

## **Mark 15:42-16:8 – Easter Sunday**

### **Hope For Our Fears**

The first death close to me that I ever experienced  
Was that of my grandmother  
I was ten at the time and she died quite suddenly from an unexpected illness at 59  
I remember waking that day to see my mum and my aunties all sitting in a room crying  
I didn't cry until the funeral  
I read Psalm 23 at my grandmother's funeral service  
At the front of the church in front of everyone  
I was wearing that school uniform in the picture  
And then immediately after I finished doing that reading in the service  
The dam wall broke and tears came flooding down my face  
The fear that I would never see my grandmother again hit me hard  
I would never taste the noodles she made for me after school  
I would never hear her voice again  
We had just moved to Melbourne a few months before  
And I had just started at a new school  
And my grandmother who lived with us in Sydney  
One of the sources of comfort and stability in my life was now gone  
And to be honest, it felt like all my fears were going to swallow me up  
Have you ever felt like that?  
That you were going to be overwhelmed by your fears?  
I think if we were completely honest  
Most of us, most of the time, live under the shadow of all kinds of fears?

If that is you, I'm glad that you're here.  
Because for followers of Jesus,  
All around the world today  
Easter Sunday represents Hope for our greatest fears  
Billions of Christians around the world will be rejoicing in the hope  
That Jesus rose from the dead  
And that all who trust in Him will also rise from the dead  
And I want to show you from the last chapter in Mark's gospel

### **The Risen Jesus is the Hope for Our Fears**

I want to look at three point  
The Risen Jesus is hope for our fear of people  
Our fear of guilt and shame  
And our fear of grief and death

### **Here's our first point**

#### **The Risen Jesus overcomes our fear of people**

As we read on Good Friday  
Jesus has died on the cross, giving his life as a ransom for the sin of many  
The temple curtain was torn in two  
And the Roman centurion overseeing his execution declares him to be the Son of God  
This is what happens next

We're told in verse 43 that Joseph of Arimathea  
Went to the Roman Prefect Pilate to ask for Jesus' body  
And we're given some background to Joseph  
He was a prominent member of the Sanhedrin  
This was the ruling council of Jerusalem made up of 70 men  
And they were the ones who accused and tried Jesus falsely

We're told in John's gospel  
That Joseph of Arimathea was a secret disciple of Jesus because of his fear of the Jews  
So can you imagine how painful it must have been for Joseph  
Seeing Jesus being treated so unfairly in this fake trial  
Torn between his conviction to stand up for Jesus His Lord  
And his fear for himself if he spoke out in favour of Jesus  
How would the other members of the Sanhedrin treat him  
if they knew he was a follower of Jesus?  
But now his love for Jesus overcame his fear of people  
Clearly Joseph didn't think that Jesus was coming back from the dead  
But he didn't want Jesus' body to be dumped like a lot of bodies after crucifixion  
And so he plucked up the courage to out himself as a follower of Jesus  
To the roman prefect Pilate no less  
Surely this news would travel to the other members of the Sanhedrin eventually  
Once Joseph receives the body of Jesus he wraps the body in cloth  
And places the body in his family tomb  
Where other members of his family would come to be buried in time  
Just like this one in Jerusalem called the Garden Tomb

And you had to have some wealth and status to own a tomb carved out of the stone like this  
And what we're starting to see is that following Jesus wasn't just for people of low status  
People like fisherman and tax collectors and prostitutes  
Even people of high status like Joseph or Nicodemus are now following Jesus  
People with more to lose it seems  
So it would have been easy for Joseph to give in to his fear of people  
To remain a secret disciple  
And yet Joseph decided to take the risk to do this act of incredible devotion for his Lord.  
I love that the gospels record Joseph's name – he is secret no more  
I love that he treats Jesus like a member of his own family  
Which is saying that Joseph didn't stay in his fear  
Love overcame fear  
And this wasn't even the risen Jesus helping Joseph overcome his fear  
In his mind Jesus was staying dead but how much must Joseph have loved him to do this.  
Imagine Joseph's reaction when he eventually saw the risen Jesus!

