

The Resurrection

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[0 : 00] We're going to open up to Mark chapter 15 for our scripture reading this morning. So we've been looking through the book of Mark for a year now, and this is the last time we're going to be looking at this.

And we're reading from verse 42 of chapter 15 to verse 8 of chapter 16. And I just want to mention briefly, you'll notice starting in chapter 16 at verse 9, everything after that is in parentheses.

So we're going to stop reading at verse 8, but you can see that it goes on for another few verses. And the reason that we're not going to read past that, probably your Bible has a little footnote there that says, some of the earliest manuscripts do not include verses 9 to 20.

And I think we could put that more bluntly, that our earliest manuscripts that we have of the book of Mark stop at verse 8. And so that's where I believe that the gospel ends, and that's where most Christians and scholars believe that the gospel ends.

But I just wanted to explain why we're not going beyond that. So we're going to read from verse 42 to 16, verse 8. 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 for the body of Jesus.

[1 : 42] Pilate was surprised to hear that he should have already died. And summoning the centurion, he asked him whether he was already dead. And when he learned from the centurion that he was dead, he granted the corpse to Joseph.

And Joseph brought a linen shroud and taking him down, wrapped him in linen, in the linen shroud, and laid him in a tomb that had been cut out of the rock. And he rolled a stone against the entrance of the tomb.

Mary Magdalene and Mary, the mother of Joseph, saw where he was laid. When the Sabbath was passed, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome brought spices, so that they might go and anoint him.

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?

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.

[2 : 47] And they were alarmed. And he said to them, Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has risen. He is not here. See the place where they laid him.

But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going before you to Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you. And they went out and fled from the tomb, for trembling and astonishment had seized them.

And they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid. Amen. This is God's Word. If I say the words, December 7, 1941, to many of you that's just a date.

But to many of you who are of a certain age, that's really the beginning of a sentence, right? December 7, 1941. A date which will live in infamy. And that's so significant to so many people, especially of a certain age, who lived through that.

Because that was a day where you looked around at the world around you and you said, Nothing is the same. Nothing can be the same. And you can act like it didn't happen. But that doesn't change the fact that there's an event in front of you that has redirected the whole course of history.

[4 : 02] And all of us have dates like that. Whether it's a date that all of us share together. For someone my age, that's 9-11. For the past 20 years, people refer to the age we live in as the post-9-11 era, right?

And then you might have dates of your own, like the day that you got married or the day that you became a father or a grandfather or a grandmother. And that is not just an emotion.

Something has changed in your life and you have been redirected by that event. And what Mark does in the last few verses of this gospel is he invites us in on the life of three women.

And you see their names. It's Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome. And he allows us to follow them on what to them was a very ordinary, if tragic, day.

They were going to anoint a body like anyone would for someone that they loved in first century Jerusalem. And what Mark shows us is how the event of what happens next redirects their entire lives.

[5 : 11] The empty tomb that they find changes everything for them. And what Mark is doing is he's saying that what redirected the lives of these women, the event that happened, also has redirected the world and needs to redirect the world.

And Mark shares this gospel so that everyone who will read it will read it and say, something happened at the empty tomb.

Something happened at that tomb that has changed the world. And if you pay attention to it, it will redirect your life. And that's what we want to see this morning is how the empty tomb redirects us today, just like it redirected those three women who saw it for the first time.

And I want to point out two ways. The first way is this. The empty tomb redirects us by confronting us with the fact of the resurrection. You know, people today come to church for all kinds of different reasons.

You may be here for all kinds of different reasons. People come to church because they love the community of it. They don't want to be lonely. And so they come to church and they know there's community there. Or they come to church because they were raised to do it.

[6 : 16] And it's just, it's built into their bones that you go to church. Let's not talk about what you believe. You go to church because you're so-and-so's son or you're so-and-so's daughter. Or even today, you've got people like Elon Musk, who's I'm sure well-known to many of you.

Elon Musk is someone who, in interviews, will call himself a cultural Christian. And what he means by that is he doesn't really care about whether Jesus rose from the dead, but he thinks that Christianity has helpful morals to teach the world.

