

The Realistic Resurrection

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Preacher: Rev. George Sinclair

[0 : 00] Father, some of us in the room are very smart, and others of us maybe aren't quite as smart. And so first of all, Father, we ask that your Holy Spirit would help us to think as clearly and see as clearly as we possibly can.

But secondly and most importantly, Father, as your Holy Spirit does this deep work of us to help us to think and to listen and to think and listen and see as best we can, we ask, Father, that you would humble our minds and humble our hearts and humble our wills by the moving of your Holy Spirit. We confess before you, Father, that unless your Holy Spirit, unless you draw us to yourself, we never can truly understand or see the scriptures or even truth and facts themselves, that we are dependent, Father, upon your Holy Spirit moving in our minds and hearts and wills.

You know how strong our tendency to bias and ignorance and self-conceit, how strong these are, even in your people. And so we ask, Father, for a mighty work of your Holy Spirit to soften our hearts, to make us good soil, so that your word will truly enter into us and we will bear much fruit to bring you glory.

And all this we ask in the name of Jesus, your Son and our Savior. Amen. Please be seated. The Bible has been changed so many times over time, has been changed so many times over time that you can't trust it.

[1 : 36] And even though you can't fundamentally trust the Bible, that we actually know what Mark originally wrote, the little bit that we can see from Mark's gospel would be very clearly teaches us that Jesus didn't rise from the dead, that that's not what Mark believed.

And most people believe that what fragments that we do have of Mark were the very, very first fragments which were ever written. And so if, in fact, the gospel of Mark, we hardly know what it originally was, but the little bit of evidence is that there was no resurrection.

If there was no resurrection, then it's quite understandable to believe that really Mark is telling us that Jesus didn't truly die. And some of you who are guests here are wondering why on earth you came to this church on Easter Sunday.

But everything that I've just said are very, very common things that people tell us, that people tell people like me. Often they have to get comfortable with me for a while, but I can often tell just by looking at them that they sort of think that I'm sort of very, very naive to actually believe anything in the Bible because, as I've just said, there was different types of conspiracies by groups to change the wording of the Bible.

The Bible suffered under the many times it was copied, and so error after error after error crept in. But even if you take into account of that, it's just very, very clear from Mark's gospel that there's no resurrection.

[3 : 09] If there's no resurrection, then he didn't die on the cross. It's a very, very common set of beliefs in our culture. And so we're going to look at all of those things. We're going to sort of try to just take some of these questions and put them a little bit in order.

A couple of years ago, I had a great privilege of going to a high school philosophy class, the senior year of high school, grade 12. And the teacher invited me in to sort of be, it was like a roast, the Christian, for an hour and a quarter.

And, you know, I did all right. But afterwards, I've still been hoping that some teacher would invite me back to a class like that. And if I could go back and do a second time, the one problem I had with the thing is that the class was filled with lots of people, and they were asking lots and lots and lots of questions.

And there probably were a few people in the class who were asking genuine questions, but most of it was just like a lot of very, very, you know, they'd actually read, you know, thought about a couple

of things, and they thought they could get Christians and theists with these things as if nobody had ever thought of it before them.

But the main mistake I made is I think if I could go back in time and do it again, or if I ever get asked to do it another time, I'd get them to sort of stop asking like 57 questions and sort of agree on one or two or three or four, and I'd write them on the board, and then I'd hold us and them to it to try to look at the questions.

[4 : 29] And so I'll sort of do that a little bit this morning. Let's just sort of look, first of all, at whether or not Jesus died. Because obviously, if the, I mean, people are completely and utterly correct.

If Mark, in fact, is the earliest gospel, and if Mark tells us that Jesus didn't rise from the dead, then he probably didn't die on the cross, did he? I mean, he either died on the cross and something else happened, or he didn't die on the cross, and it's, if there's no resurrection, maybe he didn't die. Maybe he didn't die on the cross. I mean, really, for agnostics and skeptics, the issue would just be, of course, I mean, duh, of course, it's 2,000 years later, of course he's dead. The issue is, did he die on the cross?

So it'd be very helpful if you take out the Bible. We're going to start by looking at that. And if you turn, if you don't have a Bible with you, there's a few extra ones here. You're welcome to take them. And please turn with me to Mark 16.

Actually, what we're going to do is we're going to look a little bit before Mark 16. Mark chapter 15, verses 33. And that will sort of lead us into chapter 16. And we'll just look at this very, very basic question.

[5 : 35] Did Jesus die on the cross? Did Jesus die on the cross? And we'll begin reading at verse 33 of chapter 15. It goes like this. And when the sixth hour, that's 3 o'clock in the afternoon, had come, there was darkness over the whole land until the whole land until the ninth hour.

