

THE REAL JESUS
A Series on the Book of Mark
“The Resurrection of Jesus”
Mark 15:42-6:8
June 21, 2009
New City Church of LA
Speaker: Kevin Haah

I. Introduction

Welcome to New City!

Happy Father’s Day! (pray for fathers)

Today is the last Sunday of the series called REAL JESUS, a series on the Book of Mark; we started to study the life of Jesus 40 weeks ago. We are finally finishing the book! It has been a fun journey.

On the first Sunday of July, we will start a short series called “Breathe: Prayers of the Heart.” After that, we are going to do a series called Love, Sex, Singleness and Marriage; it’s a series on the relational aspects of single and married life.

As we end the book, let’s go back and see how he started the book.

He started out very boldly with the statement: “The beginning of the gospel about Jesus Christ, the Son of God.” This is not a sentence; there is no verb. So, it’s a title.

He starts out by saying that the subject of this book is world changing news (that’s what the gospel means—it’s good news that changes the foundation of the world) and this good news is about Jesus, and the first thing Mark says about Jesus is that he is the Christ. That’s not his last name. Christ means the anointed one, the messiah, who was to come into the world to save us, the messiah that the people of Israel have been waiting for hundreds of years. Then, Mark says that this Jesus is the Son of God. What does he mean by saying that Jesus is the Son of God? Does he mean that Jesus is the son of God like sometimes the angels are called sons of God? Does it mean that Jesus is God? Well, Mark clarifies himself by quoting Old Testament prophecies:

2It is written in Isaiah the prophet:

"I will send my messenger ahead of you,
who will prepare your way"—

3"a voice of one calling in the desert,

'Prepare the way for the LORD,

make straight paths for him.' "

This is a bombshell. It's huge. In these passages, it says that the LORD himself will come, and that there will be a messenger before the LORD comes. Mark says that the messenger is John the Baptist, and the LORD is Jesus. What's the big deal? The word translated into LORD (in our Bible, it is translated as LORD in caps) is YHWH, the holiest name of God revealed to Moses in the burning bush. The name that is so holy that Jews didn't even say it. This means that the creator of the earth, God himself, has come to us in the person of Jesus Christ. It's not like the guy upstairs came down, like someone of higher rank came down. It's more like Shakespeare writing himself into Hamlet. This is the only way Hamlet will ever know Shakespeare.

The transcendent God who is omnipotent, omni-present, omniscient has taken on a body. God moved into our neighborhood. The invulnerable has become vulnerable. The ideal has become material. God loved us so much that he became a human.

But some of you are thinking: we're modern people and we can't believe this kind of stuff that primitive people believed. There are too many barriers. But, keep in mind that all of the original believers were Jews and they had far more barriers to believing that God would become human than you. This was absolutely counter to their worldview. They thought of God as so transcendent that they didn't even say His name. Jews were the only monotheist in the world at the time. I think it'd easier to believe that God became a human being if you come from a polytheistic background, but for Jews, it was absolutely antithetical to their worldview. **Yet, they did believe it.** Something shattered the barriers to their world view. What was it? Mark says I am going to show it to you. Something broke through, and I am going to give it to you so read on.

So, we read on.

He preached the Kingdom of God, the upside down nature of the Kingdom of God, where to be great is to be the servant of all. He exemplified it with his life.

He touched lepers and healed them.

He befriended tax collectors and sinners and loved them and hung out with them.

He performed amazing miracles. He healed the paralyzed, calmed the storms, cast out hundreds of demons, fed thousands with five loaves and two fish, walked on

water, opened the eyes of the blind, raised people from the dead. People were healed just by touching him.

He claimed to be not only the Messiah, the one who is prophesized about in the OT, but also to have the power to forgive sin, something only God can do, and ultimately, he claimed to be the Son of God.

For the first half of the book, we got this sense that Jesus was this amazing God-man who could do amazing things. People were flocking to him from all over the place. He had power, charisma, and love.

But, instead of planning a rise into the religious-social-political power structure, he repeatedly taught that he will suffer and be rejected by the religious leaders, and be killed and rise again in three days. He said he came to be a servant and give his life as a ransom for many. He said he came to free us from the hold that demons have on us. He said he came to take upon our sins upon himself. He said he came to rescue us from the pit that we are in by dying on the cross to pay for our sins.

