

Who shall roll away the stone

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[0 : 00] Let us turn to consider words you will find in the chapter we read, the Gospel according to Mark, chapter 16, verse 3.

Mark 16, verse 3, and they said among themselves, Who shall roll us away the stone from the door of the sepulcher?

And when they looked, they saw that the stone was rolled away, for it was very great. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. I must say that it crossed my mind that continuing that theme and taking this text on New Year's morning, that in some respects at least hopefully it might be seen to be a relevant passage of the word of God for this kind of day.

[1 : 59] and I hope that that is a way that you will see it as well. We saw last Sabbath night that the burial of our Lord was undertaken by Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus, two men who were members of the Jewish Sanhedrin and who as a result of the death of our Lord were brought out into the open to make us stand publicly on his side and in his name.

And from the accounts that we have in the Gospels, it seems as though they were responsible really for the burial.

He was wrapped in linen which Joseph had bought at great cost and the spices provided by Nicodemus were used in the wrapping of the body of our Lord and together they would have laid him in Joseph's tomb.

We know also from the Gospel writers that several women, three or four at least, were present with them.

What part they took in the burial, we are not told. We gather from the narrative that they were onlookers. Amongst them, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Joseph, Salome the mother of John and James and perhaps Joanna and maybe other women.

[3 : 45] But we saw that, and this is where we left off last Sabbath evening, when Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus left the graveside, the two Marys stayed on.

And they were the last to leave the tomb, Joseph's tomb. And the next, this chapter we have here, takes up the account from then.

It was their intention, obviously, to come back the day after the Sabbath and to anoint the body of the Lord, as they probably saw it, properly.

And we read that when the Sabbath was passed, immediately after that, they went to obtain the necessary spices to prepare for that anointing.

And with the intention of returning as early as possible that morning to the graveside, to the tomb.

[5 : 03] And, of course, the first available moment was at the breaking of day. And that is what we read here, they had brought sweet spices, they had bought sweet spices that they might come and anoint to them.

And very early in the morning, the first day of the week, they came unto the sepulcher at the rising of the sun. And these, as far as we know, the same three or four women in that eerie light, making their way, no doubt sorrowfully, towards Joseph's tomb.

And they were there to pay tribute and their last respects to the corpse of the one who had been their leader and who had also been their saviour.

It seems that it was the practice in that part of the world to try and anoint a corpse within the first three or four days of death.

And hence, maybe their haste to leave their homes, to leave their vicinity at that very, very early hour of the day.

[6 : 32] And this morning, I would like to follow them with you and to consider the problem that confronted them on the way to the sepulcher.

It was not until they had nearly reached the sepulcher that this particular care that they had revealed itself and unsealed their lips.

We remember that the two Marys had seen, at least the two Marys, had seen Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus placing our Lord's body in the tomb.

And they had seen Joseph roll that great stone to the grave mouth. We know that because they had stayed on. And that problem was not, as some people understand it, they asked, why were they not concerned about the soldiers who were guarding the tomb?

was their mind so confused, were they in such a dilemma, that that thought never crossed their mind.

[7 : 49] The soldiers, which in the eyes of some people would have been a greater fear and a greater problem than that of moving the great stone.

But then again, in answer to that, I think we are led to understand from the gospel narratives that these women probably didn't know that a watch had been set over the tomb on the instruction of Pilate to the Jews.

They didn't realize that the soldiers were there and as far as we know they never even saw them. their problem was this stone.

The stone which was normally rolled over the opening to the tomb to protect the tomb from intruders. And that stone became their great anxiety.

This was their one great problem and difficulty and perplexity. This was what concerned them. something which they knew was beyond their strength and their ability to cope with.

[9 : 05] Who was going to move the stone from the sepulcher? Little did they realize the shock that they were going to receive.

A shock for which they were not prepared. When they came and sank to the tomb they saw that the stone had already been moved and when they inspected the tomb they saw that it had been disturbed.

It was empty. And this white clad figure or these white clad figures spoke to them and told them in no uncertain terms that the one whose body they had sought had risen from the dead.

