

A Surprising Ending

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Preacher: Andrew Price

[0 : 00] Our gracious Heavenly Father, we do thank you so much for this Easter Sunday and what it represents, that Christ is risen. Father, we do thank you for your word which reminds us of these truths.

And so, Father, we pray that you would be with us this morning, that you would give us minds to understand your word and a heart that would live in light of it. For we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. A few years ago, there was an article in a UK newspaper, 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.

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.

They're not going to be asked to look after any more pets, I'm sure. But the article continues by saying, The next day, the rodent rose. In fact, it had been hibernating.

[1 : 06] And it reappeared as perplexed Les of Gloucester crushed a pile of old boxes for recycling. He says, Suddenly, a little face popped out of one of the boxes and gave me a big startle.

And I thought, imagine how poor Tink felt being buried alive. So here's Tink on the next slide, I think. Here she is alive and well. But the article ends rather presumptuously by saying, Tink has now been dubbed Jesus by the family after Easter resurrection.

Well, today we come to Mark's account of the real Jesus and his resurrection. And Mark wants us to know, I think, that Jesus not only really rose, but that means that he is really king.

But he begins his account for us this morning by making sure we firstly know Jesus really died. Point one, verse 40. Have a look there in your Bibles at verse 40.

It says, And now if you're here on last Friday, on Good Friday, we would have heard how Jesus had just died.

[2 : 30] And we ended at verse 39 with the centurion declaring, Surely this man was the son of God, which is another title for king.

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

But instead, he mentions these women as seemingly out of nowhere and that they witnessed Jesus's death. In fact, in verse 41, he adds, It's more than just the three women who saw Jesus died.

Many more women also were there and saw Jesus die. It seems Mark includes this detail so that we might know this is no hibernation, but that Jesus really died for these women witnessed it.

And then also he adds a detail about Joseph, who indicates this. Have a look at 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's body.

[3 : 47] Here, we're told Joseph went boldly to Pilate. The reason for that is, if you were tried under Roman law for treason, that is claiming to be a king, even king of the Jews, then Roman law said you had to be humiliated even after death.

Your body had to stay on the cross, you see. So by asking for Jesus's body was to go against Roman law. It was a bold move. What's more, Joseph was a well-respected member of the Jewish council, a prominent member, we're told.

A prominent member of the council, the same council who, in chapter 14, tried to convict Jesus of being guilty, even though he wasn't. So they had that sham trial.

The same council who, in chapter 15, verse 1, made plans to get Jesus crucified by Pilate. And so by requesting the body, Joseph now openly declares his allegiance to Jesus, over against the council who just want nothing to do with Jesus, and in fact just orchestrated his death.

I wonder if we here get a glimpse of Joseph fearing God more than his fellow Jews, and even Pilate, which I think is not a bad example for us to follow, whether at work or school or amongst family.

[5 : 08] But the point here is that his bold request for a body indicates that Jesus had really died. After all, you don't usually request to bury a body when they're still living. You see, Mark wants us to know that Jesus really died.

The women witnessed it. Joseph indicates it. And now Pilate confirms it. You see verse 44? 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. Here we have Pilate himself, the governor, the big banana, and he confirms with the centurion that Jesus is really dead.

You can't get kind of a bigger witness than that. Now, by the way, there's no way the centurion is going to get the wrong body or tell his boss a lie. That means he would be killed.

No, Jesus really died. And in case we're left in any doubt, Mark records the fact that he was then buried too. Verse 46. So Joseph bought some linen cloth, took down the body, wrapped it in linen, and placed it in a tomb cut out of the rock.

[6 : 18] Then he rolled a stone against the entrance of the tomb. Then Mary Magdalene and Mary, the mother of Joseph, saw where he was laid. You see, Mark lines up all these witnesses, almost in like a sandwich kind of pattern on the next slide, actually.

