

A Surprising Ending

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[0 : 00] Our gracious Father, we thank you so much for what this day in particular represents, the resurrection of our Lord Jesus and for all that that means to us.

Father, we thank you for your word which points us to this truth and we ask now that you would help us to hear it, understand it, but more than that, to live in light of it.

We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, a few years ago there was an article in a UK news website called The Metro and on the next slide it was entitled, Hamster Resurrection, Pet Rises from the Grave at Easter After Being Buried in the Garden.

This is a real article. The article begins by saying, Tink the hamster was buried on Good Friday after being found cold and lifeless in the bottom of her cage and laid to rest by a couple who were looking after her for a friend.

No doubt they'll never be asked to look after another pet again. But the article continues by saying, But the next day the rodent, who was not dead but hibernating, reappeared as perplexed Les of Gloucester crushed a pile of bald boxes for recycling.

[1 : 13] I think on the next slide we have a picture of poor Tink who was startled. The article ends by saying, Tink has now been dubbed Jesus by the family after her Easter resurrection.

Well, today we come to Mark's account of the real Jesus and his resurrection. And Mark wants us to know, firstly, well, he wants us to know actually overall that Jesus really rose as the real king.

That's what he's getting at. But he begins by making sure we firstly know Jesus really died. Point one in your outline, verse 40 in your Bible.

As some women were watching from a distance, among them were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James the younger, and of Joseph and Salome. In Galilee, these women had followed Jesus and cared for his needs.

Many other women who had come up with him to Jerusalem were also there. You see, last Friday, we heard how Jesus was the king who died.

[2 : 17] And we ended after his death with the centurion saying in verse 39, surely this man was the son of God, which is another title for king.

Now, at this point, Mark could have simply skipped to chapter 16 and the resurrection. After all, Mark likes to keep things short and sweet. His gospel is by far the shortest of all four gospels in the Bible.

But he mentions all these women who saw Jesus die. Like these three. In fact, he even adds in verse 41 that there were many more women who also saw Jesus die.

It seems that Mark wants us to know that this was no hibernation. Jesus really died for these women witnessed it. What's more, he also adds that Joseph indicates it.

You see verse 42? 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.

[3 : 24] Joseph, it says, went boldly to Pilate. You see, if you were tried for treason, like claiming to be a king, even the king of the Jews, then Roman law said you had to be humiliated even after your death.

Your body had to stay on the cross, in other words. And so by asking for Jesus' body, it was going against Roman law. It was a bold move, you see.

What's more, we're told that Joseph was a well-respected or a prominent member of the council. At the same council who, in chapter 14, 55, looked for evidence against Jesus.

At the same council who, in 15 verse 1, made plans to get Pilate to crucify Jesus. And so by requesting the body, Joseph is now openly declaring his allegiance to Jesus and risks his prominent

standing with the council.

It showed he feared God more than his fellow Jews and even more than Pilate. Not a bad example for us to follow at work or amongst family or at school.

[4 : 36] But the point is, his bold request for the body indicates that Jesus had really died. After all, you don't usually request to bury a body when it's still living.

You see, Mark wants us to know that Jesus really died. The women witnessed it. Joseph indicates it with his request. And now thirdly, Pilate confirms it. You see verse 44?

Pilate was surprised to hear that he was already dead. And so 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.

Here we have Pilate himself, the governor, the big banana. And even he confirms with the centurion that Jesus really died. And there's no way, by the way, that the centurion is going to get the wrong body or tell his boss a lie.

That would mean death for him. And in case we're left in any doubt, Mark also records the fact that Jesus was buried. You see verse 46? So Joseph brought some linen cloth, took down the body, wrapped it in the linen and placed it in the tomb cut out of rock.

[5 : 49] Then he rolled a stone against the entrance of the tomb. Mary Magdalene and Mary, the mother of Joseph, saw where he was laid. You see, it's as though Mark lines up all these witnesses, almost in this sandwich-like pattern.

I think it's on the next slide. The women, then Joseph, then Pilate, then Joseph again, and then the women who saw it at the end in verse 47. He lines up all these witnesses so that we might know for sure Jesus really died.