The body they had come to anoint was no longer there. And I think that as you read the accounts that we have in the four gospel writers of what happened then I think that it might fit in with that kind of account to look at it to see it like this that these women understandably were stricken with fear and terror and panic that they run from the graveside that Mary Magdalene who was probably the youngest of the women run faster than the rest and sought help from the people to whom you would expect them to go from the disciples she ran and told Peter and John they have taken away my Lord and we don't know where they have laid and that in the company of

Peter and John she then returned to the tomb and it was at that time that the Lord revealed himself to Mary Magdalene the duty they left their homes that morning to prepare it to perform a duty to render a service which they never did there was no need for it and though one cannot condone the lack of faith and the lack of understanding concerning our Lord's teaching about his own resurrection at the same time you cannot turn a blind eye to their love and to their devotion but for a few minutes this morning this question this problem that they had who would roll away the stone now Mark tells us and the other writers tell us that the stone was very great it was a huge stone rolled over the opening of the tomb who moved it you know there are books written there is one book that has that title who moved the stone well we are not told some read into the account that we have that the second earthquake that took place remember there was an earthquake at the time that Jesus died and the rocks were rent worried also there was an earthquake at the time that our

[12 : 25] Lord rose and some people believe that it was the earthquake that moved the stone other people believe that it was the angel that moved the stone to allow the both the earthquake and the angel to allow the Lord to make his exit from the grave but I think that it is also reasonable for us to assume that our Lord had left the tomb before the stone was moved the stone was moved not to allow him out but rather to allow them to go in and this stone which was moved which had which proved to be their particular difficulty at that time had in essence just melted away as soon as they were within sight of the tomb they realized that the stone was no longer there it had been moved farther now how can we apply this to our own situation today what application can we make of this at the beginning of this new year well in the first place these words addressed spoken by the

women they weren't the last time that these words were spoken by human beings many a person today has the same problem who is going to move this particular stone for me and the women themselves were not the last to utter these words you and I conjure up in our minds all kinds of difficulties and problems all kinds of crosses and obstacles we conjure up in our minds the possibility if not the probability of difficulties which none of us can surmount as these women looked at it the stone was so great and they were so unequal to the task of moving it that the question remained on their lips who shall roll us away the stone from the door of the sepulcher and as you think about these problems that arise in your own mind there are times I suggest to you when you are almost paralysed not so much by the problem of today but with the problem of tomorrow it's not the burden that you carry at the moment that is so difficult and so insurmountable it is as you look at it in the light of the future it assumes tremendous proportions and then you come to conclusion that it will be impossible for this particular difficulty or obstacle to be removed and so it is I suggest to you that there are times when you have difficulties which seem insurmountable problems in life which are insoluble dilemmas which are inexplicable you face providences that for you are wholly unintelligible and when you consider your duties and your tasks they alarm you by virtue of their very magnitude the Lord

perhaps is directing you along a path which you find extremely frightening he is calling you to something that you consider to be well beyond your strength when you look at all these things together with that there are hindrances which seem to block up your way and all our hopes and all our desires and all our prayers seem to revolve around this one great question who is going to move the stone and as the women felt and recognised that morning their own weakness and their own inability and their own hopelessness and helplessness I suggest to you that there are times when you and I are confronted with similar situations and as these women also failed to recognise and as I mentioned earlier failed to understand and failed to see the power and the ability and the omnipotence of God to accomplish what he himself had said he would do they had completely forgotten it so I suggest to you and

I lose sight of that power and of that ability and of that and isn't it interesting that the friends of our Lord who heard more about his teaching of the resurrection than anybody else failed to remember that teaching failed to apply that teaching completely forgot that teaching whereas his enemies who were bent on the destruction of all that he had taught were disturbed at the recollection of that teaching above all other teachings did not this deceiver say when he was yet with us destroy this temple in the three days I will build it and they went to Pilate sought a watch to be set over the grave in case they said his friends come by night and steal him away and then things will be worse at the end than they ever were at the beginning but they were hiding behind these words the fear that the recollection of the

