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From Rock to Cornerstone

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Have you ever watched a movie or read a book that left you hanging? Or ended in a different way than you expected? A few years ago, I read the book, *We Were Liars*. It followed a teenage girl who was from a wealthy family. They seemed perfect on the outside, spending their summers on a private island with her cousins and close friends. They created a pack, calling themselves, “the Liars.” One summer there is a mysterious accident and Cadence suffers memory loss and debilitating headaches. When she returns to the island, she tries to piece together what happened that summer. I don’t want to give the book away, once you find out the truth you suddenly rethink the entire story you have just read. It reframes the entire story. It is emotionally unresolved, with no neat closure. You’re not left asking “*what happened?*” but rather “*how do I process what happened?*”

Or, if you’ve seen *The Truman Show* starring Jim Carrey—it’s about a man who doesn’t realize his entire life is a scripted reality TV show. As he begins to notice things aren’t quite right, he discovers that everything around him has been controlled since birth. The final scene of *The Truman Show* is simple, quiet, and powerful visually. After

sailing across the “ocean,” Truman’s boat hits what looks like the sky—but it’s actually a painted wall. The horizon is fake, the sky is something he can touch. Truman finds the edge of his world and walks out through a door into the real world, the unknown. We don’t see what’s on the other side. We may ponder: Does he adjust well to real life? Is he overwhelmed or relieved? Does he reconnect with real relationships? The film *cuts to black* right after he leaves—so we never know. What comes next?

The account of Jesus’ crucifixion and resurrection is found in all four gospels. The empty tomb is recalled by all four writers, and yet Mark’s account has an abrupt ending, or what may seem like one. Some of the most ancient authorities bring the book to a close at the end of verse 8. This morning I read until verse 7, verse 8 goes: “So they went out and fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.” One authority concludes the book with a shorter ending added on, that says “And all that had been commanded them they told briefly to those around Peter. And afterward Jesus himself sent out through them, from east to west, the sacred and imperishable proclamation of eternal salvation.” In other authorities verses 9–20 follow immediately after verse 8, though the passage is sometimes marked as being doubtful. I will leave that for you to read.

As Mark writes, three women, with spices, were heading to the tomb this first day of the week. As they're walking they're talking about how are they going to roll the stone away from the entrance of the tomb. They are not expecting a resurrection. They have spices to anoint the body, indicating that the women expected to find Jesus' body in the tomb. Sure, they are going to the tomb out of love and devotion to Jesus, to care for him in his death, but they are limited in their imagination. They have been with Jesus, they have listened to the same predictions of his death, his resurrection. Why do the women expect him to be in the tomb?

And how come they are talking about how to roll the stone away? Wouldn't that have been a thought before now, maybe as they're buying the spices, or even if they have talked about it before and are now talking about it on the way, what are they expecting to do about it once they get there. Are they thinking, hey, if Joseph rolled the stone against the door, surely we can roll it back? But tombs are usually sealed with a large rock and fancy tombs often had a disk-shaped rock similar to a millstone which was rolled back and forth in a channel. The channel sloped towards the opening so that it was easy to cover the hole but difficult to remove the stone and uncover it.

Their question implies an expectation that someone must step in and act. They are not simply seeking information

about the stone itself, but are instead expressing a sense of despair and helplessness in the face of an overwhelming obstacle: “Who will be there to help us with this impossible task?” This was going to be a real issue to roll the stone away. It then says, “When they looked up.” This takes us back to two times that Jesus raised his eyes to heaven before performing a miracle in Mark 6:41 when he took the five loaves and two fishes, looked up to heaven, and blessed and broke the loaves and in Mark 7:34 when he looked up to heaven and said “be opened” healing a deaf and mute individual. Mark is hinting at an expectation of something miraculous. And when the women look up, they realize the stone has been rolled away, not what they expected. A miracle. In a moment, everything they believed about how the story would end was undone. The stone was already rolled away. The tomb was already empty. Death had already been defeated. The biggest obstacle that they imagined at that time, for the stone, God had already dealt with. But we know that wasn’t all that God had done. What they believed to be their biggest obstacle not only did God take care of that, but he went above and beyond it.

They enter the tomb and see a young man, dressed in a white robe, an angelic type figure, and they are alarmed. He says, you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth. You might think this seeking is completely well-motivated. They went to care for his body...you might say, a very honorable thing

to do. But the way Mark writes it, their seeking of Jesus, is driven by human concerns, not the concerns of God. They heard Jesus' predictions and yet, going to anoint His' body indicates they didn't expect a miraculous power of the kingdom to break forth. They are not to be alarmed, God has raised Jesus from the dead. The young man is saying Open you eyes, you saw him buried here. Do you see him anymore? No, he has been raised from the dead! Go, tell the disciples and Peter!