Well how about us.  
I want to put a thought in your head if you're someone who identifies with Joseph  
As a secret follower of Jesus  
or someone secretly investigating Christianity  
I want you to think about the people you fear the most if they found out  
Now I want you to imagine one day being so full of love for Jesus  
And so full of his love for you  
That you could overcome that fear of these people  
I think that's why Joseph's story is recorded here

If it was possible for him  
Maybe it's possible for you.

### **Here's our second point**

#### **The Risen Jesus overcomes our fear of guilt and shame**

It's Sunday morning, what Christians came to call the "first day of the week".  
Two days have passed since Jesus' crucifixion and burial  
And because it was the Sabbath, the day before  
The women had to wait to anoint the body of Jesus until the Sunday  
Now this was also an act of devotion shown by the women  
Given the state that the body would normally have been in.  
And the purpose of this visit was for the women to pour sweet smelling perfumes and spices  
to offset the smell of the body and so honour Jesus in this way  
And maybe they didn't know that this had already been done by Joseph  
as recorded in John's gospel  
But maybe they know and this was also their expression of love in their grief  
But they hadn't thought about how they were going to get inside the tomb  
Because to close the entrance to the tomb  
There would normally be a large carved circular rock  
That would need to be rolled into a groove to seal the entrance  
This rock would not be easily moved by these women  
But to their astonishment the rock has been moved  
The tomb is open and empty and there is a young man dressed in white inside the tomb  
Matthew's gospel tells us that this man is an angel from God  
And he is the one who moved the stone from the entrance

<sup>6</sup> "Don't be alarmed," he told them. "You are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they put him. <sup>7</sup> But go, tell his disciples and Peter, 'He is going ahead of you to Galilee; you will see him there just as he told you.'"

And here is the first thing to notice about what the angel says about Jesus.

Jesus is a promise keeper

He is going ahead of you to Galilee just as he told you.

This is referring to what Jesus said to his disciples the night of his arrest

Chapter 14 verse 28

But after I have risen, I will go ahead of you to Galilee."

And it has happened just as Jesus promised.

But there's another thing to notice about Jesus

Well notice who's not here at the tomb

The men

The disciples who have gone into hiding

When Jesus gave himself over to be arrested

They ran in fear for their lives

Now look carefully at what the angel said to pass on to the disciples

But go, tell his disciples and Peter, 'He is going ahead of you to Galilee; you will see him there just as he told you.'"

Notice those two words – and Peter

Why is Peter being singled out from the remaining eleven disciples

Because remember what Peter promised Jesus at the last supper

This is Mark 14

<sup>29</sup> Peter told him, "Even if everyone falls away, I will not..." <sup>31</sup> But he kept insisting, "If I have to die with you, I will never deny you."

And that same night he denied knowing Jesus on three separate occasions

Peter wept bitterly with the knowledge that he had broken his promise to Jesus His Lord and friend

And short of the betrayal of Judas.

What Peter did to Jesus was incredibly shameful

Imagine someone you knew and loved

Someone whom you had spent years of your life with

Telling others that they never knew you

Imagine the amount of guilt and shame Peter would have carried

over these two long days and nights

Imagine the fear that Peter would have carried to the grave

That this could be the defining moment of his life

This shameful denial of Jesus

And now that Jesus was dead there was no way to right that wrong with Jesus

And then to hear those words from Jesus "and Peter"

"You will see me in Galilee just as I told you"

Peter, despite what you did to me, you are welcome to see me again

I can forgive you

Your promise breaking will never outdo my promise keeping.

This is who Jesus died on the cross for

People like Peter,

People like you and me

People stained by the shame and guilt of broken promises

People who carry the burden of our sin against God and others

He came to wash our stains away through his death on the cross

To open up the way for us to be forgiven

So as to be in a right relationship with God.

And the resurrection is the proof of this living hope.

Years later, Peter was to write these words about the resurrection of Jesus. 1 Peter 1.

<sup>3</sup> Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Because of his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead <sup>4</sup> and into an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you.

Peter wrote these words to Christians who were suffering persecution

Who were tempted to deny Jesus in the face of suffering

And he knew what the risen Jesus meant to him

And could mean to others

Great mercy - Living hope - Eternal life in heaven with God.

I want you to put yourself in Peter's shoes

What is the guilt and shame that you carry before God?

Now imagine living with the fear

that you will die carrying that guilt and shame to your grave

Now imagine the resurrected Jesus

Who already knows your guilt and shame

Saying to you “and Peter”

Except he says your name “and Clinton”, “and Helen”, “and Amir”, “and Andy”

Could Jesus’ invitation to you be better than living with this guilt and shame?

Imagine one day sitting at a meal with the risen Jesus

That’s what he did with his disciples by Lake Galilee

Freshly caught fish roasted on an open fire

Imagine one day instead of them

Jesus invites you to sit down with for a meal with him

Knowing that what he did on the cross

Was more than enough to cover your guilt and shame

And that even though you hate yourself for what you’ve done

His love for you is even greater

This is what Jesus offers you in his resurrection

The risen Jesus is hope for your fear of guilt and shame

### **Lastly, the risen Jesus is hope for our fear of grief and death**

As you read chapter 16 of Mark’s gospel

The elephant in the room is that this is a very strange ending to the gospel of Mark

We never meet the risen Jesus

Only an angel telling us that he is risen

And then once the angel tells the women to tell the disciples

We are left with the women being afraid and silent.

This is not a Hollywood happy ending where the loose ends are tied up neatly

It’s more like an arthouse indie movie where you’re left wondering what happens next

And it’s clear that there were others who thought this as well

If you’re reading this in your printed bible or even the app on your phone

You can see a number of verses printed after verse 8 - Verses 9-20

Except they appear in a section with the description

“some of the earliest manuscripts conclude with verse 8”

And if you pick up just about every commentary on Mark’s gospel

Scholars believe that this later section was added by a well-meaning scribe

And not written by Mark

Clearly this scribe wasn’t very satisfied with the ending and so he added an appendix

And if you read verses 9-20 you can tell they are written by another author

because the style is quite different and perhaps the scribe wanted to appear very different so as not to confuse readers.

This scribe’s ending was then copied after he added it

But the earliest surviving copies of Mark’s gospel did not have verses 9-20

So the common conclusion is that the original version of Mark’s ending

is what we see in verse 8

And that the later verses are interesting but not considered inspired by God

Now as to why Mark’s gospel ends so abruptly in verse 8

Some scholars think it’s a deliberate ending by Mark

and others think there was a longer ending that was damaged and lost

But whatever reason for the verse 8 ending

God did not think that we needed anything different other than this ending.

So let’s work with verse 8

Firstly let me clarify that it is not meant to cast the women – Mary, Mary and Salome

In a poor light

In fact, these women in the gospels are full of conviction and courage

In chapter 15 we learn that these and other women  
Were so convicted of the ministry of Jesus  
that they followed him and took care of Jesus and the disciples  
In Luke 8 we learn that these women were the financial backers of Jesus' ministry  
And in all of the gospels including Mark's gospel  
The authors make a careful point of showing that the women were the eyewitnesses of the  
death, burial and resurrection of Jesus.  
It was their testimony that we rely on in the Scriptures  
Now that is quite a courageous thing given how noticeable it is that the male disciples of  
Jesus were absent because they were scared of being arrested themselves  
And if the disciples were making all this up  
I'm sure they would have written it differently to cast themselves in a better light  
And given that the testimony of women  
Was not considered as important as men in that culture  
They might well have made up that it was men who were the first eyewitnesses  
to the death and resurrection of Jesus  
But it is the women who are present because that is what happened  
And they are named so that people could test their eyewitness testimony

But still why did the women respond with fear and silence?  
Well to be honest, I think that would be a fairly normal response  
Given that absolutely no one in this account expected Jesus to rise from the dead  
It's as hard for people to believe in the resurrection then as it is now  
So if you're a bit sceptical about the resurrection you're in good company

If someone you loved and devoted your life to following  
Was killed brutally and unfairly  
And while you were still deep in the grips of grief over their death  
Visiting the cemetery and finding an empty hole where they were buried  
And then suddenly told by a stranger that they were alive  
How do you think you would react?  
Trembling, overwhelming astonishment  
Speechless fear would be appropriate responses.  
But there's more to think about  
"Fear" in relation to Jesus is a common theme of Mark's gospel

