

Meet Jesus: As He Defeats Death

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Date: 27 April 2011

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[0 : 0 0] Dear Heavenly Father, we begin by thinking of world situations and there seems to be so much unrest in the Middle East, so many lives lost of late. And we ask Father that in respect of politics you would give wisdom to those in authority. We think of the United Nations and we ask Father that the UN policy in Libya would hasten a resolution that's acceptable to all parties. Where the ambitions of the various factions in Libya are incompatible with peace, we ask Father that these would be laid aside for the sake of the Libyan people as a whole. We think also of Syria and over 400 protesters shot dead in the last six weeks.

And we ask again Father that UN resolutions and sanctions would have some effect, that President Assad would realise that the world is watching, that we would just be able through our prayers and through the United Nations to somehow give him a sense of accountability. Father we despair at these situations and it's certainly good to pray for those in authority. Yet we know that ultimately only the Gospel can change lives and bring peace. We also know of your sovereign purposes, that somehow even such conflicts are used by you. And so Father we lift these situations to you. And more than anything we pray for your good purposes, that your glory would be our desire. And we pray

Father for the church in the Middle East that she would be strong in these turbulent and dangerous days, that she that she would steadfastly hold on to your promises and proclaim the hope that is in Jesus for the people of these lands. And Father more widely we pray for the whole world that it would realise the fragility of peace, that you would use these events in the Middle East and even the events in Japan, the tsunami Father.

To disturb the complacency of the complacency of our world. That people would seek a stability that this will can never deliver. That in these days, Father, that millions of people would be contemplating these issues as they lie in bed. We just pray you'd help folk to meditate on these things.

And thereby to begin thinking more seriously about you and your son Jesus Christ. We think now Scotland and the 2011 elections to Parliament on the 5th of May. We pray Father that you would give your church wisdom in voting. That we would properly think about the candidates and examine their policies.

[3 : 5 1] That as Christians we would look at the morals that as Christians we would look at the morals that the various leaders and candidates espouse.

We know Father that we would look at the morals that the morals that the morals have eroded so much in our society. We pray that we would look at the morals that we would look at the morals that the morals of God. We pray that you would help your church at least to seek an influence for the good of society.

For those here soon returning back to work we pray that you would be with them Father and that you would guide them in all they do. Help them to seek excellence and do things for your glory.

Maybe it's such a difficult and hectic environment to work. Maybe it's such a difficult and hectic environment to work but we can do anything for your glory Father. We can live our lives in whatever circumstances you place us in for your glory.

So we lift these folk going back to work shortly to you and we pray that you'd be with them. Help folk to see an eternal perspective in the way that they do things and the way they conduct themselves.

[5 : 04] And Father as we come to your word we ask that you would help us to respond this lunchtime as we ought. And we finish our time of prayer with the Lord's Prayer.

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread and forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors.

Lead us not into temptation and deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory forever. Amen.

So you might like to pick a Bible up which you'll find on the seats. And we're looking at Mark chapter 16 which is on page 853.

And we'll just look at the first eight verses of chapter 16. So Mark chapter 16.

[6 : 09] When the Sabbath was passed, Mary Magdalene and Mary, the mother of Joses and Siloam, brought spices so that they might go and anoint Jesus. And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb.

And they were saying to one another, Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance of the tomb? And looking up, they saw that the stone had been rolled back.

It was a very large, says Mark. And entering the tomb, they saw a young man sitting on the right side, dressed in a white robe, and they were alarmed. 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. 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. 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.

[7 : 18] So, chapter 16, and we'll look at those first eight verses. And obviously it's about the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

But friends, I'd like us firstly to think about death as we begin. Genesis chapter 2 and verse 17. God said, And friends, since Adam's rebellion in Genesis chapter 3, we've all been dying, haven't we?

As a race. I don't know about you, but I think the most painful thing about death is that it breaks relationships. You lose a mother or a father or a brother or a sister or someone that you love.

And most of us know, don't we, what that's like. Here's a poem about bereavement. Just one verse of it. Void, empty, hollow inside. My dreams have fled.

