

WEEK 6

JESUS – HIS RESURRECTION

BEFORE THE TALK

*Welcome the course participants and suggest they take 20 minutes to work through the Study Guide section called **GROUP DISCUSSION 1** with their group.*

THE TALK

Deliver the talk. The wording below is intended only as a general guide. The aim of the talk is to present the facts of Christ's resurrection and to show how they bring both hope and a warning.

Last week we saw that forgiveness is a gift, paid for by Jesus Christ. We don't deserve it, and we can't earn it. And that is grace: God behaving towards us in a way we simply don't deserve. Remember the line in Ephesians: "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast." So in other words, it's faith in what Jesus has done that saves us. Nothing else.

We've seen that Christ's death brings us forgiveness. This week, we'll see what his resurrection adds to that.

All of us know we're going to die – the only uncertainty is exactly when. We are mortal, and each one of us will die. We all have a terminal disease, it's called "life," and its fatality rate is 100%. The question I have for you is this: How do you cope with the certainty of death? And not just the certainty of your *own* death, but also the deaths of those people you love.

Ministers have some thankless tasks. And one of them is standing at the graveside, throwing some soil into the grave, and saying these words from Psalm 103: "As for man, his days are like grass, he flourishes like a flower of the field; the wind blows over it and it is gone, and its place remembers it no more." But that's the truth. Our lives are brief, and however flourishing they have been, they soon come to an end. This is a miserable start to the evening, isn't it?

Now, Jesus was in his early thirties when he died. And yet here we are, two thousand years later, still discussing his life. You see, if Jesus had not apparently risen from the dead, we would probably never even have heard of him. But his resurrection changes everything.

At the end of his account of Jesus' death, Mark focuses on three women who have watched the whole gruesome ordeal. Please turn with me to Mark 15, and we'll start to read from verse 40.

Read aloud Mark 15:40 – 16:3.

You will need to have the following headings ready for display, gradually revealing each of the headings as the talk progresses.

The shadow of death
The shock of discovery
The significance for the disciples

THE SHADOW OF DEATH

So point 1 – the shadow of death. It was unusual for crucifixion to result in death so quickly, so in verse 44 the Roman governor Pontius Pilate queries the centurion – the same centurion who had stood only a short distance from the cross and watched the extraordinary way in which Jesus had died. The centurion confirms that yes, Jesus had indeed already died. The Romans had many talents, but when it came to killing people, they were experts. So the centurion’s words would have been confirmation enough. Having established that Jesus is dead, Pilate gives Joseph permission to remove the body from the cross.

Not only have the women watched Jesus die, but two of them also watch him being buried. Verse 47 says: “Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joses saw where he was laid.” They, too, are witnesses of his death.

Now we come to Mark chapter 16, verses 1–3, about thirty-six hours later. The women return to the tomb that they had watched Jesus being buried in. They don’t go hoping that Jesus might be alive; they go expecting to find a corpse. Things could not be more dismal – they are grieving and afraid because the young man they’ve loved and served has been murdered. Jesus’ other followers are still in hiding. They don’t even think they will be able to get to his body, because they know that a huge stone has been laid across the entrance to the tomb. And that brings us to our second point: the shock of discovery.

THE SHOCK OF DISCOVERY

Let’s continue reading from Mark 16, verse 4. In this passage, the women are subjected to three shocks of escalating intensity.

Read aloud Mark 16:4–8.

The first shock comes in verse 4: “But when they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had been rolled away.” In the original Greek, this phrase literally means “hurled out.” There is no need for them to worry about the stone because divine power has dealt with it.

Then comes the second shock as they go inside the tomb. Look again at verse 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.” They see a man whose appearance is so striking that it causes the Roman soldiers guarding the tomb to shake. Matthew tells us that they become “like dead men.” The women, understandably, are terrified. But they are not delusional – the man affirms the reality of what is happening in verse 6: “Don’t be alarmed,” he said. “You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified.” Yes, the man from Nazareth, the one you’ve been following these past three years, was killed. “See the place where they laid him.” He was really buried here; you don’t have the wrong address. The fact is that Jesus simply isn’t here anymore.