And that was 3 o'clock in the afternoon. And at the ninth hour, Jesus cried out with a loud voice, Eli, Eloi, lima sabachthani, which means, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

And some of the bystanders hearing it said, behold, he is calling Elijah. And someone ran and filled a sponge with sour wine, put it on a reed, and gave it to him to drink, saying, wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to take him down.

This comes by the fact that Jesus was speaking an ancient form of Hebrew, a type of Aramaic. And some of the soldiers would have been speaking either Greek or Latin or some other type of native language and then probably picked up Greek.

And it sounds to their ears a little bit like he's saying the name Elijah. And so they've heard rumors of Elijah maybe taking him down. And that's why it's a bit of a language difficulty where you know a little bit of another language, just enough to get it wrong.

[7 : 01] And so that's what happens here. Verse 36, and someone ran and filled a sponge with sour wine, put it on a reed, and gave it to him to drink, saying, wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to take him down.

And Jesus uttered a loud cry, and note here what it said, and breathed his last. So the text begins by saying that Jesus breathed his last, which is a very, very common way of talking about death. I don't know how many of you have been in a deathbed, but when I've been in a deathbed, it's really funny. You're with the family, and it's almost as if in the silence you keep watching them breathe. And you see a person breathe, and then you wait. and sometimes when a person's dying there's a bit of a pause and you wait and you wait and you wait and then they take breath. But then that time comes that they breathe and then you wait and you wait and you wait and you wait and you wait and you wait and you wait and then you realize they haven't breathed again and they've died.

[8 : 04] So actually even in this very, very simple way, in the original thing it would have been very, very obvious because in a crucifixion as the body sinks, it's hard to breathe so the person in agony has to push themselves up to breathe and if they don't push themselves up to breathe, they remain sort of slumped in such a way that it's very difficult, if not impossible, to breathe.

And so they see that Jesus has breathed his last. It's a very, very touching but very powerful description. And the verse 38, and the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom and when the centurion who stood facing him saw that in this way, notice again, what does it say? He breathed his last. The centurion said, truly this man was the son of God. Now, there were also women looking on from a distance among whom were Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of

James the younger and Jose and Salome.

That's three people. It's not that Mary was the mother of these three people, but Mary is the mother of the two young men and Salome. And just sort of pause there. If you go back and read the Gospel of Mark from the beginning to the end, and it would be the topic of another sermon, but this is Mark's sort of gentle way of saying that that's Jesus' mother who's there.

If you go back and read the Gospel of Mark from the beginning to the end, you'll see that earlier on, the second time that Mary's introduced Jesus' mother, that's how she's introduced. And so this is actually very important that three women all have given their historical names and identifiers.

[9 : 44] And maybe that was partially why Mark used the names Mary's children other than Jesus, because if you went looking for Mary, you could ask for this Mary who is the mother of these other children rather than the mother of Jesus, and it might help you to find her.

But we have to always remember when we read the New Testament that there was no television, there were no photographs. So unless you actually had physically seen someone, you wouldn't have any idea in the world what they looked like.

It's well, well, well before the Twitiverse and emails having your picture on them and all that stuff. Some of you, by the way, when you email us, your picture's really old. You need to update your picture a little bit, but that's a separate point.

I mean, maybe you like the way you looked 10 years ago or whatever, and if that's what you want to do, that's fine. But these then were three women who definitely knew who Jesus was, and they're watching all of this.

That's what Mark is saying. Verse 41, And when he was in Galilee, they followed him and ministered to him, and there were also many other women who came up with him to Jerusalem.

[10 : 52] In other words, there's a crowd of women who all knew him very well, who watched all of this happening, and three of them are Mary, Mary the mother of Jesus, and Salome. Verse 42, And when evening had come, since it was the day of preparation, that is, the day before the Sabbath, Joseph of Arimathea, a respected member of the council, who was also himself looking for the kingdom of God, took courage and went to Pilate and asked, and note what he asked for.

He doesn't ask that Jesus could be brought down. He says, Can I have Jesus' body? And it's what that is in the original language. He asked for the body of Jesus. Pilate, verse 44, was surprised to hear that Jesus should have already died.

And that's what the original language is saying. There's some tense issues there in terms of the exact grammar, but Pilate's a bit surprised that Jesus has died already.

So, continuing on, in summoning the centurion, Pilate asked the centurion whether Jesus was already dead. That's another time, three times, just in a few words, that Jesus is dead.

In verse 45, and when Pilate learned from the centurion that Jesus was dead, he granted the corpse to Joseph. And those are all, if you look at the original language, those are all accurate words, and we see they're all put together in a very, very powerful way.

