

Easter evening

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[0 : 00] So what do I want these verses to do for you this evening? I hope that what they might do for you is that you will see that your feelings are not the most important thing in the end.

! It is the facts that are. And so in Mark chapter 15, from what we read, we see a man traveling to the cross. He is planning to collect the body of Jesus and bury it.

And he is feeling quite courageous. And even though he has very few facts to go on. And then we see a few women in chapter 16 traveling to the tomb.

And they are planning to anoint the dead body of Jesus. And they are feeling nervous. Nervous about everything. But eventually the facts will break in on them and change them.

Eternally. I think it's a fact that the world in which we live puts very little thought into how we will land safely in the next world.

[1 : 07] Do you meet people who are thinking and planning and trying to work out how they will land safely in the next world? It's very rare, I find. But we do have, don't we, lots and lots of people in this world who are thinking and working out how to stay safe in this world.

Very much so at the moment. People desperate to stay alive and to stay safe. And rightly so. But they show no concern or little concern about the next world.

And so I want us to be very sure of the facts tonight. Somebody has said that you're entitled to your own opinions. You're entitled to your own feelings.

But you're not entitled to your own facts. And I want to think about this evening under two headings. The two headings are number one, a brave trip to the cross. And number two, a nervous trip to the tomb.

First of all, a brave trip to the cross. Look at verses 42 to 47. It's the night of Good Friday. And there is a dead Jesus on the cross. There's a man called Joseph who decides to bury him.

[2 : 18] And normally, normally criminals on crosses would be thrown into common graves unless the family stepped in and they did something for the deceased. And we can't be sure why Jesus's family have not shown up at this point.

But this man, Jesus, this man, Joseph, takes the initiative. But we're told in verse 43, can you see that, that he was an honorary member of the Jewish council.

And that's fascinating, isn't it? Because the Jewish council had just voted to kill Jesus. It's obvious that Joseph is a very different member from the Jewish council.

In fact, we're told in verse 43 that he was a secret believer. Because he was expecting the kingdom of God. And that doesn't mean he was a typical Jewish man waiting for the Messiah one day to come.

It means that he believed that Jesus had brought the kingdom of God. And Jesus would soon fulfill the kingdom of God. He was persuaded of that.

[3 : 20] And so he goes to Pilate, Pilate the governor, and he asks, can I have the corpse? Now, why is that an interesting moment? Joseph, I'm going to Pilate.

Imagine we could ring Mark, the gospel writer, tonight on his mobile in heaven. And imagine we could say something to him like this.

Mark, why are you giving us these details? Of all the things that you could tell us of the death and the resurrection, you know we are busy. Well, we're normally busy.

You know that we've got very short concentration spans. And we want to know things that are important. In other gospels, I'm sure there was an earthquake. There's two men traveling down the road.

There was the time of Thomas and his doubting and then his believing. And the eating of the fish. So why, Mark, do you give us this? And I wonder whether Mark would say something like this.

[4 : 17] Because Joseph made a decision. Joseph made a decision. Joseph didn't know everything.

But he knew enough to pin his colors to Christ. And even though at this point Jesus is between death and resurrection, Joseph is persuaded that Jesus of Nazareth can be trusted.

Pilate. Do you remember? He refused to make a decision. He held off, didn't he, from doing anything until the crowd forced his hand.

And Pilate is like many people in this city that want to be agnostic. But really, I wonder whether there is too much pride or cowardice to actually make a decision about Jesus, the King of Kings. And because Pilate made a decision to stay uncommitted, he stayed actually opposed to Christ. But not Joseph. And I say Joseph didn't know everything.

[5 : 24] The one thing he knew for sure pretty well is that Jesus was dead. You don't survive crucifixion. And Mark wants us to know, he wants you to know that Jesus was really dead.

We read in verse 44. Can you see there? Jesus was dead. Pilate checked. And verse 44, Pilate checks.

Verse 45, the soldier comes back and says, yeah, he's dead. Verse 45, Pilate says, you can have your dead Jesus. Verse 46, Joseph wrapped and buried dead Jesus.

