your relationships. It determines how you behave materially or financially. It determines how you behave morally. And ultimately it determines how you live spiritually, which will determine how you live *after* this life. What you understand as truth determines the entirety of your life and eternity. What we believe about the death and resurrection of Jesus determines what we believe and how we live.

Instead of going through these chapters event by event, I want to ask the question, "Is Jesus Alive?" Is this something we can *really* believe? Did Jesus really rise from the dead? Is this factual history or just a fictional Hollywood ending? What is true and what is false? Because our answer determines our lives.

There are, of course, people who don't believe the resurrection of Jesus. They don't think Jesus defeated the bonds of death, so they have to develop other theories. Let's look at three theories that are commonly suggested to explain away the resurrection...

1. Jesus' body was stolen.

This theory was actually a story concocted by the Jewish religious leaders that plotted to kill Jesus, and then was spread by the Roman guards only hours after Jesus' resurrection. We see this happening in Matthew's Gospel. Let's read how this happened in Matthew 28, starting at verse 1:

"Early on Sunday morning, as the new day was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went out to visit the tomb. Suddenly there was a great earthquake! For an angel of the Lord came down from heaven, rolled aside the stone, and sat on it. His face shone like lightning, and his clothing was as white as snow. The guards shook with fear when they saw him, and they fell into a dead faint. Then the angel spoke to the women. "Don't be afraid!" he said. "I know you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He isn't here! He is risen from the dead, just as He said would happen. Come, see where His body was lying. And now, go quickly and tell His disciples that He has risen from the dead, and He is going ahead of you to Galilee. You will see Him there. Remember what I have told you." The women ran quickly from the tomb. They were very frightened but also filled with great joy, and they rushed to give the disciples the angel's message. And as they went, Jesus met them and greeted them. And they ran to Him, grasped His feet, and worshiped Him. Then Jesus said to them, "Don't be afraid! Go tell My brothers to leave for Galilee, and they will see Me there." As the women were on their way, some of the guards went into the city and told the leading priests what had happened. A meeting with the elders was called, and they decided to give the soldiers a large bribe. They told the soldiers, "You must say, 'Jesus' disciples came during the night while we were sleeping, and they stole His body.' If the governor hears about it, we'll stand up for you so you won't get in trouble." So the guards accepted the bribe and said what they were told to say. Their story spread widely among the Jews, and they still tell it today." (Matthew 28:1-15, nlt)

The guards spread the story that the disciples had stolen the body in the night and took it to an unknown location. This is still a popular claim today, particularly in Jewish circles.

There are some problems with this theory though. First of all is the fact that Jesus had taught His disciples to be honest people of integrity. Stealing Jesus' body and then perpetuating a hoax—a lie—would have gone against everything they had been taught.

Secondly, some people argue that the disciples lied because they were trying to make Christ's prophecies about His resurrection come true. But there's a problem with that: it is clear that at the time of Jesus' death, they didn't even understand that He was going to die, let alone that He would rise from the dead. At the grave the disciples were confused. They didn't understand what was going on. So even though Jesus tried to explain it to them, the last thing they were expecting was a resurrection.

The third problem to this theory is the amazing change that took place in the lives of the disciples. At Jesus' trial, death, and burial, they scattered and hid in fear of being caught (Mark 14:50). At that point the disciples were cowards. But when they saw Jesus alive, suddenly they became bold and outspoken. Jesus' resurrection changed them; the resurrection was the theme of the earliest preaching by the apostles in Acts (Acts 2:30-31;

3:15; and 4:10, 33). After that Easter morning they placed belief in the resurrection at *the center* of their entire faith (Romans 10:9; I Corinthians 15:1-5, 12-19). Think about it: if they *had* stolen Jesus' body, then they were killed (most of them brutally) for what they *knew* to be a lie. Now...

People will sometimes die for what they think is true, but they won't die for what they know is a lie.

It's unbelievable that none of the disciples ever denied belief in the resurrection of Christ, in spite of being imprisoned, suffering, persecution, torture and martyrdom. (cf. 2 Corinthians 11:22-33; Hebrews 11:32-40)

Finally, the greatest problem with this theory is, if the body *was* stolen, then how did Jesus keep showing up alive? So this first theory is...

