

Life Group Questions

March 31st, 2024

Soul Breathing – Ray Harms-Wiebe – **Mark 15:40-16:8**

Note from Pastor Jonathan

Hey Life Groups,

I hope you all had a wonderful time celebrating the resurrection of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. I pray that it won't be a spiritual mountain top experience that leads to plains. Let's continue to celebrate, because Jesus is still alive, and all His promises are true!

Check out my video update for this week: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eFIOGCRwUDM>

For more information on the food drive, check out the page: <https://willingdon.org/events/food-drive/>. If anyone wants to serve, please email localoutreach@willingdon.org. God's blessed our church with many generous people, but we need enough volunteers to receive and process it. It's a good problem to have!

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OVERVIEW



1. Why did Jesus' followers not believe that Jesus would die and come back to life?



2. Why do we struggle believing that Jesus died and came back to life? What can we do about it?



3. Why is trusting Jesus worth it?



4. Who can you tell about Jesus' death and resurrection? What are some ways you can do it?

QUESTIONS



1. Why did Jesus' followers not believe that Jesus would die and come back to life?

This should not have been a surprise to Jesus' followers. Jesus didn't tell them a happy story. "Hey, disciples, for my plan to become king, I'll do a couple miracles and win the religious leaders over. Then we'll all go to talk to Pilate. He'll understand and the Romans will leave."

Instead, Mark records that Jesus tells them three times He'll die. I thought of looking at their responses.

The **first time** comes after Peter declares that Jesus is the Christ.

Mark 8:31–38 — And he began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be killed, and after three days rise again. And he said this plainly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. But turning and seeing his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, "Get behind me, Satan! For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man."

And calling the crowd to him with his disciples, he said to them, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it. For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul? For what can a man give in return for his soul? For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of Man also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels."

Self-Preservation. When Jesus declared He would die, Peter said no! Why? Peter didn't have a theological answer. "But Jesus, Second Opinions 3:1 says Messiah won't die!" Jesus points out that Peter was thinking of what he wanted, not what God wanted.

Jesus elaborates to the crowd. Jesus modeled self-sacrifice for the kingdom, so His followers would have to do the same. Instead of remembering Jesus' prediction and sacrifice, Peter can only think of his safety. It's also telling that Joseph and Nicodemus are the ones that take care of Jesus' body, not the 11 disciples who ran away in fear.

The **second time** in Mark happens after Jesus transfigures and comes down the mountain.

Mark 9:30–32 — They went on from there and passed through Galilee ... saying to them, "The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill him. And when he is killed, after three days he will rise." But they did not understand the saying, and were afraid to ask him.

Didn't Ask for Clarification. They're confused and too afraid to ask. Perhaps if they had said, "Hey Jesus. What you're saying doesn't click with my understanding of the Son of Man. We just saw you transfigure and all that, but now you're saying you're going to get killed. Please explain." Maybe they could understand Jesus' mission. They would still be sad to see Jesus die, but they would know how it fit into the plan. They could then look forward to the next step. The disciples could have waited outside the tomb with a WELCOME BACK TO LIFE cake while confused Roman soldiers looked on.

We see this confusion when the women arrive at the tomb. Pastor Ray notes they're wondering who will roll away the stone. They should have been asking, "It's the third day. What time will Jesus resurrect?"

The **third** prediction happens on the final journey to Jerusalem before the crucifixion.

Mark 10:32–37 — And they were on the road, going up to Jerusalem, and Jesus was walking ahead of them. ... And taking the twelve again, he began to tell them what was to happen to him, saying, "See, we

are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death and deliver him over to the Gentiles. And they will mock him and spit on him, and flog him and kill him. And after three days he will rise.”

And James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came up to him and said to him, “Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you.” And he said to them, “What do you want me to do for you?” And they said to him, “Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory.”

Own Agendas. Following Jesus’ declaration of His impending death, two disciples ask Jesus to be Jesus’ right and left-hand men. They were too focused on fulfilling their fantasy. “Hey, disciples. We’re on the way to Jerusalem. I’m going to be mocked, spat on, flogged, and killed. And I’ll come back to life after three days!” “Yeah, yeah, yeah. Mocked and killed. Ok. Sure, Jesus. Whatever. Can me and my bro get thrones next to yours?”

When Jesus dies, their plans for Jesus are destroyed. The hope vanished of a new Jewish kingdom free from Rome where the disciples could be dukes or governors or some other political positions. “Now what? Our king got branded a traitor and killed. Now we may be targeted for being His followers.” If they had followed Jesus’ agenda, they would have been right on track. “Hey, Jesus! Thanks for dying for our sins. We’ll see you on the other side!”

