

Mark 15:40—16:8

August 25, 2019

Charles Dickens' classic book A Christmas Carol opens,

*"Marley was dead, to begin with. There is no doubt whatever about that. The register of his burial was signed by the clergyman, the clerk, the undertaker, and the chief mourner. Scrooge signed it. And Scrooge's name was good upon 'Change for anything he chose to put his hand to. Old Marley was as dead as a doornail."*

Remember last week?

Jesus died, and Mark wants us to have no doubt about that. To borrow a word from Dickens, Jesus was dead as a doornail.

Death had swallowed the man from Nazareth. As Jesus was extinguished so was the hopes for so many. Death as we know is no respecter of persons. Even Jesus.

Because you see, Jesus was dead as a doornail.

We join Mark on that dark Friday afternoon. As the shadows lengthen and the sun falls past the horizon—the one thing you need to know is Jesus was dead.

The power of death had conquered Jesus. And he was dead as a doornail. There was no doubt about this. You must not have any doubt about this.

He did not just appear to die.  
He did not faint on the cross.

He died.

And for all time Death always meant, 'the end.'

And yet.

As Sunday morning dawned in Mark 15, there was a power stirring. A deep and unstoppable power greater than death, a power able to turn death back on itself.

Death always meant, 'the end.'

Mark will take us by the hand for the last time to see the day when death died. The day when the definition of death changed. For the very first time, death became not an end but a beginning.

Let's look at the day that changed the definition of death.

"There were also women looking on from a distance, among whom were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joses, and Salome. <sup>41</sup> When he was in Galilee, they followed him and ministered to him, and there were also many other women who came up with him to Jerusalem.

<sup>42</sup> And when evening had come, since it was the day of Preparation, that is, the day before the Sabbath, <sup>43</sup> Joseph of Arimathea, a respected member of the council, who was also himself looking for the kingdom of God, took courage and went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. <sup>44</sup> Pilate was surprised to hear that he should have already died. And summoning the centurion, he asked him whether he was already dead. <sup>45</sup> And when he learned from the centurion that he was dead, he granted the corpse to Joseph. <sup>46</sup> And Joseph bought a linen shroud, and taking him down, wrapped him in the linen shroud and laid him in a tomb that had been cut out of the rock. And he rolled a stone against the entrance of the tomb. <sup>47</sup> Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joses saw where he was laid.

PRAY

## *1. Death Witnessed*

We have been walking with Jesus, guided by Mark so long and over that time, his writing style has emerged. Mark has a subtle and understated style.

With his characteristic minimalist style Mark really wants to know that Jesus was dead.

He could have said, Jesus died. And that is it. Instead he calls witnesses.

Vs. 40,

"There were also women looking on from a distance, among whom were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joses, and Salome."

These three women watched Jesus die from a distance.

Vs. 47,

"Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joses saw where he was laid."

Two of those ladies followed the group that took Jesus' body down from the cross and laid in the tomb.

Vs. 1,

"When the Sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him."

These three ladies along with Salome went to the tomb early Sunday morning.

One of the most popular retorts to the news of the resurrection of Jesus was that maybe he wasn't dead. He only appeared dead. Set aside the fact that the Romans were experts in the discipline of death. It is laughable to think that Jesus only appeared dead. The Romans soldiers had one job day after day—kill criminals by torture.

Jesus was dead as a doornail Friday afternoon.

Mark is saying, you don't believe me? Talk to Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James & Joses and Salome.

When this book was originally written these ladies were alive and Mark was saying—don't believe Jesus was really dead?

Talk to Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James & Joses and Salome.

Others might say, Maybe they didn't know where he was laid. They could have just gone to an empty tomb and said, "Jesus is alive!"

Nope. Talk to Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James & Joses and Salome.

Still others might say, his followers expected him to rise from the dead.

Wrong again. Talk to Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James & Joses and Salome. They took spices to anoint his dead body on Sunday morning. Go ask them.

The resurrection of Jesus was attested by eyewitnesses. These ladies saw Jesus die. They saw the tomb that his body was laid in and they went back early Sunday morning.