And so some people endorse Christianity or go to church, not because they believe that Jesus rose from the dead, but because they think that it will help society if people believe the moral beliefs of Christianity.

And let me just say this. None of those reasons are why Christianity spread in the first century. Christianity spread in the first century because there were rumors going about all over the Roman Empire that some man in Judea in about 32 AD, some man rose from the dead.

And there were enough eyewitness accounts to that event that that began to spread like wildfire. That's how Christianity started. It started because there was an empty tomb, not because Jesus was a great teacher.

[7 : 31] It's because he rose from the dead and people believed that. And the challenge for us, the challenge for you and me, we're 21st century modern people. We're very smart.

We have computers in our back pockets. And the challenge for us is how do you judge this claim? You know, you read a passage from 2,000 years ago and it says, a man rose from the dead. And let's face it, we hear supernatural claims all around us in the world.

You know, so-and-so was healed. So-and-so, another person rose from the dead. How do you judge? How do you judge a claim like this without saying, this is just like every other claim that we just can't believe?

And maybe it's that first century people are just irrational and they believe something they shouldn't have believed. But I think if you just look at this passage by itself, even these, we're going to focus on the last eight verses of chapter 16, the first eight verses.

Even here, I think you get a good reason for why the resurrection of Jesus Christ is historically plausible, why it's reasonable to believe this. And I want to talk about that before we talk about what it means for us personally.

[8 : 37] And, you know, one reason to believe the gospel accounts here about the resurrection is because of the unexpectedness of the resurrection. You know, you've got these women, these three women, they go to the tomb and it's, you see how Mark really gets inside their head and he talks about their anxieties and he talks about what they're thinking.

And these women, at least two of them saw where Jesus was buried. So they saw that body. They saw a dead body and they saw that body go into the tomb. And what they're doing is he died on Friday, right?

And on Saturday, they couldn't touch the body because it was the Sabbath. And so they have been waiting. They've been patiently waiting for the first moment where they can go and visit that body and anoint the body that they know is laying in that tomb.

And that's what they're doing. And they've got one anxiety, right? It says here, they're not anxious about whether Jesus is resurrected or not. They're worried about the stone. They're going to say, who's going to roll away the stone? And they go right when the sun rises.

There's not a single hint that they think that Jesus, when they get there, Jesus may be risen from the dead. There's not a single hint of it. And there's a reason for that.

[9 : 48] You could say, well, that's just part of the story. This is a fake, this is a made-up story. And part of the surprise of it is that these women are surprised by the fact that there's a resurrected body. But it's more than that.

Because it's not just surprising that they find a resurrected body. No one in the first century believed that a resurrection of the body was possible. Even Jews.

So pagans in the first century, they believed that after death there was either nothing, or after death you escape from your body and you live in this disembodied spiritual world.

And if you were a God-fearing Jew, your great hope, for some Jews at least, was that there will be a resurrection of the dead, but it will happen at the end of time. And I say that to say, no one, not Jesus' disciples, not these women, not any Jew in the first century, was expecting anyone to rise from the dead in the middle of history.

One writer put it like this. He said, dead bodies rose from the dead in the first century with just as much infrequency as they rise from the dead in our century. It just doesn't happen. And why is that important?

[10 : 56] It's important because it means that this account is not just wishful thinking. These women weren't saying, I really hope that Jesus, when I get there, he's going to be risen from the dead, because they didn't even have a religious belief that that would happen.

They were surprised when they get there. And you see what happens. The angel who meets them has to explain it to them, and he really forces the truth on them.

You see he's standing there by the tomb, and he says there in verse 6, he says, see where they laid him? In verse 6, do not be alarmed.

You see Jesus of Nazareth who was crucified. He is risen. See the place where they laid him. And you get this picture of these women who are coming to find a dead body. That's what they're coming to see. And when they don't see it, they're totally thrown off.

They're not thinking resurrection. They're thinking, who took the body? And this angel says, he takes them by the hand almost, you can imagine, and he points, he says, you remember, you remember the body was right here.