You know, the women witness it. Joseph asks for the body. Then Pilate confirms it. Then Joseph buries. And the women witness it again. Mark lines up all these witnesses so that we make sure we know Jesus really died.

But why spend so much time on this? I mean, surely everyone knows this. Well, because without a real death, there can be no real resurrection from the dead.

Instead, it's just a hibernation like Tink the Hamster. In fact, some people say that Jesus didn't die, actually. He just kind of fainted with the pain.

It's called the swoon theory, where Jesus swooned with the pain, and then he kind of recovered in the tomb and then came out as though he rose from the dead, but didn't really. Now, in case we think that's a bit too ridiculous for anyone to believe, let me tell you, there are actually millions of people who do believe something very close to that.

[7 : 34] For example, on the next slide from the Muslim Quran, it says, they killed, this is about Jesus, they killed him not, nor crucified him, but he was made to appear to them in that way.

That is, it only looked like Jesus was crucified. That's what the Quran says. That's what millions of Muslims believe. For some Muslims, it means that another person took his place.

That's how they think it happened. And for other Muslims, it means he was now to the cross, but he didn't really die. He just looked like he did, you know, kind of swooned, though they don't use that word.

But either way, 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 he can really rise.

Point to chapter 16, verse 1. Have a look there in 16, verse 1. When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Salome, bought spices so that they might go to anoint Jesus' body.

[8 : 43] 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 the stone away from the entrance of the tomb? Now, again, some non-Christians will try and explain away the resurrection by saying they went to the wrong tomb.

Or they will say it was just a hallucination that his followers were, you know, kind of predisposed to because Jesus had been talking about his resurrection. But notice how Mark mentions the women by name again in verse 1.

I mean, he's only mentioned them by name just the verse before. Why repeat all this detail? Well, so that we might know they didn't go to the wrong tomb.

The same women who saw where he was laid are the same women who go to the tomb. It's not a wrong tomb theory. And what's more, notice they are not predisposed to a resurrection.

I mean, they're out buying spices to anoint Jesus' dead body and asking who will roll the stone away for them. They weren't expecting a resurrection.

[9 : 50] So much for the predisposed theory. In fact, it was so unexpected, they get the shock of their life. Have a look at verse 4. 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. I mean, alarmed is a bit of an understatement, isn't it?

When I see my household bills go 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 a man in a white robe, which the other Gospels say is an angel, well, I'd be overwhelmed.

But then comes even bigger news. 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's going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.

[10 : 57] Now notice the words of the man here that Mark records for us. First, this man in the white robe ensures the women that this is not a case of mistaken identity. He not only says that Jesus from Nazareth, that's who you're looking for, he also says Jesus from Nazareth, who was crucified.

It's as though he's saying you're in the right place, you're looking for the right guy. It's not a case of mistaken identity. But secondly, he says, check it out for yourself, that the tomb is empty.

He says, come and see where the body was laid. Have a look for yourself and see that the body that was really dead has now really risen.

And then thirdly, he says, go tell the disciples you can see him in Galilee for yourselves. In other words, check it out for yourself, that he is really risen. You see, this man wants the women to know that Jesus really rose.

And Mark records these words for us because he wants us to really know it wasn't a predisposed hallucination, nor a wrong tomb, nor the wrong person, but there is an empty tomb.

[12 : 09] And now there are eyewitnesses who saw Jesus alive. And we have their testimony in our Bibles today. What's more, we know that their testimony has been handed down to us with remarkable accuracy.

We have thousands of manuscripts we can compare. More than that, we know that these disciples also suffered and died for Jesus later. Would they really have done that for a corpse?

I mean, if they stole the body and just told people Jesus rose, what did they get for it? Did they get rich? Did they have an easy life? No. No. No.

They suffered, they were persecuted, and many were martyred. In fact, in John chapter 20, verse 19, on the next slide, he tells us that the disciples at this point 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 men to boldly proclaiming Jesus as king only a few weeks later?