[12 : 15] The body, the body, the body, died, died, died, corpse. And all in the context of a Roman official of centurion, a prominent member of the Sanhedrin and the council. So, we've already seen that the women have seen that Jesus has died.

In verse 46, and Joseph bought a linen shroud, and you buy those to do Jewish embalming in, so Joseph wouldn't have spent the money on this if he didn't think that Jesus was dead.

And taking him down, in other words, they had left Jesus' body on the cross. In fact, it was the Roman custom to, usually, the Jewish leaders were actually asking for a bit of an act of mercy for Jesus and the two other thieves that were crucified with him to have their bodies taken down.

Usually, Roman custom was that the body would be left there for quite a while. As the body rotted and decomposed, animals would eat the bodies, and it was a warning to others not to be troublemakers.

So the soldiers weren't going to mess themselves up with Jesus. The body's hanging there, slumped, not breathing. It's a corpse.

[13 : 23] Joseph takes it down. Obviously, Joseph wouldn't have felt any tremor of pain if Jesus was still alive. It would have been excruciatingly painful to take the body down.

And so, verse 46, and Joseph bought a linen shroud, and taking Jesus down, wrapped him in the linen shroud, and laid him in a tomb, because he's dead, that had been cut out of the rock.

And he rolled a stone against the entrance of the tomb. And Mary, Magdalene, and Mary, ultimately the mother of Jesus, saw where Jesus was laid. And when the Sabbath was passed, these same three women, out of all the women, in Mark's account, just focusing on these three, Mary Magdalene, Mary, ultimately the mother of Jesus, but mentioned here is the mother of James, and Salome, by spices, so that they might go and anoint him.

And this is actually quite a remarkable thing that these women had been doing, were about to do. The body has been dead for two days, it's a Mediterranean climate, it's April, early April, and so the body would have been decomposing for two days, and it would have started to smell.

But these women obviously know that Jesus has died, he's dead. And they saw him die, they saw him stop breathing, they know that he's dead.

[14:45] And they go to anoint the decomposing body of Jesus. Verse two, and very early on the first day of the week when the sun had risen they went to the tomb, because they're expecting him to be in the tomb dead.

And they were saying to one another, who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance of the tomb, said again, and looking up they saw that the stone had been rolled back and it was very large.

And entering the tomb they see a young man sitting on the right side dressed in a white robe and they were alarmed, and for other linguistic reasons we know that it's an angel. And we won't get into that historical aspect of angels for now, just listen to the account.

And this angel said to them, do not be alarmed, you seek Jesus of Nazareth who was crucified, he is risen, he is not here. See the place where they laid him, but go tell his disciples and Peter that Jesus is going before you to Galilee.

There you will see him just as he told you. And here's the really remarkable thing about the story is that they don't all sing, Christ has risen from the dead trampoline over, they don't sing that.

[15:55] They don't say, hallelujah, they don't get down on their knees, they don't pray, they don't do, they don't ask the angels any questions. They flee the tomb for trembling and astonishment had seized them and they said nothing to anyone for they were very afraid.

They were afraid in the original language, it's the idea that they were overwhelmed with great fear. They were terrified. Now, I mean, if you, often when people talk to me about the Bible, what I often really know, I mean, it's not always true, some people, they really know their Bibles backwards and forwards, but often what they do, they just know that Mark doesn't have a resurrection appearance in his gospel, and so they'll say other types of things, but you can't, as I've just shown to you, you can't actually read the account and not get the idea that Jesus is dead.

I mean, he died on the cross. It's very, very clear. It tells them time after time after time after time in the text that Mark is saying that Jesus died, and as a bit of a separate thing, while most people, most scholars would agree that Mark was probably the first, today now, they would agree that Mark was the first gospel that was written, written, and just by, from historical reasons, you can actually, Mark was probably written about 22 years after the death and resurrection of Jesus, but there's actually several books in what we now call the Bible.

There's actually early letters which were written before Mark, and these letters all bear witness of the death and resurrection of Jesus. What we now think of as the letter of James, as the letter of first letter to Corinth, the second letter to Corinth, the first letter to Thessalonians, the second letter to Thessalonians, and Galatians, these all were originally letters written by early Christians to other early Christians, and all of them also say that Jesus died and rose from the dead.

So there's actually quite a few documents, all even preceding this written maybe in the year 55 or 56, that say that Jesus actually died.

[18:04] And so that's my first point, if you want to put it up here on the screen, is that it's very obvious from these early documents, Mark and others, that Jesus really died on the cross.

Jesus really died on the cross. Jesus really died on the cross. You might not know it, and I don't know if we have anybody who's a follower of Islam in the room, and if you are, we're really glad you're here.

