

Mysterium Tremendum

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[0 : 00] Well, good evening. Happy Father's Day. Happy Father's Day, everybody. I've got socks. Pretty good. Smart, casual. Smart, casual socks. Good for any occasion. Fantastic. Love it.

A curate is like an apprentice priest. And from the cure part is from the phrase the curer of souls, which is sort of like a job title for a curate and a priest, somebody who cures souls, somebody who leads people to God to heal their souls.

I know it's kind of, yeah, it's great. It's a lovely word, actually. Mysterium Tremendum. That's a great sermon title, eh? Is that like the best sermon title ever?

Latin. That's all I'll say. It actually means a kind of a crazy response to a crazy situation.

But Mysterium Tremendum sounded a lot better than that. The other title of crazy response to crazy situation. All right, let's crack on to this. This is our last Mark sermon.

[1 : 17] This is the last passage. Now, I mentioned this a week ago, but I'll repeat it. I'm sure if you look in your Bibles, you can see that Mark does appear to go on after verse 8, right?

You can see that. It goes on to verse 20. But you'll notice that it has square brackets around, sort of 9 to 20. And somewhere in your Bible, it might say something like, this does not appear in the earliest manuscripts.

What that means is that the oldest and most reliable versions of Mark's gospel did not have anything beyond verse 8. So at some point, some person looked at the original ending of verse 8 and thought, goodness, that's very depressing.

No resurrected Jesus. The woman run away terrified. They don't tell anything to anyone. And they would have compared it to Luke, which has, you know, like the road to a maze.

It has Jesus doing this Bible study with his team. And in John's gospel, we have three amazing appearances of Jesus. And in Matthew, we get the Great Commission.

[2 : 22] And Mark, let me read how it ended. And they went out, this is the ladies, 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.

So somebody at some point thought, this is around 100 AD. Somebody at some point sort of thought, goodness, I need to tidy that up. And they borrowed some bits from other gospels and attached it to the end to give it a bit more of a Disney finish.

All scholars, wow, almost all scholars agree that verse 9 to 20 were added later are not part of the original canon.

For the reason we've said so far, it's not in the earliest scripts, and the Greek is a bit, the Greek is kind of different. The phrasing is a bit different, which is why we're finishing Mark 16, verse 8.

Now you might still be thinking though, yes, but Aaron, it does end very abruptly. So many loose ends. Think about it.

[3 : 28] It is actually in keeping with the style of Mark and the themes. Remember the start of Mark. You're in 14 verses at the start of Mark. The first 13 verses.

You had John the Baptist. You had Jesus baptized. Jesus was tempted by the devil and he started his ministry. The other gospels, they have chapters of genealogies. They have the birth of John the Baptist.

They have like Elizabeth and Mary singing songs. They have the Christmas story. Mark is all action and it finishes like it starts with this kind of like a, like a, like a, like a one inch punch.

If you know that sort of phraseology, right? Like a bam, like that, right? And also it is actually very consistent with one of the major themes of Mark, which I'll get to at the end. And when I explain it, you'll understand.

It's kind of like Mark's in his final verse gives one kick of the can of this very important theme he's been trying to get across. So let's have a look at it. Open your Bibles.

[4 : 28] Let's have a crack. Okay, you can see we've got two sections here. We've got the end of chapter 15, the burial, the whole of chapter 16, which is just eight verses, the resurrection, chapter 15.

Just slide your eyes over that. Now normally a person who was crucified was not given a proper burial. They were left up there as a warning, and so their bodies were taken by vultures or wild animals.

Alternatively, they were thrown into just a big pit. You needed special permission to bury somebody. Intro, Joseph.

This new kid on the block, Joseph. So a day before the Sabbath, new guy, Joseph, appeals to Pilate for the body of Jesus. Now normally if this kind of request was made, it was normally almost always made by a relative, a close relative, which would make sense.

So the fact that it's somebody else asking for the body further sort of emphasizes this abandonment of Christ issue that's been a big issue in the last sort of chapter or so.

[5 : 42] Now this, our man, Joseph, here is an interesting guy. Mark says that he was actually a respected member of the Sanhedrin, so that's the Jewish High Council. That's the Supreme Court.

These are the guys who actually kind of got Jesus arrested and got him killed. Matthew says he was a wealthy guy. Luke says that he was a good and decent guy.

