

All age Easter service - investigating Jesus death & resurrection

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Date: 17 April 2022

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[0 : 00] Mark 15 verses 40 to 47. Some women were watching from a distance.

Among them were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James the Younger and of Joseph and Salam. 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.

It was preparation day, that is the day before the Sabbath. So as evening approached, Joseph of Arimathea, a prominent member of the council, who was himself waiting for the kingdom of God, went boldly to Pilate and asked for Jesus' body.

Pilate was surprised to hear that he was already dead. Summoning the centurion, he asked him if Jesus had already died. When he learned from the centurion that it was so, he gave the body to Joseph.

So Joseph bought some linen cloth, took down the body, wrapped it in the linen, and placed it in a tomb cut out of rock. Then he rolled a stone against the entrance of the tomb.

[1 : 16] Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joseph saw where he was laid. Well, good morning everyone.

My name is Andy. I'm one of the assistant pastors here at Grace Church. And it's Happy Easter. It's so good to be here on this very special day. I've got my big Easter egg that I got from my mum yesterday, which I look forward to eating that later on.

But did you know that Easter is, there's more to Easter than chocolate. There is more to Easter than chocolate. Because Easter is when we celebrate Jesus dying on the cross and coming back to life again.

But here's the big question. Did it really happen? Did it really happen? Now lots of people believe that it didn't happen. Maybe some of us here this morning might not believe that it happened.

And we're so glad you're here to investigate with us. Because this morning we're going to be detectives. Okay, so I've got my detective hat. And I've got my magnifying glass.

[2 : 23] We're going to be detectives. We're going to be looking at the Easter story, asking the question, What happened to Jesus? What happened to Jesus?

You see, Mark was one of Jesus' followers. And he talked to people who were around when Jesus was alive. And he wrote this book so that we can be sure that the first Easter weekend really did happen.

And firstly, Mark has written his account of Jesus' life to tell us that Jesus really did die on the cross. If you've closed your sheet, open it again, if you've got it with you, and look at little verse 44, the number 44. Pilate was surprised to hear that he, that's Jesus, was already dead.

At summoning the centurion, he asked him if Jesus had already died. When he learned from the centurion that it was so, he gave the body to Joseph. Pontius Pilate was a Roman governor who sentenced Jesus to death.

[3 : 38] And he double-checked with the soldier in charge that Jesus really did die. And the Roman soldier tells his boss, yes, we did the job.

Now, a centurion is a high-ranking Roman soldier, reporting to a high-ranking ruler who could end your career and your life.

He's got no reason to lie and every reason to tell the truth to his boss. Jesus really did die on a cross.

And not only did the Romans in charge know it, so did the Jewish rulers. And we're told about an important member of the Jewish council called Joseph of Arimathea.

What did he do with Jesus' body? What did he do with Jesus' body? Well, look at the little 46. So Joseph bought some linen cloth, took down the body, wrapped it in linen, and placed it in a tomb cut out of rock.

[4 : 47] Then he rolled a stone against the entrance of the tomb. This is all done in slow motion, isn't it? Joseph wrapped Jesus' body.

That is a perfect opportunity to notice any breathing from Jesus. One thing you don't do is bury someone without being absolutely sure that they have died.

And then, to top it all off, we have the tomb. Here's the tomb. It was sealed with a large, immovable rock.

And we're even told in other parts of the Bible there were soldiers outside the tomb. So let's be detectives then. Got my detective hat on.

We're looking. We're asking the question, what happened to Jesus? What happened to Jesus? Maybe Jesus only fainted on the cross.

[5 : 45] They didn't really die. He passed out because it was very painful. And he woke up again in the tomb. But does that fit with the evidence that we have before us?

No, it doesn't. Here is... a fish. Here is a fish.

Now, this fish is no longer alive. This fish is dead. How do I know this fish is dead? It's not moving. It's in a packet. And I bought it from Tesco yesterday. All the evidence points to the truth that this fish is dead, is no longer alive.

Well, just as all the evidence points to this fish being dead, all the evidence we're given in the Bible points to Jesus really at being dead.

[6 : 48] The Roman authorities confirmed it. The Jewish authorities confirmed it. The tomb sealed shut confirmed it. Jesus really did die on the cross.

Well, why do we need to be sure of this? Why does it matter? Well, Mark is setting up what comes next. On the first Easter Friday, it seems as though all is lost.

We know, don't we, that death is sad. Our world doesn't have any answers to it. But for Jesus, it's not the end of the story because Sunday is coming.

So our second reading is from Mark chapter 16 and starting at verse 1. On your sheets. When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, Mary, the mother of James and Salome, brought 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 away the stone from the entrance of the tomb?

[8 : 09] But when they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had been rolled away. As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man dressed in a white robe sitting on the right side and they were alarmed.

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. Brilliant. Thanks, Val. For this next bit, I need a volunteer.

And there may be chocolate involved for you. Hands up. Who wants to volunteer? Tim Evans.