Jesus was dead. Dead as a doornail.

It is important to establish the fact that Jesus was actually dead. If he wasn't dead, there was no possibility for him to rise from the dead. If he wasn't

dead, there would be nothing remarkable on Sunday morning for him not to be in the tomb.

But Jesus WAS dead. Dead as a doornail.

We've heard it from Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Salome.

Death witnessed and now,

## *2. The Dead Buried*

Verse 43 tells us that not EVERY Jewish authority was blind. We meet a brave man named Joseph.

*"Joseph of Arimathea, a respected member of the council, who was also himself looking for the kingdom of God, took courage and went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus."*

So, not all Jewish authorities wanted Jesus dead. Joseph, a wealthy man took Jesus and laid him in his own family tomb. We know he had money because only the uber-rich could afford to have the kind of tomb with a stone rolled in front of the entrance.

Notice, when Joseph came and asked for Jesus' body Pilate was taken aback.

Vs. 44,

<sup>44</sup> Pilate was surprised to hear that he should have already died. And summoning the centurion, he asked him whether he was already dead. <sup>45</sup> And when he learned from the centurion that he was dead, he granted the corpse to Joseph.

Pilate was surprised because most people who were crucified took days to die. Jesus was only on that cross for a few hours. The centurion who oversaw the Jesus' crucifixion joins the women that he was really dead.

This unnamed centurion was in command of a detachment of soldiers who crucified people all the time. They would have been very good at their job. Just like you, if you are at a job for a while you get used to it and it becomes second nature.

Death was this centurion's job.

So Mark gives us an additional witness to the death of Jesus. An authority on death said Jesus the Nazarene was dead. Did you notice that Pilate didn't say, "Are you sure?"

Pilate knew this man knew this man was an authority on death.



If the centurion said Jesus was dead, Pilate knew he was as dead as a doornail.

So far, one thing is sure. At this point, Jesus is dead. Dead as a doornail.

It had to be that way.

Christian teaching is centered on the belief that Jesus paid for sins by means of his death. If Jesus were not dead that Friday afternoon a resurrection from the dead would make no sense.

Jesus HAD to die.

If Jesus only died and stayed dead, he would not be worth following. He might be someone who could give a bit of good advice but in the end, he would have been like everyone else.

But for the first time, death was only the beginning of something.

Then Sunday dawned. And with it, a new beginning.

### ***3. A New Beginning***

Lets look at Mark 16 together.

16 When the Sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him. <sup>2</sup> And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb. <sup>3</sup> And they were saying to one another, "Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance of the tomb?" <sup>4</sup> And looking up, they saw that the stone had been rolled back—it was very large. <sup>5</sup> And entering the tomb, they saw a young man sitting on the right side, dressed in a white robe, and they were alarmed. <sup>6</sup> 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. <sup>7</sup> But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going before you to Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you." <sup>8</sup> And they went out and fled from the tomb, for trembling and astonishment had seized them, and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid."

And that is the end of Mark. So, why do we have verses 9-20?

The best and oldest manuscripts do not include 9-20—Manuscripts are simply copies of parts or the entire Bible. When the King James Bible (KJV) was translated in 1611 the copies of scripture that had been discovered were fewer. In the 400 years since

the KJV release more reliable, older manuscripts have been discovered and Verses 9-20 are not included.

Additionally, the writing style is clearly different. Someone other than Mark wrote 16:9-20. Most modern English translations follow the KJV tradition by including these verses, though evidence and nearly 100% of biblical scholars agree that 9-20 is not authentic.

So, what happened?

Some well-meaning scribe could have written this ending to make the end of Mark seem smoother. They may have thought it not very hopeful that the last note struck is one of fear.

If Mark is anything he is abrupt. This ending is classic Mark. He starts the gospel abruptly—no genealogy (like Matthew), no prologue (like John), no extended purpose statement (like Luke)—just, 'The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God...' It would only make sense that Mark would end the gospel curtly.

But there is more here than might be obvious.

The ladies got the shock of their life when they walked into that tomb.