[13 : 21] What made them willing to die for Jesus? What changed their behavior so dramatically? They say it was that Jesus really rose.

In 1984, a leading German historian, Dr. Lapid, he's on the next slide. You may not have ever heard of him, but he's quite big in the, well, he was quite big in the historian circles.

He writes, 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 or a fake body or whatever, without a fundamental faith experience, notice, then this would be a much greater miracle than the resurrection itself.

He's a non-Christian. Okay, he's not writing as a Christian, and yet even he says the change in their behavior without the resurrection is a greater miracle than the resurrection itself.

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

[14 : 33] In other words, Christian faith in the resurrection is not blind faith. It's a rational faith based on bags of evidence. You see, Jesus really died, but he also really rose, and that really matters.

Point three. I asked my daughter yesterday why Easter Sunday really mattered, and she said chocolate eggs. It was a low point in my career as a minister. I was really hoping to break the stereotype of minister's kids, but for the record, she eventually got there.

And it matters that very first Easter Sunday for at least three big reasons. First, it shows Jesus really paid for our sins so that we could be reconciled to God.

How does the resurrection show that? Well, imagine I committed a crime, I stole something, and I was sentenced to prison for two years. Now, how would you know when I had paid or paid for my crime, done the time, and I was able to go free?

Well, you'd know when I was released, wouldn't you? You'd know because you'd see me walking around, released from prison. Well, in a similar way, Jesus was sentenced to death, not for his sins, but for our sins.

[15 : 49] How do we know when he's paid for our sins? Well, when we see him released, not from prison, but from death, and walking around. You see, the resurrection is proof he paid for our sins at the cross, and that means we can be reconciled to God.

And we get a lovely picture of this with Peter. Did you notice in verse 7 how the man singles out Peter? He says, go tell the disciples and Peter. You notice that?

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 to Jesus.

His relationship restored. And so, says Jesus, tell Peter, tell the disciples and Peter that I'll see him 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 him can now be reconciled with him and live our whole lives, not as God's friends, but more than that, as God's family.

[16 : 56] The resurrection, you see, really matters. It's proof that Jesus paid for our sins. But secondly, it really matters because it means we can really trust Jesus' words, including his word about our resurrection hope.

Notice again the man's words in verse 7. He says, there you will see him, end of verse 7, just as he told you. You see, Jesus said on the next slide, back in chapter 14, verse 28, that he said to his disciples, but after I have risen, I will go ahead of you into Galilee.

That's what he said. And now, that's exactly what happens. And so, if he kept his word about this seemingly far-fetched promise about rising to new life, if he's kept his word about that, then we can trust him to keep his word about everything else, including rising again ourselves to life in a new creation.

And that gives us great comfort in the face of missing out on things in this life, doesn't it? If we miss out on things in this life for following Jesus, we know our eternity will more than make up for it.

What's more, it gives us great assurance in the face of death in this life too, for we know we will live again. I was visiting one of our members, a lady called Faye Chu, last week, or the week before, I think it was.

[18 : 29] And she's undergoing palliative care, which means she's close to death. And I said to her towards the end of my visit, I said, I'll see you again later this week.

And she responded in a weak voice, saying, I hope to see Jesus first. Now, there's nothing against me, I don't 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 power and authority and that makes him the king of all kings.

See, Mark says in the very first verse of his whole book that he is writing about Jesus, the Christ, the son of God. Chapter 1, verse 1. And the Christ and son of God are both titles which mean anointed king.

[19 : 41] And I think that's what Mark is showing us in his very last verse even though it seems like a rather odd ending. Have a look at verse 8 of your Bibles.

Trembling and bewildered, the women went out and fled from the tomb. They said nothing to anyone because they were afraid. That's an odd way to end your book, isn't it?

I mean, there's no joy. There's no Jesus. There's no reunion. There's no great commission like there is in the other Gospels.