And I don't mean to offend by these comments, but in fact, it's a very, it's a fundamental Muslim belief because they believe it's taught in the Quran that in fact, Jesus didn't die on the cross.

I don't know if you know that about your Muslim neighbors or friends. Muslims believe that Jesus didn't die on the cross. Muslims believe that Jesus was taken up to heaven.

Muslims believe that Jesus will return, actually. In a sense, a Muslim could join with a Christian saying, Maranatha, come Lord Jesus, come. I mean, they're obviously more focused on Muhammad and Allah, but Muslims believe that Jesus didn't die on the cross.

[19 : 10] They believe that God took another person, took Jesus out of the hands of the sinful men, put another person on the cross, changed the face of that man so he looked like Jesus and that that man died on the cross.

But Jesus, because he was a great prophet, could not have suffered such a terrible fate as dying on a cross. But we can see here, and with all due respect to Muslims, the Quran was written over 600 years, 700 years maybe, after the death and resurrection of Jesus.

And unless for other reasons you believe the Quran is something which directly comes from God, there's actually no historical reason from an evidential point of view. There's no reason why you should believe the Quran over Mark.

Why would you believe a document written maybe 700 years after compared to a document written 22 years after the death and resurrection of Jesus, which follows other documents written even earlier, which all say that Jesus died on the cross.

And I'm not going to talk later on about the swoon theory about how Jesus didn't really die on the cross. The early evidence here is that Jesus died on the cross.

[20 : 22] And whatever else you have to sort of understand about things, it's, I mean, the evidence would say that Jesus died on the cross. Now, some of you might say, okay, George, George, George, George, George, you got all this from the gospel of Mark?

Oh, George, come on. Like, George, just look at your Bible. Come on, George. Like, here, your Bible goes up to verse 20, you've only read to verse 8, and we all know that, you know, people all know now that verses 9 to 20 probably weren't originally written by Mark, and you know that there's some textual transitional problems between chapter 15 verse 47 and chapter 16 verse 1, and that there's some difference in the evidence, and George, come on, we all know that these early primitive people, they were far more primitive than us, and they were gullible in terms of things like this, and we all know, oh, come on, George, Mark had this huge bias, I mean, so he's gullible, he has this bias, I mean, the Bible text has been changed, who knows how many times, you don't even know if this is the actual text that Mark wrote, like, how on earth are you going ahead and talking about this as if now this is any particular evidence, it's actually really interesting, this happens in lots of people, but they'll say that there's enough evidence in Mark that there's no resurrection, because there's no resurrection appearance, but when you want to talk about something else that goes against their theory, then they say the Bible's worthless, that's just a bit of an aside, but it's a very, very common move that people make unselfconsciously, in a sense, just picking and choosing which bits of the text fit into their theory, and obviously, if we want to be hard-headed and looking at things from evidence, you don't cherry-pick the pieces of evidence that you like, you look at the evidence as it sort of lays out, so you can't really very well say that there's no resurrection appearances, and therefore Jesus didn't rise from the dead, because that's somehow trustworthy, but all this other stuff about him dying on the cross isn't trustworthy, it's, you have to sort of go all the way through it, but let's just look, let's try to pick some of those different things up,

I don't want to leave, have you all leave here unsettled, I mean, I'm not saying anything to you that maybe people haven't said to you already, or that if they haven't said it to you, they think it, you see it in the citizen, you see it, I mean, I hear it all the time once you get to the point where people will have sort of a beginning of an honest conversation with you, let's look again at the text, we'll try to unpack some of these different things, look again at chapter 16 verses 1 to 3, when the Sabbath was passed, Mary Magdalene, Mary called here the mother of James, Salome bought spices so that they might go and anoint him, they believed Jesus is dead, and very early on the first day of the week when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb, and they were saying to one another, who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance of the tomb?

Now what we see here is not people who are looking particularly gullible, we don't see any evidence here of anybody actually believing that Jesus had risen from the dead, everything here, every single person in the story, even these women who had, on one level, they had such a huge respect for Jesus, that while the men were all hiding because they were afraid they were going to be arrested, while the men are all hiding, these women have such a respect for Jesus that they're willing to suffer abuse from the guards, get a tongue lashing from the guards, put themselves in danger, all to handle a corpse which has been decomposing in the Mediterranean for two days, and is going to be

pretty rank, and in fact, they might lose their breakfast several times trying to fulfill the task, it doesn't look like people going because they want to fulfill some type of a resurrection, you know, belief or myth, and then look at the really funny thing at the end, verse 8, and they went out and fled from the tomb for trembling and astonished to seize them, and they said nothing to anyone for they were afraid, like, rather than Mark writing something down which looks very pious, and as if it's, I mean, everything about the account puts the original witnesses in really a bit of a bad light, doesn't it? I mean, you'd sort of expect that if he was gullible and he was just trying to trick us that, I mean, the women would come out looking better than they do, don't you think that?