False

A second common theory is that...

2. The women went to the wrong tomb.

This theory says the women made a mistake; the tomb they visited was empty, and so they jumped to the conclusion that Jesus rose from the dead. Then they spread this misinformation to the rest of the disciples, which then led to widespread belief in the resurrection of Jesus.

There are serious problems with this theory too, even if it is more creative. If the women went to the wrong tomb, then the disciples who then went to check on the women's claims, *also* went to the wrong tomb. But – even if the men *did* repeat the mistake of the women, all that the Jewish authorities would have had to do to stop the resurrection rumors was to just point out that they went to the wrong tomb. They would have said, "No, you have the wrong tomb. See: here's the *right* tomb and Jesus is still in this tomb. Here is His body." That obviously would have disproved the disciples' claim that Jesus had risen from the dead. So this theory is also...

False

And again, the greatest problem is, if they went to the wrong tomb, then how did Jesus keep showing up alive? Some say the resurrection appearances were because...

3. Jesus' resurrection was a hallucination.

Some people claim that what *appeared* to be Jesus' resurrection was actually a hallucination. They say that people just *thought* that Jesus kept appearing to be alive; people were actually hallucinating because they wanted so much to believe he would rise from the dead that they desperately wanted to see Him alive.

One problem with that theory is the fact that the disciples did *not* believe Jesus would rise from the dead. They were devastated when he died. They thought He was dead and gone. In

fact, even after some of the disciples *saw* Jesus alive, some *still* didn't believe it. The disciples told Thomas that Jesus was alive, and he still didn't believe it. You can read about that in John 20. Thomas did *not* believe Jesus was coming back from the dead. He was a skeptic and he wanted proof. So Jesus gave it to him; remember? He appeared to Thomas and told him to touch his scars and feel for himself. Thomas didn't just see Jesus alive again, he actually put his fingers in Jesus' nail pierced hands and spear pierced side.

And again—if it were just a hallucination, then where was the actual body? Why didn't the Jewish or Roman authorities just bring out Jesus' body to show everyone? All they had to do was take Jesus' corpse and wheel it through Jerusalem. That would have stopped all resurrection talk and hallucinating. So this third theory is also...

False

Now we are left with the last option, which is that...

4. Jesus is alive!

Not only are the theories of alternative explanations of the resurrection flimsy and biased attempts to avoid the facts, the evidence supporting the resurrection is *extremely* strong. Jesus is alive, never to die again. Let's look at just three arguments that show that Jesus' resurrection is the most amazing fact of history.

- Jesus predicted it.

Jesus actually predicted He would rise from the dead.

Have you ever read the predictions of Nostradamus? I don't know about you, but the ones I have read are so vague and confusing that they can be interpreted to mean just about anything. Or what about horoscopes?

Horoscopes range from hyper-specific daily warnings to sweeping cosmic declarations. But over and over again, scientific studies show astrology is no better than random guessing. They rely on an outmoded 2,000-year-old Babylonian system that doesn't even match the actual positions of the stars. Even so, the internet and historical records are filled with predictions that are so vague they *seem* true:

- "You may feel a sudden urge to reconnect with an old friend this week, but make sure to guard your energy around people who drain you."
- "An unexpected expense could pop up, but a new opportunity on the horizon will help balance things out if you stay patient."
- "A professional choice requires a careful balance between your head and your heart. Do not rush into a final answer just yet."

The predictions of Jesus were anything *but* random. Jesus' predictions were not generalized or vague. They were very clear and specific. Listen to some of Jesus' predictions:

Mark 8:31– (Jesus) then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again. (niv)

Mark 9:30-32 – They left that place and passed through Galilee. Jesus did not want anyone to know where they were, because he was teaching his disciples. He said to them, “The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men. They will kill him, and after three days he will rise.” But they did not understand what he meant and were afraid to ask him about it. (niv)

Mark 10:33-34 – “We are going up to Jerusalem,” he said, “and the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and the teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death and will hand him over to the Gentiles, who will mock him and spit on him, flog him and kill him. Three days later he will rise.” (niv)

Mark: 14:28 – But after I have risen, I will go ahead of you into Galilee. (niv)

