

He is going before you

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[0 : 00] Well, it's great to hear a great Easter hymn in the middle of June.

I should wish you a happy Easter, a second time. We're at that point in Mark. We've gone through for the whole year, since last September, the Gospel of Mark. And we're finishing up today. Finishing up with the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. And we are finishing on verse 8, you'll notice. And yet your Bibles keep going from 9 till 20.

That's a longer ending for Mark. We're not covering that because that really wasn't written by Mark. It was something that was written later.

The style is very different. The earliest manuscripts do not have that section in it. And the people who wrote it were wanting to really tie up some loose ends.

[0 : 57] Because at the end, there is this, what will happen next? This expectation. And Mark intended that. He intended that knowing how the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ was preached throughout the world by that time.

And Mark is writing to people in Rome. They're being persecuted by Nero, who you know by reputation. And this is a Gospel of incredible encouragement and strength.

It's a Gospel where Mark emphasizes that Jesus is the anointed Son of God. He is the one to whom all power and authority belongs. And we as readers take that in.

And we are strengthened by it. We need to decide what we're going to do by it. And of it in our lives. At the very beginning and at the end of Mark, in Jesus' ministry, we see tremendous power.

It's power beyond imagination, beyond any power in the world. But the interesting thing is, and I think this is where faith comes in, it is always power that is shown in weakness.

[2 : 05] And so at the beginning of Jesus' ministry, there is a voice, a powerful voice from heaven. And the voice says, this is my beloved Son. With you, I am well pleased.

Speaking to Jesus, a voice from heaven. But it comes as Jesus was baptized. He was baptized just as sinful people were baptized by John in the Jordan River.

And then the last voice that we hear from heaven is what we heard today. That voice is the voice of the angel. And God's words say, he was raised.

He is not here. And that voice takes place in a tomb. It takes place in the tomb where Jesus' lifeless body was laid.

A place of great weakness. But there is where you hear the words of heaven saying that all power, for even the power of death, are now subject to Jesus Christ.

[3 : 08] He is God's beloved Son, and he is risen. He is God, and he is man. He has absolutely destroyed physical death and spiritual death.

And he has brought eternal life to earth, so that anyone who believes in him, even though they die, they will live forever. You see, it's eternal life coming in to our world.

And so this morning is a crucial time for you and me. We have heard God's word. We've heard Margaret read it. And in those words, we are confronted with the central claim of Christianity, that Jesus rose from the dead.

And if this is not true, then Christians, as Paul said, Christians are the most to be pitied of anyone in the world because we worship a dead person.

We follow and obey someone who lied. And our sins, which are very real, remain. And we have no relationship with the living God. There is no future.

[4 : 14] But clearly that tomb was empty. Even Jesus' enemies agreed that it was empty. They said that the disciples stole the body.

If, however, it is empty because Jesus rose from the dead, then he has the right to be the central reality in our lives. Whether we have been a Christian for many years or whether we are just

thinking about it, we don't know for sure if God exists.

If that is true, that he rose from the dead, then he has the claim of center place in our lives. There is no greater truth than Jesus, if that's true, and his words.

There's no greater love than his love for us. And there's no greater hope than the hope that opens before us in him. The hope that our sins are forgiven.

The certain hope. The certain hope that life without end, with him, belongs to us as we trust in him. This is very, very good news.

[5 : 18] It is really about God coming into our broken and sinful lives and remaking them completely. That is power.

It is Jesus' power to bring us to God and remake you that the resurrection is all about for us. And I think there are many people here in this congregation who can testify to him remaking your life and your future by the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

And so I'd like to turn to Mark 15. And I want to start at verse 40 because there are people that Mark mentions that are wonderful examples of how God does this kind of powerful work through people who are broken and through people who are imperfect as well.

And really, our bold titles there, which aren't part of the Bible, kind of let us down here because it says Jesus is buried. But I want you to go up to verse 40 because in verse 40, Mark writes about three women.

And then he's going to write about a man as well who are wonderful examples of how God does his powerful work through people who are broken and imperfect. Mark is making another one of his famous sandwiches that we have talked about before.

[6 : 42] And you can notice that here. The women, Mary Magdalene, Mary Mother of James, and Joseph, and Salome, are all named in verse 40. And then if you jump down to 47 and 16.1, they are mentioned by name again.

It's repeated. And in between there, in verses 42 through 46, we hear all about Joseph of Arimathea. His name's mentioned three times there. Mark does these sandwiches to highlight something very important, themes that he had in Mark.

He highlights these people for a reason. Why does he do it? Why does he do it as we end up with this incredible ending of Mark with the resurrection of Jesus? Well, it is because these four people are weak and broken, but God makes them essential for the good news of Jesus Christ going out into the world and reaching us clearly today.