John says that he was a secret follower of Jesus, secret because he was fearful. In verse 43, this man took courage, it says, took courage and went to Pilate for the body.

Wonderful, wonderful thing, right? Wonderful thing to do. He had a lot to lose, of course. In a culture where status was king, so to speak, Joseph risked a lot making this request, essentially declaring his loyalty to Jesus, putting himself in opposition to this very exclusive club that he was a part of the Sanhedrin, a brave man, a man to be emulated.

Now we can see that this request was granted, which was very rare in a case where the crime was treason. Perhaps Pilate was feeling bad about the whole thing, knowing that Jesus was innocent.

[7 : 00] You remember he kind of tried to get him off the hook there, tried to get him released. But that's not the big idea of those first three verses there.

Let me read 44 to 47 to you, emphasizing a few words so you kind of get the big idea. It'll come clear pretty quickly. Verse 44.

Pilate was surprised to hear that he should have already died. Died. And summoning the centurion, he asked him if he was already dead. Dead. And when he learned from the centurion he was dead, dead, did you get that?

Dead. He granted the corpse, right? Dead person. To Joseph. And Joseph bought a linen shroud and taking him down, wrapped him in the linen shroud and laid him in the tomb.

Tomb. That's where he put dead bodies, right? And that had been cut out from the rock and he rolled a stone against the entrance of the tomb. Tomb. Mary Magdalene and Mary, the mother of Joseph, saw where he was laid.

[8 : 00] Okay, so the major emphasis here is on death. Mark wants everyone to know, Jesus really did die. His body was lifeless. And it was really Jesus.

You see in verse 46 here, it's him, him, him. I think Greek, describing a corpse, I think is often gender neutral, but here it describes it as wrapped him in a linen shroud, laid him in a tomb.

It was really him. He really died. And this is important because there's theories out there trying to explain away the resurrection of Jesus.

If Jesus didn't resurrect, I mean, Christianity wouldn't exist. I mean, there was, everyone was obviously pretty chicken at this point when he died. But something happened, which caused Christianity to flourish.

The sensible answer is that Jesus really did resurrect. He really did come back to life. But people try and explain that away, and they go, well, there's one thing you might have heard of, it's the swoon theory.

[9 : 14] If you've heard of the swoon theory, S-W-O-O-N, swoon theory, which they said that Jesus just fainted on the cross, and he was revived in the tomb because the air was like cooler.

Or there's the wrong tomb theory, which reckons that the Mary's visited the wrong place to look for Jesus. Well, the passage just doesn't let us take those theories very seriously.

Dead, dead, dead corpse, tomb, tomb. The highest office in the land, Pilate, said, yep, no, he's dead. Just declared him dead. The centurion, probably the guy that watched him die. Yep, no, he's definitely dead. And Mark makes sure that we know that the woman didn't go to the wrong place because it says, just this little note, right? They saw where he was laid. It wasn't a mistake afterwards.

They didn't go to the wrong place. So all the details are there to confirm it, right? More. Let me give you some more. More information about this.

[10:15] When you think about the Jesus story, this part, this kind of, this ending part of the Jesus story, here's what you probably think this. You probably think, Jesus died on the cross and he was resurrected three days later, right?

That's kind of like, if we had to say it really, really quickly, he died on the cross, resurrected three days later. That's a fair assessment. But do you notice that Mark really hammers home the burial aspect of this?

Kind of like, he just talks about it with some detail. And it was, this was important to the church fathers, like the Apostles' Creed. We just said it, right? We just said it.

We just said it. I'm very confident we just said it. He was crucified, died, and was buried. I mean, why is that?

Like, for Mark, who is all about action, why slow the narrative down to give us the details of the burial? Well, here's what I think.

[11:24] The burial is important because burial is like a capstone of death. I don't know if you've been to a graveside funeral before. You might have been to a memorial service.

A memorial service, there's no body. Graveside funeral, a graveside, a funeral, there's a body in the church. A graveside funeral is where, you know, they lower the, they lower the body into the ground.

It's, that's a brutal sort of, it can be quite brutal, particularly if you're not people of faith. Watching somebody physically be buried, visually, it's, it's, it's really full on because their life is not just finished, they disappear.

The, the separation, death results in separation, right? You know that. But in this, the visual representation of this, that they are gone.