[11 : 57] This is where they laid him. He's not here. He's risen. And the angel has to kind of bring them along to the truth, because it wasn't what they were expecting. It wasn't even their hope, because they didn't even know that they could have hoped for such a thing.

It's not wishful thinking. So that's part of the reason why the resurrection account is so plausible, is because Jesus told the disciples ahead of time that he was going to rise from the dead, but not even the disciples believed him.

They didn't understand him, at least. They didn't know what that meant. And so for Mark to say that this happened, it's coming out of left wing. No one even knows that it was even possible. And there's another lesser reason why I think that this is historically plausible.

No offense to the women in the crowd, but in the first century, women were viewed as not reputable as far as testimonies in court went.

So if you were in a Jewish court, women were not allowed to come forward and bring testimonies as to what they saw. This was a world in which women were not trusted. Josephus, who was probably the most famous historian from this period of time, he wrote this.

[13 : 05] He said, from women let no evidence be accepted because of the temerity and levity of their sex. Now, I don't believe that. I trust a woman's testimony in court.

But the point is, Mark is writing to a world in which women's testimony was not viewed as credible. And so the question you have to ask is, well, if Mark were making this story up, why would he have women as the first eyewitnesses?

It doesn't make sense. The only reason he would include women as the first eyewitnesses is if they were really there. Because it's so implausible. If any of us want to make an argument for something that happened, we want to bring the most reputable witness that we can.

So if you were making this story up, you would say, oh, it wasn't just one of Jesus' disciples that saw this. It was his most trustworthy disciple. Or maybe it wasn't even one of his disciples. It was a centurion who saw it.

But no, Mark says it was these three women who first saw the empty tomb. And that speaks to the truth that something really happened here that we believe. Now, what do we do with that?

[14 : 16] What do we make of something like this? Well, the first thing is this. When any of us come to Christianity, you've got this Bible. My Bible is probably 1,500 pages. And it feels so overwhelming.

And especially people who are not very well-versed in Christianity, you don't know where to start. Now, I remember I would often have friends who I knew in college and afterwards who weren't Christians. And sometimes they would want to understand the Christian faith.

And so they would say, well, you know, I'm going to read the Bible from front to back so I can get Christianity. And if you've ever tried to read the Bible from front to back, you know how hard that is. This is a complicated book. It's complex.

But the best place to start when you're assessing whether Christianity is true or not is just one question. Did Jesus rise from the dead?

The gospel. Christianity bets everything on that one question. Did Jesus rise from the dead? Because if he didn't, then you can't trust Jesus because he wasn't who he said he was.

[15 : 19] But if he did rise from the dead, then that means, well, now I have to slow down and think about everything else he said because this guy really, he's for real. He rose from the dead. Christianity is not merely intellectual.

You know, we're talking about intellectual stuff right now. It's not merely intellectual. But it's not less than that. You know, Christianity, remember, we've been talking about this in our Wednesday night group for the past few weeks before we started in our new series.

It's, you know, remember Peter said, always be ready to give a reason for the hope that is in you. And what Christianity comes to the world, and it doesn't just say we have a helpful philosophy for the world.

What it says is something happened. Something happened in 32 AD. And we're not afraid to let the world examine it. I think this is especially relevant. If I could speak just for a moment to anybody who's between the ages of 10 and 30 years old.

You know, when you get on something like TikTok, or when you get on something like Twitter, any kind of video thing that you can scroll through, it's not hard to find a clip from someone who is explaining to you why there's no way that Christianity could be true because of this problem in the Bible, or because Christianity believes in this doctrine.

[16 : 34] And let me just say, the first question you always have to ask yourself is, did Jesus rise from the dead? That's the central question.

But also, what you find here in this passage is the same thing that you find across the rest of the Bible, which is that the Bible doesn't mind being explored. And if you have questions about Christianity, and if you have questions about parts of the Bible that don't make sense to you, don't run away from those questions, but seek out the answer because I promise you, God is not hiding truth.