But why spend so much time pointing this out? Well, because without a real death, there can be no real resurrection. Instead, it's just a hibernation like Tink the Hamster.

In fact, some people say that Jesus just kind of fainted with the pain but didn't really die. It's called the swoon theory, where Jesus swooned or fainted and then kind of recovered in the tomb and then came out appearing to be alive.

Now, in case we think that's too ridiculous for anyone to believe, which does sound a bit ridiculous, there are actually millions who do believe something like that.

[7 : 01] For example, the Muslim Quran says on the next slide, That is, it only looked like Jesus was crucified.

Millions of Muslims believe that. For some, there's a bit of debate about how it worked out. For some Muslims, it means another person took his place on the cross. For other Muslims, it means he was now to the cross, but he didn't die.

He was able to withstand it. He kind of just looked like he fainted or swooned, though they don't use that word. The point is, millions don't believe Jesus really died.

And without a real death, there can be no real resurrection. But Mark gives us all these witnesses, including the burial, so that we might know Jesus really died, which means it can really rise.

Point to chapter 16, verse 1. Now again, some non-Christians will try and explain the resurrection by saying they went to the wrong tomb.

[8 : 33] Or they'll say it was just a hallucination that the followers were predisposed to because Jesus talked about his resurrection. But notice how Mark mentions the women by name again.

These are the very same ones who saw, chapter 15, verse 47, the same women, the verse before, who saw where Jesus was laid.

So much for the wrong tomb. They saw where he was laid and then they went to the right place the next day. And notice that they are not predisposed to a resurrection. I mean, they're out buying spices to anoint Jesus's dead body.

And they're asking who will roll the stone away. They weren't expecting a resurrection. So much for the predisposed theory. In fact, it was so unexpected for them that they get the shock of their lives. Do you see verse 4? Alarmed is a bit of an understatement, really.

[9 : 45] When I see my household bills going up, I get alarmed. When I hear about Russia's behavior, expelling the ambassadors from Russia, I get alarmed. But seeing an empty tomb with this man in a white robe, I'd be overwhelmed.

This man in a white robe, the other gospels tells us, is an angel. The word angel means messenger. And his message is huge. Do you see verse 6? Don't be alarmed, he said.

You are looking for Jesus, the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen. He is not here. See the place where they laid him? 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. Now notice here the words of the angel that Mark records for us. At first, the angel ensures the women that it's not a case of mistaken identity. He not only says it's Jesus of Nazareth you're looking for, but notice he says it's Jesus of Nazareth who was crucified that you're looking for. You're in the right place.

[10:57] You've got the right guy. It's not a case of mistaken identity. But second, he says he's risen. Check it out for yourself that the tomb is empty.

Come and see where the body used to be. He's not here. In other words, the body that was really dead has now really risen.

And they could check it out for themselves. And thirdly, the angel says, go tell the disciples you can see him in Galilee. In other words, you can see for yourselves that he has really risen.

You see, the angel wants these women to know that Jesus really rose. And Mark records these words for us, not just because that's what the angel said, but because he wants us to know that it wasn't a predisposed hallucination, nor the wrong tomb, nor the wrong person.

But there is now an empty tomb. And eyewitnesses who saw Jesus alive, the disciples, and whose testimony we now have.

[12:02] And we know that this testimony of the disciples has been handed down to us with remarkable accuracy. We have thousands of manuscripts to compare.

What's more, we also know that these disciples suffered and died for Jesus. Would they really have done that for a corpse? I mean, if they stole the body, as the Jews said, and just told people Jesus rose, what did they get for it, for their lie?

Did they get rich? Did they have an easy life? No, they suffered and were persecuted and many were martyred. In fact, in John chapter 20, verse 19, on the next slide, John tells us that the disciples at this point in time were locked in an upper room, scared of what the Jews might do to them.

And so what made them suddenly change from being a bunch of scared disciples to boldly proclaiming Jesus as king only a few weeks later?

What made them willing to die for Jesus? What changed their behavior so dramatically? They say it was because Jesus really rose.

[13:18] In 1984, a leading German historian, Dr. Lapid, on the next slide, writes as a non-Christian, it's a long quote, but listen to it. He says, he's not a Christian, but he says, If the defeated and depressed group of disciples overnight could change into a victorious movement of faith, based only on auto-suggestion or self-deception, you know, a lie, a hallucination, without a fundamental faith experience, then this would be a much greater miracle than the resurrection itself, he says.