Vs. 5,

"And entering the tomb, they saw a young man sitting on the right side, dressed in a white robe, and they were alarmed. (you think?) <sup>6</sup> And he said to them, "Do not be alarmed. (that always makes me laugh—don't be alarmed! This whole situation is the definition of alarming!)"

You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has risen; he is not here. See the place where they laid him."

He has risen.

Jesus who was crucified (dead) is alive.

Though Mark doesn't tell us but it stands to reason that the young man sitting in the tomb is an angel. Angel means messenger and this angel had a message to deliver.

Vs. 7,

<sup>7</sup> But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going before you to Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you."

Go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going before you to Galilee.

When did Jesus tell them that he was going to Galilee after his resurrection? Right after they celebrated the Passover meal together and began to walk in the direction of Gethsemane we overheard Jesus.

"And Jesus said to them, "You will all fall away, for it is written, 'I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered.' [28] But after I am raised up, I will go before you to Galilee." Mark 14:27–28

The disciples would go on to claim allegiance and swear that they would stick by Jesus until the end. They seemed to have missed the bit of instruction in verse 28,

[28] But after I am raised up, I will go before you to Galilee.

Jesus said this before:

- All his disciples promised to stand by him
- They went to the garden

- Jesus asked his disciples to watch and pray three times
- They fell asleep each time
- He was betrayed and arrested
- All his disciples ran from him
- Peter verbally betrayed Jesus by denying him three times

In his time of greatest need Jesus was utterly and completely alone.

After all that, I would expect that the angel would deliver a different sort of message. Something like, "Hey you go tell that group worthless cowards, Thanks for nothing. Tell them I have a score to settle."

OR

"You had better go tell those losers, I'm back. You better keep running from me."

But that is not what he said at all.

<sup>7</sup> But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going before you to Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you."

Go tell the disciples and Peter.

How different Jesus is from you and me!

Peter had forcefully denied Jesus three times and yet here we have a message from Jesus that he wanted to see Peter and all the disciples again.

This tells you all that you need to know about Jesus. He loved Peter despite his failure. He wants Peter back.

Shocking.

Why? He loves Peter despite Peter's actions.

Get the picture, the Lord is alive and he wants to see Peter, and the others not to lecture or punish or admonish but to reaffirm his love.

This is the new beginning won after Jesus defeated death.

Up to this day, Death always won. Think about it. Who escaped death? No one.

Wealth could never ward off the grim reaper.

Fame could not erase mortality.

Altruism was no ticket to immortality.

Death had muffled every song.

Death had stilled every pulse.  
Death had stifled every happy ending.  
Death had wilted every hope.  
Death snuffed out every light.

Up and to this point—Death seemed like the most powerful force in the universe. All pain and hopelessness at some level radiated from the power of death.

Then Death met Jesus.  
And Death has never been the same.

The power of God overwhelmed the power of death.  
And with his resurrection, Jesus ushers in a new beginning.

What kind of new beginning?

We heard it from the angel to his followers.

But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going before you to Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you."

That—my friends—is a message of love and grace and forgiveness of sin. The good news is that Jesus has already gone before us—not to Galilee—but to his father and our father.



There we will see him, just as he said. That is the kind of new beginning that Jesus won by rising from the dead.

What love!

Jesus loved Peter and the rest despite their actions, you might even say, despite their life-defining failure.

What kind of new beginning? Your failure cannot disqualify you from his love.

His love is sure, certain and unflagging. The Savior's unwavering disposition to his people—to you—is one of love no matter our failures. Even life-defining failure.

If he loved greatly and stayed dead—what good is that?

But we can be confident in better things—he is alive.

If he can want Peter back after what he did, he will never send us away. His resurrection gives confidence of a new beginning. Because Jesus has defeated death, we can enjoy a love from him without end.

The end of death means love is forever. Not only that—he gives grace.

What grace!

What does that mean? God does not treat us as our sins deserve—he gives us his favor because of the son of God's death and resurrection. Jesus took our disgrace upon him so we could receive grace from him.