He's not. The gospel opens itself to be examined because it's reasonable and it's not afraid of your questions. So the first thing we see in this passage, how does this story redirect us?

Well, it redirects us by forcing us, confronting us with the fact of the resurrection. It's just, just take it at that. Is the resurrection true? Is this account plausible? Because if it is, then this is just like, you could almost say it's the opposite of Pearl Harbor.

This is, this is the good news of human history. And you have to reorient your life around it if it's true. Okay. But the second thing that the second way this passage redirects us is it calls us to walk in mission.

[17 : 50] So you've got these three women who are in the tomb with an angel and it reads just like an eyewitness account because it doesn't even call him an angel.

It says it's a man, but it's a man sitting in white. And so we know it's an angel. And we also know that because they were terrified. And any person who comes across an angel in the New Testament, their instinctive reaction is fear because they're standing in front of something holy and totally unnatural, supernatural.

And the angel comes with a fact and a mission, a fact and a commission. The fact is in verse six. Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth who was crucified.

Here's the fact. He is risen. He is not here. Okay. And that immediately leads to a command in verse seven. Go tell his disciples and Peter that he is going before you to Galilee.

There you will see him just as he told you. So the angel is telling these women, this fact is not just something that you can see and walk away from.

[18 : 52] This is, this is amazing news and it's meant for the world to know. And so the moment they get it, he sends them off on mission to tell the rest of the world about it. And I have almost nothing but good things to say about these women.

These women are exemplary in the gospel because they are there when every man has walked away from Jesus. They were there at the foot of the cross when by this time so many of Jesus' disciples had deserted him.

They saw where he was laid. They're the only ones that show up at the tomb the first chance that they get. But if we could point out one weakness of these women, one place in which they stutter, it's that they don't immediately take the gospel out.

They don't immediately take the truth of the resurrection out. And you see the reason why in verse eight. It says, it says, they went out and fled from the tomb for trembling and astonishment had seized them.

And they said nothing to anyone for they were afraid. They were afraid. That's why they don't go.

[20 : 03] And they don't do the one thing, at least immediately, that the angel tells them to do, which is to go and tell other people what has happened. And why? Why don't they go out?

And what does it mean that they're afraid? And I think you could even say that their fear is probably a good kind of fear. You know, months ago, we read about the story where Jesus is in the boat with the disciples and they're afraid of the storm.

And then Jesus calms the storm. And by the end of it all, they're not afraid of the storm anymore. But it says suddenly they feared Jesus. And it's because they realize that they're now in the presence of someone that they didn't realize who he was.

They didn't realize that this man has the power over the oceans, that this man really is. He must be divine. And you see the same. I think the same thing is happening here where these women are afraid because suddenly they have life is not ordinary anymore.

They thought they were going to a tomb to bury a dead man. And suddenly they're in the presence of something divine. Someone has risen from the dead and there's an angel confronting them about that truth. And they realize they are in the presence of the holy.

[21 : 11] You know, we sang that song, the first song we sang this morning, holy, holy, holy. I think these women are afraid because suddenly the holiness of God is impressing itself upon them. And they realize Jesus was my friend, but he wasn't just my friend.

He was holy. He has risen from the dead. And to know what happens in the rest of the story, you have to go to another gospel. And it's really interesting. When you go to the gospel of Matthew, and it almost tells you exactly the same thing that happened, but it tells us a little bit more, which I think is because it gives a little bit more of what happens afterwards.

In Matthew 28, it says, So the women departed from the tomb with fear and great joy. So what changed for the women and what allowed them to eventually go out and spread the mission, spread the gospel, was that not that their fear went away, but that that fear turned into a kind of joy alongside of it.

And I think that's the point that I want to make here. How do you go on a mission? How do you go from realizing the fact of the resurrection to going out on mission in the way that the gospel calls us to?

And you have to accept the fact, but you also have to see it as joy, as good news, as gospel, like we talked to the kids about this morning. And why is the resurrection joy?

[22 : 31] Why is it joyful? When you think about these women, you know, a couple of nights ago at our house, we have a habit of reading these. We have a deck of cards that have a question on them that kind of spur conversation.