Lord's teaching had instilled in their minds and it's not without significance and perhaps not without some lesson to you and to me here today that there are times when the enemies of the Lord are more concerned about his teaching than even his closest followers in the world well if that is a general application of the problems that may confront you and I in life today the difficulties and the problems and the dilemmas and the providence that I mentioned can we come a bit closer to home maybe and apply it more personally to each one of ourselves well let's try and I just want to mention three or four things in this very short service this morning first of all this the problem and the burden that many people carry with reference to the sins in their own lives you know that this was the problem that has confronted man throughout the ages how shall man be just with God or justified before God what can I do with the problem of my own sin the greatest problem of all the sin that indwells me and I can't get away from it and no matter what I try or where I go it is there I carry it with me wherever I am and whatever I do and you know that there are people who try many ways of eliminating this problem and no matter how they try it still confronts them it rises up before them like this great move of a stone who is going to move it who can deal with it and maybe there are people here today who are confused because of this problem because of this difficulty and this dilemma that they have the problem of unforgiven sin no matter what you try no matter what the resolutions and no doubt there are many resolutions in many hearts here today no matter what you set out to achieve it is with you and you cannot get rid of it who is going to eliminate it the problem may be of unconquered sin perhaps this bothers you today more than anything else and if you know your own heart

[22 : 01] I have no doubt that it bothers you more than anything else perhaps having set out on the life of grace knowing that the Lord's sanctifying spirit was going to cleanse you from all sin and here you are today sin welling up may be as never before the things that you thought had been destroyed they weren't destroyed after all they're there and the race in their heads may be as never before who's going to move that stone and you're confronted day by day with a struggle which is unremitting in its intensity this conflict that you have this running battle that you have this struggle this war this conflict with sin in your life and the alarming thing is this that very often the plea that comes on the lips of sin seems to speak louder than the power and the ability of God to deal with sin is that not the case do you not find yourself at times so much in the grip of this sin that you lose sight of the word of

God and the promise of God you lose sight of the efficacy of the work of Jesus Christ as the savior of sinners that his blood will cleanse us from all sin this is God's answer to our problem God was in Christ reconciled the world unto himself God alone can justify the sinner who believes in Christ God alone has the power to deal with the sin and with your problem with reference to sin in this world in your heart God alone has the way of acceptance God alone has provided the way of justification the way of peace and the way of blessing God has the answer to this question and as that grave that morning testified to the women that he had risen with power victorious over death and over the grave risen into the newness of life with resurrected power so the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ comes to you and to me with that same glorious message today the Lord is risen and the Lord is ascended to the right hand of God a prince and a saviour to give repentance and remission of sins to many God has the answer to the problem of sin in your life then there is secondly this the burden of a difficult providence now I don't need to spend too much time on this but I'm sure that there are people today who are really burdened with the thought of tomorrow it's not just what you have today it's it's as you look if God spares you to the end of this day and it's almost like a snowball there is this multiplying effect of the problem as you look beyond the present and as you try to peer into the future you see everything so so dark and so difficult it seems to be impossible for you to see the way out of this particular dilemma that you find yourself in perhaps some illness in your own life and some loved one's life perhaps a family problem a crisis within the four walls of your own home perhaps something personal to yourself that no one in the world knows of but yourself but as you see it your way seems to be completely hedged in but do you remember this that in the midst of all that

God lives and God reigns in the midst of all the changes that are taking place and perhaps changes that leave you maybe bowed down today and burdened with this particular load yourself do you realize what the psalmist said as he considered all these changes in his own life and around him but God lives he said blessed be the rock of my salvation and if there's anything at all in life that you and I ought to be learning it is this and as we stand on the beginning of our new year we ought to remember this as well that everything yes everything is a broken system but God is the rock of the ages he alone is the fountain of life he alone is the unchanging and the unchangeable one and he alone is the one who bids you today come to himself with whatever burden and problem this is he alone reminds you that in the midst of all these things he is in control and he says this to all those whose love and whose devotion have been one to himself all things work together for good to them that love