[25 : 07] And you'd think he'd end it in a different type of way. But, you know, here's the thing, the text doesn't really look at all like Mark's being gullible about it, it looks like he wants to try to emphasize in the most, in quite intimate detail that not only did Jesus die on the cross, but that absolutely nobody expected anything other than a stinking corpse.

And it doesn't come across as very gullible. And then, and here's the thing about bias. I became a Christian, I'm ancient of days and so I'm from, I went to high school in Ontario, they used to go to grade 13, I became a Christian grade 12 and I had lots of conversations with people and all the way through grade 12, all the way through grade 13, all the way through first year university and well into second year university, one of the constant problems that I would have talking to people was that they would try to say that they couldn't, I couldn't, they couldn't listen to what I have to say because of my bias.

And then, believe it or not, in second year sociology, the light bulb went on in my head because I studied Max Weber, one of the founders of sociology, and I started to become familiar with the sociology of knowledge.

And what I learned was that everyone has bias. And all these people who were talking to me, trying to beat me up about bias, they talked as if every time that we were in the room, there was only one person with bias, me.

But the sociology of knowledge says what? Who has bias? Everyone has bias. You don't think atheists have bias? Read Weber, study the sociology of knowledge.

[26 : 56] You don't think Islam or Buddhists or New Age have bias? No, that's not how it works. Every human being has bias. In fact, even at a scientific level with experiments, you look at Heisenberg, and Heisenberg has shown that the problem, even there's going to be always a fundamental limit to scientific knowledge because even the act of observing scientific things changes the reality.

And that, the question then comes back, and for many people, the response to that knowledge of constant bias is a type of cynicism and a type of despair.

fear. But all it's actually asking us to do is do something else. Be humble. Don't think you're God. Be aware of the fact, and that's actually what the Bible would tell you, that the human problem is pride, and that when our pride is pierced, we tend towards cynicism and despair.

And the Bible merely wants us to understand that we're creatures, that as creatures we are limited, and because we're limited we will never know everything, and because of sin there will always be bias, and so the question that needs to come before us is to be humble, not to believe that you can't know things, but to be humble.

And so, Mark has no more bias than anybody who asks questions against it. I mean, the question really would be, is, in fact, excuse me, you know, if you read, I love reading detective novels, I love a novel where somebody dies, and the type of detective novels that I most like are ones often with a fairly damaged type of detective, it doesn't matter if it's male or female, and often in these well-written books that sell lots of copies because we know that it's true of experience, often powerful people, influential people, higher-up people, the betters, you know the betters, you know the people who are better than you, the betters, they don't want to know the truth, they quickly jump to a conclusion, they don't want to know the truth, and what often drives the story is the detective often during having to deal with threats to his or her career, threats to whether or not they're going to have to be put on administrative leave or outright fired, they persevere in knowing the truth because they believe that the evidence doesn't point in a particular way, and so what we see from detective novels, what we see from experience is that in fact it's a common human problem to stop pursuing the truth, and the question isn't whether or not it's just a

[29 : 54] Christian problem, it's a common human problem, which we all at one level, nobody I think ever reads a detective novel identifying with the mindless bureaucrats.

If I'm wrong about that and you say, oh yeah, the thing I love about those novels are the mindless bureaucrats who make up their mind and they're only concerned with their own position in power and how things are going to look on them, those are the people, that's why I read those books, that's me, oh, look at me, maybe that's the case, okay, but I'm guessing that even if in real life you're that mindless bureaucrat fearful of the truth, only concerned with your own position, power, prestige, when it comes to reading these books you identify with the detective seeking truth. In fact, the real question isn't whether or not there's human bias, whether or not there's all these things that want us as human means to stop looking for the truth, the question really is does your philosophy, your theology, does it provide resources and impetus to be more like the detective and less like the bureaucrat?

In fact, that's what we see here in the text, because the text is going to hinge everything on the trustworthiness of Jesus upon the empty tomb, upon evidence.

In fact, the angel says, look and see, look and see. That's this constant refrain in the scriptures is to think, to look, to search, seek the truth.

[31 : 23] Seek the truth. I'm not going to deny that there's just as many Christians who are completely and utterly terrified about truth, will refuse to open their minds, will refuse to ask any questions.

I'm not going to deny that that happens to Christians. I'm just going to say is that when we as Christians do that, we're going against what the Bible tells us to do, which is to say, George, be very careful.

It's very easy for you to be the bureaucrat. I want you to be the detective. That's what the Bible, that's what God is saying in the text. And that's what we see here in Mark, is that Mark even records things in the story that go against his case.