♥ 2. Why do we struggle believing that Jesus died and came back to life? What can we do about it?

Your group probably has lots of answers. I’ll be elaborating on the ones from the previous questions.

Self-preservation. When we are threatened with losing our job, a bad medical diagnosis, or a constant barrage of bad news on TV, we feel helpless and exposed. Our automatic reaction is to **fight** (Attack the problem! Find a solution! Do something!!!!), **flight** (Escape to fantasy! Watch YouTube videos or scroll social media to pretend my life is different. Get away from my problems by going on trips. Lots of beer, marijuana, or other drugs. I can’t commit to anything because I need an escape route.), or **freeze** (There’s nothing I can do to solve the problem! I can only grow calluses, so it doesn’t affect me or become detached and avoid everything.)

Instead of setting our eyes on Jesus, we set them on our problem. If we believe Jesus died and came back from the dead to bring us forgiveness of our sins and eternal life, we would trust that He will take care of us. No matter what happens, even if we die, we have hope.

One way to address this is to spend time with Jesus. The more read the Bible, pray, worship, and fellowship with other believers, the easier it will be to look to Jesus when life happens. Being around other believers allows them to lovingly guide us back when we’re fighting, flying, or freezing.

Didn’t ask for Clarification. I admit that when bad things happen, my first reaction isn’t to ask Him for wisdom (James 1:5). When my wife and I have arguments, our son’s not sleeping right, and I feel overwhelmed by my workload, I can get stuck in my own thoughts. “Ugh, I feel so overwhelmed! Why can’t things work out smoothly for once? How can I figure this stuff out? Frustratiooooo!” Usually, it doesn’t solve the problem and I get more stressed out.

I should seek God for clarification. “God, I know your Son died and came back to life so I can have new life in You. I trust that You have everything in Your hands. Nothing caught Jesus off guard when He was betrayed, so I know there’s nothing in my life that’s a surprise for You. So, is there a sin in me that You want me to address? What promise do I need to trust? Even though I don’t know the full picture, what steps do You want me to take?” I can continue to read the Bible and pray. I can seek other godly people. I can ask God to help me understand.

Own Agendas. I don’t know about you, but sometimes I wish I could rewrite God’s plan for my life. How about instantly teaching me life lessons like how Neo learned Kung Fu in the Matrix. *ZAP*. Now I know how to trust God in the valleys. *ZAP* Now I don’t wrestle with lust or anger. *ZAP* Now I am a perfect Christian ~~boy~~ man, just like Jesus. But God wants us to experience Him. It’s one thing to know (factually) that God can bring you through a storm like cancer or a layoff. It’s another thing to know (experientially) by going through cancer or a layoff yourself.

Knowing that God uses struggles to grow us doesn’t make them easy, but it gives hope. God used Jesus’ death to bring life to many. There’s hope that God’s plan is somehow better than ours, that God can use this plan to grow us closer to Himself, that God will provide help and support, that God will be glorified.

We can continue to learn God’s agenda through His Word. When we see that His plan is different from ours, we can ask God to help us understand what He wants and make our goals fit into His.

♥ 3. Why is trusting Jesus worth it?

Thankfully, Jesus came back from the dead! That means all His promises are true. It’s hard to trust in Jesus when we don’t know why. I’ve copied the many blessings that Pastor Ray shared in his sermon. Take a moment to think about how these can encourage you to seek God in your current struggles.

- Forgiveness for sin: Jesus was the perfect sacrifice, once and for all. Through His ultimate act of service, He paid the penalty for our sin – all those times we miss the mark with our thoughts, words, and actions. He died for you and me so that we could be forgiven - completely freed of all our guilt.
- Peace with God: Jesus made it possible for us to be at peace with God, in relationship with Him, no longer doing life on our own, alienated from Him.
- Identity and belonging: Jesus opened the way for us to be adopted into the family of God. We are gifted with a new identity. Our shame is removed. We belong.
- Meaning and Purpose: Jesus fills our lives with meaning. There is coherence to the events of our lives, significance to each moment, purpose and direction.
- Victory over sin: Jesus triumphed over sin – our self-centered, independent nature that tries to do life without God. Through Jesus, we receive resurrection power to not sin.

- Victory over the powers of darkness: Jesus defeated the evil one. We have authority over the evil one. Our fears are dispelled.
- Eternal life: Jesus conquered death. When we put our trust in him, we receive the gift of eternal life, that begins now. God breathes the Holy Spirit into us.