God who are the called according to his purpose then there's one other thing I want to mention something I've no doubt that perplexes each one of us here who loves the name of the Lord and the cause of Jesus Christ not just the problem of sin in your own life but the problem of evil in the world in which you live as you consider the flood of ungodliness that seems to be pouring into every community in our land as you consider the opposition to the gospel of the Lord and the risen Jesus Christ as you consider the articulateness with which the enemies of Christ advance their own cause and seem to defeat and destroy every attempt that is made to advance the cause of the Lord Jesus Christ you know just as these Jews sought

[29 : 25] Roman soldiers to stand guard over the tomb of Jesus so there are people like that standing guard over the gospel of Christ not to defend it but to keep it as it were entombed entombed standing guard over the risen and the triumphant Lord Jesus Christ standing guard over the truth and the proclamation of the gospel there are people who go to any length to see that the cause of Christ is defeated a minister was once told by a man in one of the other professions if I ever find myself he said in the same community as yourself I will do everything in my power to resist

the cause that you represent make no mistake about it there are many people like that and their number seems to be increasing and you and I are living in an area where the cause of the Lord Jesus Christ is being opposed and in some cases even being ridiculed but my friend God has already acted God has already revealed the emptiness of the tomb and that is a central fact of the Christian message that we proclaim and will be proclaimed to the end of the ages the Lord is risen and there have been some men and women who have passed by the grave of Jesus Christ and seen and recognized its emptiness seen the emptiness of the grave testifying to the fullness of victory and power and life and blessedness let me mention some of them to you George Whitefield passed by it Martin Luther passed by it John Knox passed by it the Wesley's passed by it Charles Haddon Spurgeon passed by Murray McChain passed by they were filled with the thought of the greatness and the glory and the graciousness and the love of God and they went out with that message they confronted an unbelieving world with that message they faced the ungodliness of the land they took the ungodliness of the land on face to face in the power of the risen Lord and they were triumphant in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ men were delivered from the graves of their own sin ruined lives the sepulchre in which they dwelt were opened by the power of his grace and this is God's answer to you and to me today who is going to move the stone who is going to help us in our conflict in our battle for the Lord Jesus Christ our help is in the Lord's great name do you believe that and does that give you confidence to step out into the year that has now begun one other word in conclusion there is of course the problem of your own weakness your own inability of your own insufficiency and may God grant that each one of us each day that we live may recognize that so that our hope and our trust may be in him may God save us from becoming strong in ourselves may we go on from this day as never before to live in distrust of ourselves but in trust in him to lean not upon our own understanding not upon our own ingenuity not upon our own ability to do this or to do that may we learn as Paul asked

Timothy to learn to be strong in the grace that is in the Lord Jesus Christ you face your problems and your difficulties with your own solutions and your own strength and you'll never overcome them you face them in the strength and in the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and as the Lord said to Isaiah the mountain will become a plain through and the rough places will become smooth may we then enter 1988 in the strength of the Lord casting all our cares upon him looking to the one with whom all things are possible and the one who can make things happen for you and for me for his cause here in

[35 : 12] Stornoway in Lewis in Scotland and throughout the world and may God grant that you and I may see as the days unfold the stone rolled away and revealing to the eye of faith more and more the glory of the triumph of Christ and the victory of his death and of his resurrection over sin and over the grave and may you and I be empowered to live in his name and for the honour of his cause and may we live looking as well to the coming of this great saviour who has said that he will come again to judge this world let us pray bless us O God we thank thee for thy word and we pray that we may see in the hand of the spirit of the living

God that word prospering Christ riding forth triumphant in the chariot of the gospel O do thou make those who are thine enemies make them thy friends those who are thy foes bring them into thy kingdom to become soldiers of the Lord Jesus Christ bless each one of us here today undertake for us and guide us from this day forth with thy counsel may we seek O God the honour of thy glorious name and the forgiveness of our sins in Christ's name Amen