And immediately after His death, even His enemies quote Jesus' prediction about His resurrection. Listen to this:

Matthew 27:62-64 – The next day, on the Sabbath, the leading priests and Pharisees went to see Pilate. They told him, “Sir, we remember what that deceiver once said while He was still alive: ‘After three days I will rise from the dead.’ So we request that you seal the tomb until the third day. This will prevent His disciples from coming and stealing His body and then telling everyone He was raised from the dead! If that happens, we’ll be worse off than we were at first.” (nlt)

Over and over again, Jesus not only predicted that He would be arrested, mocked, flogged, and crucified, but that He would actually rise from the dead three days later. His enemies acknowledged that he said it, and then He did it!

- Eyewitnesses saw it.

Not only did Jesus predict that He would rise from the dead, but eyewitnesses saw it. The Apostle Paul was an unbeliever who arrested and killed Christians. Then he met Jesus. This is what he said about Jesus’ resurrection:

“I passed on to you what was most important and what had also been passed on to me. Christ died for our sins, just as the Scriptures said. He was buried, and He was raised from the dead on the third day, just as the Scriptures said. He was seen by Peter and then by the Twelve. After that, He was seen by more than 500 of His followers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have died. Then He was seen by James and later by all the apostles. Last of all, as though I had been born at the wrong time, I also saw Him.” (1 Corinthians 15:3-8, nlt)

Jesus was seen alive over a 40-day period after His crucifixion and burial by men, women, skeptics, believers, individuals, and simultaneously by a group of over 500 people.

Dr. Edwin M. Yamauchi, associate professor of history at Miami University in Oxford, Ohio, emphasizes: “What gives a special authority to the list (of witnesses) as historical evidence

is the reference to most of the five hundred (witnesses) being still alive. St. Paul says in effect, 'If you do not believe me, you can ask them.' Such a statement in an admittedly genuine letter written within thirty years of the event is almost as strong evidence as one could hope to get for something that happened nearly two thousand years ago."

- History supports it.

Lastly, history supports the resurrection of Jesus. That the church ever came into existence and that you are here today at this church is a result of the resurrection of Jesus.

What do you think the main message of the disciples was after Jesus rose from the dead? – Turn the other cheek." "Give to the poor." "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." No. It was none of those things. The main message of the disciples was "Jesus is alive!" Listen to what Peter said:

"People of Israel, listen! God publicly endorsed Jesus the Nazarene by doing powerful miracles, wonders, and signs through Him, as you well know. But God knew what would happen, and His prearranged plan was carried out when Jesus was betrayed. With the help of lawless Gentiles, you nailed Him to a cross and killed Him. But God released Him from the horrors of death and raised Him back to life, for death could not keep Him in its grip. King David said this about Him: 'I see that the LORD is always with Me. I will not be shaken, for He is right beside Me. No wonder My heart is glad, and My tongue shouts His praises! My body rests in hope. For You will not leave My soul among the dead or allow Your Holy One to rot in the grave. You have shown Me the way of life, and You will fill Me with the joy of Your presence.' "Dear brothers, think about this! You can be sure that the patriarch David wasn't referring to himself, for he died and was buried, and His tomb is still here among us. But he was a prophet, and he knew God had promised with an oath that one of David's own descendants would sit on His throne. David was looking into the future and speaking of the Messiah's resurrection. He was saying that God would not leave Him among the dead or allow His body to rot in the grave. "God raised Jesus from the dead, and we are all witnesses of this." (Acts 2:22-32, nlt)

Within a generation of Jesus' life, documents were written about His death and resurrection. If treated without prejudice the historical records of the resurrection are more plentiful and more reliable than any ancient event we know of. As F.F. Bruce, of Manchester University, said, "If the New Testament were a collection of secular writings, their authenticity would generally be regarded as beyond any doubt."

Let me ask you this: who was our first president? You weren't there; you didn't see it – how do you know that? Because historians wrote it down, so we know that without a doubt. That was just over a couple hundred years ago. Let's go back further: look at Alexander the Great – one of the most well-known figures in history. He lived and died three centuries before Christ. He was tutored by Aristotle himself. He's famous for building one of the largest military empires and conquering the known world by the time he was thirty. He spread Greek culture across three continents. But *everything* we know about him comes from two primary sources that were written *four hundred years* after he

died. But nobody questions it. There are no debates on college campuses about whether he was real. People trust those two biographies written centuries after the fact.

