

Christmas: Jesus Lives - Mark 15v42-16v8

Christmas Gift!

I want to give you an early Christmas gift.
It's the greatest gift you could ever receive and it's the greatest gift you could ever give.
This gift has the power to change our lives and shape our eternal destiny.

Want to know what the gift is? Here it is, it comes in the middle of chapter 16v6.

'He has risen'

That's the gift. Three simple words *'He has risen'*.

You see the historical fact that Jesus has been raised from the dead changes everything.
It deals with our greatest problem death itself.
It gives us certain hope in the midst of our broken world
It offers us restoring grace in the failure of our lives.
And it's all true.

So this Christmas as we look at the baby Jesus wrapped in cloths lying in a manger....
Look forward and see the risen Jesus with his burial cloths discarded at the empty tomb.

Three things we learn about this gift: How we know this gift is true; Why we need this gift
and What the gift offers us.

First how we know this gift is true - the certainty of the resurrection.

For many people the idea of the resurrection is too good to be true.
It's nothing more than a made up story, no more believable than Santa Clause!
But this is true. The resurrection of Jesus is a historical fact.
Two events point to this:

Jesus did die

Seven times in the first five verses of our text we are told that Jesus was dead.
Now that's very important because without a death there can be no resurrection.

43 Joseph of Arimathea, a prominent member of the Council, who was himself waiting for the kingdom of God, went boldly to Pilate and asked for Jesus' body (Literally corpse). **44** Pilate was surprised to hear that he was already dead. Summoning the centurion, he asked him if Jesus had already died. **45** When he learned from the centurion that it was so, he gave the body (corpse) to Joseph. (15v43-45)

History tells us that the Romans crucified hundreds of thousands of individuals while in power, and not one of them is recorded as surviving. They all died.
In other words these soldiers were good at their job.
They knew how to kill people.
So when Pilate checked with the centurion, the chief executioner, if Jesus was dead – you can be sure he was dead.
In fact all who witnessed the crucifixion were certain Jesus died.
Joseph wrapped the dead body in linen cloth and put him in the tomb.
The women prepared spices to put on the dead body.
The truth is Jesus actually died.

The tomb was empty

47 Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joseph saw where he was laid. (15v47)

4 But when they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had been rolled away. 5 As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man dressed in a white robe sitting on the right side, and they were alarmed. 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." (16v4-6)

Jesus was in the tomb now he is not in the tomb!

So the sceptics say the disciples must have stolen the body – Right? Wrong!

There is one simple answer to this.

The disciples built their life on the fact of the resurrection.

In fact they were all martyred for their belief in the resurrection – some of them in brutal fashion. So tell me, why would anyone steal a body, invent the resurrection, and then be willing to die for something that was not true!

It makes no sense. Unless of course it was true!

Also the first witnesses to the empty tomb are women.

Mark makes a point of that. He refers to them three times.

The women saw him die (v40), they saw where he was buried (v47), they saw that the tomb was empty (16v6).

Now that might seem a credible witness to us but in the first century it would be laughed out of court. The testimony of women was not counted. Their social standing meant their testimony was not admissible evidence in court.

In other words if you wanted to prove the fact of the resurrection you would never use the witness or testimony of women – that undermined your evidence.

Writers of that time never used women to back up their case.

So why does Mark do it?

Well the only reason Mark would tell the story like this – is because what the women saw was true. There is no need to tamper with the evidence. They were the first eye witnesses. The tomb was empty. Jesus was raised.

Jesus has been raised

The fact of the resurrection might not fit in with our way of thinking. It might be outside of our experience. It might contradict everything else we know to be true. But Mark through his account wants us to be absolutely sure, without any doubts that Jesus died was buried and rose again from the dead.

Too good to be true?

Not at all. It is better than Good. This is the most amazing fact in the history of the world and it is absolutely true. The fact that he has risen changes everything.

Second why we need this gift – the problem of death.

We need this gift because death is a problem for us all.
It's a problem in two ways:

Death steals our hope

43 Joseph of Arimathea, a prominent member of the Council, who was himself waiting for the kingdom of God, went boldly to Pilate and asked for Jesus' body. (15v43)

Here is a man full of expectation. He was waiting for the '*Kingdom of God*' to come. He was longing for the kind of world we all dream of. A world of peace and justice, a world without hurt and pain. A Kingdom ruled by a loving King, where everything is put right. And as far as Joseph was concerned Jesus was that King. Jesus had proved it through his many miracles: Healing the sick, calming storms, feeding the hungry, forgiving sins even raising the dead.

Jesus was the one who came with absolute power and supreme authority. He came to restore broken lives and renew this disordered world. But now Jesus is dead. Jesus is just a corpse, lying in a tomb.

Joseph' dreams have been shattered. Death has stolen his hope.

Now whatever our religious belief or background we all long for a better world. We want peace and justice to rule, we dream of life without hurt and pain. But death always robs it from us. You see we all look to someone to make life better. But no sooner do they begin to make a difference and they die. A kid looks to his Dad to make their life safe and secure.

A husband looks to his wife for love and joy. A nation looks to it's leader for peace and justice. We all invest our hope in someone – but then they die.

That's why so many people are grieving the death of Nelson Mandela. He spoke of the world we all want...He represented the kind of leader we long for. But now he is dead. Death shatters our dreams and steals our hope.

Death separates us from friends/family

Look at the women who had watched Jesus die.

40 Some women were watching from a distance. Among them were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joseph, and Salome. **41** In Galilee these women had followed him and cared for his needs. (15v40-41)

They were not just disciples but close intimate and caring friends. In fact one of them was Jesus' own mother. But now their friend and son was dead.

46 So Joseph bought some linen cloth, took down the body, wrapped it in the linen, and placed it in a tomb cut out of rock. Then he rolled a stone against the entrance of the tomb. (15v46)

As that stone rolled against the entrance, and slotted into place, it signalled the end.

Death had separated them from their loved one. All they have left are memories.

Now all of us have stood by a grave and said goodbye to a loved one. We have watched as the coffin is lowered...*ashes to ashes dust to dust*..it signals the end. And at Christmas time that sense of loss is magnified even more. Death always separates us from the ones we love and care for the most. No wonder the bible calls death our enemy. It's the one problem we can't beat, it wins every time. It's breaks us and destroys us.

Stealing our hope and separating us from friends and family.

Without the gift of the resurrection death remains an unsolved problem.

Third what the gift gives us – the hope and grace for our lives

This gift gives us hope and grace for our lives.

Hope Restored

For Joseph and the women, death meant they had lost everything. But listen to what the Angel said.

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. (16v6)

These words change everything. The fact that Jesus is alive means Joseph no longer lives with broken dreams, His hope is restored. The fact that Jesus is alive means the women are no longer separated from their loved one, they are now reunited. That's why we need the Gift that Jesus has risen. In Jesus our greatest dreams and longings come true. Death is not the end it has been defeated by the true King of Kings. The world we long for is a reality in Jesus and those we love will not be separated for ever.

When Jesus died on the cross it seemed like it was the end. As Jesus suffered the torture and the mocking it seems to all looking on that it was over – their hope was lost, separation was a reality. But the resurrection proves beyond doubt that Jesus was victorious. Jesus is the champion. His resurrection proves that he did die for my sins.... Therefore I can be forgiven, no longer separated from God and no longer separated from those who love God. His resurrection proves he did defeat Satan and the powers of darkness...Therefore I can look forward in certain hope to the new creation, a world without evil, full of joy.

Because Jesus has risen he alone has the power and authority to restore hope. And that's what this gifts offers, hope today and hope for all eternity.

Grace Received

The risen Jesus gives grace so that we too can share in that hope.

7 But go, tell his disciples and Peter, ‘He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.’”

Remember what the disciples did when Jesus was arrested? *‘They all deserted Jesus and fled’*. At the time when Jesus most needed his friends they betrayed him and denied him. But look at how Jesus responds. The first thing the risen Jesus will do is go to those who have failed him to offer grace. He does not wait to be invited or asked, he takes the initiative and goes to them.

Well you say, Jesus might offer hope to some people, but there is literally no hope for me. My failures and my sin are just too much. There is no grace for me. But look what it says...

7 But go, tell his disciples and Peter,

Remember Peter's words: *‘Even if all fall away, I will not...even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you..’*

We know the story, Peter messed up big time. If there is anyone who does not deserve Hope it's Peter. But that's what grace is – it is undeserved, it is unearned. So Jesus, knowing Peters guilt and shame offers him grace so that even failures like him can share in the hope. *‘But go, tell his disciples and Peter..’*

Because Jesus has risen that means he continues to offer that same grace to you and to me.

The grace of Jesus means that hope is restored to failures like us.

Open the Gift

This Christmas we will all be given at least one gift – but that gift will be of no value to us unless we open it. In the same way the gift of the resurrection, the historical fact that Jesus has risen will have no effect on our lives unless we take the gift and open it for ourselves.

8 Trembling and bewildered, the women went out and fled from the tomb. They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid. (16v8)

It's as if they have been given a gift but haven't opened it. Instead of receiving it in faith they have run away in fear. You see we have been confronted with the reality of the resurrection. We have looked inside the tomb and discovered that Jesus is alive. Now perhaps you are afraid of that. Maybe you are afraid of what people will think if you do believe it. You might even be afraid of what it will mean if you do follow this risen Jesus.

We'll don't let fear get in the way of opening this gift. This gift will not disappoint you or harm you. This gift restores your hope and offers you grace.

It's the greatest gift we could ever receive and it's the greatest gift we could ever give.