Mark doesn't shy away from the fact that there is an awesome power of Jesus  
That on several occasions provoked a fear in those present  
When the disciples saw Jesus calm a wild storm on Lake Galilee with a few words  
They went from fearing the storm to fearing him  
When Jesus drove out the legion of evil spirits from a man  
Leaving him transformed – calm and in his right mind  
The townspeople are scared of Jesus  
When the disciples saw Jesus walking on water  
They are terrified of him because they think he's a ghost  
When Peter saw Jesus transfigured in dazzling white standing  
with two prophets who had long since died  
Peter is frightened  
And here at the empty tomb of Jesus  
If it is true, that Jesus has conquered the great enemy of death itself  
Even after confidently saying that he would

Well wouldn't you think that rightly provokes fear  
One commentator William Lane puts it helpfully  
"The account of the empty tomb is "soul-shaking""  
When was the last time your soul was shaken?  
That's my hope for you today on Easter Sunday  
That your soul will be shaken by Jesus  
All of us one day will stand at the edge of a dark abyss called death  
When someone you love dies  
Or when you yourself face death  
And the fear of grief and death and what lays ahead after death  
will threaten to swallow you up  
Well what if there is a better fear?  
A fear of Jesus that shakes your soul and leads you to real hope

Now if you read Mark's gospel, what is clear  
Is that Jesus doesn't want your fear  
He wants your faith

After calming the storm Jesus said to his disciples in Mark 4  
Why are you so afraid, do you still have no faith?  
And when Jairus the synagogue leader was told that his daughter was dead  
Jesus told Jairus, "Don't be afraid, just believe"  
And then he went on to raise Jairus' daughter from the dead  
To show Jairus that Jesus can overcome the fear of grief and death

And in John's gospel when comforting Martha grieving the death of her brother Lazarus  
Jesus gave her one of the most beautiful promises in the bible  
"I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me, even if he dies, will  
live. <sup>26</sup> Everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?"  
Jesus's resurrection from the dead  
Is the hope of our own resurrection from the dead  
And faith in Jesus is the key to experiencing life after death with Jesus  
Jesus doesn't want your fear he wants your faith

Thankfully from the other gospels we know that the women did not remain in fear  
And they did not remain silent

Matthew records that the women were afraid  
yet filled with joy when they ran to tell the disciples  
I love how there is this mix of fear and joy in Mary, Mary and Salome  
As they dash back with the news.  
They must have been trying to get their heads around the possibility  
Could it be real that Jesus has risen from the dead?

But Mark's ending has grown on me over the years  
Because like the ending of an arthouse indie movie  
It's meant to make you think about your own response to the resurrection of Jesus

I think Mark's mysterious and abrupt ending is leaving us with homework  
How will you respond to the resurrection of Jesus?  
Will you choose faith in Jesus or remain in fear?

A life lived gripped by fear is no life at all  
And if Jesus has come to bring real hope for our greatest fears  
Then you owe it to yourself to get to know him better  
And you see if he really rose from the dead.  
And can raise us from the dead  
Then that's a game changer.

If you're here today and you're not a follower of Jesus  
If you came with a Christian today  
I think you should ask them why they believe in the resurrection of Jesus  
And what the resurrection of Jesus means for them  
If you're someone a bit sceptical about whether the resurrection is even believable  
We are giving away books in the foyer to help with this  
Rebecca McLaughlin's short book called "Is Easter Unbelievable"  
Of if you're someone who is just wanting to find out more about Jesus  
Then can I invite you to a course I will be starting on Tuesday April 29  
called Christianity Explored  
Where you can come and find answers to the questions you might have  
including questions about the resurrection of Jesus.

I was 37 when my grandfather died after 12 years of dementia  
I was in the room when he took his last breath  
My grandfather's last day on earth was a precious gift to my family from God  
I conducted his funeral and Psalm 23 was read by my cousin Matthew  
But this time for me instead of fear there was peace and joy and hope  
My grandfather trusted in Jesus late in his life  
Just as my grandmother had done less than year before she died  
I know that both of them will one day be raised to new life with Jesus  
And I know that the illness that stole my grandfather's mind and body  
Will not compare with the resurrection body that Jesus will give him  
And I knew at age 37 what I didn't know at age 10  
That because of Jesus's resurrection  
Even my greatest fears will not compare to the day  
When I will see them both again  
When God himself will wipe away our tears  
For there will be no more grief, or crying, no more pain  
No more guilt and shame  
No more death  
The Risen Jesus is hope for our fears.  
Will you choose faith in him this Easter?