But when it comes to Jesus, people are arguing and debating *despite the fact that the entire New Testament was completed within 70 years of his resurrection and was written by eyewitnesses or people who knew eyewitnesses. AND – we have over 5000 manuscripts or copies that are 99% identical to one another without one deviation from the core statement that Jesus Christ rose from the dead!*

People are certain of George Washington and Alexander the Great, but when it comes to Jesus, people still say, “Yeah, I’m not sure that he really rose from the dead.”

What?!

The resurrection of Jesus could not have been preached and believed for a single hour in Jerusalem if it were not true. There would have been too many ways to discredit the claims and disprove the evidence.

With all of that, the question has to be asked, “So what?” Why does it matter that Jesus rose from the dead, never to die again?

There is more historical evidence of Jesus’ resurrection than ANY event of ancient and near ancient history. Why is this so hard to accept? Here’s why: because we’ve all sinned, and we know it in our hearts. We’d rather stay slaves to our sin then be set free by the resurrected Jesus.

The consequences are enormous. Jesus' resurrection sets Him apart from all other religious leaders and anyone else who ever lived.

***All other religious leaders were powerless in death, proving their humanity.
Jesus had power over death, proving His divinity.***

The resurrection is the foundation of the Christian faith. All of what Jesus said and did falls apart if the resurrection is false. But – all of what Jesus said and did stands forever if the resurrection is fact.

If the resurrection is true, you can put your trust in Jesus Christ. You can be forgiven of your sins. You can be given the power to live abundant life today – to live right. You can have everlasting life – being reunited with loved ones after death, and even getting to see, know and love Jesus forever.

Jesus *did* rise from the dead. The cross is empty, the tomb is empty.

So now what? Jesus *rose* from the grave. He gave many evidences and proofs that He was alive. Do you remember what he said to “Doubting” Thomas?

Then (Jesus) said to Thomas:

“Put your finger here,” see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe.” Thomas said to him, “My Lord and my God!” Then Jesus told him, “Because you have seen me, you have believed, blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.” (John 20:27-29, nlt)

Jesus was talking about you! You can't see Jesus, but you have heard the evidence. You can't see Jesus, but you can believe. Can you hear him? He is saying to you, "Believe."

You don't have to have all your questions answered and all your doubts cleared to make a thoughtful decision and claim that you believe in Jesus. Where do you stand right now? Are you ready to respond to Jesus? If so, everyone – including intellectuals – come to God the same way. Do you believe? If you believe, then first, pray this prayer with me (repeat):

"God, thank You for what you have done for me. I believe You sent Jesus to die for me. I believe Jesus rose again to give me everlasting life. Please forgive me for the wrong things I have done. Please give me a clean heart. I invite you into my life. Teach me to do everything You want me to do and to follow You all the days of my life. I pray this believing what Jesus did for me. Amen."

Second then, you must obey Jesus. He said:

"All who love Me will do what I say. My Father will love them, and We will come and make Our home with each of them. (John 14:23, nlt)

Jesus' commands are summarized in what he said was the greatest command of all:

"The most important one...is this: 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' The second is this: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these." (Mark 12:29-31, niv)

Love God supremely and love others equally. And you can learn specifically how to do this as you read the Bible. You can continue to do this by being a part of a good church like this one – a church that is learning to follow Jesus together.

If that is you; you prayed that prayer and you want to obey Jesus, would you join us for communion?

Communion liturgy

If you have put your faith in Jesus, would you tell us? Would you write it on a connect card, or email us, or see one of our pastors after this service? We have a packet we can put into your hands so we can begin to help you understand what has happened in your life and support you as you live it out.

Benediction:

May you believe in the resurrection of Jesus Christ, and may it determine how you live. May it determine how you behave relationally. May it determine how you behave materially and financially. May it determine how you behave morally. May it determine how you live spiritually, which will determine how you live *after* this life. May the resurrection of Jesus shape the entirety of your life. Because what we believe about the death and resurrection of Jesus determines what we believe and how we live.