

TREASURE JESUS

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[0:00] Gracious Father, we ask on this Easter Sunday that you might help us to see Jesus, that you would change our minds and our worldview, that you would change our hearts and that you would change the course and direction of our lives.

And we ask it for your sake. Amen. On the 5th of October 1974, five people died, 65 were injured in IRA bombings in two pubs in Guildford in England.

The public was outraged. The British police were pretty keen for an arrest. They quickly arrested a small-time Belfast criminal named Gerry Conlon.

He was one of four people arrested and the four of them together became known as the Guildford Four. The police also arrested Gerry Conlon's father, Giuseppe, for conspiring in the bombing.

With all their evidence, the police actually had no evidence to prove that Giuseppe or the Guildford Four were in fact guilty of the crime.

[1:04] In fact, they received evidence to the contrary, and particularly that Giuseppe Conlon was clearly innocent. But in spite of that, Giuseppe Conlon was sentenced to 12 years imprisonment, even though they knew he was innocent.

And his son Gerry, along with the rest of them, were sentenced to life imprisonment. Gerry Conlon was released after 15 years imprisonment, and he went on to write a book about his innocence and his vindication.

His father, Giuseppe, however, died in prison, an innocent man in January 1980, after roughly 10 years or a bit under 10 years in jail. It's another story of an innocent man being condemned for crimes that he didn't commit.

It's a miscarriage of justice, not unlike the innocence of the death of Jesus. Of course, there are some significant detail differences, but the death of Jesus would be nothing without the resurrection.

Without Jesus' Easter day, his Good Friday, would just be simply another travesty of justice in history.

[2:20] And Jesus would not get much of a mention in Wikipedia, just like Giuseppe Conlon gets virtually no mention in Wikipedia. Without the resurrection of Jesus, the death of Jesus would get a one-line mention, maybe a paragraph, in the history books.

But that's about it. The resurrection of Jesus changes everything. There are three changes that I have in mind this morning from that passage that was read out to us, particularly verses 6 and 7 of Mark 16.

Firstly, there is a word of challenge to change our minds and our worldview. Then there is a word of mercy to change our hearts and to give us hope.

And finally, there is a word of mission to change the course and the direction of our lives. The first there is the word of challenge to our minds.

It's there in 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.

- [3 : 28] Now that is a challenge to our minds. Jesus came back to life after he was executed. The fact that Jesus was crucified is not an unusual fact. Around the time of Jesus' life and around that place, there were dozens, dozens of little movements where the leader of those movements declared themselves to be the Messiah of the world. As Jesus himself did. And in almost every case, the leader of these movements was killed. They were executed. And the movement just simply collapsed. The leader's dead. People just went home. That's it. It's done. Except for this one, led by Jesus. Only one movement didn't collapse after the death of its leader. In fact, it exploded. Within 200 years, it dominated the Roman Empire. And today is the largest and most widespread culturally and geographically of all religious faiths.
- [4 : 38] And so, what made that difference? Well, the Bible says, the Christian church says, that after Jesus was killed, he came back to life and appeared to his followers. That is, the resurrection of Jesus changes everything. The Bible says, that is why Jesus' followers didn't pack up and go home. That is why Christianity exploded. But this is Chatswood in 2014. We are one of the major centres in the secular city of Sydney. And most people around us just, frankly, don't believe that. That the resurrection of Jesus is literal. And I get it. I understand that. This is a significant challenge to our minds. And so, in challenging our minds, or our thinking and our worldview, if you like, it is important, I think, to not be intellectually lazy.
- [5 : 51] If you want to jettison the resurrection, then you have to come up with an alternative explanation as to how this one little movement exploded like it did. And I fear that too many are prepared to jettison the resurrection without much thought or without genuine alternative explanations. The one thing that they know is that they don't know. And it just seems that they can be comfortable with that. And so, rather than looking at the evidence, what tends to follow is accusations that the texts like Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, you know, Mark, which we've got in front of us now, are just frankly not reliable. To justify ignorance, there is a temptation to call the historical documents legends. And Mark challenges that view for us here in front of us again. Three times in eight verses, Mark 15 verse 40, in 15 verse 47, and in 16 verse 1, Mark writes down the names of the eyewitnesses who saw it all.
- [7 : 00] Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome. Why three times in eight verses? The answer of one New Testament scholar who understands a whole lot more than I do about ancient historiography is that this has all the marks of the way that historians did history in those days. These are the marks of history, not legend. These women are clearly described as eyewitnesses. Notice it there in chapter 15 verse 40, some women were watching. And again in verse 47, Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joseph saw where he was laid. Then in chapter 16 verse 4, when they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had been rolled away. Then in verse 5, as they entered the tomb, they saw. Then again in verse 6, see the place where they laid him. It's pretty obvious the way that Mark has written this here, that he wants us to see that these women are eyewitnesses of the facts.