What kind of new beginning? He extends constant favor to you not because you deserve it but because he ended died and lives again to give grace to sinners.

Because he lives we can say along with Sibbes, with great confidence, There is more mercy in Christ than sin in us.

And because he is alive we can be confident that he is only always gracious to his people. If he was gracious and stayed dead, what good is that?

But we can be confident in better things—he is alive.

What love!

What grace!

What forgiveness!

God does not merely choose to look the other way from our many past, present and future sins. He does not sweep them under the rug and pretend that everything is okay.

NO! The Lord counted out our many sins one by one and put them on Jesus. And Jesus paid the price for them all. Our forgiveness sure not just because Jesus died but because he lives.

What good would our forgiveness be if Jesus were still dead? But he is alive and we can be confident of better things.

His death led to a new beginning for us. The resurrection of Jesus proves that his payment for our sins was fully accepted.

What love!

What grace!

What forgiveness!

All blessing we enjoy comes from the new beginning won by Jesus for us upon his resurrection.

A deep and unstoppable power was unleashed when Jesus was risen. A power greater than death, a power able to turn death back on itself.

The women who visited the tomb that day, did not yet understand what his being raised meant.

Vs. 8,

And they went out and fled from the tomb, for trembling and astonishment had seized them, and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.

Their fear eventually gave way to joy and excitement and they did not stay quiet for long. I know they got over their fear but I'm sure they never got over their amazement at hearing the angel say, "You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has risen; he is not here."

Death always meant, 'the end.'

No longer.

We've gone as far as we can with Mark as our guide. But the story is not over. Jesus is alive and still working.

What are some things for us to take away?

- The Definition of Death has changed

Christian, death is no longer a threat to you. Jesus has defeated it for you. Anyone who trusts in Jesus death has been forcefully and forever redefined.

Christian, your death has been redefined. No longer do you have an eternal death reaching for your soul—now you have eternal life.

When saints die, we should mourn because we miss them and our lives will change, but not because they are gone forever. They are not.

The new beginning Jesus won ensures that all the saints who die in Christ will be with Christ forever.

The definition of death has changed.

- Jesus is worth following

There is no one like Jesus. If for nothing else he died as a ransom for many. There is no one like Jesus. He knows what you need. He knows what I need.

Following Jesus is hard, but Jesus is an easy leader to follow.

That might sound contradictory but who else has done for you what Jesus has done? Who else loves

you like Jesus? Who else has given you grace like Jesus? Who else has paid for your every sin?

We've gotten to know Jesus through Mark and he is worth following. No matter what. Jesus promised that the love of many will grow cold. He said some will fall away. Even leaders.

We have seen that in recent days.

But we follow Jesus, and he is worth it.

- He died so that we might live.
- He gave all so we could have all things.
- He was cursed we could be blessed.
- He was abandoned so I might never be alone.
- He killed death by dying for us.

Life is hard, but Jesus is worth following.

Don't give up!

The definition of death has changed.  
Jesus is worth following.

- His power is not dependent on your faith

Sometimes we get everything backwards. We think that we have to have great amounts of faith to get

God to do anything. Like if we believe enough then he will give us what we are asking.

That isn't quite right.

The women had faith, but they had faith that Jesus was dead. They believed he was dead and they toted spices to the tomb. They were afraid.

The disciples had faith, but they had faith they had to run away from Jesus to live.

This story is not a story of human faith but of God's power.

We have no record that even one person took Jesus at his word and believed he would conquer death. And yet he did.

The story of Christianity is about the power of God. Mankind was inept and God was kind. He sent his Son and defeated death once and for all.

For who?

- For any who trust in him. Even if your faith is small—trembling and full of fear.

For who?

- For any who trust in him. Even if you have been marked by life defining failure.

For who?

- For any who trust in him. Even if you have been running from Jesus your whole life.

For who?

- For any who trust in him. Even if you have lived a life pock-marked by failure—if you continue following him.

There is no one like Jesus.

He offers new beginnings.

Jesus WAS dead as a doornail, but he is dead no more.

PRAY

To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood [6] and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. Revelation 1:5b–6