Isn't Peter one of the disciples. Remember Peter's denial of Jesus? The angel is saying, even Peter, Peter who denied Jesus, tell him. The disciples, including Peter, continue to belong to him. A powerful note of grace. That no matter what you have done, you are never too far gone for Jesus. Remember that!

They are to go to Galilee where they will see Jesus. And what did they do? Not what you expected! As Mark writes, "they went out, fled the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them, and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid." And that's how the gospel of Mark ends, or how some versions end. That's it? What kind of ending is that?

We probably expected the women to go away with joy and tell the disciples, who then told others, but this ending may come as a shock. But we know they didn't flee in terror and not tell anyone, or at least, they eventually did tell

someone, for we know about it today. But with this ending, is Mark challenging us, as readers and hearers to assume the responsibility of telling the good news to everyone? Is Mark showing that ultimately Christian faith does not rest upon signs and miracles, even appearances of the risen Lord?

There are other endings to this gospel which are in many Bibles, that I am not going to go through with you today, but if you would like, Spencer has done a sermon on the endings that you can look up. But I will quote something that he said during his sermon:

“To be a Christian is to trust what the Bible says. But what if the Bible, whether by incident or perhaps even by design, does not, in some cases like this case, give us an easy place to stand? If you feel like these options do not give you an obvious decision, maybe that is where God’s Word wants you to be. What if the faith that the Bible demands is much riskier? What if the Bible intends us to do something more like take a leap rather than stand still? Because if it was perfectly black and white, seamlessly clear, unquestionable and certain, would it be faith? And if that causes discomfort or decentres you, perhaps that is the kind of effect Mark’s ending is trying to produce (whether by the intention of the human author or divine author). Its purpose is not to harm faith but to deepen it.”

When the women went to the tomb they expected the

stone to be there, to face a stone that seemed to say: it's over. And if we're honest with ourselves, we know something about stones like that. We know what it feels like to stand before something that seems immovable. And so, what do we do with the unexpected, the immovable? An unexpected diagnosis, a job loss, a sudden death...a grief that lingers longer than we expected. A relationship that falls apart, a door that suddenly closes...Or even the everyday moments—a changed plan, a disappointment, a conflict, a quiet feeling of being left out...A silence from God that we don't understand...What do we do when life doesn't go the way we thought it would? We know what it is to ask: Who will roll this stone away? But Easter begins in that very question. Because when the women came to the tomb, carrying their spices and their sorrow, expecting to find death where they had left it, they discovered something unexpected. The stone that sealed the tomb, that seemed to declare the end, that held all the weight of grief, fear, and finality, was rolled away, a testimony of God's power. The tomb was empty. Jesus is not just gone—He is alive. The empty tomb shows us that death has been emptied of its power by the risen Christ. God raised Jesus from the dead - Jesus is alive!! As the women discovered, God can do anything beyond our biggest imagination.

Before they arrived. Before they asked. Before they could do anything about it —God had already acted. And when

they looked inside, the tomb was empty. Jesus was not there. He is risen. The turning point of everything. This is the moment that transforms every stone we have carried along the way. Because the resurrection is not just an event to remember — it is a reality that reshapes how we understand every part of our lives. And here is what you are invited to carry with you: the stone was not rolled away so that Jesus could get out...it was rolled away so we could see in. So that we could see death is not the end, hope is not lost, God is still at work, even when all seems finished. God is always working — often in ways we cannot yet see, often before we even arrive at the place of our deepest need. So, what happens when things don't meet our expectations?

Don't pretend it doesn't hurt. Don't rush past the grief, the confusion, or the questions. Because the women didn't either—they came carrying spices and sorrow. But don't stop at the stone. When things don't meet our expectations, we are invited to trust that God is already at work in ways we cannot yet see. Before we arrive. Before we understand. Before we have the strength to do anything about it—God has already gone ahead of us. Because of the resurrection, we are not just people trying to survive hard things—we are people who live in the power of a risen Christ.

It means learning to bring our questions to Him: “Who will

roll this stone away?” It means acknowledging that what feels like the end... may not actually be the end. That what looks like silence... does not mean absence. That what seems immovable to us... is not immovable to God. And it means choosing daily, moment by moment, to trust not in what we see... but in who God is. Because the resurrection shows us this: God does His greatest work in places we least expect it—in tombs, in endings, in moments that feel final. So when life doesn’t go the way we thought it would, keep walking. Keep looking up. Keep trusting that the same God who rolled the stone away is still moving in our lives today.

Easter is not an unresolved ending. It is not a story that leaves us wondering what comes next. Easter is the moment where God steps into the story and rewrites the ending entirely, all for love’s sake.