[8:07] They were there. They saw the death and the burial and the resurrection of Jesus. They saw the empty tomb. Now this in itself is slam dunk proof that the resurrection is history and not legend.

Because one of the earliest arguments against Christianity, and particularly against the resurrection of Jesus, is that the accounts of the resurrection of Jesus is based on the testimony of women.

Second century Greek philosopher named Kelsus was one of the first and most savage opponents of Christianity. He wrote that the resurrection was clearly a lie because women were the eyewitnesses and women were regarded as not historical but hysterical and unreliable.

And people in the second century went, hmm, good point, Kelsus. Good point. That is a real problem.

It was an incredibly strong argument because in that ancient culture, women were marginalised and you could not believe their testimony. And this is the very culture that Mark was writing into.

[9:47] And so if Mark was making this all up, if this was a legend, then they would never have put women in as the only eyewitnesses to Jesus' empty tomb.

The only way to account for the women being recorded as the eyewitnesses of Jesus' resurrection is that they in fact were. It can't be legend.

And so what Mark is doing for us here is he's challenging our minds, challenging our worldview. He has written this as historical documentation of actual events, events that challenge the way that we see the world.

And at this point, it'd be easy for us to say, okay, this stuff, written as history, but they got the facts muddled up a bit. Ancient people were just a little bit gullible about miracles.

They don't have our modern developed minds. We've learned a thing or two in the past 2,000 years. You see, it's easy to assume that their worldview is different than ours.

[10:57] And in some aspects, it was. Like, for instance, they in those ancient days were open to the idea of a resurrection. But we ourselves in our modern mind are not.

We can assume that they approach the tomb. The stone is rolled away. The tomb's empty. And they immediately go, resurrection.

Resurrection. And Mark challenges here not to be so quick to make assumptions that they were ignorant and that they were gullible. One thing you'll notice as you read through Mark's gospel, as we've done here as a church in the last little while, is that Jesus tells his disciples quite clearly that he will die and that he will rise again on the third day.

It's there in chapter 8 and it's there in chapter 9. Now, Mark's an economist and he wasn't sort of, he was running out of ink, so he did the shortened version. So when Mark repeats something, says it twice, it's like he says it over and over and over again.

He's making a very significant point here. I'm going to die, going to rise again, going to die, going to rise again, going to die, going to rise again. Disciples, do you get it? And the weird thing is that the third day after his death arrives and it seems that no one's expecting the resurrection.

[12:18] The blokes are gone. The women had bought spices to anoint a dead body. As they wheeled their trolleys, you know, past the spice rack at Woolies, they didn't go, ah, spices are on sale.

Unfortunately, we're not going to need that this time. They bought the spices to anoint a dead body. They didn't think, ah, Jesus is just going to borrow the tomb for a few days.

And the disciples on the third day weren't sitting around with brunch and thinking, hey, guys, it's the third day.

Do you think we should go and check? Just in case. No one does it. No one's expecting the resurrection.

And what's more, those who did go to the tomb, these women, these three women, it says they're wondering as they go there, who's going to roll away the stone for us?

[13:26] It's like we've prepared everything except that one fact. How are we going to get in? And their first thought of seeing the empty tomb was not that Jesus had come back to life, but that someone had stolen his body.

A fair assumption back in those days. Grave robbing was a pretty common practice. You either went and stole things out of people's tombs, or you went and got the bodies and threw them out of the tomb so you can bury your own relative in the tomb.

The point is that if you have doubts about the resurrection, so did they. So did they. But they let the evidence challenge their worldview.

We need to be careful of what C.S. Lewis called chronological snobbery. It's where we think that those who have gone before us, especially those who have gone before us a long time ago, are naive, that they are gullible, and they are stupid.

