

Who Will Roll The Stone Away?

The holidays are supposed to be a time of celebration, but the challenges of life don't magically disappear during the holidays. So on Sunday Robert Ferguson shared some biblical principles that can help us face – and facedown – our problems during this holiday season and beyond.

1. Warm-up Question: How as your Thanksgiving?
2. Worry is a killer. A great percentage of illnesses are related to worry and anxiety and stress. Studies indicate that 38% of all deaths are heart related and many of those are related to hypertension, high blood pressure, and anxiety. Worry has been linked to cancer, lung ailments, accidents, cirrhosis, gastrointestinal illness, and suicide. And 3/4 of all visits to primary care physicians are stress-related complaints or disorders.
 - a. What causes you the most worry in your life?
 - b. How does worry tend to manifest in your body?
 - c. If worry is a killer, why do we do it? Is worry optional?
3. In a moment, we'll read our Gospel story, which takes place at a time when Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome were in a place of great loss, worry, and anxiety. Jesus had just been crucified and they were worried what would happen to them, to the other disciples, to Jesus' mother, and to the whole Jesus Movement that meant so much to them. On top of that, they were grieving the death of their beloved friend, teacher, and Savior – Jesus. They were eyewitnesses to his brutal execution. They were buried under stress, grief, and anxiety.
 - a. When in your life have you experienced the deepest stress from grief? How would you describe what that feels like?
 - b. Stress and grief is not always the result of a physical death. Sometimes it's the death of a dream. The three women in our Gospel passage not only lost Jesus, they lost the dream of the Jesus Movement. When in life have you experienced the death of a dream? How would you describe what that felt like?
 - c. With the foregoing as background, let's now read Mark 16:1-8, as printed on p. 3.
4. On the way to the tomb, it's clear the women were not expecting resurrection. They were not looking for a miracle. They were not looking for a blessing. They had accepted what had happened to Jesus. Robert said, "Sometimes we give up too much on life based solely on what it looks like to our physical eyes. . . . It seems as if in the midst of their grieving, [the women] had forgotten who Jesus said he is."

- a. For example, in John 14:6, Jesus said, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” What does this tell us about who Jesus is?
 - b. In John 6:35, Jesus said, “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.” What does this tell us about who Jesus is?
5. Instead of focusing on who Jesus is (and all the possibilities that represents), the women in our Gospel passage were preoccupied with their immediate worry. As they made their way to the tomb, “They asked each other, ‘Who will roll the stone away from the entrance of the tomb?’” Mark 16:3. Not only was the stone massive, but Matthew’s Gospel tells us Pilate ordered the tomb sealed and posted guards. So the stone represented a huge problem for the women, an obstacle, a barrier, just one more massive problem on top of everything else they were facing.
- a. Robert said, “What normally breaks us or causes us to want to give up is not the first problem; normally it’s the problem that comes after the first problem. When we’re trying to move forward in life, it seems like something else just gets in the way.” When in your life have you faced 3 or 4 problems all at once, layered on top of each other? How did that feel?
 - b. When the women arrived at the tomb, Mark 16:4 tells us, “When they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had been rolled away.” In other words, as Robert pointed out, the Problem of Verse 3 became the Victory of Verse 4. That prompted Robert to ask each of us, “Are you going to hang around for the ‘next verse’ of your life?” Well, are you? With whatever problem(s) you’re facing right now, do you believe God has already given you the victory? Why or why not?
 - c. To the women, the stone represented death and defeat, but God turned it into victory and a new beginning. From this, we’re meant to learn an important lesson. As Robert said, “Your mess ups are not the end of the world. Your failures are not the end of the world. If you don’t get the job, it’s not the end of the world. If you don’t get the raise, it’s not the end of the world. If your marriage is struggling, it’s not the end of the world. If they won’t support you, it’s not the end of the world.” Because Jesus overcame death and defeat, so can you. So how would you complete this sentence right now to make it personal and applicable to what you’re facing: If _____ does (or doesn’t) happen, it’s not the end of the world.
6. The stone not only represents external circumstantial problems in our life, it also represents our negative inner perspectives. To experience victory, we also need to let God roll away those stones. In Ezekiel 36:26-27, God offers this promise, “I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you. . . .” What inner perspective is a massive stone/barrier to forward progress in your life? Are you

willing to let God roll it out of the way and replace it with a victorious perspective?
What does that new perspective look like?

Mark 16:1-8

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. ²Very early on the first day of the week, just after sunrise, they were on their way to the tomb ³and they asked each other, "Who will roll the stone away from the entrance of the tomb?"

⁴But when they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had been rolled away. ⁵As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man dressed in a white robe sitting on the right side, and they were alarmed.

⁶"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. ⁷But go, tell his disciples and Peter, 'He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.'"

⁸Trembling and bewildered, the women went out and fled from the tomb. They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid.