

Fear and Trembling

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Preacher: Nick Lauer

[0 : 00] We're looking at Mark 16, that's page 853 in the Pew Bible, if you want to turn there. We'll have it on the screens too. We're looking at Mark 16, verses 1 through 8, page 853.

This is the passage that our teaching will be based on tonight. Let me read this for us. Let's read this.

And looking up, they saw that the stone had been rolled back. It was very large. And entering the tomb, they saw a young man sitting on the right side, dressed in a white robe, and they were alarmed.

And he said to them, do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has risen. He is not here. See the place where they laid him.

But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he's going before you to Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you. And they went out and fled from the tomb, for trembling and astonishment had seized them.

[1 : 37] And they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid. If you've been coming to Trinity last fall and this spring, then you know that we've been working our way through the Gospel of Mark.

And the Gospel of Mark is one of the earliest historical accounts of the life of Jesus. And tonight, we come to the end of Mark's Gospel. To Mark's account of the resurrection.

And tonight doesn't just end our series on Mark, but it starts a series that we're going to do for the next five weeks on the resurrection of Christ. On the resurrection of Jesus. So starting tonight, we're going to take a look at each of the Gospel accounts over the next five weeks.

And see how each one brings a unique perspective on this utterly massive, history-changing, life-changing event. Each of the four Gospels gives us a perspective on what has happened.

And in each one, there's something unique and crucial and life-giving to see about Jesus' resurrection. So, in the month ahead, that's what we're going to be doing. So tonight, Mark 16. Next week, Matthew 28.

[2 : 45] The week after that, Luke 24. And then we're going to do John 20 and then John 21. So that's where we're headed in our evening service. But tonight, we're here.

We're beginning with Mark. We're ending with Mark. And I think you'll agree that as we look over this passage, that the overriding and surprising, I think, theme in Mark's account of the resurrection is fear.

Verse 4 says the women who came to the tomb were alarmed. That's a really strong word in the original. And then verse 8 at the end says that trembling and astonishment had seized them.

And the paragraph ends with Mark telling us they were afraid. Now, I think, if you're like me anyway, I think that we're used to the Easter message being one of comfort and joy and hope.

Last week, I preached an Easter sermon that I hope was full of comfort and joy and hope. And yet, you know, and indeed Easter is all of those things, right? But before it is any of those things, the resurrection of Jesus is unsettling.

[4 : 04] The resurrection of Jesus ought to make us tremble. So when you and I think about the resurrection, does it make us tremble?

Or have we kind of domesticated it? Have we made it sort of merely comfortable? Have we even made it a little sentimental? When the message first rang out from the empty tomb, when the angel told the women that Jesus had been raised, their response wasn't, aww, let's give each other chocolate and take pictures with a bunny.

Right? No. They were terrified. They trembled. But why? Well, I want to suggest tonight that Mark's account points us to three things concerning Jesus' resurrection that ought to make us tremble.

And I think if we can get this, my hope is that if we get this, if we get the trembling of the resurrection, then we'll really start to get the joy and the hope and the comfort of the resurrection. So, first, the resurrection makes us tremble because it tears apart our merely human expectations. [5 : 29] The women come to the tomb to do one last honorable thing for their dead friend, right? To pay their last respects and to show their devotion one more time. They had no doubt spent all day Saturday leading up to Sunday morning, the Sabbath, grieving over their lost friend.

Mark is very clear, if you look at the passage leading up to this last chapter, Mark is very clear that Jesus died on the cross Friday afternoon. And then if you read verses 40 through 47 of chapter 15 that leads up to our passage, it's very clear that Jesus was buried in a tomb because he was dead. And the women, these particular group of women, saw where he was buried, and they go and they observe the Sabbath, they rest, and then they come back first thing on Sunday morning, the first day of the week, to anoint Jesus' body, to say goodbye one last time.

In fact, on the way, they're wondering, right, who's going to move this large stone away from the entrance of the tomb? Joseph of Arimathea, the guy who actually got Jesus' body and buried it Friday afternoon, probably had a number of male servants who helped him move the stone on Friday.

But a few women probably are not able to manage it themselves. So as they're going in their grief to pay their respects, to pay their devotion, they're not even sure how they're going to get into the tomb.

[6 : 50] And yet, when they arrive, the stone has already been moved. And upon entering the tomb, they see an angel.

Mark calls him a young man in white clothing, which we all know what that means, right? At least Mark's audience would have. They see an angel who tells them that Jesus isn't there any longer. He's not dead any longer. Remember that he has been raised to bodily, new creation, unending, unshakable life. Now you can imagine how their heads must have been spinning.

First, they're startled by the fact that the tomb is even open. And then this young man, this angel, seated in the tomb. And then I'm telling him this message that the Jesus, who they just saw executed about 36 hours previous, was alive.

In a matter of seconds, everything they thought that they would find that early Sunday morning was completely flipped upside down. Right?

[7 : 54] Common sense told them that a heavy stone would stay in place and that a dead person would stay dead. And all these expectations on that first Easter morning were dashed.

They were seeking a dead Jesus. And they come to find that a living Jesus is now seeking them. The resurrection, friends, is the great paradigm shift, if you will. It's the great worldview changer. You see, we live our lives from the moment of our birth in a completely self-centered way. With our own expectations of what God should and shouldn't do. Of whether God is or isn't real. And that way of viewing the world is very safe for us, isn't it? Because, ultimately, we're the ones who stay in control.

If I can hold God here and sort of cast my verdict on Him, then I'm in control and I'm very safe. But, you see, with the resurrection of Jesus, we're being confronted, not with a self-centered worldview, with a God-centered worldview.

[9 : 06] That God is real. And that He has a purpose and a plan for the world and for us. And that He has acted supremely in and through Jesus to bring those plans to pass.

Now, the resurrection doesn't mean that God is unpredictable, that anything can happen. But it means that God is in control. And He's taking history to its appointed conclusion.

And you and I will need to have our expectations challenged and even overthrown if we're to truly come to grips with this God and with His reality.

So, the resurrection of Jesus, God the Father raising Him from the dead, breaking the finality of death, pushes us out into a view of ourselves and the world.

Or not where we're in control. Not where I'm ultimate. But where God is in control. And where God is ultimate. Not into an unpredictable world.

[10 : 14] Not into an erratic world. But a world where you and I are not in control. And where our plans can be overturned by His plan. And where Jesus Christ is Lord.

And that brings us to our second point. The resurrection makes us tremble. Not just because it sort of overturns our expectations in a general way. But because it tears apart our safe understanding of

who Jesus is.

Let's read again the words of the angel in verses 6 and 7. Look with me again there. The angel says to them, Don't be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth. Who was crucified?

The crucified one. Then He says, He has risen. Or He has been raised. He's not here. See the place where they laid Him.

In other words, The tomb is empty. You can look. But go tell His disciples and Peter that He's going before you to Galilee. And there you will see Him.

[11 : 15] Just as He told you. Just as He told you. It's hard for us to wrap our minds around the magnitude of that little phrase.

Just as He told you. Now on the one hand, that's a direct reference to Mark 14, 28. If you flip back just a page, you'll see on that verse where Jesus, right before His betrayal in the Garden of Gethsemane, told the disciples that they were going to abandon Him.

They'll strike the shepherd and the sheep will scatter. And then He says, But after I'm raised up, I'll go before you to Galilee. It's all happening exactly as He told you, the angel says to the women. He's going before you to Galilee. And for that matter, Jesus had been telling this during their whole journey to Jerusalem. If you can think back, think back, chapter 8, verse 31, right?

Chapter 9, verse 31. Chapter 10, verse 34. Three times Jesus tells His disciples that once they get to the city, once they get to Jerusalem, He's going to be handed over and crucified and three days later rise again.

[12 : 23] Everything Jesus had told them was happening just as He had told them. You see, the resurrection, friends, is a great seal on everything that Jesus said and did in His ministry.

The resurrection is God's own verdict upon His Son vindicating Him, raising Him up as right and righteous. It's God saying, completely true, completely faithful.

And isn't that one of the great ironies of Easter? But in the week leading up, the authorities had cast their verdict on Jesus, saying He's a blasphemer and a liar and a threat, and executed Him.

And then on Sunday morning, God says, here's my verdict. It's true. Friends, the resurrection shows us that everything Jesus taught about Himself was true.

And that in and of itself should make us tremble. Think back over Mark's gospel. What has Mark been trying not just to tell us about Jesus, but show us about Jesus?

[13 : 32] What has he been trying to show us? Here's the one with authority over sickness and death. Here's the one with authority to teach God's word without any hesitation or any other authority to back Him up.

Here's the one with authority over unclean spirits, over evil itself. Here's the one with authority over nature, over the material world. He calms the storm.

He turns bread into a feast that could feed thousands. Here's the one, Mark shows us, with authority over Israel's central institutions and symbols. For thousands of years, what Israel had structured their whole life around, the Sabbath, the temple, the purity codes.

Jesus says, they're all about me. I'm the Lord of them all. Here's the one, Mark shows us, who has authority to call men and women to leave everything and follow Him.

Here's the one who has authority to bring people back from the dead. You remember the raising of Jairus' daughter. Here's the one, Mark shows us, with authority even, most shocking of all, to forgive our sins.

[14 : 49] If we've been following Mark's gospel up till this point, if we've been awake at all as we've walked through this gospel, then don't you see who this Jesus is?

Who could have such authority? Who could have the right to do such things? Who could have the right over sickness and death? Over the material world? Over the spiritual world? Over God's word? Even over God's right to deal with sins?

Who could be that one? Other than God Himself? Other than the Lord? Friends, tonight, how safe is your understanding of Jesus?

When I was in college, the Jesus is my homeboy hats were very cool. And I think you were supposed to wear them a little cocked like this, because that was cool too. I was not cool. I did not own a Jesus is my homeboy hat or shirt.

But is he your homeboy tonight? Is he your casual buddy tonight? Or is he a good moral teacher? Someone who can sort of show you the ropes and show you the rules and tell you how to live your life and get some blessing?

[15 : 59] Or is he a religious leader pointing to some timeless truth like other great religious leaders? You know, is he sort of one of a series of Moses and Muhammad and Buddha and others pointing us towards some kind of way to God?

The resurrection, friends, tears all those merely safe Jesuses to shreds.

Do you remember that scene in Acts when Paul sort of comes into Athens? And in Athens, he heads up to what's called the Areopagus, the Mars Hill. And that was the place where people would debate the great ideas of the day.

It was a place where seekers would look for truth and constantly search out and try new ideas and opinions. And conversations would happen and teachers would teach and people would come and they'd sort of share their new ideas.

And people would be constantly searching and seeking because they love new teachings and new doctrines and new ideas. And then when Paul comes to the Areopagus, what happens? He begins talking about the one true God who made everything and everyone.

[17 : 05] And how he made all of us to seek him. And at this point, you can sort of see the intelligentsia sort of shaking their heads. Yeah, seeking. We like that. Cool. God made us to seek him.

Awesome. And then Paul tells them about Jesus. And about how God raised Jesus from the dead. And how that one man that God raised from the dead has been entrusted with all authority to judge and to rule as Lord.

And then Paul says, now the time for seeking is over. Instead, it's time to repent. It's time to turn and come home.

It's time to decide. You see, friends, Jesus hasn't come simply to be a pointer to the way. He himself is the way. And he's not just another truth to be considered, but he is the truth.

And he's not just another teacher saying, if you do this, you'll find life. But he's saying, I'm the life. Me, in my own person.

[18 : 09] And that's why the resurrection is unsettling. That's why it makes us tremble. Because of who it demonstrates Jesus to be. The true king.

The true Lord. The true judge. He's the end of our searching. He's the one upon whom we must decide. The one to whom we must turn.

And that doesn't mean that seeking is bad. And it doesn't mean you shouldn't use your brain when you become a Christian. But it does mean that if Jesus is who he says he is. If God raised him from the dead. If everything is true, just as he told you.

As the angel tells the women in Mark 16. Then we can't simply hold Jesus at arm's length. We can't simply give him lip service as a good teacher.

Or, you know, whatever. We've got to bow before him as our Lord. We've got to surrender our whole lives to him.

[19 : 14] And entrust our very selves into his hands. I remember hearing the story once of a small Pacific island during World War II. Where a number of Japanese snipers were stationed during the war.

And apparently the story goes that when the war ended. This small group of men were forgotten about. And they were never actually notified. About how things had turned out. So years later they were still holding their post.

They were still holding their post on this island. Ready to sort of poise to attack the enemies if they landed on shore. But of course the battle was over. It had all been decided. And once they heard the news that the allies had won.

Well friends, what choice lay before them? They had no choice but to come out of hiding. And lay down their arms. And surrender. Because it was done.

They didn't need to fight anymore. They didn't need to hold their ground anymore. And in fact to keep doing so would have been completely foolish. And it's the same with Jesus.

[20 : 19] For us to keep hiding. For us in some sense to keep sort of putting up our defenses. Is to refuse the reality of the resurrection.

That the risen Jesus is Lord and King. That he's won a victory. And it's done. And though it makes us tremble.

Friends, we have to give our lives to him. And that brings us actually to our last point tonight. Third. The resurrection makes us tremble.

Because it tears apart. Our religious view. Of ourselves. Did you notice what else the angel says to the women? Go, he says.

Tell his disciples and Peter. Peter. Who just two days before. Was denying he ever knew Jesus. Peter.

[21 : 17] Who lied to save his own skin. When it really mattered. And rejected Jesus three times. That Peter. Go tell him. That the crucified and risen Jesus.

The Lord. Wants him back. Friends. The message of the resurrection. Is a message. Of grace. Of undeserved favor.

For sinners like you and me. Who've blown it with God. Who are total moral failures. Failures. People like you and me.

And yet the risen Christ. Wants us. Back. Do you remember what he said in Mark 10 45. I've come. To give my life as a ransom.

For many. To reclaim those. Who don't deserve a place in the family of God. And yet to bring them home. And that too. Should make us tremble.

[22 : 18] Because. We spend our whole lives. Living by the code. That who I am. Is determined by. What I do.

That my performance. Dictates my identity. That if I'm a good person. Then God accepts me. And if I'm not. Then God rejects me. So. I better try really really hard. To be the kind of person.

That God would accept. And that mentality. Rules. My life. And I bet friends. It probably rules yours. So if I'm good.

And I'm proud. And if I'm not so good. Then I'm down. And I'm depressed. But. The resurrection takes that mentality. That religious view of ourselves. And how the world works.

And smashes it to pieces. You see friends. Peter. Had blown it. Three times. He denies Jesus.

[23 : 16] And yet. The risen Jesus says. Go tell Peter. I want you back. And I want you to be there. The resurrection means.

Not just. That Jesus is Lord. God. But that he's done everything. Needed. To heal. Your relationship with God. That he took our sins.

And our failures. And our denials. With him. Down into the grave. In death. Your sins. My sins. With him.

And he left him there. And in the resurrection. He rose to new life. With a fresh beginning. For all who believe.

Friends. A new beginning. That never grows old. A fresh start. That always stays fresh. That we can never lose. That we can never get out of.

[24 : 17] That's the kind of trembling. Friends. That will bring you comfort. And joy. And hope. Well we know.

That on that first Easter Sunday. The women eventually told the disciples. They eventually become the first ones. To proclaim. The fact.

That Christ was risen. But along the way. What they knew. About the world. And about Jesus. And about themselves. And about themselves.

Was totally being torn apart. And being remade. So how about us. On this first Sunday. After Easter. As we launch into.

What the church has called. Easter tide. How about us. Is the resurrection of Jesus. Is the risen Jesus. Just a nice thought for us. Or does it shake us to our bones.

[25 : 16] Friends. Friends. Friends. If it's the reality. That makes you tremble. Then perhaps you're starting to see it. For the first time. Let's pray.

Let's pray. Father. Father. Father. Father. Father. We do pray.

That by your spirit. The resurrection. Of your son. Would create in us. A deep. Trembling. God.

A good. Kind of tremble. That would lead us. To see you rightly. And to see Christ. Your son rightly. And to see ourselves rightly.

Lord. That we would see Jesus. As Lord. And we would see ourselves. As recipients. Of grace. In Christ. God.

[26 : 12] Make that so. By your spirit. We pray. Amen. We're going to. Continue singing. Together. In response. To Mark.

So. I think this song. We're going to sing next. Is a new song. For some of us. So. As soon as you pick. I'll sing.