We need to be careful that our chronological snobbery isn't in actual fact an excuse for intellectual laziness. Are those people just stupid?

[14:43] And therefore I don't need to think. A little ironic. A little ironic. The worldview of these early believers didn't allow for resurrection either, but they had the intellectual integrity to allow the evidence to challenge their worldview.

It's normal to question the validity of the resurrection. But if you do for integrity's sake, then we have to come up with an alternative, historically plausible reason why this ragtag group exploded to all the four corners of the globe and changed the world for over 20 centuries rather than dying out of the crucifixion of their leader.

If we reject the resurrection. If we reject the resurrection, then we have to come up with an alternative, historically plausible reason why hundreds of people claim to have seen him resurrected.

And why the opponents of Christianity couldn't produce a body and why these early Christians joyfully gave their lives to see this message of the resurrected Jesus spread through all the globe.

That's the first challenge. The challenges to our mind and our worldview. And if you allow this word of challenge from Mark 16 to change your mind and to change your worldview, then it will be a word of mercy and grace to your hearts.

[16:25] That's the second change. A word of mercy and grace to change our hearts. Look at this wonderful word in chapter 16, verse 7.

Go tell his disciples and Peter. He is going ahead of you into Galilee and there you will see him just as he told you. To understand what an incredible word of grace this is, let's consider what wasn't said.

He didn't say to these women gathered, you go and you tell those faithless, backstabbing cowards that I might see them in Galilee if they come to me and they grovel.

And they'd better grovel. If they have any hope of me reinstating them as part of my crew and into this movement, then they'd better grovel.

Now, of course, that would have been warranted given what they did to him. But Jesus doesn't work the way that you and I work. He's forgiving them and calling them back to himself even before they have repented.

[17:38] This is a word of mercy and grace and forgiveness. But the biggest word of grace is simply in the name Peter.

There is a whole bunch of disciples. But Peter gets a special mention. Go and tell the disciples and Peter.

I'll meet you in Galilee. Why? Why is Peter singled out? The end of chapter 14. Peter disowns Jesus three times after having earlier declared that he would never abandon Jesus.

When the pressure came on, he says, I know nothing about Jesus. And he runs to save his own skin. And so if this word to the women was simply go and tell the disciples, they would have relayed that message to the disciples.

And Peter may have been sitting there and he would have said, you guys go. Jesus can't mean me. Not after what I've done.

[18:49] But here Jesus specifically says to the woman through this angel, I have plans for my disciples, even Peter. Even Peter, who was the biggest screw up. He became the biggest of the leaders in the early days of the church.

His screw up was the biggest. His repentance, the deepest. And his grasp of the grace of the Lord Jesus the greatest. The good news of the Christianity is that salvation is by grace, not by our works and by effort or by our strength.

Salvation comes to us by the weakness of Jesus dying on the cross. Salvation comes to us by Jesus when we admit our inability, our weakness, our failure.

Salvation comes to us by the Lord Jesus the greatest. When we admit that we need a savior. Jesus is the savior that we need. Forgiveness is offered to Peter and to us through the resurrection of Jesus.

You see, when a criminal completes their jail sentence, they fully, completely, totally satisfy the sentence.

[20:00] And when they walk out of prison, the law has no more claim on them. They are free. Can't be charged again for the same crime.

And Jesus came to pay the penalty for our crimes against God. It was a huge penalty. It was a huge sentence. The sentence was death. Death, but he must have satisfied it fully because Easter day, he walked out free.

Death could not hold him down. In Jesus, God has stamped paid in full right across history so that we cannot miss it.

And because Jesus was raised from the dead, God can come to us with a word of grace saying, Peter, oh Peter, you foul up.

You're a screw up. You've got the biggest debt, but it will lead to the greatest resurrection. And so if we take this word to our minds and let it change our worldview, we open ourselves up to a word of mercy and grace and forgiveness that will transform and change our hearts.

[21:23] And then finally, there's a word of mission that will reshape the way we live our life. And this mission is really simple. It's just there in that word go. Go and tell people about the resurrected Jesus.

Go and communicate in every way about the resurrected Jesus. And I think that's why verse 8 is such a shocking way for Mark to end his gospel account.

Trembling and bewildered, the women went out and fled from the tomb. They said nothing to anyone because they were afraid. Now, I'm not down on the women here.

