

EASTER SUNDAY EVENING - Where Do You Look for Jesus?

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Preacher: Danny Saunders

[0 : 00] This is the evening service at Holy Trinity on the 15th of April 2001. The preacher is Danny Saunders.

His sermon is entitled, Where Do You Look For Jesus? and is from Mark chapter 16 verses 1 to 8.

Hi, good evening. My name is Ginny Barker. I'm 28 years old and I have been blessed with two beautiful little girls, Madison and Jessica. Until nine months ago, I thought I was a good enough person because I never hurt anyone intentionally.

I kept to myself and looked for love in all the wrong places. My childhood was a hurtful time in my life. Due to this, I became involved with a bad crowd. My life consisted of parties, drugs, lying, stealing and not respecting others.

I never really understood that my life was worth more than this. I look back at my life. I am so ashamed of the things I have done and the people that I have hurt.

[1 : 10] Then someone who meant a lot to me in one of the darkest times of my life rang and told me that he was going to church. And what a fantastic change that it had made in his life.

Over two months, we talked about his faith and what it meant to him to be given God's grace. I could not believe that after everything I had done in my life, that God loves me and through this wonderful love sent his son to die for me.

I started reading the Bible and I finally understood that Jesus came to save the sinners, not the righteous. I was one of God's children and he loved me too.

Sean asked if I'd like to go to church and just to see what it was like. I was blown away. The people were warm and loving. I was welcomed by a wonderful woman who accepted me and the girls with open arms.

The feeling I got was something I have never felt before. And that was kindness, love and most of all, true friendship. Probably two weeks later, I was praying, asking for forgiveness and the tears started rolling down my face and a bright light filled my eyes.

[2 : 25] There was a presence with me that was pure love. I knew that I had been forgiven for the sins that I had done. A very heavy weight had been lifted off my shoulders and I knew I could move on with my life as one of God's children.

I'm not saying that I don't struggle every day with all the things that had been in my life before. But with God's help and the ever-loving presence of the Holy Spirit, I walk with my head held high, taking one day at a time.

Since receiving God's calling, all the things I'm sure we have all done, like yelling and screaming at our kids or our loved ones, seem so petty. I'm not saying that this doesn't happen anymore.

But with the inner peace and love we all share in God's family and the guidance that we all receive, I find it easy to talk and express what I feel. Before I would let it all bottle up and explode.

Believe me, it wasn't a pretty sign. I can also say that through prayer and time, God has guided me into a job that not only do I love, but God's presence can be felt and used to help people with their walks.

[3 : 28] I no longer feel alone and the need for false love. Because when I wake, when I work, when I pray, when I sleep, even the smallest things that may be affecting my life, I know that God loves me no matter what I have done.

I praise our Heavenly Father and our Lord Jesus Christ for giving me their grace and allowing me to start my life as one of God's children. I now live my life with love, guidance and an ever-present best friend that gave the dearest thing in his life to save me, his Son and our Lord Jesus Christ.

May we all live within their kingdom forever. Thank you. Well, you might like to leave your Bibles open there at Mark 16 as we take a look at that together.

Before we do so, though, why don't I just pray for us? Dear Lord, we thank you that we can meet together this Easter Sunday and celebrate your resurrection.

Just pray now that you would speak through me and you would help us all to understand just how important the resurrection is and what it means for us. Help us, Lord, to respond to it in faith.

[4 : 36] In Jesus' name. Amen. Well, on Good Friday we remembered the death of Jesus on the cross and today, Easter Sunday, we celebrate the resurrection.

Jesus rose again. He is risen. Hallelujah. Well, I'm sure we can do better than that. Let's try that again. After he is risen. Hallelujah. So, on Good Friday we remembered the death of Jesus on the cross and today, Easter Sunday, we celebrate the resurrection.

Jesus rose again. He is risen. Hallelujah. That's good. Well, we can understand today that Jesus' death is not a tragedy. It is a great victory that he's won for all of us.

Jesus won the victory over sin at the cross and he won the victory over death at the resurrection. So, the cross and the resurrection must be held together as two aspects of one great rescue mission of God.

He can't have one without the other and both of them must be received in faith. That's what I want you to take home, if anything, tonight. That the cross and the resurrection must be held together as two aspects of one great rescue mission of God.

[5 : 47] You can't have one without the other, but you must receive both of them in faith. Imagine you were using a toothbrush. Sorry, imagine you were using toothpaste without a brush. I'm sure at one time or another we've all been camping and forgotten the toothbrush.

We've tried the finger brush with the toothpaste on the finger, but it's just not quite the same, is it? It doesn't really work. So, what about using the toothbrush but without the toothpaste?

Well, there wouldn't be much point to that either, would there? So, I've got here some toothpaste. This can be exhibit A, the Colgate toothpaste. Now, it's said on this toothpaste that it strengthens teeth.

It gives you maximum cavity protection. And we turn over and we see that Colgate's fluoride formula fights the food acids that cause cavities by strengthening tooth enamel, leaving your teeth harder and more resistant to cavities.

Isn't that fantastic? So, there's power in this toothpaste that you wouldn't have if you brushed without it. And I'm sure that none of us have actually taken the contents of this toothpaste into a lab and broken them down to see whether it really actually contains what it says it contains.

[6 : 57] No, we just receive that. We take that in faith. Mrs. Marsh, the Colgate lady, told us that we should brush and so we do. Well, in sort of the same way, you can't have the cross without the resurrection.

The cross and the resurrection must be held together as two aspects of one great rescue mission of God. You can't have one without the other, but both of them must be received in faith.

So, the Christian faith then is not dedication to a dead person. It's not like other religions that follow a spiritual teacher or a guru that has actually died and they can visit the grave.

Christians are devoted to a living, reigning king, the Messiah of God, Jesus Christ. But we read in verses 1 and 2 of this passage that things might not have started out like this.

After Jesus' death, the women were devoted to a dead Jesus. And so we read from verse 1. So you can see from that that their preparations show that they had no expectation of the resurrection.

[8 : 20] They were going to anoint a dead body with these spices that they had purchased. They were devoted to a dead Jesus. And so maybe Nietzsche's slogan that God is dead was true at the time for these people.

And it's something that we still see today in many traditions that seem to be dedicated to a dead Jesus hanging on the cross. Look, the crucifixion is a fantastic victory over sin.

But let's not leave Jesus hanging on the cross. God is dead is only half the story. So let's keep going. In verses 3 and 4, again we see that the women had no expectation of the resurrection.

It says, They had been saying to one another, Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance of the tomb? And when they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had already been rolled back.

So they were going along. They had no expectation that the stone would be rolled away and Jesus would not be there. Mark's gospel, he doesn't tell us how it happened. It's quite a straightforward account.

[9 : 24] You'll have to read the other gospel accounts if you want to know more information about how it happened. But we're not told anymore because Mark's gospel is action-packed. He wants us to focus on what's important.

It's what the angel says in the next few passages that's the most important part of this story. So he doesn't give us all the details here because they're not important to him. It's enough for him to say that it happened.

So like all the stories of Jesus in this gospel and in the gospels, we're caught upon to respond in faith. It's clear that the women didn't understand what was happening.

And like these women, though, we're being asked to also respond in faith. The next three verses, then, are the most important part of the story, verses 5 to 7.

And that is what the writer of Mark's gospel wants us to focus on. So let's read those verses together. Well, the empty tomb itself, doesn't really say much, does it?

[10 : 46] It just raises the questions for us. Well, what happened to the body? Where is it? The tomb by itself, it doesn't answer anything. It just raises more questions for us. Where is the body? What happened to it?

Well, this young man is sent from God to tell us exactly that. The messenger is sent by God to make the fact of the resurrection clear. He reveals the truth of the situation to us.

It's the ordinary Greek word here for young man that's used, not the specific word for an angel or a heavenly messenger. However, it's fairly clear that the young man here means an angel because he brings to us a divine message.

And so in verses 6 and 7, he tells us three things. Let's have a look what they are. Firstly, the identity of who they are looking for. Now, this is quite an important point because it shows us that this isn't the wrong tomb.

The women haven't gone to the wrong tomb in their grief. No, this is the right tomb. He doesn't say to them, yes, what are you doing here? Can I help you? No, he's quite clear of their intentions.

[11 : 49] And he says, you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth who was crucified. So secondly, once we have established who it is he's talking about, he says, he has been raised.

He's not here. Look, there is the place they laid him. He's saying Jesus isn't dead. He's risen. Why do you look for the living amongst the dead? You don't go to Springdale Cemetery to look for Uncle Bob, who's alive and kicking over in Williamstown.

Why do you look for Jesus here? He's already on his way to Galilee. And so this is part of the third message to the women. Go and tell the disciples and Peter that he's going ahead of you to Galilee.

There you will see him just as he told you. Now this message fulfils Jesus' promise back in Mark chapter 14. Just turn one page over in the Bibles and have a look at that with me.

Verse 28. Peter's singled out here because Jesus had prophesied at that place, in verse 28, that Peter would deny him three times. But then Jesus says that after this, after he's raised up, after he's resurrected, he would go before them to Galilee.

[13 : 01] So the angel is sent from God to explain the empty tomb. The messenger is sent by God to make the fact of the resurrection clear. This is the most important part of this story because it reveals to us what's going on.

Why is the tomb empty? What's happening? The answer, of course, is Jesus has risen. He's not dead. He's alive. God doesn't leave us in the dark, guessing for an answer.

He wants to make the fact of this resurrection clear. Our God is a personal God. He's loving and relational. And so he wants to reveal his truth to us through this divine messenger.

And so once again, we're asked to respond in faith and believe the messenger and what he tells us. And this is the same choice for the women.

They could believe the messenger or they could deny that this was the truth. Well, at first glance, it actually looks like that they do deny this revelation to them.

[14 : 01] The messenger tells them to go and tell the disciples. But verse 8 tells us, So they went out and fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them. And they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.

Well, we shouldn't really be surprised by this reaction. They are afraid because of the presence of God in the tomb. Just about all places in the Bible where God reveals himself, that person is struck down with fear and can't speak.

At the Transfiguration, earlier on in Mark's Gospel, chapter 9, Peter, James and John tell us that they were terrified and they didn't know what to say. They were numb with fear.

Also, John, on seeing the glorified Christ in Revelation, tells us that he fell at his feet as though dead. It's therefore quite reasonable to assume that they were in a state of shock and that eventually they did go and tell the disciples as they were instructed.

They did believe. In fact, in the other Gospels of Matthew and Luke, even though they were afraid, they did run and tell the other disciples straight away. So I don't think that this is meant to mean that the women didn't believe what they were told.

[15 : 09] It's more likely that they did believe. They found it so full on. And so rather than laughing it off, they were struck dumb with fear and awe at the appearance of the messenger and at what they were being told.

The real question then is, why does Mark end his Gospel here? This is an important question because it is because people have been dissatisfied with this ending that other endings have been added that most people agree are not original to Mark's Gospel.

You can see those there in the Bible. Well, with this ending, the Gospel is leaving us with a story that is just earth-shattering. Not only does an angel of God appear, but Jesus has miraculously risen from the grave.

This is an amazing turn of events for his followers who witnessed his crucifixion. And so this amazement is described in the terror and overwhelming fear of the women. The Gospel accounts of the life of Jesus are simply awesome.

Jesus performs miracles everywhere he goes. He teaches with authority like no one the Jews have ever seen. He claims to be the Son of God, the promised Messiah. He prophesied three times that he would die and three days later he would rise again.

[16 : 22] And now, exactly as he has predicted, this is what's happening. The messenger of God is saying that this is exactly what has happened. Jesus has been resurrected and he will appear to his disciples and others in Galilee and elsewhere.

Well, this is truly amazing. It's incredible. The Gospel of Mark is asking us to respond in faith to this news. This good news is earth-shattering.

It demands a response. If Christ has died on the cross and been raised from the dead, then life can never be the same again. If Christ has died on the cross and rose again, then life can never be the same again.