4. Who can you tell about Jesus' death and resurrection? What are some ways you can do it?

Who are the people in your life (home, family, work, school, gym, neighborhood, supermarket) who need to know about what Jesus did? How about people who come to our church? We have plenty of regulars who don't know Jesus. These include people who are curious about Christianity or non-believers who come because of their believing spouses.

One way we can do that is by sharing what Jesus has done for us. In the sermon, we watched Elisangela's testimony of trusting God during her move from Brazil and attending Bible college all while her husband was a non-believer. Praise God that He saved João, so now he can also share.

If someone in your life shares their struggle with sin, you can share God's forgiveness and victory over sin in your life. If people feel that they're being judged by some higher being, you can tell them how God loves you and made peace with you. If people feel lonely, you can share how Jesus gave you a church family. If people feel that life is meaningless, you can share how Jesus gave your life purpose. If people feel that the world is just too evil, you can share how Jesus is in control and all evil will be defeated.

And if you haven't experienced Jesus at work in your life yet, continue to seek Him. Give Him time and He will.

BACKGROUND & COMMENTARY

Joseph of Arimathea

We're suddenly introduced to Joseph. You'd expect Peter, John, James, or any other disciple (except Judas). Joseph was a member of the council, meaning the Sanhedrin. "The supreme Jewish religious, political, and legal council in Jerusalem in NT times." (Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels). It probably had 71 members, mostly priests and other religious leaders. Although they were responsible for sending Jesus to be crucified, Joseph wasn't on board (Luke 23:51), because he was a secret disciple of Jesus (Matthew 27:57; John 19:38). Asking for Jesus' body would have outed him as a believer.

Arimathea could refer to Ramathaim, where Samuel's father was from (1 Samuel 1:1). It's around 30 kilometers northwest of Jerusalem.

John's Gospel notes that fellow Sanhedrin member Nicodemus joined Joseph in burying Jesus (John 19:39-40). He's the guy that came to Jesus at night (John 3).

Rush for the Body

Deuteronomy 21:22–23 — "And if a man has committed a crime punishable by death and he is put to death, and you hang him on a tree, his body shall not remain all night on the tree, but you shall bury

him the same day, for a hanged man is cursed by God. You shall not defile your land that the LORD your God is giving you for an inheritance.

This passage helps us understand more of the details in this passage.

First, it explains why Joseph went to take Jesus' body down. Jesus died after 3pm (the 9th hour) so leaving His body up all night would violate this command. Sunset was around 6pm at the time.

Second, hanging on a tree indicates the person is cursed or under God's judgment. As covered in last week's material, Jesus' ultimate punishment wasn't the physical suffering He endured. He suffered God's judgment for sin.

Third, leaving an accursed person on the tree overnight is such a big deal it would defile the land. Immoral actions can be so serious that even the environment can be polluted (e.g., Numbers 35:33; Jeremiah 16:18). I'm going through Joshua now in my daily Bible reading. Joshua hangs enemy kings on trees but takes the bodies down at sunset (Joshua 8:28-29; 10:26-27).

It's the day of Preparation and the next day is the Sabbath. God commanded all His people to not work on the Sabbath (Exodus 20:8-11). They prepared everything beforehand, like cooking food. Jewish tradition allowed preparation for a body, but with limitations.

Mishnah Shabbat 23.5) — One may perform all of the needs of the dead on Shabbat. One may smear oil on the body and rinse it with water, and all of this is permitted provided that one does not move any of its limbs, which would constitute a violation of the laws of set-aside objects. When necessary, one may also remove a pillow from beneath it and thereby place it on cold sand in order to delay its decomposition. Similarly, one may tie the jaw of a corpse that is in the process of opening.

Nowadays the next day starts at midnight, but back then it started at sunset. Once the sun goes down (around 6pm), it's the Sabbath. Jewish historian Josephus wrote about how the Romans made allowances for some Jewish rules, for example, Jews didn't have to go before a judge on the Sabbath day or after 3pm the day before (Josephus, *Antiquities* 16.6.2 §163). After 3pm it's crunch time to get everything ready before sundown. So, Joseph has, at best, between 3pm and 6pm to get Jesus down from the cross and buried. It's more likely 4pm to 6pm.