My hopes have died. And C.S. Lewis, he was grieving at the loss of his wife. And he said this. He said, No one ever told me that grief felt so much like fear.

[8 : 38] And many of us, we know that feeling, don't we, friends? And Jesus wept. But the good news is that Jesus came to deal with that curse and offer those who trust in him an eternal life in a new creation.

And chapter 9, verse 31, he explains that he's going to die and then after three days he's going to be raised back to life.

And we come now, friends, to the tomb. And we've got two points. Our first point is the tomb is closed and our second point is the tomb is open. So firstly, the tomb is closed.

Just look with me at the end of chapter 15. Just look there at verse 46. And Joseph brought 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. Mary Magdalene and Mary, the mother of Joseph, saw where he was laid. Just imagine if Mark's Gospel finished there, the end of chapter 15.

[9 : 52] It finished. In chapter 15, there'd been a gruesome, humiliating execution, hadn't there? And the body of Jesus was placed inside the tomb, the stone was rolled across and it was left to rot.

What would it be like if Mark's Gospel finished there? Well, I think it would be just like one of the world's made-up religions. You know, there's fine words, but the leader is dead and buried.

Fine words, but no power over death. And friends, in this world, death would reign, wouldn't it? Friends, if Jesus had not been raised from the dead, this world would be a very sad place to live.

Am I right? Friends, just think if Jesus wasn't raised, all funerals would be like humanist funerals that offer no hope.

Chapter 15 and verse 46, the stone was rolled across the entrance of the tomb. And if Jesus wasn't raised, somebody would put a plaque on it.

[11 : 12] Here, O death, is your victory. And if Jesus was not raised, there'd be no church, there'd be no New Testament, there'd be no Book of Acts, and we wouldn't be here today, would we, friends, if Jesus had not been raised.

If Jesus had not been raised, Christians of all people, says the Apostle Paul, are to be pitied. If Jesus was not raised, then John Lennon's song is almost right.

Imagine, imagine there's no heaven, it's easy if you try. No hell below us, above us, only sky. Imagine all the people living for today.

And I'm wondering if there's anybody here, this lunchtime. You're just imagining what will happen when you die. Yet, friends, the good news is that the author of life has visited the planet.

And the whole plotline of the Bible, from Genesis to Revelation, is all about the reversal of death. So our second point, is the tomb is open.

[12 : 37] Let's just think for a moment about the mechanics of Jesus' burial. Today, we bury folk, don't we? Or else folk are cremated. Verse 46, Jesus is placed inside the tomb, isn't he?

And a stone is rolled across the entrance of the tomb. And the realm of death, think about it, is locked away inside. And the body of Jesus is left to decay in the darkness.

As the world carries on outside. And so just imagine it, the stone is like a barrier between two realms. The realm of death on the inside and the realm of life on the outside.

And the stone is separating those two realms. And the end of chapter 15, verse 46. And it's like the door of a large safe closing shut.

And the locks sliding into place. Just look there, chapter 15, the end of verse 46. And he rolled a stone against the entrance of the tomb.

[13 : 44] And so the stone is rolled into place. A button is pressed at the crematorium. The minister throws some earth over the coffin.

And all is silent. And the question hanging in the air is, can God pull it off? And we think back to chapter 5 of Mark's Gospel.

And a wee girl, she's dead. There's wailing outside of her house. It was a sound of death. Everyone in the village would know what had happened inside the house.

Inside. Inside the house, she lies there, motionless. Her dad, he remembers her first breath. But he never saw her last breath.

You see, he was with Jesus, pleading with Jesus, pleading with him. My little daughter is dying, she said to Jesus. Please come and lay your hands on her so that she might be healed and live.

[14 : 53] Chapter 5, verse 23. But then, the stone is rolled across the tomb.

Her eyes close. And it's like the realm of death, isn't it? And soon in the village, it's the sound of death. People are crying.

People are wailing loudly, says Mark in verse 38. And into the village walks the author of life. There was no such sound when he created the world.