You cover them in dirt. The person's gone. The burial is final. It is this capstone of what has happened to this person.

[12:29] The stone rolling in front of the tomb. He's gone. So all the burial stuff in this narrative is there to let us know, yeah, Jesus is gone.

He has died. He is separated from you. He is actually separated from the Father as well. So why is this important? That's the big question, right?

Why is this important? Well, if Jesus didn't actually die, which is the major point here, if Jesus didn't die, it means he didn't die for our sins. If he didn't die for our sins, we're not reconciled with God.

If we're not reconciled with God, we are enemies of God. If Jesus didn't go through death and come out the other side, there's no hope for us when we die.

There is no new life. There is no new creation. I went to two funerals in the last month. Two funerals in the last month. Husband and wife, Derek and Rowena Slack.

[13:30] Some of you guys may know them. They were long-time attendees of St. John's. They've been coming to St. John's for 30 years. The 7.30 a.m. service.

Great people. Died within two weeks of each other. So I'm at the first funeral, which was for Derek. And I spoke to an elderly man after the first service, thinking that he might be a bit, he was quite an older guy, not in like amazing health, thinking he might be a bit down, right?

I went up to him and said, like, how are you going, mate? How are you going? You all right? And he said to me, you know, I haven't been this encouraged for a long time. And he just starts chatting to me, right?

And he needs help in his house. So he has a live-in carer who is finishing up her contract, and he needs to get another live-in carer quickly to help him kind of with food and cleaning and stuff.

And he goes, because, you know, I need somebody to live with me just in case, because, you know, what happens if I die and some poor soul's fine? What if I die? I don't have a live-in carer.

What if I die and some poor soul finds me five weeks later just face down in my apartment and then laughs his head off?

[14:46] Like he's just like, that would be really funny, you know? This man was very encouraged by this funeral. He was really excited because he was reminded that Christ really did die.

And Christ went through death and came out the other side. And that gave him such hope and such joy. Folks, there is a lot riding on the burial of Jesus.

Hope and joy. Moving on to chapter 16. So after the Sabbath, so these same women, the Marys, who watched Jesus be buried and walked with spices to the tomb, they were going to make Jesus smell nice, right?

They were going to perfume the body. It was like an act of devotion. They believed Jesus' body would have started to decompose at this point and they wanted to do something nice for him. So, they are so grieved, so broken at the finality of seeing that stone rolled in front of the tomb that they're not even thinking very well about what they're about to do.

Because on the way to the tomb, they're like, so, does anyone know how we're going to get the stone? Does anyone know how we're going to do that? I hadn't even thought, just hadn't even thought about that.

[16:17] It was an impossible thing for them to do, but they just kept walking towards the tomb anyway, not knowing what else to do. Verse 4, it says, when they got there, the stone had already been rolled away.

Emphasizing, this is quite a miraculous thing, it says, it was very large. So, they enter the tomb and there's a young man dressed in white, that's a clue, this person is a messenger from God, and he says, you're looking for Jesus of Nazareth, like the specific guy, Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified, who died, that's who you're looking for.

He's not here. And in the best words ever, he is risen. And then the young man says, you can look, you can look, you can look for yourself, have a look.

And then the messenger from God gives him some instructions, he says, go, tell, see, go, go, go, go tell everyone, go, go tell the guys, and, and see Jesus, you'll see, meet him in, he's in Galilee, waiting for you.

And how do these women respond? Awe and obedience. No. Fear and flight.

[17:30] And that, friends, is the end of Mark's gospel. How, what can we, what do we, I mean, what can we possibly learn from that?

Well, despite that rather downer of an ending, it's actually remarkably encouraging.

And here's why. So, the messenger from God, the angel says, go, tell, see, go, tell, see, it's his commissioning.

It says, go and be my witnesses. Go and tell, go tell people that I've risen. And let everyone know what's happened.

He has risen. And go meet Jesus. It's a commissioning and a reuniting with Jesus. It's great. Think about that. That's Jesus' message. That's the first, that's, that's what Jesus tells the angel to go tell people after he's resurrected, to the people that's abandoned him.

[18:34] That's what he says to go do. Isn't that cool? What would be the human experience? What would be my experience? What would be your experience if you died and resurrected?