Verse 47, other people saw dead Jesus get buried. And that is what makes Joseph's decision very, very special. Because the council had voted against Jesus.

And Joseph now turns his back on the council and he turns his face towards Jesus Christ. And I imagine that there were lots of people in that council who turned their back on Jesus.

[6 : 28] And it all looked pretty successful, didn't it? And a hundred years later, that council, or where are they? Joseph turns his back on the council, puts his trust in Jesus.

And a hundred years later, where is Joseph? I've no doubt that it was the end for Joseph. Of any kind of welcome back into the council.

You can imagine, can't you, the conversation that took place in the days that followed. Did you hear about Joseph? He's betrayed us. He's thrown his lot in with the dead Nazarene.

What a tragedy. What a tragedy for him. What a tragedy for his family. He must have lost his mind. Is he insane? If he thinks that a dead man holds the key to the future.

But I wonder whether Joseph had been listening to Jesus very carefully. I wonder whether he'd heard of the miracles. I wonder whether he'd heard of the healing of the sick and the raising of the dead.

[7 : 34] That he'd listened to the promises of Jesus. When Jesus says, I am the good shepherd who lays down his life for the sheep. When Jesus says, I am the resurrection and the life. Had he heard that prediction to die and rise.

To die and rise. To die and rise. And it seems that the truth had penetrated his mind and heart. And found its way into his new life.

And Joseph was persuaded that Jesus died for him. And held the keys of the future. And he was willing to bet everything on Christ. And so it's no wonder in verse 43.

Can you see it? He went boldly. To ask for the body. And he did this before the resurrection. With less info that you and I. Than you and I have today. And yet it was enough for Joseph.

And therefore I consider Joseph. As one of the greatest men of the New Testament. He's one of the unsung heroes. Of the New Testament. Because here is a man.

[8 : 38] Who's prepared to leave the crowd. And pin his hopes very wisely on Jesus Christ. And it is amazing isn't it? That this weekend.

In our country. Which is a very secular country. We're given this magnificent weekend. And it's an opportunity for rest. And family time. And normally.

We can go out and about. It's a little bit different this weekend. But people love Easter holidays.

Don't they? When I used to work in BT. Tea. And my friend used to blasphemously say.

Thank Jesus for this bank holiday weekend. Leavey. But people won't go on their knees. The Jesus will they. And ask for that forgiveness. And that mercy.

And that new life. Which he came to bring. And. I watched a video. Recently of Chris Pitchens. Very very famous. Atheist.

[9 : 36] He's a very very. Intelligent man. And I watched the video. Partly thinking. I need to know the arguments. He obviously thinks. I'm a total idiot. For believing.