The fact that it's women who are the first ones to see that the grave is empty. The fact that the women don't respond to this thing in a very, very good way, that they disobey the angel, that they're not pious, that they're afraid, that Mark is not afraid to record things that seem to go against his case.

And I would say that the implication is that he just wants to try to get it right. He just wants to try to get it right. And even, you know, even this idea that somehow there's this conspiracy, that there's a group of people who want to try to change the Bible.

[32 : 37] You know, I've heard that all the time. Do you realize that just under a hundred years ago, there actually was an historical, there's an historical case of people trying to do that to the Bible.

Did you know that? It's called Jehovah Witnesses. I'm not making that up. Jehovah Witnesses just decided that there's parts of the Bible that they don't like.

If you read a Jehovah Witness Bible, it will have, in very significant places, it'll be different than your Bible. And they will tell you that their Bible is more accurate.

And that's, I almost said a bad word. That's not true. Sorry, I almost had a Christian equivalent of a Justin Trudeau moment.

And there would have been lots of bad Twitter about me too, and well deserved. Okay, I'm not trying to show I'm middle. I actually am from lower middle class, actually.

[33 : 38] My dad only had a grade 8 education. So anyway, and from Canadian standards, I went to Carleton and Ottawa U, so I didn't go to high-rate universities like Harvard and Yale and all that stuff.

So I have lots stacked against me. Anyway, I completely lost my, where was I? Yes, okay. So, you know, so actually, so people say, oh yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, you know Constantine changed it, or these bishops changed it.

Well, the fact of the matter is, is that Jehovah Witnesses tried to do that. Now, who uses a Jehovah's Witness Bible other than Jehovah's Witness? Nobody. Nobody, as they say on television.

Like, it just hasn't worked. Like, it just hasn't worked. And all this other stuff about the Bible, the fact of the matter is, is that there's no document in ancient times that has more different copies.

Copies not only in Greek, but also in Latin and in many other languages. That part of the reason that we know that Mark was probably written in around the year 55 is that because very shortly after this, lots of other Christians were writing letters, and we have copies of those letters, and they're saying that Mark wrote this time, and John did this, and Peter did this, and this is how Paul died, and it's because the Christians, at their best, following the Bible, aren't afraid of the truth, and so

people study all the different versions of the Bible, and it's correct.

[35 : 03] You know the principle that people use? This is not common knowledge. It's not on the front page of the Citizen or anything like this when they talk about things like the Bible, but if you go back and you read the academic commentaries on this, the principle they use is if you have two early documents that have, and they differ in terms of the wording, what is it that scholars say?

The way bias works is that people will smooth out difficulties, not create difficulties. And so some early scribe, noticing that in chapter 6, Mary's referred to as a certain way, and now seeing that in chapter 15, verse 47, and chapter 16, verse 1, that she's not referred to the same way, and because the scribe doesn't want to cause needless confusion, sort of he looks over his shoulder to the left and the right, and he changes the wording to smooth over the difficulty.

So the rule in scholarship is you take the difficult reading, always. And so when you have, I'm using the ESV, when you use the ESV, this is the result of scholars studying thousands of documents, always taking the difficult reading, not the easy one.

In fact, it's often people like Elaine Pagels and often skeptics who take fanciful interpretation, fanciful things, not the difficult one, believe it or not. And that's why you can have 99.999% that what you read here is a faithful English translation of a document that Mark wrote in the year 55, 22 years after the death and resurrection of Jesus.

Put up the next point, please. The Gospel of Mark is an early and accurate account of Jesus based on eyewitness testimony.

[36 : 57] The Gospel of Mark is an early and accurate account of Jesus based on eyewitness testimony. Just one little, I have to say this, I'm sorry. The fact is that, for instance, Islam, without a tradition of asking hard questions, while Muslims will tell you that the Quran is perfect word for word, just as it came to Muhammad.

The fact of the matter is is that nobody knows the actual proper original text of the Quran. There's three early writers of the Quran.

Muhammad didn't write. Three early writers of the Quran, they don't all have the same bits in the Quran. And because there is no historical tradition of criticism, you actually don't know what's in the Quran.

It's a very, very difficult thing to say to a Muslim. But it's historically correct. Evidentially correct.

Some of you say, but George, okay.

What? You said some interesting things. I hadn't realized that there were thousands of early versions of Mark that you have lots to compare it to. You can go across languages that, you know, okay.

[38 : 17] But even if I grant that the gospel of Mark is an early and accurate account of Jesus based on eyewitness testimony, I mean, come on. It doesn't have a resurrection in it. But it does.