There's only fear. And it seems like the women disobey the man's command in verse 7 by saying nothing to no one. In fact, Christians back then found this ending so odd that they made up another one.

It's in your Bibles in italics. But it's not part of the original which is why there's a line and a note telling you it's not part of the original manuscripts. So why does Mark deliberately end like this?

[20 : 48] Well, for Sardis, the women don't actually disobey. In verse 7, they're only told to tell the disciples, not everyone else at this stage. And we know from Matthew and Luke, that's what they did. They did tell the disciples.

It's just that they said nothing to no one along the way towards the disciples. What's more, their fear is somewhat understandable, especially when we remember that in the Old Testament, resurrection was associated with judgment day.

You know, the day that everyone would rise, some to everlasting life and some to everlasting death. So no wonder the women were bewildered and afraid. For them, 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, I think, that Jesus has God's power and authority which makes him the king. Now, let me explain. Whenever Mark records people's fear of Jesus in his book, it's always when Jesus has displayed his supernatural God-like authority or power.

[22 : 00] For example, when Jesus calmed the storm, it says that the disciples were afraid of him. And 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 Jesus. Or when Jesus heals the woman who was bleeding, she was afraid of him. Or when Jesus walks on water, which is, you know, a God-like thing to do, the disciples were again afraid of him.

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

For the women's fear reminds us of Jesus' God-authority, this time over sin and death, and which in turn shows him, or shows us, that he is the God-king, the king of all kings, 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.

[23 : 15] It's as though he gives us the impression that now that Jesus has been unleashed from death, he rules over every place. You see, the resurrection really matters, because firstly, it shows us that Jesus really paid for our sins, there could be reconciliation now.

Secondly, it shows us that we can really trust Jesus' words, including our resurrection hope. And thirdly, it shows us that Jesus really is the king, God himself, who has power and authority over all, including death.

And so, is there anyone greater that we can trust in for life? Is there? Really? There isn't. And so, can I ask you this morning, have you put your trust in him?

Have you accepted him as your king who defeated death for you? For us who have, then, is there anyone greater we can keep trusting in for life in this world?

You know, to give us guidance in how we live in love with one another, to bring us joy and contentment, even with little. To work good out of bad, to furnish us with strength during hardship, and to carry us home to glory.

[24 : 37] If I had more time, I could give you examples of how King Jesus has done all those things for people I know. But instead, finally, let me ask, if this is who Jesus is, if the resurrection shows us that he is the God King with all authority, then is there anyone more worthy of our fear and reverence in life?

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

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

And then Faye went on to say to me, this was about two weeks ago, Andrew, I just want to glorify my Lord Jesus. Let me set the scene.

Here she is lying in bed on oxygen and morphine, struggling to breathe and talk, mostly skin and bone. And yet she is saying, Andrew, I just want to glorify my Lord Jesus.

[25 : 54] You see, she knew Jesus was her King, her Lord. For he had not only died for her, but risen to prove it. And so even in her dying state, she not only took comfort, but wanted to fear, honour, glorify him.

I told her, you will, because I will tell people of your faith to encourage them. Faye passed away yesterday. And while it is sad, we can also rejoice, because Jesus really rose.

And so it means not so much that she passed away, but that she went home. But the point is, she knew there was no one greater to trust in for comfort than King Jesus, nor anyone greater were you to serve with reverence and fear.

for Jesus really rose. Well, unlike Tink the hamster, Jesus really died, he really rose, and that really matters.

Let's pray we might live like it. Let's pray. thank you. Our gracious heavenly father, we thank you for the joy that this day reminds us is ours, because the Lord Jesus not only really died, but he really rose.

[27 : 19] And that really matters because we can be reconciled to you, knowing he paid for our sins at the cross. we can trust his words, that our hope of resurrection is secure.

And father, we can know that he really is king. And so help us, we pray, not only to take comfort in him, but to live our lives in reverence and fear of him.

We ask it in his name. Amen. Amen.