In purely logical terms, because he doesn't really believe it, but in logical terms, the resurrection of Jesus is the lesser of two evils for all who seek a rational explanation.

In other words, the resurrection is the best explanation we have for the change in the disciples. A Lepid doesn't want to admit the resurrection is real, which is why he says it's the lesser of two evils, but he preferred to admit that than an irrational explanation.

The point is, Jesus not only really died, but he also really rose, and we have bags of evidence for it. And that, that he rose, really matters.

Point three. I asked my daughter yesterday why Easter Sunday really mattered. She sadly said chocolate eggs. It was a low point in my career as a minister.

[14:44] I was really hoping to break the stereotype about ministers' kids. Though, for the record, she eventually got the right answer. But that very first Easter Sunday really matters for at least three big reasons, which are much bigger than chocolate.

First, it shows Jesus really paid for our sins so that we can be reconciled to God. How does the resurrection show that? Well, imagine I committed a crime.

I stole something or something or other, and I was sentenced to two years in prison. Now, how do you know when I had paid for my crime? How do you know that I'd done my time?

Well, when you see me released and walking around. In a similar way, Jesus was sentenced to death, not for his sins, but for ours.

And how do we know that he's paid for our sins? Well, when we see him released from death and walking around. You see, the resurrection is proof that he paid for our sins at the cross in full so that we can now be reconciled to God.

[15 : 53] And we get a lovely hint of this with Peter. Did you notice verse seven, how the angel singles out Peter? He says, go tell the disciples and Peter.

Why? Well, because Peter had just denied Jesus three times and abandoned Jesus at his trial. But now that Jesus had paid for Peter's sins, he can be reconciled, relationship restored.

Restored. So says Jesus, tell the disciples and Peter that I'll see them. I'm looking forward to seeing them in Galilee. And it's the same for us. Our whole lives no longer need to be lived as God's enemies.

We who believe in Jesus are now reconciled to God and can live our whole lives, not as friends, but much more as family.

See, the resurrection proves that Jesus paid for our sins so that we can be reconciled. It really matters. The second reason the resurrection really matters is because it now means we can really trust Jesus's words, including his word about our resurrection hope.

[17 : 05] Did you notice again the angel's words in verse seven? It says, there you will see him just as he told you.

You see, Jesus said on the next slide from in chapter 14, verse 28, he said to his disciples, after I have risen, I will go ahead of you into Galilee. Now, that's exactly what happens.

And if he kept his word about this seemingly far-fetched promise about rising from the dead, if he can keep his word about that, then we can trust he'll keep his word about everything else, including our rising again to life in the new creation.

And that gives us great comfort in the face of, you know, missing out on things in this life for following Jesus. For our eternity in the new creation will more than make up for it.

And it gives us great assurance in the face of death. For we know we will live again. I was visiting one of our members from this congregation, Faye Chu.

[18 : 13] She's been at Millwood for a couple of years now. But she was in palliative care when I saw her recently. She was close to dying.

And I said to her, I'll see you again later this week. And she responded in a weak voice saying, I hope to see Jesus first. Now, I'm pretty sure it's nothing against me, I think.

But you see, she was absolutely sure of where she was going and even ready to go there. Such was her assurance and hope. Why? Because Jesus really rose just as he said he would.

And so we can trust his words about our heavenly hope too. And thirdly, the resurrection really matters because it shows us that Jesus has God's authority.

And that makes him the king. See, Mark says in the very first verse of his book that he is writing about Jesus, the Christ, the Son of God.

[19 : 18] Both titles, the Christ and Son of God, mean anointed king. And I think that's what Mark is showing us with his very last verse. Even though it seems like a rather odd ending.

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

Notice there is no joy. There's no Jesus. There's no reunion. No great commission. Like in the other gospels. There's only fear.

And it seems like the women disobey the angel's command in verse 7 by saying nothing to no one.

In fact, Christians back then found this ending so odd, they made up another one.