Think of the steps. Jesus was crucified around noon and Joseph must wait until Jesus dies. Crucifixion usually takes a day or two. After Jesus dies, he walks from the crucifixion site outside of the city (Hebrews 13:12) all the way to Pilate and asks for the body. Pilate's surprised Jesus is already dead. They didn't have cell phones, so Pilate sends someone back to the crucifixion site to confirm. Who knows, maybe they're trying to trick Pilate and get Jesus before He's dead. (Check out this article about the "swoon theory": <https://answersingenesis.org/jesus-christ/resurrection/faking-death/>.) The centurion goes to Pilate to report. Pilate gives the OK. Joseph buys a linen cloth and picks up Jesus' body. Soldiers remove the nails from Jesus' hands and feet and lower the body down. That's a lot of steps just to get Jesus' body!

Joseph follows Jewish tradition and washes Jesus' body, cleaning off the blood. He closes His eyes and trims His hair. Nicodemus brings 75 pounds of myrrh and aloes (John 19:39). They put the spices within the burial cloth and wrap Jesus in it. Because of the limited amount of time, they probably had to do everything in a rush or even skip some steps. It's a lot to do in 2-3 hours!

Mary Magdalene, Mary, and Salome

Mark notes many women who followed Jesus watched the crucifixion at a distance while focusing on three. These women ministered to Jesus, including through giving financially (Luke 8:2-3).

Jesus cast seven demons out of **Mary Magdalene** (Luke 8:2). Mary was a super common name at the time and last names weren't a thing. People often added their hometowns to their name. For Mary, it's Magdalene, referring to her hometown of Magdala, a city on the northwest shore of the Sea of Galilee. Jesus was also a common name, so people often called Him Jesus of Nazareth.

The other is **Mary the mother of James and Joseph**. Joseph is a shorter Greek version of the name Joseph. She is likely Jesus' mother.

(Other women named Mary in the Bible include Jesus' mom, Martha's sister, and John Mark's mom.)

Salome was at the crucifixion but wasn't named at the tomb. She is Zebedee's wife (Matthew 27:56) and mother to James and John. She asked Jesus to let her sons sit beside Jesus when His kingdom comes. She's the type of mom who goes to the teacher to get her kids preferential treatment. The other disciples did not like this (Matthew 20:20-24).

Her appearance after Jesus' death suggests a 180. She wanted Jesus to make her sons bigshots in the kingdom. Jesus died, so the hope of Him being a king died, too. I think she realized there was something more to Jesus.

Burial

They placed the body in a tomb **cut out of the rock** with a **stone against the entrance**. It was Joseph's tomb (Matthew 27:60) that had never been used before (Luke 23:53; John 19:41). That's why we sing "They laid Him down in Joseph's tomb" in O Praise the Name (Anástasis): <https://youtu.be/LqBpifDpNKc>.

Back then, people put bodies in the tomb and let them decompose into just bones. After a year, they came back and put the bones in an ossuary (bone box) and left it in another part of the tomb. If you have time, Expedition Bible has a fascinating video debunking the supposed discovery of Jesus' ossuary (<https://youtu.be/N8ki0CAxc6M>). The video also shows what ancient tombs were like.

Matthew presents a more dramatic picture. "And [Joseph] rolled a great stone at the entrance of the tomb and went away. Mary and Magdalene and the other Mary were there, sitting opposite the tomb." (Matthew 27:60-61). Imagine the women watching as Joseph and Nicodemus carry Jesus' lifeless, wrapped body into the tomb. They place Jesus' body down and slowly exit; eyes downcast as they fight tears. The sun is setting while golden sunlight fades away while they roll the **very large** stone across the entrance. The women cry and hold each other as reality hits. Their savior was truly dead.

Resurrection

NOTE: There are four resurrection accounts, and each author emphasizes different details. Some see the differences as irreconcilable contradictions. Got Questions has a good possible timeline that fits everything together: <https://www.gotquestions.org/resurrection-accounts.html>. Since Pastor Ray is preaching on Mark's account, we'll focus on that one with some details from the other Gospels mentioned.

Jesus dies and is buried on the day before the Sabbath (Friday evening). He stays in the grave on the Sabbath (Saturday). He resurrects on the day after the Sabbath (Sunday).

	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
Morning			Jesus resurrects. Women go to tomb.
Afternoon	Jesus is killed and buried.		
Night	Sabbath begins.		

Day 1: Day of Preparation – Day 2: Sabbath – Day 3: Day after Sabbath

Jesus predicted He would die and come back to life after three days (Mark 10:32-34). The Jewish way of counting included partial days.

The Sabbath ends at sundown on Saturday. The women can buy spices to prepare Jesus' body. It's too late to work on the body because the sun has set and everything's dark. They're eager, so they get there **very early when the sun had risen**.

