

The Resurrection: Fear, Amazement and Wonder

Read Mark 16: 1-8 and then pray; “*Lord, open my heart and mind to the magnificent wonder and glory of the resurrection of Jesus. Amen!*”

Today we are considering the story of the resurrection of Jesus from the perspective of the gospel writer **Mark**. You will not be surprised to see that Mark’s account of that first Easter morning is by far the shortest of the four gospel writers – just 8 verses in total. *Brevity* was Mark’s middle name. We have noticed before how his gospel is direct in style, punchy, pacy and succinct. He tells the story as it is. In each part of his *historical narrative* – Mark gets to the main point quickly, and the main point here is the one made by the angel who awaits the arrival of the women at the tomb. Referring to Jesus whose dead body the women had specifically come to lovingly anoint, the angel declares;

He has risen! He is not here. (6)

Following this direct sensational announcement of the fact that Jesus has risen, the women are given instructions to go and share this mind-blowing news with Peter and the other disciples, that the risen Jesus is going ahead of them to Galilee where ***they will see him***. They will meet the resurrected Christ! Then comes what appears to be the strangest, most abrupt, and anticlimactic of endings;

Trembling and bewildered, the women went out and fled from the tomb. They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid. (8)

And that is it! The End! That is how Mark decides to close his gospel - with the women fleeing from the tomb whilst shaking with fear, overcome with utter astonishment, and dumbstruck with wonderment.

The verses that follow this conclusion (v 9-20) *are not included* in the most reliable early manuscripts, and virtually all biblical and textual scholars agree that they are not original to Mark, and are therefore *not part* of his gospel. The gospel *does finish at verse 8* with the frightened and astonished reaction of the women. Let’s look at the build up to this strange ending and seek to understand why Mark chose to end his gospel this way – on a note of fleeing, fear and deep astonishment, and how this then *challenges and hopefully changes us too!*

As in the other gospels, the story of Easter morning is a story about the love and devotion of Jesus’s female disciples. We are told here by Mark, that *as soon as* the Sabbath was over, three of them bought spices at the *earliest possible opportunity*, so that they could go and anoint the body of their Lord. This was to be a final act of devotion in which the women would express their deep and sincere love for Jesus.

Earlier in the week, just a few days before the suffering and death of Jesus, an unidentified woman had entered the home of a man called Simon the Leper (Mark 14:1ff) where Jesus was being entertained. She anointed Jesus with a most fragrant and expensive perfume, pouring the whole jar of the extremely valuable perfumed oil upon his head. All of it was poured out! Jesus believed this to be a beautiful and sacrificial act of love and worship, and he explains to those present who appeared appalled and indignant by the woman’s action, that *she poured perfume on my body beforehand to prepare for my burial*. Jesus said that her inspirational act of generous love would be immortalised in the story of the gospel wherever it was carried and shared. **(Mark 14: 8-9)**. On that first Easter morning, the three women, who desperately wanted to visit the tomb where Jesus’s body lay, were following on from her example and actions. This time the body of the Lord would be lovingly anointed by women ***after*** his death and burial. They had seen where the highly influential and wealthy Joseph

of Arimathea had placed the body of Jesus (15:47) somewhat hurriedly as the Sabbath approached. Now, at the first possible opportunity, out of sheer love and concern for the dignity of Jesus' body, the women wanted to return and complete the task of anointing. They wanted to pour their hearts and love into this one last act of service for their Lord. Their hearts and minds were totally focused and fixated on how they would anoint his dead body as their final act of devotion. **So, there was not even a hint of the thought of resurrection on their minds!** They were only concerned with a body that would be quickly decomposing. They had to act swiftly.

As the sun rose, and as they approached the tomb, their minds then became troubled by one major problem and hurdle. Who would move the huge stone that had been rolled in front of the tomb to cover and protect its entrance? Moving such a large disc-shaped stone would be beyond them. How could this problem be addressed? This is what was troubling them. Their final act of love might not be possible after all. But then, to their shock and amazement, as they approached the tomb, they observed that the stone was gone! It had already been rolled away! The entrance was open! What on earth had happened? Bravely, almost certainly numbed by panic and shock, they entered the tomb, only to find a stranger, a young man dressed in white. They were totally alarmed by his presence! (5)

This young man (an angelic messenger) had been waiting patiently for them! He had been expecting them! He knew they would turn up! He is on a divine mission with a good news mandate. He had news for the women to hear – extraordinary news that they must take and share with others. This is the news about Jesus the Nazarene who had been crucified. The news is this, and *it is hot of the press!*

He has risen! He is not here.

The angel invites the women to take a look at the place where the body of Jesus had been lying. There is no body there now. **He has risen!** The tomb is empty. The angel explains that the women are going to meet and see Jesus! It will be just as Jesus had told the disciples it would be. Before his death, at the point where Jesus had accurately predicted that all his disciples would “fall away”, he had promised Peter and the others that “*after I have risen, I will go ahead of you into Galilee.*” (14:28) All Jesus's words about his rising had now been fulfilled. He had risen as he had said he would – and they would all now see him in Galilee as he had faithfully promised. Could the women take all this in?

The women then flee from the tomb as the male disciples had fled terrified from the scene of Jesus's arrest in the garden (Mark 14:50-52). And this amazing gospel about the Son of God comes to end with the women fleeing in fear, full of astonishment and awe-filled wonder.

Is this an odd and unusual ending to the gospel story, or is it the most appropriate way for the women to respond to all that they had just encountered? They had been suddenly and shockingly put into a position of having to come to terms with the rising again of Jesus? They were fleeing from a scene in a tomb where the power of Almighty God had very recently broken through - the power of the Father in raising his own beloved Son from death to life! Their reaction of fear and bewilderment and amazement should not be surprising at all.

Mark is **calling us** to also gasp with wonder and fear and amazement at the tremendous exertion of the power of God in raising Jesus from the dead. The women have just been standing on holy ground and they could still sense the awesome work of God in resurrection power. I bet the hairs on the back of their necks stood on end. It was as if the power of the God was still lingering in the air within that tomb.

This is the way to respond to the sudden and glorious news that **He is risen!** Is that how you respond to the glorious and mighty resurrection of the Jesus Christ – the Son of God? Shock and awe? Fear and wonder? This news should also consume *us* with fear and wonder of the living God!

Mark, from the first verse of his gospel, has been seeking to convince his readers that **Jesus is the Son of God.** (1:1). This truth was revealed and declared as God the Father spoke at both the baptism and transfiguration of his Son. (1:11, 9:7) It was not confessed by a human being until it was confessed at the foot of the cross by a trembling Roman Centurion. **Surely this man was the Son of God.** (15:39). **But now** it is being declared by God to the world through an angelic messenger to any who would listen. “Hear this, people of every generation and era, the resurrection declares with divine power and authority that Jesus is God’s Son and the Lord of all!” (**Romans 1:4**). This is the trumpet call of the resurrection. Jesus is Lord! Jesus is the Son of God.! That very trumpet call was still sounding in the ears of the women who fled the empty tomb. No wonder they were filled with fear and amazement.

Paul Beasley-Murray states: *“They were stunned by God’s mighty act of resurrection.”*

Are we not also stunned? The resurrection of Jesus should stir **us**, as it did those women to fear and astonishment. Death has been smashed and defeated by the power of God! Life and immortality have come to light through the gospel of the resurrection of Jesus. (2 Timothy 1:10)

Their reaction also emphasises and makes crystal clear the fact that this was a real historical event and occasion. As Steve Wilmschurst correctly asserts; *“There is no place here for the idea that the resurrection is merely some kind of metaphor, a picture representing new hope, or the disciples’ determination to carry on the ministry and message of Jesus after his death.”*

This was real. This was history. They were terrified. That would have been your reaction had you been there! Death has been conquered! Wonder of wonders!

This reaction of awe and wonder to Jesus **has permeated the whole of this gospel.** This is a gospel story that has been punctuated again and again by fear, astonishment, amazement and wonder at the person, power and presence of Jesus. And this is how it ends – fittingly so in my opinion. Listen again to the pattern of gospel reaction to Jesus and **the arrival of the Kingdom of God** in him.

*The people were **amazed** at his teaching, because he taught them as one who had authority, not as the teachers of the law. (1:22)*

*The people were all **so amazed** that they asked each other, “What is this? A new teaching – and with authority! He even gives orders of evil spirits and they obey him.”(1:27)*

*He got up, took his mat and walked out in full view of them all. This **amazed everyone** and they praised God saying, “**We have never seen anything like this.**” (2:12)*

*They were **terrified** and asked each other, “Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!” (4:41)*

*When they came to Jesus, they saw the man who had been possessed by the legion of demons, sitting there, dressed and in his right mind; and they were **afraid.** (5:15)*

*So, the man went away and began to tell in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him. And all the people **were amazed.** (5:20)*

Continue to read the following; note the reactions;

Mark 5:42, Mark 6:51, Mark 9:5-6, 15, Mark 10:24, 32, Mark 11:18, Mark 12:17, Mark 15:5;

Is it any wonder that this gospel concludes with these words and leaves us to also wonder with amazement at the resurrection of Jesus from the dead;

Trembling and bewildered the women went out and fled from the tomb. They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid.

Have we lost that utter astonishment at the power of God in raising his Son from the dead? Are we not ready and willing to worship with awe and wonder and with the most reverent and trembling fear? Are we not stunned by this demonstration of God's power and love which is extended ***to us through Jesus?*** His resurrection was the glorious first fruit. Our resurrection is to follow. As Paul, the man who encountered the risen Christ on the road to Damascus explained;

But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. (1 Corinthians 15: 20). Jesus is the firstborn among many brothers and sisters. (Romans 8:29)

Or as Jesus himself stated and promised;

And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all that he has given me, but raise them up at the last day. For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. (John 6:39-40)

Are we not awed by his promises? Are we not stunned and overwhelmed by the grace and power of our God?

The women went away silent and trembling, not saying anything for a short time as they sought to come to terms with the awesome message and reality of the resurrection – such was their sense of shock and awe. However, we know from the testimony of other gospel writers that fear and astonishment soon gave way to joy unspeakable, (Matthew 28: 9-10) and stunned silence gave way to ecstatic confident testimony. (Luke 24: 9-10) Stemming from their faithful testimony, and the apostles faithful and powerful preaching – the gospel of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ has cascaded down the centuries like a mighty unstoppable river of power and life from God. We now have resurrection hope and assurance! In and through Jesus – this is our living inheritance – and it can ***never perish, spoil or fade – because it is kept for us by God himself.*** (1 Peter 1: 3-5)

All those who believe and trust in Christ will, like him, be raised on the last day! This should fill us with wonder, awe, love, exuberant joy and the fear of the Lord who conquered death and so graciously gives us everlasting hope and life.

Thanks be to God for the eternal good news that Jesus, his Son, is risen! Hallelujah!

Amen