In Christ. And I watched the video. And I waited for the arguments. And the arguments are terrible. They are woeful. And Christopher Pitchers. Who no doubt. Was a very very intelligent man. Said on the subject of the resurrection. I am glad. It is not true. Because it would be horrible. Where is the weight. In that. And we have to ask ourselves. Why is there such disinterest. In Christ. The best man who's ever lived. Why is there. So much hostility. To Jesus. A man. Who's come into this world. Who's taken away. The danger. Of our very real sin. And has opened the door. Of very real death. [10:31] And we say to him. No thanks. And I think if. Mark was preaching to us tonight. He would say. It's because people are more like. Pilate. Than Joseph. That people are short. Of courage. To go with the facts. But Joseph was not. A brave trip. To the cross. Secondly. A nervous trip. To the tomb. That's in verses. And one to eight. A nervous trip. To the tomb. And we come to the women. They've seen the burial. In fact. They've seen the crucifixion. These women. They've seen the burial. And in the last verse of 15. Can you see. They. They are planning a trip. To the tomb. In chapter 16. To anoint the body of Jesus. And I have to tell you something. That's very unpopular. It's a terrible thing. To say in our day. But women. In the first century. Were discredited. As witnesses. Not. [11:31] As far as God. Was concerned. Not as far as. Jesus. Is concerned. Christians. But they were discredited. By Rome. And they were discredited. By many. Of the religious. And that's why. These verses. Seeing the burial. And these women. Being at the tomb. And then the women. Announcing. The resurrection. Are so powerful. Because if Mark. Was an inventor. He would have put in. Some very impressive. Statements. But he's not an inventor. He sticks to the truth. And the truth is. God. Chose. Women to be there. For the burial. And for the resurrection. And as we know. Of course. These women were there. At the cross as well. And even though. The culture. We live in. May now decide. We only want. Impressive witnesses. And. But in the first century. [12:28] These women. Are perfectly fine witnesses. But they are nervous. They are nervous. Because they think. That Jesus is dead. They're going to the tomb. To anoint his body. Chapter 16. In verse 1. Of course. He had said. He would be alive. By Sunday. But they obviously. Didn't believe that. Or forgotten that. And so they are nervous. He is dead. They are nervous. Because there's going to be. A big stone. In front of the tomb. Verse 3. Who is going to move. The stone. And notice. Incidentally. They don't need. To be nervous. And when they see. The stone has been removed. And Mark doesn't even. Stop to explain. How this happened. He just tells us. The stone was moved. The tomb is opened. And when the women. Walk in. They see a young man. Sitting there. [13:21] They are nervous. They are nervous. Nervous. Nervous. Their feelings. Are all over the place. As indeed. The disciples feelings. Were all over the place. And this young man. In the tomb. Is no doubt. An angel. Matthew tells us. He's an angel. There's an angel. At the birth of Jesus. There's an angel. At the baptism of Jesus. There was angels. In the life of Jesus. There's an angel. In Gethsemane. There's an angel. At the resurrection. You cannot remove. The supernatural. From Christianity. You cannot. Understand. Jesus. Without the supernatural. But when the women. See the stone. Is moved. And the tomb. Is empty. And the young man. Standing. The angel. Inside the tomb. They are no clearer. They are still. Unsure. And they need someone. To explain things. To them. Because seeing. Is not always believing. Him. So this young man. [14:17] In verses 6. And 7. He begins. To explain everything. Because you and I. Need things. To be explained. We might look. At the cross. On Good Friday. And think. Oh what a tragedy. But it's not a tragedy. We might say. He's setting an example. But he's not just. Setting an example. No. God tells us. He died in your place. We might stand. At the empty tomb. And say. Well. Well. Well. Somebody stole the body.

But somebody didn't steal the body. And we might say. Oh. We're at the wrong tomb. But we're not at the wrong tomb. And God says. He's been raised. And this angel in the tomb.

He says 10 things to the women. Can you count them. With me. Here are the 10 things. Okay.

Number one. Don't be frightened. Number two. You're looking for Jesus.

[15:13] Number three. He was crucified. Number four. He's now been risen. He's raised. Number five. He's not here. Number six. Go and tell the disciples.

Number seven. He's gone ahead of you. Number eight. He's in Galilee. Number nine. You will see him when you go to Galilee. And number 10. He's already told you this. 10 things. It's a great summary.

And Jesus had said to them. Hadn't he? I'll see you in Galilee. And so these events are crucial. But God has to explain them. And now he has explained them.

We want the women in the last verse of Mark's gospel. In chapter 16 and verse 8. To say great. Got it. Hallelujah. It all makes sense.

And happily ever after. We're full of joy and courage and confidence. We're going to run and tell everyone. But look at verse 8. Verse 8. And they went out and fled from the tomb.

[16:14] For trembling and astonishment had seized them. And they said nothing to anyone. For they were afraid. What a terrible way to end a gospel. And it is a terrible way to finish.

That people. So terrible. That the people down the years thought this is not good enough. We must tack something more onto the gospel. And that is why in your Bible. You've got these other verses. Which have been tacked on a little bit later.

So let's get our phone out. Let's call Mark in heaven again. And say to him. What are you doing? Why would you finish your gospel.

With this depressing verse 8. And I wonder whether Mark would say something like this. The feelings. Of these women. Are not the point.