It was very good as he strolled around in the Garden of Eden. And he looks down at this wee girl. Did she remind him of Eve?

Mum and Dad hold the breath. Jesus takes his breath and then words of life fall from his lips. Did Eve hear those same words?

[15 : 52] Talitha kumi, says Jesus. Chapter 5, verse 41. And then death flees and her wee eyes open. And Jesus' words of life, friends, are stronger than the grip of death.

Her dad smiles. Jesus says, get her something to eat. I wonder if he said that to Adam. Get your wife something to eat, Adam.

And friends, death is losing its grip, isn't it? And with that background, friends, we come back to our passage.

Who's dead this time? Jesus is dead. The disciples say to each other, they say, well, I suppose it's back to fishing now. Like riding a bike, we'll soon get used to it again.

We'll soon get back into the swing of things. What's happening? They're trying to move on, friends, aren't they? They just shrug their shoulders and they're trying to get on with life. The upper room, the road to Emmaus, Roman crucifixion.

[17 : 00] It had seemed so powerful, more powerful than Jesus' words. Death still reigned in the thinking of the disciples. Back at the tomb, there's no mourning, there's no wailing, it's deserted, but for the soldiers.

But like a melee of press photographers, scrambling to get into positions, some climbing up on ladders, the whole of the Old Testament is looking at this tomb.

And Mark brings us the unfolding drama. Mark paints the picture, doesn't he? And these women approach. Women! Their testimony wouldn't even be heard in a court.

Why did God choose women in this encounter right at the centre of the Bible? Why not Pilate or Herod or Barack Obama or somebody?

But he comes, doesn't he? Jesus comes to the lowly. He reveals himself, friends, doesn't he, to them. A Moabite, we last, by the name of Ruth.

[18 : 12] A shepherd named David. A carpenter named Joseph. A young girl named Mary. Even a young man who's gone and let him down.

Go tell Peter. Jesus comes, doesn't he, friends, to the lowly in heart. Where is the wise man, says Paul? Where is the scholar?

Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? And these three women, they've risen early, haven't they?

I guess who are tossing and turning all night long, thinking about the events, thinking all that they've seen, all that's happened. No alarm clock, so they're looking eagerly, aren't they, at the first glimmer of dawn.

And like a bereaved mum taking flowers to the side of the grave. These women, they want sort of a last ritual of respect. It's like saying goodbye.

[19 : 12] And so these grieving girls, they make their way, don't they, together to the tomb. And it's as if, it's as if God has almost instilled some sort of romantic desire with them to be with Jesus once more.

Like an instinct. Instinct is drawing them back, isn't he? Their feet are damp from the morning dew as they make their way to the tomb. The only sound you can hear is the breathing.

And that stone, that stone awaits them, doesn't it? It's hugely symbolic. Verse 3, Who will roll away the stone? They're asking each other.

Verse 4, friends, look at verse 4. And looking up, they saw that the stone had been rolled back. It was a very large, says Mark.

Not so much to get Jesus out, but friends, to let the world, to let you and me look in. 2,000 years of us, we all look into the tomb, eyes popping out, piercing through the centuries, back to the tomb.

[20 : 23] And this young man, that young man is sort of angelic, isn't he? He's there waiting. The girls, they're standing, afraid, aren't they? I guess the hearts are pounding. In contrast, he's just sitting, isn't he?

Sitting, waiting, waiting for them, waiting for us with a message. And perhaps God has waited for this moment with someone here today.

So here's the angel, and he's been waiting with a message. A message, friends, that's not so much new, but forgotten. So let's, together, just sort of listen to the clarity of this message.

This paragraph in verses 6 and 7, it isn't religion, it's logic. It ought to stun us with absolute certainty as we look at it.

Just look there, verses 6 and 7. Can you see? And he said to them, Do not be alarmed. You see, Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has risen, he's not here.

[21 : 29] See the place where they laid him. You've got the right tomb, girls. Verse 7, But go, tell his disciples and Peter, he is going before you to Galilee, and there you will see him, just as he told you.

And suddenly, friends, suddenly, our doubts about life beyond the grave, they're washed away, aren't they, with this message.