I mean, think about it. If a man has died and been raised to life, then this will have an impact on life and history and humanity forever.

Well, perhaps this is reflected in the fact that our calendar is taken from the death and resurrection of Jesus. It has changed our lives. So whether you believe it or not, this event has changed the way our world thinks and behaves.

[17 : 32] History is marked by this event. Nothing else has ever had such an impact on humanity than the life of this man, Jesus. The life and death and resurrection of this man, Jesus.

Well, the Bible says that sin leads to death, but it also says that those who believe in Jesus to take their sin will rise again.

Just like Jesus, we will rise from death. Jesus says in John's Gospel, I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live.

And everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. If on the cross, Jesus paid the ransom price for the sins of humanity, then the resurrection is the proof.

It is the stamp of approval. It is confirmation that the sacrifice of Jesus was acceptable to God. And it confirms that both sin and death were finally defeated.

[18 : 37] Easter is a great time to reflect on God's grace. God is holy and light. And we were created by God to be in a relationship with him.

Yet we all choose, every one of us, to disobey God. And so there's darkness in us that God must deal with. He must judge our darkness and remove it before we can live with him in a relationship, in harmony.

It was therefore this sin, this discord, this darkness that led to Jesus' death. It was our sin, our rebellion against God, living our own way that caused this to happen.

But God loved us so much that he didn't want us to face the judgment for sin. So he sent his only son to die for our sins on the cross. The cross then is a great victory over sin.

But the story doesn't end at the cross. Jesus rises from death. The resurrection is a great victory over death. And in these two things we can rejoice today and be grateful.

[19 : 44] The cross and the resurrection are two aspects of one great, redeeming, rescue mission of God. But we must receive both of them in faith. Well, you might doubt that the resurrection actually happened.

You might think we're sort of taking this for granted. You might think it's a myth rather than an actual historical event that we celebrate every Easter. Something that actually happened.

Well, if this is you, then it is important that we settle the resurrection as an historical event, something that actually happened once and for all. See, once this is established, then we can more easily respond by putting our faith and trust in Jesus and in God and what he's done.

So let's look briefly at the evidence and the counter-arguments to see whether the resurrection story stands up to scrutiny. Well, firstly, we've got the church. Well, this is a global community of people that was established 2,000 years ago.

The Western world is only now talking about globalisation. But the church has been doing it ever since the resurrection. To the early Christians, the resurrection was central.

[20 : 55] Paul says that without the resurrection, our faith is futile. How could the church still exist today if it was based, if it was founded on something that never actually happened? Secondly, we've got Sunday Sabbath.

We read in verse 1 of this chapter in Mark 16 that it wasn't until after the Sabbath, on Saturday, that's the Sabbath, that these devoted Jewish women went to the tomb of Jesus.

The women went to the tomb on Sunday when Jesus rose again. And this day became known as the Lord's Day amongst the Christians. And this is the reason that Christians celebrate the Sabbath on Sunday, the first day of the week, not the last.

So because of the death and resurrection of Jesus, a whole movement of Jewish believers went against the law of Moses and started to celebrate the Sabbath day of rest on the Lord's Day, on Sunday.

Well, it would be impossible to make such a huge fundamental change to the Jewish faith unless there was a good reason. And that reason is the resurrection. Thirdly, we've got the New Testament.

[22 : 02] The New Testament contains all sorts of accounts and eyewitness accounts of the resurrection. The event was well known and it was accepted without question. But the funny thing about this story is that under Jewish law, women weren't allowed to be witnesses.

If they'd seen someone murder someone, the woman couldn't actually go to court to testify against that person. That was written in the law of Moses. So there's no reason the first Christians would have made this up. If they were going to make this up, surely they would have had the angelic messenger go to two males who would have been accepted as a witness.

So as it stands, no one would believe this account simply because they were women. Therefore, this can only be explained on the basis that it was the truth. The women were the first ones to hear about it.

Fourthly then, how do we account for the empty tomb? One theory put forward was that it was stolen by the disciples. You can actually read about this in Matthew 28 verses 11 to 15.

This explanation was circulated by the Jews when they found out that the body was gone. They told the guards to say that the body was stolen while they were asleep. But if they were asleep, how did they know who stole the body?

[23 : 13] And surely they would have woken up if someone tried to move the stone. Also, how can we explain the amazing transformation that came over the disciples? Before the resurrection, they were frightened sheep without a shepherd.

We've got Peter denying Christ three times, hiding and running away. Yet after the resurrection, they were as bold as lions. They went around everywhere proclaiming the good news of the death and resurrection of Jesus.

At Pentecost, we've got Peter saying that you Jews killed Jesus. How is this change possible? They could not have changed so dramatically if it was all based on a lie.

And how did they then go on to face the test of martyrdom and torture for their belief if all along they actually knew it was false? Well, you might die for something you believe in, but you wouldn't die for what you know is a lie.

Only the actual resurrection could have led to such a dramatic change in the disciples. Well, another theory is that the Romans stole the body or the Jews stole the body.

[24 : 18] Well, if they did steal the body, why didn't they simply produce the body to show that the early Christians were lying? The resurrection is central to Christianity. All they needed to do was bring the body out and they would have proved that Christianity was false once and for all.

But they didn't. If the body was stolen by them, why didn't they produce it? We know the women didn't go to the wrong tomb because the messenger clearly tells them what they're doing there.

And Mark 15, 47 says that the women saw where the body was laid. Again, if they did go to the wrong tomb, why didn't the Jews and the Romans just go to the right tomb and produce the body again to show that it was false?

Well, maybe Jesus didn't actually die. This is called the swoon theory. It's argued by some that Jesus actually fainted. Yeah, it was a hot day. He'd lost a lot of blood. The Romans assumed Jesus was dead.

You know, a few stab wounds and nails wouldn't really hurt, would he? He just fainted. And later in the cool of the tomb, he woke up. He came out of the tomb and he appeared to his disciples who somehow mistakenly thought that he was the risen Messiah from the dead.

[25 : 28] Well, even if this was possible, how did Jesus, with these spear wounds in his side and nails through his hands, these wounds and feet survive without food or water or medical treatment for three days?

And then how did he have the energy to move the stone from the inside, fight off any guards that were around and then walk miles and miles to Galilee with these injuries and appear to disciples everywhere?

It probably takes more to believe this than the actual resurrection itself. Another problem with these theories is they don't explain the appearances of Christ.

If the body was stolen, how did Jesus appear to so many people over the next 40 days? These are eyewitness testimonies, people that were fully and profoundly convinced of the truth of their statements.

The disciples weren't on drugs and they weren't hallucinations as some people have claimed. The disciples saw Jesus. They touched him and ate with him. To argue that these were hallucinations completely ignores the evidence.

[26 : 32] Lastly, how do we explain Christians that claim that Jesus is alive today and that Jesus lives with them by the Holy Spirit? The gospel accounts of the living Christ aren't four but millions upon millions.

Every Christian can give a story of how they came to know this good news in their lives, how they came to believe in and encounter the living Lord Jesus just as we heard from Jenny's story tonight.

So you'll see that the resurrection is really the only conclusion that makes any sense of all the evidence. This is a miracle. We can't explain it but nor are we meant to.

It's a miracle to be accepted in faith or to be rejected in stubborn denial. The resurrection powerfully demonstrates to us who Jesus is.

On three occasions Jesus brought people back from the dead. These miracles show us that Christ is the master of death. He also prophesied three times that he would die and rise again.

[27 : 38] We therefore shouldn't really be surprised when this actually happens. What this shows us is that Jesus is who he claims to be. He is the son of God. He is the Messiah promised by the prophets to come into the world and take away our sins and bring people back to God.

The cross and the resurrection must be held together as two aspects of one redeeming one great rescue mission of God. The cross shows us Jesus' humanity.

He could die and the resurrection shows us his divinity. He was God. He had victory over death. Death would not hold him down and he rose again.

But this rescue mission isn't just about defeating sin and death. It also means that if Jesus is alive today we can have a relationship with him now. Jesus is available to everyone who responds in faith by believing in this rescue mission for them and who asks Jesus to come in and be a part of their life.

