

Easter Sunday

April 20, 2014

Title: Seeing Is Believing

Text: Mark 16:1-8

Summary: God's resurrection of Jesus is a story affirmed by eyewitness testimony. The big question is whether the eyewitness's seeing is adequate for your believing!

Eyewitnesses

Google Glass:

Just this past week Google put its latest gadget on the market: Google Glass. On April 15th the public was given the first opportunity to buy those newfangled glasses with a camera and viewing screen attached to the right temple. If you missed out, don't worry: you'll be seeing more of them in the near future!

The idea of a computer that you wear on your face isn't exactly new. (show image of Borg.)

Google's version was first introduced in 2011. It weighed in at 8 pounds. The current version weighs less than 2 ounces. In May 2012 Google demoed it shooting live video. It went on sale in 2013 to testers and developers for a cool \$1500.

And it is not without controversy. It takes pictures with the wink of your eye. It takes live video. It uploads information to the web. While you can do the same with a smartphone, you still have to get the phone out and point its camera. With Google Glass all you have to do is look around.

Irrefutable Evidence?

So why would we put up with such intrusive technology? Perhaps part of the reason has to do with the power of "seeing." You know the old saying, "Seeing is believing." Police cars already sport dash-mounted video cameras. Some officers are outfitted with video cameras in their shirt pockets, designed to record their every move. We see surveillance cameras in stores and parking lots, at intersections, in our parks and over our sidewalks. Our comings and goings are well documented.

The ancient historian Heraclitus wrote: "Eyes are surer witnesses than ears." If we want to know what happened, there's nothing better than seeing it for ourselves, live or recorded for posterity!

Eyewitnesses:

Of course, ancient writers had no recourse to cameras or recorders. No wonder, then, that for them the testimony of an eyewitness carried such importance! In the preface to his gospel Luke writes:

Luke 1:1-2 NIV

Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us, just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eyewitnesses and servants of the word.

Luke's story of Jesus -- His life, death and resurrection -- was entirely based upon eyewitness testimony from people who had been with Jesus.

His most important source was the Gospel of Mark, undoubtedly one of the "accounts" that he says was "handed down" to him. Look closely at Mark's Gospel and you see that time and again he tips us off as to the eyewitness sources of the stories he relates.

His primary source is Peter. Papias, who lived in the generation that overlapped the last of the eyewitnesses to Jesus, tells us:

The Elder used to say: Mark, in his capacity as Peter's interpreter, wrote down accurately as many things as he recalled from memory -- though not in an ordered form -- of the things either said or done by the Lord.

And when Peter wasn't present, we find Mark identifying those who were. Nowhere is this more evident than in the most important part of his story: Jesus' death and resurrection.

The Women's Story

"Were you there when they crucified my Lord?"

Mark anchors his story of Jesus' death on the cross upon the eyewitness testimony of those who were there:

Mark 15:37-41 NIV

With a loud cry, Jesus breathed his last.

The curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. And when the centurion, who stood there in front of Jesus, saw how he died, he said, "Surely this man was the Son of God!"

Some women were watching from a distance. Among them were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joseph, and Salome. In Galilee

these women had followed him and cared for his needs. Many other women who had come up with him to Jerusalem were also there.

He names three of the many women who had followed Jesus to Jerusalem, and had been brave enough to follow Him out of the city to the hill where He died:

- Mary Magdalene
- Mary, mother of James and Joseph
- Salome

Peter, we know, was not there. He was in hiding somewhere in Jerusalem. But Mark tells the story from the perspective of those who were. Mark's word that is translated "watching," is *theoreo*, from which we get our word "theater." It means "to be a spectator," "look at," "observe," "watch," "see" with physical eyes. They were, God's "Google Glasses" for us.

"Were you there when they laid Him in the grave?"

We find two of these same women at Jesus' grave an hour or two later:

Mark 15:46-47 The Message

Having already purchased a linen shroud, Joseph took him down, wrapped him in the shroud, placed him in a tomb that had been cut into the rock, and rolled a large stone across the opening. Mary Magdalene and Mary, mother of Joses, watched the burial.

Once again, Mark uses the word, *theoreo*. The women were present and they were all eyes, taking careful note of everything that Joseph and his servants did with Jesus' body.

Notice how Mark leaves no gaps in the story. The two Mary's and Salome watched Jesus die on the cross. The same two Mary's now watch as he is hastily buried in a rock-cut tomb not far from the place of crucifixion.

The tombs of that day were carved out of solid rock, with a small opening that led into one or more burial chambers. The opening was usually no more than three feet square. And once a body had been placed in the tomb, the mourners placed a large stone over the opening to prevent animals or grave robbers from gaining easy entrance. The last thing that the women saw on Friday afternoon was Joseph and his helpers rolling a large stone across the entrance to the tomb.

God's Google Glasses didn't miss a thing.

Early Sunday Morning:

So it's no surprise that we find these same women -- all three of them -- returning to the same place on Sunday morning:

Mark 16:1-3 NIV

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. Very early on the first day of the week, just after sunrise, they were on their way to the tomb and they asked each other, "Who will roll the stone away from the entrance of the tomb?"

This is their story. No one else is there to live it or tell about it. These three women went out on Saturday evening, just after sunset, and purchased spices for Jesus' funeral. These three women made their plan to go to the tomb early the next morning. These three women got up before the sun, gathered up the spices, and walked out of the city to the tomb in the garden beneath that hill where Jesus died.

They even give us a glimpse into their conversation: "Who will roll the stone away...?"

God's Google Glasses.

Seeing Is Believing

What the women saw:

But when they got to the tomb, they were in for a surprise:

Mark 16:4 NIV

But when they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had been rolled away.

When they entered the already-open tomb they discovered something even more surprising: somebody was waiting for them inside the tomb!

Mark 16:5 NIV

As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man dressed in a white robe sitting on the right side, and they were alarmed.

Imagine the shock of stooping down to crawl through the opening of a grave. Your eyes have not had the chance to adjust to the dark. Only a little bit of light streams in through the small square entrance behind you. And in the gloom you discover that you're not alone! A stranger in a white robe is sitting next to where the body is supposed to be.

Picture three women huddled in sheer terror against the far wall, trying to decide whether or not to make a break for it.

What the women heard:

Then the white robed person broke the silence:

Mark 16:6 NIV

"Don't be alarmed," he said. "You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him."

"He has risen! He is not here. Look for yourselves!"

Never in a million years would any of them had imagined this news! They had come looking for the body of their Teacher and Lord. They had brought the spices for a proper and honorable burial. Their biggest concern had been simply getting into the tomb.

Now the young man challenges them to *keep on looking, keep on seeing*. They are God's Google Glasses -- staring wide-eyed and terrified into God's New Creation. They are the very first human beings to hear that Death's grip has been broken, that Sin's power has been destroyed. They were the first human beings to learn that the ancient promise had begun to be fulfilled:

1 Corinthians 15:54-57 The Message

Then the saying will come true:

Death swallowed by triumphant Life!

**Who got the last word, oh, Death?
Oh, Death, who's afraid of you now?**

It was sin that made death so frightening and law- code guilt that gave sin its leverage, its destructive power. But now in a single victorious stroke of Life, all three-- sin, guilt, death-- are gone, the gift of our Master, Jesus Christ. Thank God!

What the women did:

The final thing that the young man did was command the three women to go tell their story:

Mark 18:7 NIV

“But go, tell his disciples and Peter, ‘He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you. ’”

Their first response was quite the opposite:

Mark 16:8 NIV

Trembling and bewildered, the women went out and fled from the tomb. They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid.

Can you see them, tumbling over each other to squeeze out through the tiny door to the tomb? Can you see them hitching up their skirts and making a run for it? Can you blame them?

Unfortunately, Mark's Gospel in its current form ends right there. You will notice that well-meaning scribes supplied several "endings," parts of them clearly modeled on the other gospels. Most likely the original ending of Mark's Gospel was in fact lost somewhere along the line. In any event, we know that soon enough the women overcame their terror and began telling their story. We know from the other gospels that they did in fact inform the disciples. We know that Peter and John raced each other to the tomb. We know that Jesus appeared to Mary Magdalene, one of the three women who discovered the empty tomb.

God's Google Glasses!

Seeing is Believing?

So what about that old saying, "Seeing is believing." Did God's Google Glasses accurately capture the breath-taking discovery of His New Creation bursting into a world of death and decay? Did a cemetery become the first appearance of a new Garden of Eden? Can you and I "see" through the eyes of those three women what God did on Easter morning? Is **their** seeing adequate for **our** believing?

I think about those three eyewitnesses:

- Women in a man's world -- not considered dependable enough to give testimony in a Jewish court.
- Jews in a Roman world -- powerless and oppressed, living under permanent foreign occupation.
- Members of a spiritual movement whose leader had been put to death by the religious authorities.

When these three women got up that morning they had nothing to sell, no program to advance, no revolution to stir up. They were nobodies with no greater agenda than finishing a funeral. When confronted with the empty tomb and the announcement that

Jesus was risen from the dead, they didn't turn to each other and say, "I told you so!" No, they ran in terror, with no idea of what had happened. In other words, they were just the right people to serve as God's Google Glasses.

Which raises just one question: Is **their** seeing adequate for **our** believing?