As he predicted, he was arrested by the religious leaders and crucified. We saw last week that all of our darkness, all of our sins, all of the penalty for our wrongs, all of our alienation, isolation, and hell were laid upon Jesus on the cross, and God turned away from him. At that moment, Jesus cried out in a loud voice, My God, My God, Why Have You Forsaken Me? At that moment, the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. The symbol of separation between God and humankind was torn away; and so the separation finally undone. Jesus created a way for us to have a relationship with God, to be in the presence of God.

You see, that's what Jesus' mission was all about. God became a man and lived for a while among us. But, his coming was not just to teach us how to live, to get us to love one another more; no, it was to rescue us from the broken human condition of being separated from God by coming, suffering, being killed on the cross.

It's an amazing story of God's love for us. For God so loved the world, he gave himself, came in the form of his Son, and died for us, so that we will be forgiven and accepted by God forever.

Now, if the story just ended here, it's a nice story, but it doesn't really do anything. It's just a sad story.

But, the story doesn't end there. Something happens. Let's catch the story right after the crucifixion.

Read Mark 15:42-6:8 (the second book of the NT)

We'll talk about (1) the importance of the resurrection; (2) the evidence for resurrection; and (3) the implications for our lives.

II. First, the Importance of the Resurrection

Sometimes people come and talk to me saying something like: I like this aspect of Christian teaching, but I don't like this other aspect. But, you know what, if Jesus rose from the dead, you have to accept all of his teachings, and if he didn't rise from the dead, why worry about anything he said. It doesn't matter. The issues on which everything hangs is not whether or not we like what Jesus said but where or not he rose from the dead. If his resurrection is true, it changes everything! This whole thing about Jesus is not just a philosophy or a nifty worldview. If it is true, we can't continue to live our lives the same way. We don't have to be afraid of anything.

As you can see, Christianity is not essentially about what we are supposed to do, but about what God has done for us to rescue us from where we were. When we were powerless to rescue ourselves, he came to rescue us. Now, that's why it's the gospel, good news. How do you know this news is really true? The resurrection of Jesus Christ.

III. Second Point: the Evidence of the Resurrection

You see, the resurrection takes the question, "Is Christianity valid?" out of the realm of philosophy and even religion and makes it a question of history. So, I want to briefly see whether Christianity has a historically acceptable basis? Is sufficient evidence available to warrant belief in the resurrection?

One thing that needs to be clarified is that Christianity from its get-go has preached that Jesus died for our sins and resurrected from the dead. The written letter we have by a follower of Jesus is a letter that Apostle Paul wrote to a church in Corinth. It got included in the Bible as 1 Corinthians. (I know some of you have issues with the argument of using the Bible to support the Bible. But, you have to understand that the Bible is a collection of letters and books. They used to circulate separately. They are

different books. Someone put it all together about 300-400 years after Jesus. So, we have to look at these documents as separate documents). This first letter to Corinth was written around 15 years or so after Jesus. Every historian agrees with this. This letter was written even before Mark was written. This what he said:

•For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, •that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, •and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve. •After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep.

After Paul lists the witnesses of the resurrected Jesus, he says many of them are still living. In essence, he is saying, if you want to talk to them about it, you can go talk to them. The Romans created an excellent travel and road system. It was not that difficult to go and talk to the witnesses.

If you are going to argue that somehow this resurrection was a legend created by the followers of Jesus to help their cause, you have to argue that a legend was created in 15 years.

First, the accounts are too counterproductive to be made up

- The first people who saw Jesus resurrected were women. If they were going to create a story, they would not use women because their testimony was considered unreliable in court. Why would they say that the first witnesses were women? Because that's how it happened.
- The leaders of the early church--the apostles--look like fools and cowards.

Second, they are too detailed to be legends.

- The genre of literature of realistic fiction written like history did not exist until about 200-300 years ago. Legends and epics were not written like the way Mark, Matthew, Luke, or John wrote the gospel.
- C.S. Lewis (medieval literature professor at Oxford): "I have been reading poems, romance literature, myth and legends all my life and I know what they are like and I know that none of them are like this. There are only two possible views on the gospel texts: either this is historical reportage or an unknown ancient writer without processor or successor suddenly anticipated

the whole technique of modern realistic novel narrative. The reader who doesn't see this simply has not read."