It does, doesn't it? Look, let's look at verses four to seven of chapter 16. And looking up, they saw that the stone had been rolled back. It was very large. And entering the tomb, they saw a young man sitting on the right side, dressed in a white robe, and they were alarmed.

And he said to them, do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth. They use a very concrete historical term. In fact, they even used the denigrated word, the way of denigrating Jesus that would have been common by Jesus' enemies.

Because as some of you have heard me say before, Nazareth was between nowhere and nowhere. So if you were nowhere and you wanted to go to nowhere, you'd go through Nazareth. And so when they said Jesus of Nazareth, it was like saying Jesus of nowhere.

I sometimes have joked that if you're, I used to be in Eganville and Combermere and all those areas. There's a little place called Brudenell. Nobody lives in Brudenell anymore. There's a Roman Catholic church. It used to be a rectory.

[39 : 23] I don't think a priest even lives there. And if you're sort of between, going between nowhere and nowhere, you pass right through Brudenell. And so it's like saying Jesus of Brudenell. It's the opposite of saying Jesus of Harvard.

Jesus of Yale, of Oxford, you know, of Stanford. Jesus of the upper class. Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus of nowhere who was crucified. The angel says he's risen. And look at that how I put it. He has risen. He is not here. He has risen.

He is not here. Here's the thing. The Bible, you can put it up. In fact, I said the Bible here, but I should really say Mark. Mark teaches two complementary truths.

The tomb was empty. The tomb was empty. Why? Because Jesus, in the fullest human sense, was resurrected. And I say in the fullest human sense by meaning whatever it means to be part of a human being, he was resurrected.

[40 : 21] Whatever it means for a human being to die, that died in Jesus. Whatever it means to be a human being and rise, whatever it means. And you can't have human beings without bodies.

Sorry, I was joking a little bit before. I love what Woody Allen said about all these people who are always saying, oh, well, so-and-so has died and they live on in people's memories. And Woody Allen said, I don't want to die and live in people's memories.

I want to die and live in my apartment. Living in memories ain't any fun. I want to live in my apartment. I want to live in my condo. And so, you know, it teaches this complementary truth that the tomb is completely and utterly empty and that the reason that the tomb is completely and utterly empty is that Jesus in the fullest human sense, body, soul, spirit, mind, heart, the same person that he rose from the dead.

And that's why the tomb is empty. And this is the fundamental empirical claim of the Christian faith. It's the undeniable fact that all the historical evidence, and this not only includes historical evidence, which we now have put together with, this used to have sort of like gold edging, and it's all put, look, fancy, that original, these old scrolly documents.

But it's also, if you read Josephus, if you read Latin and Greek historians, they all make the claim that Christians proclaimed that the tomb was empty and that Jesus had risen from the dead.

[41 : 54] And the easiest way to refute such a bald historical claim was to produce the body. And no body has ever been produced, and no evidence of any existence of Jesus, earthly existence of Jesus afterwards, has ever been produced.

Nada. Nothing. And Mark here proclaims, in the face of the skepticism of the women, it's a very, very appropriate gospel for us to read in Ottawa in 2014, in the face of skepticism.

So the text here shows these complementary truths, that Jesus died and he rose again. And so here's the thing, to wrap this up, to put up the final point, the death and resurrection of Jesus is a full vindication of him.

See, there's always the so what question, right? Okay, so what? Huh, so what? Now what? Like, so what? Well, here's the thing.

Notice back in the text. Notice verses 6 and 7, what the angel says. Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He is risen. He is not here. See the place where they laid him.

[43 : 11] But go tell his disciples and Peter that he is going before you to Galilee. There you will see him. Look at these five words. Just as he told you.

Just as he told you. In a sense, in fact, actually, if you read the book in the blog that I mentioned by Nabil Qureshi, you'll see that in his intellectual journey, once he came to understand that Jesus really had actually died on the cross, and then suspected that he might have risen from the dead, and then he goes and he rereads the Gospels with a very, very different light.

And in a sense, this is an invitation now, oh, just as he said, to go back to the beginning of Mark and read it from the beginning. Because the resurrection vindicates who Jesus is.

I don't have time now because of the time, but you go back and you'll see that time and time and time again in the Gospel of Mark, in Mark chapter 8, 31, in Mark chapter 9, verse 9, Mark chapter 9, verse 31, Mark chapter 10, verses 32 to 34, and in chapter 14, verse 25, Jesus says he's going to die and rise from the dead.

And then that leads us to this final thing. What is it that fundamentally it is that Jesus said? I don't have to guess what he said, what the purpose of his coming and what the purpose of his death and resurrection would be.

[44 : 39] Jesus tells us, Mark's Gospel is structured around three famous I came sayings, where Jesus just very simple, I don't have to try to guess that, just why did Jesus come to do all of these things?