When I was a kid, I wondered why the women went to Jesus' tomb to do more burial preparation on Him. It didn't dawn on me how everyone (except Jesus) was totally caught off guard. Jesus said He would die (Mark 10:32-34), but His followers didn't get it. He told His disciples He would be betrayed but they didn't understand the result of the betrayal. He was arrested at night and killed the next day. His followers only had two to three hours to prepare Him for burial.

Jesus had predicted He would resurrect, but His followers didn't understand. So, they bring spices to finish preparing the body so it can decompose.

They seem unaware of the religious leaders placing guards at the tomb, because they're concerned about **who will roll away the stone**. When they get there, they see the stone already rolled away. As Pastor Ray mentioned, the stone wasn't rolled away so Jesus could get out. Jesus seems to teleport after the resurrection (Luke 24:31, 36). It's rolled away so the women can go in and see that Jesus is gone.

As if that's not confusing enough, they see a **young man** wearing a **white robe** chilling in there. We know he is a supernatural angel (Matthew 28:2-3). The women are **alarmed** so he says, "**Don't be surprised/alarmed**." An angel also says "Don't be afraid" when he tells Zechariah about his miracle baby John the Baptist (Luke 1:11-13), Mary about her miracle baby Jesus (Luke 1:28-30), and the shepherds about their new baby king Jesus (Luke 2:8-10). Around 2,000 years earlier, God told Abraham to fear not, because He would bless Abraham with as many descendants as the stars in the sky (Genesis 15:1-5). It's all a pattern of God revealing the steps of His plan.

The angel gives a quick review. "You're looking for **Jesus**. Yes, He **was crucified**, but **He has risen** and **He is not here!**" Dead people hang out in tombs, but God raised Him from the dead (Acts 13:28-30) so He isn't here! As proof, the angel tells the women to check out where Jesus' body was laid. "The body of Jesus would then have been laid in either a "large, deep pigeon hole," a shaft about 1½ to 2 feet square and 5 to 7 feet deep, or on a stone bench." (*BEC Mark*).

The Gospel of John notes that the linen cloths that wrapped Jesus' body and the cloth that covered His face were there (John 20:6-7). Who would take the time to unwrap a dead body before stealing it?

The women are probably so confused, trying to do the math in their heads. They saw Him crucified and stabbed in the side (John 19:34). They saw Him wrapped in linen cloths and placed in a sealed tomb. If He was alive after the crucifixion, He definitely would have died from blood loss, infection, or asphyxiation. There's no way He's alive!

The Angel's Instructions

The angel tells the women to **go tell His disciples and Peter** that Jesus is **going before** them to **Galilee**, just as Jesus told them.

Mark 14:27–30 – And Jesus said to them, “You will all fall away, for it is written, ‘I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered.’ **But after I am raised up, I will go before you to Galilee.**” Peter said to him, “Even though they all fall away, I will not.” And Jesus said to him, “Truly, I tell you, this very night, before the rooster crows twice, you will deny me three times.”

Jesus was struck down. His disciples did scatter. Peter denied Jesus three times. Everything happened just as Jesus said. Could Jesus' prediction about meeting them in Galilee be true, too? With the angel appearing and Jesus' grave cloth sitting there, it seems yes.

The women are overwhelmed, wide-eyed, and trembling. They **said nothing to anyone**, likely meaning they didn't tell anyone on the way to the disciples. Luke writes that they reported everything to the 11 (12 minus Judas) and other believers (Luke 24:8-9).

Female Witnesses

It's surprising that God chose women to be the first witnesses. Jewish teachers taught that women's testimonies are generally not valid.

Shevuot 30a – GEMARA: The mishna teaches that **the oath of testimony is not practiced with regard to women because they are unfit to testify**. The Gemara asks: From where is this matter, that women do not testify, derived? The Gemara answers: It is as the Sages taught in a baraita: When the verse states: “If an unrighteous witness rises up against any man...then the two men shall stand” (Deuteronomy 19:16–17), it is with regard to witnesses that the verse is speaking. Apparently, men, not women, may testify.

God often picks the unlikely choice. People valued the older sibling over the younger, but God chooses Jacob over Esau (Genesis 25:23). People wanted someone that looked like a king on the outside, but God looks at the heart (1 Samuel 16:6-7). People want to get near high society, but Jesus spends time with the needy and outcasts. People expected a king to conquer enemies, but God sends a king to die.

The fact that God chose women demonstrates how the Gospels continue God's story. And it also gives validity to the Gospel authors. If they were making it up, they would have picked someone everyone would listen to. You can even see that even the disciples thought the women's testimony was “pure nonsense” (Luke 24:11, NET). They had to go check it out themselves.