Thank you very much. I've become...

Great. Now, in here, I have... an egg. Who wants to see me crack an egg on Tim's head?

[9 : 15] Yeah, yeah. More hands go up this time. More hands go up this time. You've got quite curly hair. This might go everywhere. So just lift your forehead. What do you think we'd expect to happen? What's going to happen?

All the eggs are going to go all over his face. Do we think that? Okay, right. Lift your hair up. All of it. Okay. Face to front. There is a lot of it. Yeah, you're right. And tilt your head up so it doesn't go everywhere.

Ready? Three, two, one. Oh. Oh. That was quite hard, wasn't it? Oh. You all right, mate?

Yeah. Thank you, Tim. I didn't properly risk assess that. But where's the egg?

It's just shell. It's just shell. That was a surprise, wasn't it? What you were expecting to happen didn't happen.

[10 : 18] Well, we've been detective this morning. We're asking the question, what happened to Jesus? And we thought about, did he really, did he really die? Did he faint on the cross and then wake up again?

No. The evidence points to Jesus dying on the cross and he was buried on the tomb. And well, on the first Easter Sunday, there was the biggest surprise there have ever been.

Because people came to the tomb expecting to see Jesus' body but Jesus wasn't there. There wasn't a body where they expected to find a body just like there was an egg where you expected to find an egg.

All because Jesus really did come back to life. Jesus really did come back to life. You see, early in the morning, in the Sunday morning, some women went to the tomb.

Let's be detectives again. Maybe they went to the wrong tomb. Maybe they went to the wrong tomb. They got muddled up in their grief. Did they go to the right one?

[11 : 25] Well, no, because we heard in our first reading that they saw where Jesus was buried. Verse 47, if you want to look back at that. They saw where Jesus was buried.

So no, they didn't go to the wrong tomb. But on the way, it suddenly dawned to them, well, they actually can't get to see Jesus because there's a great big stone in the way.

But when they got there, they found that the stone had been rolled away and they saw an angel. They were very scared. But the angel said to them, don't be alarmed.

You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene who was crucified. He is risen. He is not here. See the place where they laid him. They looked inside.

Nobody. Just as the angel said. Jesus really did come back to life. He really did smash through death and is alive again.

[12 : 32] Well, again, let's be detectives. Maybe it was all a dream. Maybe they hallucinated it. Well, they weren't expecting Jesus to come back.

It wasn't wishful thinking. It's not like they wished it so much that they thought it actually happened. They were not expecting it. It was a big surprise. They were just thinking, gosh, how on earth did we get to Jesus' body?

We didn't think about the stone. Not whether he'll still be there in the first place. And you don't waste money anointing someone with expensive spices when you expect them to come back to life.

No. Maybe the disciples stole the body. He wasn't there because the disciples stole the body and the women just made up this story about an angel.

Well, Mark wrote earlier that all the disciples, when Jesus was arrested, they ran away from him.

They ran away. They wanted nothing to do with him.

[13 : 38] There was not in their mind to steal the body. And anyway, there's a great big stone in the way, sealing the tomb shut.

You see, when we play detective and look closely at all the evidence, it leads to only one conclusion. that Jesus really did come back to life.

And so, may I gently probe and gently ask each of us here this morning, do we believe this? Are there other explanations you can think about for what happened to Jesus?

If you are looking into the Christian faith, then do please read these accounts of Jesus' life. Check it for yourself. check your theory against the evidence we've been given.

Mark has included all the detail for us to be in no doubt that it happened. Now, we all know the symbol of Easter is an egg.

[14 : 46] It's an egg. It's all about new life, isn't it? After an egg is laid, it just lies there, not moving.

Nothing to show it's alive. But a few weeks later, cracks appear. And then what happens? A head pops out of a little chick.

And it's the sound of Easter. It's the sound of the first Easter. A chick is born, a shell is empty, new life is here.

Well, it was like that with Jesus. On the Friday evening, there was nothing to show that there was life in the tomb. But then on that first Easter Sunday, Jesus' heart started pumping blood again around the body.

The lungs expanded with oxygen, and he took his first breath, and then the stone was rolled away. New life appeared.

[15 : 58] And just as an egg is not strong enough to keep a chick inside it, the tomb and death itself is not strong enough to hold Jesus down inside.

New life has burst out. Jesus really did die, but Jesus really did come back to life. So what? So what?

How does this affect me here this morning? Well, we're going to think about that in the next part of what difference this makes to our life. Great, please sit down.

And Rory is going to come and give our third reading. Mark 16 verses 7 to 8.

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. Trembling and bewildered, the woman went out and fled from the tomb.

[17:05] They said nothing to anyone because they were afraid. Great, thanks Rory. So we're on the last part. We've been playing detectives again. Let me get my hat. We've been thinking about the evidence for Easter and we've been thinking about what happened to Jesus.

That was our big question. And we saw how all the evidence points to the fact that Jesus really did die and he really did come back to life.