Let's turn to the beginning of the Gospel, Mark chapter 1, verse 38. Mark chapter 1, verse 38. Actually, we'll begin in verse 35.

And rising very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus departed and went out to a desolate place, and there he prayed. And Simon and those who were with him searched for him, and they found him and said to him, everyone is looking for you.

And he said to them, let us go on to the next towns, that I may preach there also, for that is why I came out. That's why I came. And the rest of Mark's Gospel, it's so when you read the Gospel, you go to the end and you go, wow, maybe Jesus really, the tomb really is empty, he rose from the dead.

And it's all just as Jesus said. And you go back and you see, oh, one moment, right at the very beginning, Jesus is going to say, Mark's capturing all of Jesus' preaching. And Jesus came to preach. He came to tell us all about what he's going to accomplish.

[45 : 48] And then in my version of the Bible, I don't think you even have to turn the page, you're just on the same page. Chapter 2, verse 17, right close to the beginning of the Gospel, you have the second I came statement.

And what is it? And when Jesus heard it, he said to them, those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.

So Mark's Gospel is all going to be about listening to the teaching of Jesus, and he's speaking not to perfect people, but to ordinary people like you and me who are far from God.

And then Mark chapter 10, verse 45, just before it gets into the heart of the Gospel, the story of his betrayal, of his death, and his resurrection.

In Mark chapter 10, 45, we have the final great I came statement of Mark. And it's after some of the disciples are trying to figure out who's the greatest.

[46 : 44] And Jesus says this, for even the Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.

What did Jesus preach? That he didn't come for human beings to serve him. He came to serve human beings. And the way he would serve human beings like you and me who are far from God is by giving his life as a ransom for many.

Friends, just in closing, this is dynamite. Let me give you, in one very simple thing, what every religion basically teaches you.

What every, even the self-made religions that people are trying to put together in spirituality, they all have one thing in common. They all basically portray a picture of saying, if you don't do too many bad things, and you do enough good things, and you add them up, and if you haven't done too many bad things and you've done more good things, you go to your great reward.

Whether that's nirvana, whether that's the end of all things, merge with the one, whether it's just to go and live in your apartment in Manhattan for the rest of your life, like whatever it is, that you don't do too many bad things, you do the right number of good things or above, and basically you go to heaven.

[48 : 12] And that is the common human religion. The common human thinking of those of us who are far from God. And Jesus says, that's all wrong.

Only in the Christian faith is something completely and utterly and radically different proposed. And that is that God comes to pay our debt to free us.

That God does something that we cannot do for us.

That it's not about us making enough good things so we can climb to heaven, but God reaching down to us to bring us up to him. Not about us putting God in our debt because of our good deeds, but us recognizing that God is never in our debt and that he pays our unpayable debts.

And he does that of love for you and me. And that Jesus in his life and death and resurrection is paying our unpayable debt so that we can be free in God.

[49 : 25] And our human response is to say, thank you, Jesus. Please be my savior. Please stand. Please stand.

The Christian way, the Jesus way, is entered one by one. But we walk the Jesus way with Jesus and others. And the Jesus way is entered when we say to Jesus, I realize now what you've done.

I turn to you. Please be my savior and my Lord. Come into my life and be my savior and my Lord.

And the Christian life is begun by being grasped by the gospel or having the gospel grasp us.

But we live the Christian life by being gripped by the gospel as disciples of Jesus learning to live for his glory. It all comes back to the gospel. I'm just going to say, I'm not going to do a sinner's prayer.

I'm just going to say to you, if the finger of God is upon you, there's no better time than I'm going to say to you. I'm going to say, Jesus, please make me your disciple gripped by the gospel to live for your glory. Please be my savior and my Lord.

[50 : 35] Please be in me. And I want you to come into my life and be my savior and my Lord. I believe that you have, the resurrection has vindicated that you have come from God, that you can really and actually do this and have done it.

And I urge you to do that today before you leave, to do it now. Stop listening to me, do it now. And for the rest of us, to pray that we will be so gripped by the gospel that as we follow Jesus, that we will live for his glory.

Let's bow our heads in prayer. Father, thank you for Jesus. Thank you, Father, for your call for us to seek the truth, to be more like the detectives and less like the bureaucrats, to be willing, Father, even to have people be upset with us because we seek the truth.

Father, create within us a great hunger and desire to seek the truth. Thank you, Father, for Jesus. Thank you for what he did upon the cross for us. Thank you for his mighty resurrection.

Thank you, Father, that these are true. Make us disciples gripped by the gospel, living for your glory. Father, this is our prayer. This is the cry of our heart. And we ask this in the name of Jesus.

[51 : 48] Amen.