It all fits together. And friends, this is what it is to be a Christian. It's to be absolutely certain where you'll be after death. You'll be raised back to life again with Jesus and be in a new creation.

Is that good news? People tell me that cats have whiskers to go through gaps on fences and things. Is that right? That's what I've heard. And if the head goes through without touching the wood, then they know the rest of the body will go through and they go through the gap.

And so Jesus has been raised back from the dead, hasn't he? And all those who follow him will also, likewise, be raised from the dead. He's absolutely certain.

[22 : 40] And the young man said, there you will see him, just as he told you. And perhaps there's someone here you've been worried, friend, about your own death. Friend, the Bible is giving you a glimpse here of the new creation, a glimpse beyond death.

There you will see him, just as he told you. And so, friends, when we're worried about death, when you and I are worried about those things, we need to trust God's word, don't we, rather than our worries.

Just as he told you, and in Revelation, chapter 22 and verse 4, and John speaks about the church in the new creation. Just listen to this, they will see his face.

We will be with Jesus in the new creation, with our resurrected bodies. And it's a romance, isn't it? It's a romance with the creator of the universe, for it is indeed love, isn't it?

It's a rendezvous. Verse 8, as we finish. And they went out and fled from the tomb, for trembling and astonishment to seize them.

[23 : 56] And they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid. And so they scamper off, don't they? Terrified. Terrified. A bit like the disciples in the boat in chapter 4, when Jesus calms the seas.

They're terrified. They realise who's in the boat with them. And they're terrified. They realise, don't they, that someone has broken the curse of death.

Do you see? Jesus has risen from the dead and someone has gone and reversed death. Towards the end of last year, I got to know an elderly lady by the name of Wynne Begby.

And she was in a hospice and then another care home. And she'd spend much of her life as a missionary with her husband, Dick. They worked largely in South Africa.

And in her final weeks, she could hardly breathe, even though she was on oxygen. And when I used to go and see her, we used to talk about what our bodies would be like in the new creation.

[25 : 01] And she so longed to be with the Lord, she would talk about it all the time. And she died early in March. And her funeral was at Kilmer Cove and it was on Friday, March the 11th.

And I wasn't sure if the funeral was at 11 o'clock or 11.30. Tom McGill told me it was at 11 and the Herald told me it was at 11.30. So I was a little bit confused and not wanting to get there at the wrong time.

I arrived very early on my push bike. So I got there at something like quarter to 11. and I was sticky and sweaty. So I got changed in the entrance and there was nobody else around.

So clearly it was at half 11 the funeral started. So I got changed in the entrance of this church and then there were some curtains across, sort of like it would be at the back of our church formerly.

And I thought, hmm, I wonder what's inside there. So I pulled them back and I looked inside and there was absolutely nobody inside apart from Wynne in a coffin and me.

[26 : 07] And the coffin was right up at the front of the church and as nobody was there, I walked up to a coffin and I put my hand on it and I was thinking about Wynne's life and I said a wee prayer.

I thanked the Lord for her life and how he'd served her and I just pray that people coming along to the funeral maybe would see something of the hope that Wynne had in her life.

And friends, here it is. This is the resurrection of the Son of God and this is the great hope that we have in him.

Shall we pray? And he said to them, Do not be alarmed.

You seek Jesus of Nazareth who was crucified. He is risen. He is not here. See the place where they laid him. But go, tell the disciples and Peter that he is going before you to Galilee.

[27 : 13] There you will see him just as he told you. Dear Heavenly Father, we thank you for the great hope that we have as Christians in your Son, Jesus Christ.

who rose from the dead, who broke that curse of death. And Father, we thank you that this great hope is ours through him when we turn to you and repent of our ways and ask for forgiveness and seek to live your way in this morally confused world.

This world that has no hope without you. So we thank you for this great message and we pray, Father, that our lives would be lived accordingly, that we would radiate the great hope of the resurrection in your Son, Jesus Christ.

And to these ends, may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us this lovely sunny day and forevermore.

Amen.