Scripture tells us in Romans chapter 6 that if we have died with Christ we believe that we will also be raised with him. We know that Christ being raised from the dead will never die again.

[28 : 56] Death no longer has dominion over him. The death he died he died to sin once for all but the life he lives he lives to God. So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and a life to God in Christ Jesus.

The death and resurrection of Christ has power to transform your life now. The Christian life is about dying to sin in order to be raised to a new life where we live for God.

God well our society tells us that we're here for a good time not a long time whatever makes you happy is okay and it's probably this attitude that has led Australia to the worst use suicide rates in the world.

For many there's nothing to believe in and there's no meaning and purpose in life. in this culture it's not surprising that there's so much depression so much drugs and so much helplessness around.

The consequences of turning away from God are everywhere they're all around us but the death and resurrection of Jesus changes all that.

[30 : 09] We can share in the life of Jesus receiving Jesus into your life takes away your barriers against God and gives you a fresh start in a relationship with him. it gives you a new life with the Holy Spirit and with God's love.

It says in 2 Corinthians that he died for all so that those that live might live no longer for themselves but for him who died and was raised for them. From now on therefore we regard no one from a human point of view even though we once knew Christ from a human point of view we know him no longer in that way he's risen.

So if anyone is in Christ there is a new creation. Everything old has passed away. See everything has become new. This then is the power and the meaning of the resurrection for us.

Not only has Christ been raised from the death but he has given us the opportunity to live a new life with him now. We can be alive in God through Jesus by turning to God in repentance and having faith in what Jesus has done.

In other words our response in faith is not mere belief but has to involve a change of mind towards God with an accompanying change in behaviour. We must accept God's rescue plan for us.

[31 : 26] We must admit our rebellion against God and have an intention to follow him in the future with his help. Our response is not just mere belief. It must involve a change of mind and a change of attitude and a change of behaviour.

Well this Easter have you made that response to Jesus? Are you alive and free with Christ?

Do you know God and the love that he brings to you through this Easter message? Or are you bound up and trapped by this life and its worries?

Do you fear death and think that God is just uninterested and unknowable? God is interested and he longs to know you and have a relationship with you.

In fact he loves you so much that he sent his only son to die for you so that if you put your belief in him you will not perish but you'll have eternal life.

[32 : 31] It says in Romans that we have been buried with him by baptism into death so that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the father so we too might walk in newness of life.

Barbara Mackle was the daughter of a prominent real estate broker. On September 16 1968 she was kidnapped and held for ransom.

She was eventually released. But the amazing part of this story is that she survived the ordeal at all. Her kidnappers put her in a nine foot by two foot box.

It was like a coffin. They then buried her in a field in a remote part of northern Georgia where else but in the United States. An air pipe was inserted in the box extending above the ground so she could breathe.

And somehow she survived several days of atonement until she was released. Can you imagine that? It's very claustrophobic.

[33 : 49] this is a true story. It's also an analogy of our lives. It's quite possible that you feel like this.

Like you're lying in a tomb in a little prison chained and bound up and waiting to be released where you can be free. You might have felt like this for years.

Well the good news at Easter is that Jesus has risen again. He is alive and he has come to set you free. So the choice is yours to make.

Are you going to receive the resurrection in faith and be buried with Christ and raised to a new life or are you going to remain buried denying the great rescue mission of God and denying the cross and the power of the resurrection to set you free?

Let's pray. Dear Father God, we thank you that you sent Jesus on this great rescue mission where he died for sin on the cross and defeated death in the resurrection.

[35 : 03] Thank you that we have a risen Lord that lives with us by the Holy Spirit. Thank you that all who turn to him in repentance and faith will be saved.

And we'll live with you both now and for eternity. I pray Father that if there is anyone here who does not know you, that you would open that person's eyes to see how amazing the Easter message is and what it means for them.

Please give them the faith to believe this message for themselves and live for you. And Father, I pray for the Christians here that we would live not as though you were dead, but we would live in the victory at the cross and the resurrection in order to be more like Jesus and to live for you every day.

In Jesus name we pray, Amen.