It doesn't matter that they're nervous. It doesn't matter that they're confused. It doesn't matter that they're confused. Because soon the facts will break in on them. And of course.

[17:16] In the short term. They're telling nobody. But we know soon. They'll be telling everybody. And the feelings are not the point. And so I want to say to you this evening.

I don't know how you feel. I don't know how you feel tonight. But your feelings are not the major issue. The major issue is that somebody has died for you.

And has risen from the grave. And holds out to you as a gift. At his expense. Forgiveness and eternal life.

Which you must go to him on your knees and gather. And you may be unsure. And you may be unconvinced. This evening. And saying. I'll believe it when I get proof.

And I want to say to you tonight. You'll never get proof. You'll only get evidence. Evidence is not the same as proof. I can't prove tonight.

[18:19] That anybody loves you. But I think I could collect and gather. Some evidence that somebody loves you. And God has given us evidence. Not proof.

And you may be a believer. This evening. And you say. I'm still very nervous. How come. The Christian faith has not taken away. All my nervousness.

And I need to say to you tonight. Your nerves are not the most important thing. The most important thing. Is that there is somebody.

Who's taken away the danger. And has opened the door of glory. And is going to safely carry you through. Because you've put your trust in him. The answer is yes.

So you see. Joseph and the women. They are. On their way. They are both on journeys. Aren't there. One to the cross. And one to the tomb. They both have very different feelings.

[19:22] One is courageous. One is nervous. And it doesn't really matter. The important thing is this. Joseph has his faith.

In Jesus Christ. Who is the rock. And the women. Have their faith. In Jesus Christ. Who is their rock. That is an important thing. And the women. And you are never going to be.

And I am never going to be given. Some test tube. Watertight. Type evidence. You are just going to have the evidence. That we've all been given. That's there in front of you.

And a watertight person. Named Jesus Christ. Let me finish by telling you. Something I read recently.

It concerns the Empress of Russia. Catherine the Great. She lived in the 18th century. And she invited the great philosopher. Who was called Diderot. To come to her palace.

[20 : 22] This man had collected. What he called the knowledge of the world. He put it into 17 volumes. He was like a human Wikipedia. He was the original kind of encyclopedia.

And Catherine the Great. Invited him to spend hours. Talking with her. Talking with her. About all sorts of things. But mainly about the truths of the world. And they spent hours.

And hours. And hours. Talking. And when the conversation was over. This is what she said to him. She said to him. Mr. Diderot. I've listened. With great pleasure. You work on paper.

I work on skin. You work on paper. I work on skin. What does she mean? In other words.

She said to him. Listen. Your theories. And your knowledge. Are nice. But I want reality. Your clouds. Are pretty. But I'm dealing with life and death. A number of months ago.

[21 : 23] I went to see somebody. Who was on the edge of dying. They said to me. I'm not afraid. If I stay. That would be good. If I go to be with Christ.

That would be good. And as I. Talk to them. I thought. What should be the subject. Of this conversation. Should I tell them.

That Swansea. Are very unlikely. To get into the playoffs. And the championship. This season. Should I. Speak to this person. About the cost of living.

In London. That it's just extortionate. Should I tell them. That Lidl. Have some amazing. Offers on. Power washers. This coming week.

Of course not. The look on the face. Was just. Tell me the things. That are important. The things. That are. Eternal.

[22 : 19] And I want to say to you. That on this Easter day. That the resurrection. Is the most. Important subject. In all the world. Because it is the subject.

Of life. And death. It is for people. With skin. Who by putting. Their faith. In Jesus Christ. Will one day. Have a resurrection. Body.

And so. I remind you. This evening. That God. Has given us. His son. The savior. Of the world. The king. Of kings. And his desire. For you.

Is whatever. Your feelings. Tonight. You would stand. On the firm. Fact. Of Christ. Who lived. Died. And rose. Again. And that you would live. And that you would. Rejoice in him. Let's thank him. Let's bow our heads. Let's thank him. Let's bow our heads.