He is teaching us through this that we people may have a weak faith, but he gives us strength. He makes us, he remakes us from the inward out and uses us in his power for his wonderful goodness. And I want to start with Joseph here. If you look at verse 43, you can see that this guy is a respected member of the council. And what that means is that he is a senator, but he's not the kind that has questionable travel costs.

[8 : 14] He is somebody that is very well thought of. He is well thought of by the political elite. He's well thought of by the general population. He's very influential in the Sanhedrin, which was the Supreme Court of Israel.

And he, and that was the group, by the way, that interrogated and sentenced Jesus. He was a wealthy and powerful person.

Now, as you read further in 43, he was looking for the kingdom of God. Now, every Jew in synagogue would pray for the kingdom of God to come in their lifetime so that Israel would become a great nation again.

But clearly in this context, it means that he believed that Jesus was bringing the kingdom of God just as he preached. He believed that Jesus' words were true.

He believed that the Messiah was the anointed one. But we don't ever hear about him before this passage in Mark. We know that he did not speak up for Jesus when he was being unfairly accused, when he was going through the process of being mistreated and dying on a cross.

[9 : 31] He was an undercover believer. He wanted to protect himself, his status, his power, and his security. And you can imagine that he must have been torn up inside as he saw Jesus, even though he's innocent, tortured and executed.

Yet at the same time, Joseph not doing anything about the injustice. Perhaps he thought, it's hopeless to do anything. What can I do? A very, very weak faith you see in Joseph initially.

But God in his mercy decided to do a powerful work in this person. He changed his heart and he gave him a backbone in the most marvelous way.

Look at verse 43. Mark says, he took courage and he went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Literally, the original word for take courage means to be so bold as to challenge possible danger or opposition.

And certainly, he faced danger and opposition, not only from the powerful people of Israel, but also from the crowds as well. He was risking his popularity, his reputation, his security, and his power, really everything that was important to him in order to honor Jesus, even though he was now dead.

[11:01] And from the world's point of view, that was a very foolish thing for him to do. It is really an amazing turnaround for him. And it challenges us, I think, today.

Because if Joseph was willing to take that kind of risk for Jesus, who he knew was dead, how much more should we take risks for Jesus, who we know was raised from the dead, and who will come again to judge the earth?

It's not easy for us to do. We tend to think about what we might lose if we make Jesus central in our life. Just as Joseph was making that calculation in his mind during Jesus' ministry, very likely, these were the same calculations that Joseph had as he's very quiet about his belief in Jesus.

But God can, and he will, change your heart each day. Pray for his help, that you can take risks for the honor of Jesus.

I think this is a very good prayer for us each day. How can I take risks for Jesus? How can I bless the world for his name? It is the prayer of faith.

[12:20] And I want you to consider for a moment the good that came from Joseph's courage. Because he asked for Jesus' body, Pilate had to make sure that Jesus was dead.

And many official witnesses testified to the fact that he had died. And now today, that's part of our confession. That's what we said in the Apostles' Creed, that Jesus died and was buried.

He truly died. And then he rose from that death. The other thing is is that traitors were thrown into a pit after crucifixion. And wild animals or people could take those bodies.

But instead, Pilate allowed Joseph to give Jesus an honorable burial. And Pilate did this because he knew Jesus was innocent.

And you can see in verse 46 that Joseph prepared the body in the most respectful way that could be done. And then he laid him in a tomb that had been cut out of rock. And we know from Matthew and from Luke that it was newly made.

[13:27] It was a new tomb. No one had ever been buried there before. And he and his servants rolled a massive stone at the entrance which all the tombs of the wealthy had.

So no one could take the body. It was a very well-marked place. There could be no mistake that Jesus was buried in that particular place and that time.

And that this tomb was empty on Sunday morning. So because of Joseph, everyone, friend and foe, knew that that tomb was empty.

He really provided the place for the greatest miracle that has or ever will happen on earth where eternal life is swallowed up or death is swallowed up by eternal life forever.

That tomb is a sign of what will happen to everyone who entrusts themselves to Jesus for his coming kingdom as Joseph did in the end. So there's Joseph.

[14:28] You know, God working through his weakness in a powerful way to remake his faith. And that brings us to the women. There were a number of them looking on as Jesus died on the cross.

And we know there were two Marys. There was Salome. And the first time in Mark, we see in verse 42 there that there were a number of women who followed Jesus throughout his ministry.

They provided for him, for his work, and for his ministry in a variety of ways. They believed in him deeply and openly. They were very opposite of Joseph in that way in their life.

They had a very, very strong faith. As Clopas said as he was walking with Jesus before he knew him after the resurrection, they had hoped he was the one to redeem Israel.

But in verse 40, something happens to them as they are looking on from a distance. They can only watch from a long ways away. Because as they saw Jesus die, their hopes died within them as well.

[15:36] And I think all of us experience some kind of despair with spiritual and emotional depression in the losses of our lives as well. We can relate to these women.