But the third shock will change the women’s lives forever. It comes as the young man in the empty tomb tells them the reason why Jesus’ body is not there. Verse 6: “He has risen!” Just as there was no need for them to be worried about the stone, there is now no need for the spices they’d brought to anoint the corpse. Divine power has not only flung the stone away – it has also raised a body to life. This is supernatural. The tomb was empty because Jesus isn’t dead anymore. He is alive.

So how do the women react to this staggering news? Verse 8 says: “Trembling and bewildered, the women went out and fled from the tomb. They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid.” Why are they afraid? Because they’ve forgotten what Jesus told them would happen. Look at the young man’s words in verse 7: “... go, tell his disciples and Peter, ‘He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, *just as he told you.*’” Jesus had told them repeatedly that he would suffer, die and rise again. Mark chapter 8: “The Son of Man must be killed and after three days rise again.” Mark chapter 9: “They will kill him and after three days he will rise.” Mark chapter 10: “The Gentiles will mock him and spit on him, flog him and kill him. Three days later he will rise.”

Jesus is always in control. He knows exactly how he will die, what will happen to him beyond death, and he explains everything to them before it happens. By now, the women should have learned to take Jesus at his word. And so should we.

That leads us to our third heading: the significance for the disciples.

THE SIGNIFICANCE FOR THE DISCIPLES

The young man said that the disciples would see Jesus in Galilee. And that is precisely what happens. The disciples do see him and finally believe that Jesus had indeed risen from the dead. Well, most of them believe. All except one, in fact.

John records a wonderful incident in his Gospel. Please turn to John chapter 20, verse 24. Here we read about one of the disciples – a man called Thomas – who refuses to believe that Jesus has risen. The other disciples tell Thomas that they’ve seen Jesus. But Thomas knows that once people die, they don’t come back. He insists not only on seeing Jesus for himself, but also on touching him, as if to prove that this vision is not some kind of ghost or communal hallucination.

Read aloud John 20:24–25.

So Thomas says, “Unless I touch his open wounds, I’m not going to believe it.” And of course he wouldn’t offer to go poking around in someone else’s open wounds unless he was certain that it wasn’t going to happen. Let’s read on from verse 26.

Read aloud John 20:26–28.

What can Thomas say? The proof of the resurrection is standing right in front of him. Well, he says this: “My Lord and my God!” Thirty years later, this stubborn, rational, incredulous man was to die a martyr’s death testifying to what he had seen. The resurrection turned a group of disciples cowering in fear for their lives into preachers of awesome courage.

The Gospels alone tell us of eleven separate instances where Jesus is seen after his death, at different times and in different places, to different people. In 1 Corinthians chapter 15, Paul tells us that over five hundred people saw Jesus at one time, many of whom were still living when Paul was writing. So Paul was saying to his readers, “If you don’t believe me, go and talk to the eyewitnesses. They’re still alive and will confirm the truth of what I’m saying.”

So if the resurrection actually happened, what conclusions can we draw?

Display the following headings.

The resurrection means:

a great hope
a great warning

A GREAT HOPE

The first conclusion is that the resurrection gives us great hope. Why? Because it means we can confidently put our trust in the person who said this: “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die.” The resurrection conclusively demonstrates Jesus’ power and authority over death – not just over his own, but also over ours.

The first funeral of a young person I ever conducted was that of a professional musician called Stuart Spencer, who died of cancer in his thirties. He was a deeply committed Christian, and we became close friends. I will always remember my last visit to him. It was three days before he died. I was feeling emotional and suddenly just blurted out what was on my mind. It was out before I knew it. I just said, “Stuart, what’s it like to die?” And I will never forget his answer. He said very calmly, “Rico, Christ has risen. He is risen.” Stuart knew Christ had risen, and so he knew what he had to look forward to beyond death.

1 Thessalonians chapter 4, verse 14 explains that just as Christ died and rose again, so Christians, when they die, will rise again: “We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him.” Revelation, the last book of the Bible, gives us a privileged glimpse of what heaven will be like. Look at Revelation 21, verses 3 and 4.

Read aloud Revelation 21:3–4.