But again, so what? Why does it matter? How does this, what happened 2,000 years ago on the other side of the world, affect me in London in the 21st century?

Well, it matters because it shows us who Jesus really is and how we should respond to him this morning. But what we find out that Jesus is God's king.

Jesus really is God's king. God's forgiving king. Well, last time we're going to be detectives and we're going to see that Jesus died and came back to life, that Jesus really is God's forgiving king.

[18:25] He really is God's forgiving king. Look at the screen, here's the angel and he's telling the women that Jesus has come back to life and then he says, go.

Tell his disciples and Peter that he's going before you, ahead of you into Galilee. There you'll see him just as he told you. The women were told to go and tell Jesus' disciples and Peter that he'd come back to life and will meet him in Galilee.

But here's the question, it's a bit strange, why does the angel mention Peter by name? He's one of Jesus' disciples. disciples, why not just say, go and tell the disciples?

Why mention Peter? Why is he singled out? It's a puzzler, that one. Well, Peter is mentioned here because if you know the story, just before Jesus died, Peter let down Jesus in the most personal way.

He said three times that he didn't know who Jesus was. Someone asked him, weren't you Jesus' friend? And he said, no, I don't know him. Someone said, yes, you're with him, I saw you.

[19:40] No, I don't know him. Yes, you're one of his followers, aren't you? No, I don't know him. That's what happened. And he saw Jesus and he knew he let Jesus down, just as Jesus said he would.

And he cried. He knew he'd let Jesus down. Well, we here this morning, we all let each other down, don't we? We know when we have to go to someone and ask for forgiveness and say sorry for our mums and dads, for our spouses, to our colleagues and friends and neighbours.

We know just by our general experience that we are not perfect. And we let people down all the time. down. And the Bible says that we let Jesus down too.

It's not just other people we let down, we let down Jesus. Because we all don't live with him in charge of our lives. We don't live with him as king.

We've all done wrong in his eyes. But these words by the angel to the women tell us what Jesus' death meant for Peter.

[21:00] It meant that Peter could see Jesus again and Jesus really wanted to be Peter's friend again. Peter is forgiven for letting Jesus down.

And if Peter can be forgiven through Jesus' death and resurrection then so can anyone. This is one of Jesus' closest friends. If he can be forgiven then so can I and so can you.

So can all of us here today. Forgiven of living with ourselves in charge and welcomed into God's family. All because Jesus died on the cross to take away all our wrongdoing.

The wrong that we've done in his eyes. Forgiveness. Here is the queen. It's not a great picture with a light. It looks a bit scary.

I know. But here is our queen. I want you to imagine that because it's her platinum jubilee coming up she decides to forgive everyone in prison. And she opens all the doors and says off you go.

[22:12] Imagine how happy that would be. I mean bad policy. But imagine how happy they would be. Of course that would never happen. But the Easter story tells us something even more wonderful that has happened.

That if we put our trust in Jesus we are forgiven and free from punishment. But imagine the queen not only sets people completely free but she invites them to come and live in Buckingham Palace

and be part of her family treated as a royal heir.

Again that does need a lot of imagination that won't happen. Yet when we put our trust in the Lord Jesus that he died to take away all our wrongdoing and rose again well that is what happens to us. You see we might not see ourselves as criminals but we all need forgiveness from each other and most of all from God. And when we trust in Jesus as our saviour God forgives us and he brings us into his perfect loving family.

We are welcomed and as his children we will one day live in a mansion prepared for us in heaven. So much better than living even in Buckingham Palace.

[23 : 43] And so for those of us who would already call ourselves Christians well let's be joyful. We can remember because of this first Easter Sunday we can know we have forgiveness by God.

Maybe the weight of sin and our wrong doing weighs us down we have to remind ourselves of Jesus death and resurrection that we are forgiven and have eternal life in heaven because we have put our trust in Jesus.

And if we wouldn't call ourselves Christians here this morning then why not this Easter look into these claims more? our world doesn't have any answers to death.

We've seen that over the past two and a half years but the Easter story tells us that eternal life is on offer and the right response to the offer of eternal life and complete forgiveness is to bow before the king and take it.

Just as I close I wonder what you think the most important moment in the history of the world is. Maybe it is the invention of chocolate.

[25 : 05] Maybe it is the invention of football. Maybe it's the invention of the wheel or something like that or fire. Well the first Easter is the most important event in history.

Jesus really did die on the cross and he really did come back to life to show that he is God's forgiving king. Bringing forgiveness and eternal life to Peter and to all people who come to Jesus and say sorry to him.

So let's give thanks to God for Jesus this Easter. Let's pray together. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Dear God we thank you that you love us so much that you gave us for the first Easter weekend Jesus as our sacrifice. That Jesus came to die to take away our wrongdoing and to come back to life so we can know he really is your king who brings forgiveness and eternal life.

Please help us to think about your amazing love to us this Easter. Amen.