At times, we like them are tempted to lose hope and to wonder why God would allow terrible things like this to happen. After all, they were faithful to him.

And at times, it seems that evil wins and God's goodness is far away in the distance. These women had heard Jesus teach a number of times that he would suffer and die and rise again.

Yet now, it seemed to them that Jesus had misspoke. It was impossible now. How easy it is for us, too, to doubt God's promises, especially when the immediate circumstances are so grim.

We question his words, his power, and his plans in these times, just as these women did. But again, what we see here is that it is in the brokenness and the weakness of these women that God chooses to do his powerful work.

[16:48] And I want you to think about these women. They are unique in all the world, especially the three women, because they witness Jesus suffer and die in verse 40. And then if you jump down to verse 47, they see him buried.

They actually witness the burial take place. And then in chapter 16, they go to the empty tomb. And then they hear God speak through an angel that Jesus was raised.

And then, and we don't see it here, but in John, we know that Mary Magdalene was the first woman, the first person in the world to see the risen Jesus. And you can see in verse 16, in chapter 16, that through all of this, their faith is not very strong.

It's like a dying ember in their hearts. In fact, in verse 1 and 2, they go on Sunday morning to anoint a dead body, and they're so grief-stricken that they told Mark, you know, we didn't even think about what we'd do when we got to the grave.

How are we going to roll that huge stone away? And even when they see the angel in verses 5 and 6 and hear him speak God's word that Jesus had taught them, they flee from the tomb.

[18:01] They are astonished. They are frightened. They run away. But in the midst of that fear, God gives them this immense privilege of not only witnessing Jesus' death and resurrection, but also, he tells them to be the first people to share the good news of Jesus rising from the dead in power.

They were the first ones to talk about the good news of Jesus. And isn't that wonderful? What he's done is he has chosen these women who were emotionally shattered, who had lost much of their faith, who were frightened, to bring the message of Jesus Christ that has the power to forever transform people in this world for all time.

They were entrusted with that message. And what we see here is God's great resurrection power made perfect in human weakness. forgiveness. And for us, this is an important message as we leave this passage because if you share the gospel only when you are confident, only when you are emotionally strong, only when you've got it all together in your life, you have probably missed out on God's timing.

He deliberately chooses the weak things of the world to shame the strong. His power working in you does immeasurably more than you can ask or imagine. And so it's his power, not ours.

And this is what Joseph and the Marys and Salomies show us. This is what Mark has been teaching all along. It is in people who fail Jesus and who are poor in spirit that God does his greatest work.

[19:43] And today, we celebrate these women and we celebrate this man by name and we thank God for what he did through them. And so I want to close by drawing your attention to what the angel commanded the women to do in 16.7.

So if you can go down to chapter 16, verse 7. Look at the words of God here. Words through the angel. He said this. He said, Go tell Jesus' disciples and Peter that he is going before you to Galilee and there you will see him just as he told you.

You see, these women get to tell the disciples God's own words for them and notice that God names Peter. And you know, if you've been here in Mark, that Peter has denied Jesus three times. He has failed Jesus in the worst way imaginable. But by giving them and giving Peter this message, God is saying to Peter, Jesus has not denied you.

In fact, he goes before you and you will see him. Now did Peter deserve that immense privilege? No. Did God choose him in his failure?

[21:05] Absolutely. And Peter knew that all of his life. And in fact, Peter would preach the first sermon ever on the day of Pentecost only 50 days later. And he will preach before thousands of people in Jerusalem the place of Jesus' crucifixion, the place of Peter's denial.

And that message will be all about the resurrection. And many people will have their lives remade by that sermon. The beginning of a new life for many takes place.

And to me, this is one of the greatest evidence for the resurrection of Jesus. It is a historic fact that frightened, scattered, and hopeless people were very quickly brought together somehow and began preaching about the resurrection of Jesus somehow.

That they had seen him. What accounts for the fact that they were willing to suffer and to die for that message? Why did the Christian churches that worship the risen Lord Jesus spread into every country in the known world?

What accounts for the joy of these people? What accounts for the power of their message that changed lives that is so well documented? It can only be that Jesus truly did rise from the dead and that this good news transforms people.

[22 : 27] It can only be because he sends his Holy Spirit to make a new kind of people. A people whose love for Jesus flows over in love for each other. the resurrection of Jesus to eternal life changes us today.

And as just it changed those people that we heard about today too. And so I pray as we leave this passage for each of you here whether you have not believed in Jesus before rising from the dead or whether you have followed him for many years I pray that you will put your faith in the angels' words.

Jesus was raised he is not dead he goes before you. And this means that all true hope is found in him. In following him to heaven in knowing the joy of his forgiveness and in his rule in your life he goes before you.

Out of his great love and his power Jesus calls you by name to remake you in your weakness so that you will live for him live for the glory that belongs to him forever and ever.

Amen.