What would you like to say to the people who abandoned you? Have you ever seen that movie Tombstone? Came out like early 90s, I think maybe late 80s. White Earp. Story of White Earp. Earp. Do you know that guy? Right? Your hand over there. Thank you. Thank you, older lady, who is the only one to see that movie. Fantastic, right? Well, I guess these guys would have been like nothing, I guess at that point, right?

When was that movie? It's a fantastic movie, right? Yeah, yeah, yeah. Right. So I love that movie. So for those of you who don't know, it's OK Corral, White Earp.

You know, older people here will know what I mean. Fantastic movie. So White Earp is, he's seeking revenge on these people that have done some bad stuff. And so there's, he captures one guy and he doesn't kill him.

[19:37] He sends him away. And he says in this, it's a very iconic, if you like film, this is a very iconic scene. Kurt Russell, he says, he's playing White Earp. He says, you go tell those cowboys, the bad people, insert disciples, you go tell those cowboys, I'm coming and hell's coming with me.

It's a great line. You hear me? Hell's coming with me. It's a fantastic line, right? So that would be, that would be the human response. Because we watch that and we go, yeah. If you look up iconic movie lines, that's a really iconic movie line.

You tell them I'm coming and hell's coming with me. And we watch that and we're like, fantastic. That's right. Go get him. Go get him, cowboy. So you tell those spineless disciples of mine, I have risen and I'm coming to get them.

It's judgment day. There's going to be a reckoning. No, that's not what he says. God's grace is amazing, right? He says, I've risen. I'm recommissioning you.

Come and see me. We'll meet up in Galilee. And don't you love it how he specifically mentions Peter, but go tell his disciples and Peter.

[20 : 52] I mean, disciples is a fairly catch all kind of phrase. No need to add Peter if you just want the disciples to know. But to mention Peter by name is, I think is beautiful because, because Peter was, was the one disciple that so catastrophically failed Jesus by denying him.

And Jesus wants to know that he's included, that he's recommissioning him. He wants to see him. He wants to know these loved and forgiven. Listen, it's extremely likely that Peter was a significant witness and source to this gospel.

Very, very likely. And you can imagine Peter relating his failings to Mark, as, as Mark interviewed a whole lot of witnesses to write this gospel. And you can imagine Peter saying, listen, so I'm in the courtyard of the high priests and, and people start to, you know, say that I'm with Jesus and, and they start to question me and, and a servant starts to question me and, and she was, she was actually, she was, she was actually just a young girl.

Can you, can you make sure that they know that it was just a young girl and, and I curse Jesus. Make sure they know that, that I curse Jesus. And this would have been very hard to relay these stories of, of failure, I think.

And I, can you imagine Peter reading this, you know, reading this gospel and hearing that Jesus called him by name? I mean, he'd just be all smiles, wouldn't he?

[22 : 20] This is amazing, amazing stuff. God extending grace to people who, who don't deserve it, who didn't deserve it. And Mark, to emphasize the don't deserve part, finishes the whole gospel with, and they did nothing.

The woman with too scared, they disobeyed Jesus. It's just brilliant, isn't it? Like, it's just one final kick in the guts, you know?

Look how amazing Jesus is. Incredible. You are so useless, aren't you? And just to remind you, I'll finish my whole story of Jesus about how you disobeyed him one more time. And yet Christ was still faithful.

And eventually, obviously they got their act together at some point. But Jesus loved them, forgave them. They were part of his family.

To finish up. To finish up. I don't know where you put yourself in the story. Perhaps like Peter, in need of special mention tonight. Because you know you've failed him so badly.

[23 : 38] Perhaps a woman lost in grief, who can't think straight about the resurrection of Christ, and you're lost in your circumstances. Let me remind you, you do not deserve the grace of God.

I do not deserve the grace of God. But forgiveness and grace and mercy is on offer. We can see that, and we can see Christ is quick to forgive.

I mean, he died to forgive you. And, and on top of that, he uses these very imperfect people, like you and I, for his purposes.

So all those who abandon him, he re, re-institutes them into his plan. Now I hope you know these truths, and I hope they are at the center of your heart.

Because you will continue, to need to know these things. So, that's how Mark's story of Jesus finishes. And what a, what a wonderful, gracious end, is it not?

[24 : 38] Amen. Amen. Amen.