And the question that we read one night this week was, what do you think it was like to be friends with Jesus? What do you think it was like to be friends with Jesus?

To have walked with him in those three years. And it's a great question. But for these women, they didn't meet, they knew the answer to that question because they had been with him.

This is Mary Magdalene, who Jesus had cast seven demons out of. They knew what it was like to be friends with Jesus. And so to hear that he's resurrected, simply because of who he is, that's good news, because he was their friend.

And I think that's partly why the angel doesn't call him the son of God or Jesus Christ. The angel looks at Mary and Mary and Salome and says, Jesus of Nazareth has risen from the dead, which is a way of saying the one that you knew, the one that you remembered and who was your friend has risen from the dead.

[23 : 43] You know, some of the best stories, the best fiction books of the past few years are all about an evil person trying to overcome death.

So the Harry Potter books, you've got Voldemort, not Vanderbilt, Voldemort, who tries to overcome death. Or in the Lord of the Rings books, you've got this guy named Sauron who wants the kind of power that will keep you alive forever.

And in all of those books, the great fear is if this person overcomes death, then the world will be terrible. But what you see in these women's joy is the hope of what happens when a man like this overcomes death, because they knew him and he was their friend and they saw how good he was.

There's a great story about Dorothy Day, who was a famous Catholic activist in the past century. Dorothy Day was kind of a radical leftist who had a dramatic conversion to Christianity.

And she devoted the rest of her life to serving the poor and to advocating for the cause of the poor. But she devoted her life to Christ. And there's a story that goes, towards the end of her life, she was asked, did you ever think about writing an autobiography?

[24 : 59] Because you've got such a wonderful story. And the story goes that she says, she says that she did. She said, I sat down one day and I opened up a book and I wrote down at the top of the book, A Life Remembered, an autobiography by Dorothy Day.

And then she says this, she says, I just sat there and I thought of our Lord and his visit to us all those centuries ago. And I said to myself that my great luck was to have had him on my mind for so long in my life.

And she realized in that moment that all she wanted for the rest of her life was to simply be grateful that she had had Jesus. And she didn't need to write her autobiography because the only story that she cared about was Jesus' story and what he had done.

And Jesus is a lot of things to all of us, but do you know that he's a friend? And that's good news in and of itself. But the beauty of it is that his friendship is also a friendship with power.

And so in his friendship, in his love to the world, in his love to you and I who call him savior, he gives his life, but he also gives life.

[26 : 17] You know, we spent so many of the last few weeks talking about the cross, the cross, the cross, because it's so central to Christianity. But the gospel doesn't end there because Jesus also gives life.

And the book of Colossians and Paul, Paul calls Jesus the firstborn from the dead. And the hope there is that the first one who rises from the dead, Jesus, gives his life to others so that we also can rise in him and with him.

He saves us. He redirects us. And he redirects us on mission to tell others about that great hope. Let me close with this.

The conclusion of Mark is not the conclusion of the gospel. And you know that from the very first verse that we looked at over a year ago. Mark begins like this.

The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. And I think Mark wrote that and he ends his gospel so abruptly with these women just running off, afraid, because his gospel is not the end of the gospel.

[27 : 30] The gospel continues in your and my life as we gather these testimonies about what Christ is doing for us. In just a few minutes, we're going to sing Christ, Christ the Lord is risen today.

And I felt really bad about it because it's an Easter song. And I thought this is inappropriate. But if you think about it, when you say Christ is risen today, you're not saying today is the day when he rose.

You're saying today he is risen. Just like he is tomorrow. We can say that every single day. Christ is risen. And because he is risen, we have hope. And we have an event, something that has redirected us.

And that's good news this morning. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, help us to rejoice in the gospel. Even though, just like the women in this story, we can stutter sometimes.

We can stop stepping forward and stepping out in faith like you called us to because the resurrection joy hasn't settled into our hearts. Help us to embrace the new life that you have given us.

[28 : 37] And help us to look forward to the hope of resurrection that you have promised us. In your son's name we pray. Amen.