It's in your Bibles in italics. But it's not part of the original. So why does Mark deliberately end like this? Well, for starters, we need to realize that the women don't actually disobey.

[20 : 20] In verse 7, they were only told to tell the disciples. And we know from Matthew and Luke that that's what they did. It's just that they said nothing to no one along the way.

What's more, their fear is somewhat understandable. Especially when we remember that the Old Testament associated resurrection with judgment day. When everyone would rise, some to everlasting life, but some to everlasting death.

And so no wonder the women were bewildered and afraid. For them, the resurrection signaled the start of judgment. And so they weren't sure what was about to happen next. But why does Mark not explain any of this?

Why does he end on this note of fear with Jesus nowhere to be seen? Well, to show us that Jesus has God's power and authority, which makes him the king.

Let me explain. Whenever Mark records people's fear of Jesus, it's when Jesus has just displayed his supernatural God-like authority.

[21 : 25] For example, when Jesus calmed the storm, the disciples were more afraid of Jesus, do you remember, than the storm. Do you remember what they said? They said, who is this man that even the wind and the waves obey him?

Or when Jesus heals the demon-possessed man, the people in the town were afraid of him. When Jesus heals the woman who was bleeding, she was afraid of him. And when Jesus walks on water, which is a very God-like thing to do, the disciples were again afraid of him.

You see, throughout Mark's gospel, when people react to Jesus with fear, it's when they see his God-power and authority. And so Mark's ending here is entirely in keeping with his account.

For the women's fear reminds us of Jesus' God-authority, this time over sin and death. In other words, his resurrection shows us that he really is the God-king who has God's power and authority. He is the Son of Man from our first reading, who has everlasting dominion over all nations. And I think that's also why Mark's ending doesn't have Jesus in any place.

[22 : 39] And to give us the impression that Jesus has now been unleashed from death to rule over every place. You see, the resurrection really matters.

For firstly, it shows us that Jesus really paid for our sins so that we can be reconciled. It shows us that we can really trust Jesus' words about our resurrection hope.

And it shows us that Jesus really is the King, God himself, who has power and authority over all, even over death. And so is there anyone greater than Jesus that we can trust in for life?

There isn't, really. So have you put your trust in him? Have you accepted him as your King who defeated death for you? And for us who have, then is there anyone greater we can keep trusting in for life in this world?

To give us guidance in how to live in love? To bring us joy and contentment even in little? To work good out of bad? To furnish us with strength to endure hardship?

[23 : 51] And to carry us home to glory? If I had more time, I could give you examples of people I know where Jesus has done that in each and every time.

But finally, instead, let me ask, if this is who Jesus is, the God King with all authority, then is there anyone more worthy of our fear and reverence than him?

During one of my visits to Faye, again, she told me about how she used to say grace in front of the other residents and nursing staff.

She added, I didn't worry about what they thought. I thought, here is someone who feared her King more than she feared what people thought. She was like Joseph, who boldly declared his allegiance to Jesus by asking Pilate for the body.

And then Faye went on to say, Andrew, I just want to still glorify my Lord Jesus. And it kind of struck me because here she was, lying in bed on oxygen and morphine, struggling to breathe and talk, mostly skin and bone, and she's still saying, Andrew, I just still want to glorify my Lord Jesus.

[25 : 03] You see, she knew who her Lord was, her King, for she knew that Jesus not only died for her, but rose to prove it.

And so even in her dying stage, she not only took comfort, but still wanted to fear, to honor, to glorify him. I told her, you will, because I will tell people of your faith to encourage them.

Faye passed away yesterday. Or should I say, she went home. You see, she knew there was no one greater to trust in for comfort than Jesus, nor anyone greater to serve with reverence than him. You see, unlike Tink the hamster, Jesus really died. But Jesus also really rose. And that really matters.

Let's pray. Our gracious Heavenly Father, we do thank you for this Easter Sunday and all that it reminds us of. We thank you that Jesus not only really died, but that he really rose.

[26 : 12] And that really matters because we can be reconciled to you. Sins have been paid for. It means we can trust his word, including the word about our resurrection hope. And it shows us that he really is the King.

And so we pray, our Heavenly Father, help us to keep living our lives in joyful fear and reverence of him. For we ask it in his name.

Amen.