

Trembling And Astonishment

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 23 July 2023

Preacher: Matthew Capone

[0 : 0 0] Good morning. My name is Matthew Capone, and I'm the pastor here at Cheyenne Mountain Presbyterian Church, and it's my joy to bring God's Word to you today. A special welcome if you're new or visiting with us. We're glad that you're here, and we're glad that you're here not because we're trying to fill seats, but because we're following Jesus together as one community, and as we follow Jesus together, we become convinced there's no one so good. They don't need God's grace, and no one so bad that they can't have it, which is why we come back week after week to hear what God has to say to us in His Word. We're continuing and actually ending our series in the Gospel of Mark, and you'll remember that the Gospels tell the story of Jesus and His life and His death and His resurrection, and I reminded you last week that our journey in Mark was not meant to be merely an intellectual exercise. It would be a great tragedy, as I said, for us to move on to the book of Judges next month and to merely think of Mark as just a book that we looked at at some point, because that's not Mark's intention. That's not his goal in writing this

Gospel. His goal is that we would see Jesus and that we would be changed, and I've also been telling you over and over again that as the Gospel progresses, you move from three groups of people to two groups of people. First, you have three groups, those who are for Jesus, those who are against Him, and those who are in the middle. And as we come to the very end, the middle group disappears. There are those who are for Jesus and those who are against Him. And so Mark really gives us a double ending here, two different pictures of two people responding well to Jesus. Last week, we looked at Joseph of Arimathea, and you will remember that Joseph's response was this. He was willing to lose his kingdom for the sake of God's kingdom. Joseph was willing to lose his kingdom for God's kingdom. And we're going to return again to this same question, the question we started with at the very beginning of the Gospel. Who is Jesus, and how do we respond to Him? We're going to have one final model as we come to the end. Now, you may be wondering at this point, if you've looked in your

Bible, what do you mean that we've come to the end? I only see verses 1 through 8, and my Bible has an additional section of verses 8 through 20. Why are we not going to talk about that? Why are we suddenly ending the Gospel now? You may see, if you have an ESV, it has this note, some of the earliest manuscripts do not include 16 verses 9 through 20. In fact, most scholars do not consider verses 9 through 20 to be original. In other words, most scholars are convinced Mark did not write verses 9 through 20. And so we're not going to cover it here in worship, because our goal is we're here in worship together, as I say every week, is that we're looking at God's Word. And so I don't want to say, hey, this is God's Word, when it's unclear to us, it's doubtful that it is. Now, you may be thinking at this point, wow, I can't trust the Bible. And that's the last thing that I want you to be thinking, because what I actually want you to see here is how seriously we take the Scriptures. So seriously that your Bible has a note in it, making sure you know there are certain sections that don't appear in the earliest manuscripts. Okay, so actually I want you to increase your trust in it. Oh, when there's something going on with the original manuscripts, my Bible's going to tell me, so I can have confidence in what it is that I'm reading. Now, that raises another question for us, which relates to our passage this morning. Why would someone add on an extra ending to the Gospel of Mark? And one explanation is this, and I think this is probably one of, if not the most likely answer. Mark ends his

Gospel in a very strange way. Look at the last two words of verse 8. Really, the last four words, for they were afraid. Why in the world would Mark, after we have taken this journey with Jesus, right after we have seen his death and resurrection, decide to end his story with a group of women being afraid? Why would he end the story that way after he's told us things that we should be looking forward to? Jesus is moving forward to Galilee, right? Why isn't it that we're going to hear that story? He tells these women they're meant to go forward and be witnesses and share these things with the followers of Jesus. Why don't we get to hear about that? It's those questions, I believe, that cause certain people later to write an ending because they were unsatisfied with the way that Mark left things. It seems abrupt and strange. And I'm going to suggest to you this morning that if we understand fear rightly, this ending is incredibly fitting to Mark. It's incredibly fitting to Mark, and it's actually fitting to the witness of the rest of the Scriptures. It makes sense, as I'll explain to you in a minute, that Mark would end his gospel in exactly this way. Once again, and for the last time, he's giving us a picture. How should we respond to Jesus? And so as with that,

I'm going to invite you to turn with me to Mark chapter 16. You can turn in your Bible. You can turn on your phone. You can turn in your worship guide. No matter where you turn, remember that this is God's word. And God says in Proverbs chapter 30 verse 5, we're told every word of God proves true. He is a shield to those who take refuge in him. And so that's why we're going to start now reading Mark chapter 16 at verse 1. When the Sabbath was passed, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices so that they might go and anoint him. 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.

[6:17] It was very large. Verse 5, 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 is crucified. He has risen. He is not here. See the place where they laid him. Verse 7, 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. I invite you to pray with me as we come to this portion of God's word. Our Father in heaven, we praise you and thank you again that you have not left us to stumble around trying to figure out life on our own, but instead you have given us your word, given us your instructions about how to walk in this world. You've given us reminders about your glory and your grace. And most of all, you've given us a vision of Jesus Christ. We ask that one more time you would show us Jesus, that we would see his beauty and his glory, and it would lead us to worship him, to love him, to follow him, to obey him. We ask all these things in the mighty name of

Jesus Christ. Amen. I want you to think back just one week to how we ended our story last week. The very last verse in chapter 15, we were told, verse 47, Mary Magdalene and Mary, the mother of Joseph saw where he was laid. Now that was not a random remark. It was meant for us to know they are doing their homework. This plan that they're about to execute has been in the works ever since Jesus has been put in the tomb. They have made a note of where Jesus' body is so they can do this very thing that we see in this passage, so that they can go and anoint his body with spices and oil.