Third, 15 years is not long enough to create a legend. I got married about 15 years ago (my anniversary is coming up this week). If I told people that my best man got shot in the wedding, and I said that in a public document saying most of the people who saw this are still alive, I couldn't get away with this.

Also, according to Book of Acts, which was written about 30-35 years after the death of Jesus, the disciples started to proclaim the resurrection of Jesus Christ right where it happened, in the city of Jerusalem, only weeks after the resurrection of Jesus.

The resurrection of Jesus caused a complete change in the disciples. Before, they were afraid. They were selfish. They acted foolish. But, after witnessing the resurrected Jesus, they became extremely bold. Their view of reality changed and they had a dramatic impact on the world. The church was born and grew at a tremendous rate.

- There is no reasonable explanation as to how the church got started and how it grew so rapidly.

“[The Resurrection] transformed [the disciples] almost on the spot from a crowd of demoralized and frightened people into a band of men with a mission and purpose in life which, without delay, they proceeded to translate into action. This ‘resurrection faith’ of the disciples is a historical fact of prime importance. . . . (Paul makes the distinction between the resurrection fact and the resurrection faith in 1 Cor. 15:17, where he emphasizes that without the former the latter is illusory: “if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile”). Were it not for the resurrection event there would have been no resurrection faith. But the resurrection faith brought the scattered followers of Jesus together again, and within a few weeks after his death they appear as a coherent, vigorous and self-propagating community in Jerusalem.”¹ Luke 24:36-53; Acts 1:1-5; 1 Cor. 15:3-8, 12-24

I don't think there is a plausible alternative explanation for how the church started. How could 1st Century Jews come to believe that Jesus is God in human form? There

¹ Bruce, F.F. *New Testament History* (New York: Doubleday 1969), 205-6.

was no way they could have. It is blasphemy to believe that. Yet, hundreds of Jews began worshipping Jesus literally overnight. The hymn to Christ as God that Paul quotes in a letter he wrote to Philippians 2 is generally recognized to have been written only a few years after the crucifixion. Is there any other explanation other than the resurrection?

And virtually all of these witnesses died for their faith in Jesus death and resurrection. People who make sure stories and legends do not die for their fraud.

Now, I know some of you are saying: “There is no way a dead man can come alive.” Basically, I think you’re making the argument that a philosopher named David Hume made. He was a proponent of a philosophy called naturalism. He basically says: We can only believe an experience that conforms to normal, ordinary human experiences. Anything that is unique so far as normal human experience is concerned (such as miracles) should be rejected. In other words, naturalism says that everything must have a natural explanation.

Hume’s Argument: “A miracle is a violation of the laws of nature; and as a firm and unalterable experience has established these laws, the proof against a miracle, from the very nature of the fact, is as entire as any argument from experience can possibly be imagined . . . Nothing is esteemed a miracle if it ever happens in the common of nature.”

Problems with Hume’s Hangover/Naturalism: Whether something happened or not at a given time in history can be settled only by historical evidence.

C.S. Lewis: “Now of course we must agree with Hume that, if there is absolutely ‘uniform experience’ against miracles, if, in other words, they have never happened, why then they never have. Unfortunately, we know the experience against them to be uniform only if we know that all the reports of them are false. And we can know all the reports of them to be false only if we know already that miracles have never occurred. In fact, we are arguing in a circle.”

So, if you have questions, I invite you to continue to engage, but I also ask that you question your presuppositions before you engage. I ask you to engage the evidence and let them speak for themselves.

IV. Now, Third Point: So What? What is the Implication of the Resurrection?

If Jesus wasn’t raised from the dead, Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15:17-19:

¹⁷And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. ¹⁸Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. ¹⁹If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men.

He says that if the dead are not raised, in verse 22: “Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.”

Paul says that because Jesus was raised from the dead, it shows us that we will also be resurrected from the dead. How?

²⁰But someone may ask, "How are the dead raised? With what kind of body will they come?"

Skipping to verse 42-44:

⁴²So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; ⁴³it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; ⁴⁴it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body.

Skipping to verse 55:

⁵⁵"Where, O death, is your victory?

Where, O death, is your sting?"⁵⁶ ⁵⁶The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. ⁵⁷But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

⁵⁸Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.