It's been a big few days. But Mark does make a pretty clear point. This is not how it's meant to end. Right at the beginning, we are told in Mark's gospel about the good news of the proclamation of Jesus Christ for the world.

And yet it ends with trembling and bewildered. They walked out and they said nothing. This is not how it's meant to end. The resurrection of Jesus is such good news. How could you do anything but shout it out?

[22 : 31] The resurrection is the answer to the deepest longing of every person sitting in this room to live life well forever.

That's what you want. You want to live life well forever. That's why the beauty industry is booming. Because you don't want to look like you're dying.

That's why baby boomers wear jeans. Because they're trying to live out their teenage lives again. And again. And again. We want to live. We want to live. We want to live well.

We want to live. We want to live well. We want to live. We want to live well. We want to live well. Because those were the days before emotional pain and responsibility and frailty. We want to live. And we want to live well.

And one of the reasons it's so hard for us to suffer is that we think that this physical world is it. And when you lose it, you lose the best and the most precious thing.

[23 : 31] And the resurrection means that this is not it. This is not it. There is more to come. The resurrection means that God is going to perfectly remake this world.

You see, right now, for me, a headache can severely mess with the quality of my day. But with a resurrection body, not even holes in my hands or in my feet or in my side will impact the quality of my day.

That is good. That is good. The resurrection changes everything. There is hope for the wheelchair bound and the person with crippling emotional pain.

No religion in the world except biblical faith promises us new and perfect minds, hearts and bodies. No one else even dares to do that. Only in the gospel of Jesus Christ do people find so much hope for life now because it's not just now.

And so when people in an attempt to be helpful, and I acknowledge they're trying to be helpful, they turn the resurrection into a metaphor of new life and growth through suffering.

[24 : 53] They gut Easter of its hope. Can you imagine the first preachers of this resurrection of Jesus going out to the poor and the slaves and the outcasts of society as they did and saying, let me tell you about the resurrection.

It didn't really happen, but it's a great symbol of how good triumphs over evil. So go and be nice to one another.

Can you imagine the crippled, the poverty stricken, the tormented, the outcasts listening to that sort of a message and going, oh man, that's just the message I needed to help me cope day by day with my crippling pain and my loneliness and my hunger.

There's no hope in that. The resurrection as a nice symbol has no power to change anything. It doesn't offer us hope. But the actual historical physical resurrection of Jesus changes everything.

If you know that this is not the only tangible, concrete life, who cares what people do to you? The resurrection makes you free from this life enough to be brave and courageous and sacrificial and generous and patient and be joyful.

[26 : 19] The resurrection means that you can face the worst things in this life with joy and with hope. The resurrection means that you can give yourself to serving God in this world, the world that he loves, the world that he is redeeming and transforming and rebuilding and remaking through the Lord Jesus.

You see, if Jesus didn't rise from the dead, that he wouldn't have hardly got a mention in the history books. The resurrection changes everything.

And because of the resurrection, we have plastered everywhere here at St. Paul's that we exist to know Jesus, to treasure Jesus, and to represent Jesus for God's glory and the joy of all people.

That's why we exist. Because of the resurrection of Jesus. And so there are three words of challenge for us today. A word of challenge for our minds, a word of challenge for our hearts, and a word of challenge for the course of our lives.

This is a life-changing message. And if you're not a believer, you're someone who's struggling, doubting about the resurrection, I suppose my call to you is the call of what is out there on the banner, out the front of church here on Fuller's Road, is come to life this Easter.

[27 : 41] This is a life-changing message. Let your mind be challenged so that you can receive this word of grace and have your heart changed.

Let me say, if I was better prepared, I'd have something to give you right now to help you to think, to not be intellectually lazy. I think the best thing I can do right now is to offer you a communication card at the back of church where on the way out, just stick your name, address, and just write something under there like Easter resource and we'll post you something to help you.

Unconditional. This is unconditional, just like the grace of Jesus. It's unconditional to you so that you can actually start thinking about the resurrection of Jesus. I'd love to do that. That's the first thing.

If you are a believer in the Lord Jesus, then I think my word to you is just the word of this angel here is don't be afraid. Know Jesus, treasure Jesus, and represent Jesus for God's glory and the joy of all people.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.