Now, they've been delayed in this task because they can't do that on the Jewish Holy Day. They're not able to do it on the Sabbath, and that's why we're told in verse 1, when the Sabbath was passed. In other words, they have been waiting. They've been waiting until the moment when they can finally go and honor Jesus' body. They're buying spices then. This is again, verse 1, Saturday evening. This would be after the Sabbath is over because it would have gone from Friday evening sunset to Saturday evening at sundown so that they can be ready, verse 2, to go as soon as possible to care for Jesus. So they've done their homework. They've noted the location of the tomb. They have their assignment and their mission. They want to honor Jesus' body, and they get after it as quickly as they can. You can sort of sense their impatience here. They've been honoring the Holy Day, and they're trying to get there as fast as possible.

That's why we're told in verse 2, it is very early on the first day of the week that they went to the tomb. In fact, they've gone so early that they have not done all the appropriate planning that they should have. So it seems that while they're running to the tomb, verse 3, it suddenly occurs to them, oh wait, we didn't make a plan to deal with the stone that's rolled in front. And these stones would have been incredibly large, and so these three women would not have been capable of doing it on their own. And so we can sense their anxiety and their fear as they're approaching for this important task to take care of Jesus' body. They realize they haven't quite done everything because they know that they're not able to roll the stone away by themselves. And so that's why we see in verse 3, who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance of the tomb? Now, this also reminds us that when this angel in verse 7, and we'll talk about why it's an angel, calls them out, because he does call them out, he says, this is what he told you. Go tell his disciples and Peter that he is going before you to Galilee. There you will see him just as he told you. In other words, these women have not put the pieces together. And not just them, none of Jesus' followers have put the pieces together.

Jesus has told them over and over in the Gospels, I'm going to die, and then after three days, I'm going to rise again. And so really, it should be the expectation, as these women are going to the tomb, their expectation should be that Jesus has risen. But of course, just like everyone else, this has gone over their heads. I say all this to understand, as you understand the story, their surprise when they finally arrive at the tomb. Verse 4, we can imagine their relief. Looking up, they saw that the stone had been rolled back. And in case we'd forgotten, we're reminded that it's very large, so they're not able to do it on their own. That, of course, might cause them to be anxious and worry about what had happened to Jesus' body. But things get even worse after that. Verse 5, And entering the tomb, they saw a young man sitting on the right side, dressed in a white robe, and they were alarmed. Now, we can imagine their alarm is for a variety of reasons. One, they're not expecting to find someone else in this tomb so early in the morning, right after the

[11:57] Sabbath day has passed. But there's another reason that they would find this man alarming. It's understated here. We are told simply that he is dressed in a white robe. The other Gospels help us understand this is more than just a white robe. Matthew chapter 28 says his appearance was like lightning and his clothing white as snow. Luke, in chapter 24, tells us he had dazzling apparel.

I think that's going to be my goal from now on. I want people to say, look at him. He's got dazzling apparel. But we can understand their shock, right? We can understand why it is they are alarmed.

They're alarmed because they're probably wondering, okay, what has happened to Jesus' body? There's a potential that his body has been stolen and taken away just as they are coming to anoint him. They're terrified because here is someone who is clearly more than human. He's more than human because of his appearance. And he's also more than human because of his knowledge. What is this man able to do? And it's more than a man. Matthew's Gospel confirms for us this is, in fact, an angel.

So really, we could say he just looks like a man. Matthew also confirms for us, by the way, that it's the angel who moved the stone away. So he's done them a huge favor here. But we know he's more than human, not just because of his appearance, but because of his knowledge.

Verse 7 and verse 6. He's able to tell them what no human would know at this point. Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He is risen. He is not here.

[13 : 41] Without that explanation, we would simply assume that Jesus' body had been stolen.

It's not enough for there to be an empty tomb. There has to be an empty tomb because Jesus has risen from the dead.

That, then, is why the angel tells them, verse 6, don't be alarmed. Even though I'm a scary angel, the body wasn't stolen. Don't be alarmed.

Even though I have dazzling apparel, Jesus has risen from the dead. And, by the way, Jesus told you that over and over and over.

Things have happened just as he said. Now, there's plenty of things that we could say about Jesus' resurrection. And I'm not going to say those things this morning because I don't believe that is actually the focus of this particular passage.

[14 : 46] Yes, we see Jesus' resurrection, and Mark's focus, what he spends time on, is telling us about the response to the resurrection.

What Mark wants us to see is what these women do with it. And so we're going to focus on that this morning. Before we do, though, I want to quickly say one thing that I want you to notice in verse 7.

Go tell his disciples and Peter. Now, why should they need to go to tell the disciples and Peter?

That doesn't make sense because Peter is actually one of the disciples. It would be like I said, okay, go talk to all the new deacons we just installed and Greg.

That doesn't make sense. Greg is one of the new deacons. You don't need to add him onto the list. Except Peter is the one who denied Christ.

[15 : 47] In fact, some people think he said, tell the disciples and Peter, it's possible that Peter was so ashamed by what he had done that that would be a separate trip. In other words, it's possible that Peter has actually isolated himself away from the other disciples.

And so as Jesus tells these women to go and share the news, he remembers that he and Peter have not interacted since they made eye contact after Peter's denial.

And so as we look towards these women's response to Christ and his resurrection, I don't want you to miss this moment of grace that the forefront of Jesus' mind is Peter's denial and Jesus' desire to reunite with him.

One question the readers might ask of this passage is what is it that Jesus is going to do when he finds his disciples? The last thing they did was abandon him.

Should they be scared of Jesus coming and talking to them? Should they be afraid that Jesus is going to come and rebuke them and correct them for abandoning him? And the answer here is no.

[17 : 06] