

Mark 15:33-16:8 (PM)

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 09 April 2023

Preacher: Rev. Aaron Roberts

[0 : 0 0] Good evening everyone. Happy Easter. If you're new with us this evening, my name is Aaron. I'm one of the ministers on staff here at St. John's. For this short sermon, I want to focus on three things. Three words. Courage, death, and grace.

Courage, death, and grace. Let's just crack straight on. It probably is helpful to have your Bibles open. I think page 853. Is that right, Drew? 853, 853. Many of you will know that we've been working slowly through Mark's gospel, and this is the last sermon in that series.

And we are going to Mark chapter 16, verse 8. Now if you have your Bibles open, you'll see that Mark does appear to continue on in this gospel.

After verse 8, there's a verse 9, and a verse 10, and a verse 11, and a verse 12. There's like a couple of extra paragraphs there. And if you do have your Bible open, they might have square brackets around them.

It may be a short note that says something like, the earliest manuscripts don't include this last bit. Meaning that the original end of Mark's gospel was actually verse 8.

[1 : 1 6] So what's going on? What's going on? Well, almost all scholars agree that at some point early in church land, someone looked at the end of Mark, which ended in verse 8, and thought, goodness, that's quite depressing.

It's not a great end. Because verse 8, I'll read it to you again. So it seems really early on, and we estimate around 200 AD, somebody borrowed a few bits from some other gospels.

So it didn't just make stuff up, just borrowed a couple of stories from the other gospels, sort of chucked them on the end of this one, just to tidy it up a little bit, give it a bit more of a Disney finish. Now, here's the thing.

It doesn't need a Disney finish. It's actually a great ending. The story of this woman is fantastic. Verse 8, 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.

The problem is the translation doesn't sort of give you the nuance in there. It sounds like they were scared, and didn't do what the angel said. But the word afraid here actually means awe, like wonder.

[2 : 3 5] That's how that particular Greek word is used in almost all the other cases in the gospel. It also says in the passage that they said nothing to anyone, that they just disobeyed the messenger.

But obviously, we know they didn't disobey the messenger. They actually did go and tell everyone. We know that from the other gospels. So when it says they didn't say anything to anyone, it doesn't mean that it just means that they didn't say anything to each other, or stop and have chitty chats with people.

They just went on and told the disciples. They just got on with the task at hand. With great awe and great wonder. That, to me, that's a cracker of an ending.

I hope that's helpful for you to know. So when you get your head around that, you realize it's not a downer, isn't it? We just have an example here of some people getting on with the life of faith.

Okay, big picture again. That was a preamble. Big picture again. We're talking about courage.

We're talking about death. We're talking about grace. So we've talked about the woman, and I think they're a woman of courage.

[3 : 4 5] Let's talk about Joseph of Arimathea first. He is a great example of courage. This is verse 42 to 47. So Christ is on the cross. Normally a person who was crucified would not be given a proper burial.

They were just left up there as an example to others. Their bodies sort of, you know, scavengers would take them, or they'd be thrown into a pit. It was pretty rare to give a proper burial to someone

who'd be crucified, particularly for treason.

But the day before the Sabbath, a man called Joseph went to Pilate and appealed for the body. Mark here says he was a member of the Sanhedrin. So this is the religious elite.

It says he was looking for the kingdom of God. So what do we know about this guy? He was powerful. He was in with the cool kids. He didn't know everything about Jesus. But he knew enough to make a stand.

He knew enough to make a decision. It says in verse 43, He took courage and went to Pilate and said, Can I have the body of Jesus?

[4 : 48] Let's give this man a proper burial. It's a wonderful thing to do. And he had a lot to lose, didn't he? In a culture where status is king, Joseph risked a lot when he made this request.

He was essentially, you know, declaring his loyalty to Jesus. He was putting himself into opposition with other members of the Sanhedrin who had lobbied for Jesus' death. He was inviting ridicule into his life.

He could have been socially and vocationally sidelined for what he did. This picture up behind me here, this was found in the mid-1800s.

It's a piece of graffiti. It's scratched into the wall, a plaster wall in Rome, sometime in the 1st and 2nd century. You look closely there, you can see there's a picture of a cross with a donkey-headed figure on it.

And standing beside it, there's a picture of a man there. And below it are the words in Greek, which translate to Alex Semenos worships his God.

[5 : 55] I don't know if you've ever seen this before. It's obviously a piece of graffiti that is mocking this Christian worshipping Jesus. It's believed to be the earliest depiction of the cross.

And it's interesting that the earliest depiction of the cross is actually an insult. It's a mockery. People back then just thought the whole idea of God dying on a cross was just ridiculous.

And here, this Christian is mocked for his devotion. You know, they found another piece of graffiti nearby, just where there's no pictures. It said Alex Semenos Fidelis, which means Alex Semenos is faithful.

Which is lovely, isn't it? Lovely response to the mocking. Someone sticking up for Alex Semenos, despite the ridicule saying he will remain faithful to Christ. It's brilliant, isn't it?

This is what we want. This is what we want for ourselves. This is what we want for each other. In spite of potential derision, in spite of being potentially misunderstood, we want to be faithful and courageous followers of Jesus.

[7 : 02] Okay, that's my first point. Courageous. Be courageous. That's one of the big points of this passage. Second, I want to talk about death. This is also a key idea in our reading tonight.

Did you notice all the details in the middle section of our story? I'll read it again to you, and you'll see that Mark is emphasizing something. Verse 44.

Pilate was surprised to hear that he should have already died. And the centurion, he went and asked him whether he was already dead. And when he learned from the centurion he was dead, he was granted the corpse.

Pilate was. And there's all these details about the linen shroud and taking him down and wrapping him up and laying him in a tomb. And the stone being rolled against the tomb. And Mary Magdalene and Mary, the mother of Joseph, saw where he was laid.

So you see the major emphasis? It's death. Mark wants to know Jesus really, really died. He was lifeless.

[8 : 06] This is important. Because there are theories out there trying to explain away the resurrection of Jesus. Like the swoon theory. Like Jesus kind of fainted on the cross, but then he sort of was revived in the cool of the tomb or something.

Another theory is the wrong tomb theory. That Mary just went to the wrong place to look for Jesus. The passage doesn't let you think any of these things. Dead, dead, dead, corpse, tomb, tomb. The highest office in the land declared him dead. The centurion who watched him said, no, he's definitely dead. And Mark says, no, they didn't go to the wrong tomb.

It says they saw where he was laid. There's no mistake here. All these details are there to confirm it. Just seems really interesting to me that, you know, when we think about this weekend, we do think a lot about the cross and we think about the resurrection.

But Mark here says, no, there was a burial. He really hammers home this burial idea. Why is that? The earliest Christians thought it was important. They put it in the creeds.

[9 : 17] Suffered in a Pontius Pilate. Was crucified, died, was buried. For Mark, who was all about sort of action, he slows down the narrative to give us all of these details about burial rites.

Why is that? Because burial is important. Because burial is like, it's like the capstone of death. I don't know if you've ever been to a graveside funeral where the body is lowered into the ground. It's really difficult. Watching somebody physically being buried, visually. It's like their life isn't just finished. It's they disappear. They are gone.

Burial feels very, very final. It would have been the experience of the woman at the tomb in verse 46. It feels very final.

It feels very final. So why is it important to know that Jesus really died? Because if he didn't die, then he didn't die for our sins.

[10 : 28] And if he didn't die for our sins, we're not reconciled with God. And if he didn't go through death and come out the other side, then there's no hope for us when we die. There's no new life.

There's no new creation. I remember going to a funeral a number of years ago and speaking to an elderly man afterwards.

And I passed his face on. Hello, how are you? Are you okay? And he was really jovial. He said, I, he goes, I haven't been this encouraged for a long time.

And not what I was expecting to hear. And then he cracked some jokes about his own death. Like inappropriate jokes about his own death, you know. And I'm just listening. And he goes, oh, I just, that was just such a wonderful sermon.

I'm so encouraged by that. It heard a sermon about Christ's death and how Christ had passed through it for us. And will take us through it too. So for this guy whose death was coming sooner for him than it was for most people, that's the reason he was, I don't know, he was quite chirpy.

[11 : 37] And that is only possible when we believe that Jesus really did die. And he really did rise again.

Like all that to say, there is a lot riding on the burial of Jesus. And that's why it's emphasized.

There's no death. There's no resurrection. There's no hope for us after death.

No hope for our loved ones after death. You know, we had two people in our congregation die last week. And so they were here on Sunday and not here again this week.

And we can grieve and we can be sad about that. But we don't grieve without hope. Folks, we have concrete hope. That they are safe with Jesus.

And we will see them again. So, point one. Be courageous. Point two.

[12 : 40] Death is not the final word in our life. Now, let's talk about grace. We're moving on to chapter 16 here. So, after the Sabbath, the woman who watched Jesus be buried walked with spices to the tomb.

They're going to prepare the body. It's an act of devotion. They really grieve. They haven't really thought it through because, you know, they're thinking, how are we going to roll the stone away? That was impossible for them to do.

But when they get there, the stone has already been rolled away. So, they enter the tomb. And there's a young man who's the messenger of God, an angel, dressed in white. And he says, you're looking for Jesus who was crucified, a.k.a. he died.

He's not here. And the best words ever, he is risen. And then he gives them this message. And the message is this. Go tell his disciples and Peter that he is going before you to Galilee.

There you'll see him just as he told you. Go and tell everyone. Meet Jesus in Galilee. How did this woman respond to this?

[13 : 47] They are overwhelmed, but they get on with the job. They don't chat amongst themselves. They just get on with it. So, that's the end of Mark. So, what do we learn from this last little bit here?

Well, I think we learn about how astonishing the grace of God is. Where do we see that? Well, just look. He says, the messenger says to them, Jesus wants to meet up with you.

All of the people that abandoned Jesus, he wants to meet with you guys. He's got a great plan for them. What would our message be?

What would my message be? It would be, you tell those spineless friends of mine that I have risen and they're in a lot of trouble.

No, he doesn't say that. I mean, the grace of God is amazing here. And specifically, do you see how he mentions Peter? Go tell his disciples and Peter.

[14:50] And to mention Peter by name is so beautiful. Because otherwise, you can imagine the woman arriving to where the disciples are hanging out and saying, Jesus is risen.

He wants to meet with you in Galilee. And Peter is sitting there thinking, well, obviously, that doesn't include me. Peter is specifically mentioned here.

Because God wants them to know that he is included. Even though he failed so catastrophically, Jesus wants to know he's included. Isn't this great?

This is great. If you have any self-awareness in your life, you know you haven't got it together. Like Peter. Despite our fickleness and our sometime cowardice, Jesus calls himself, calls us to himself and says, let's get on with this life together.

Like I know, I know, I know all this stuff. I know, I know, I know. But let's get on with life together. It's going to be awesome. I've got great ideas for you. I've got great plans for you. He says your name.

[16:05] He says your name specifically. Let's finish up here. I don't know how you connect to the story. Maybe you have been called to be a person of more or greater courage and action like Joseph and this wonderful woman here.

Or maybe like Peter, you need a special message from Jesus saying your name specifically. Maybe you feel like, oh man, I've failed really badly.

Jesus calls you specifically. He says you're okay. Or maybe death has visited your life recently. Let me remind you.

Jesus is worth our courage. Jesus is worth our courage. Forgiveness, grace and mercy is offered to you.

Even to you. Even to that thing that still shames you. Years later. It's offered to you. And finally, death did not win.

[17:14] We can trust our friends. We can trust our loved ones who have died into the safe hands of Jesus because he has risen. Amen.

Let me pray for us. Very quickly. Father, help us to live a life of courage. And Lord, when we fail, give us the humility to come to you.

Help us to know and see that our failure is no match for your grace. Lord, help us to trust all of our life to you.

Even our death. And the death of those we love. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.