Think of the most mind-blowing experience you’ve ever had, the most intimate relationship you’ve ever shared, the deepest enchantment, the most euphoric joy. Well, multiply that moment’s intensity by infinity and its duration by eternity; then you are close to what it will feel like being with Christ in heaven. “There will be *no more death or mourning or crying or pain.*” In other words, we won’t have to put up with sin any more. At last, we will be free to enjoy all of the good things that God provides, eternally. As it says in Revelation, God himself will wipe every tear from our eyes. There will be no more regret, no more unfulfilled dreams, no more lost loved ones, no more fear, no more bitterness, no more broken hearts, no more loneliness, no more sin. And the Bible affirms that heaven is not a place where individuality is lost. Far from it. It’s a physical place – as real as the one we’re in now – where all our potential as individuals is finally fulfilled. This is not a pipe dream, or a cruel mirage, but an amazing reality earned for us by Christ’s death, and proved by Christ’s resurrection.

However, although the resurrection is a great hope for those who follow Christ, it is also a great warning for those who ignore him.

A GREAT WARNING

As we saw in the parable of the tenants that we looked at earlier in our GROUP DISCUSSION, a time will come when we will be judged. The resurrection is proof of that: just as death was not the end for Jesus, so it won’t be the end for us. Please turn to Acts chapter 17, verse 31.

➤ *Read aloud Acts 17:31.*

At first the thought of a day of reckoning may appear very distressing – especially if, like me, you don't just fear for yourself but also for loved ones. But actually it's a very good thing indeed, and the alternative to judgement is absolutely appalling.

The book *Schindler's List* tells of an incident in Krakow, in Poland, during World War II, when the SS guards are moving Jews from their ghetto in the town to a concentration camp outside. Oscar Schindler, the hero of the story, sees a mother and son brutally murdered by the guards. What shocks him most is that it all happened in full view of a young girl, about three years old, who stood out because she was dressed in red. The author writes, "Later in the day after he had absorbed a ration of brandy, Oscar understood the proposition in its clearest terms: they permitted witnesses, such witnesses as the red toddler, because they believed all the witnesses would perish too." Do you see the implication of that? The Nazi guards did what they liked because they thought they would never have to give an account of their actions. As far as the guards were concerned, there would be no day of reckoning, no accounting for what they'd done, no judgement. They could do whatever they liked and nothing mattered. Because all those with the power to condemn them would be dead.

But death is not the end, as we've seen. Thankfully, the Bible repeatedly assures us that wrongdoing will not be left unaddressed – ultimately there will be justice. The Bible is very blunt and clear about this. The book of Hebrews, for example, says this: "man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgement." It's a sobering thought, but the alternative is much more terrifying. Do any of us really want to live in a world where nothing matters, where even the most extreme cruelty is met with vacuous silence? But justice *will* be done, every sin *will* be paid for – that is the promise of the resurrection. There *is* a place called hell – it is a place of isolation, punishment and torment. It is a place where we pay for our sin ourselves.

Paul preached that message to the people of Athens. He told them that, ultimately, God will judge everyone, and that he "has given proof of this to all men by raising [Jesus] from the dead." Obviously, no-one likes being told about judgement, so how do these people react? Look at Acts 17, verse 32.

Read aloud Acts 17:32–34.

So some of them sneered, and some wanted to hear more on the subject. We also read that some believed. What's your reaction to the resurrection? "For [God] has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed." And who is this "appointed" man? The resurrection confirms the answer. It is God's only Son, a man who knows all about Thomas's doubts before he even speaks, a man who knows all about us and yet still gave up his life for us.

AT THE END OF THE TALK

Let me leave you with the following questions for your groups:

Display the following questions and read them aloud.

- “Heaven is not a pipe dream, or a cruel mirage, but an amazing reality earned for us by Christ’s death, and proved by Christ’s resurrection.” Has this changed your view of heaven?
- “For God has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead” (Acts 17:31). What’s your reaction to this?
- Do you believe the resurrection is possible?

*Allow 30 minutes for groups to work together through the Study Guide section called **GROUP DISCUSSION 2**.*

AT THE END OF THE DISCUSSION

Before next time, use the HOME STUDY section in your *Study Guide* to help you as you continue to read through Mark. Once you’ve done that, you will have read through the whole of Mark’s Gospel.

Remind participants about the weekend or day away, and hand out invitations and schedules.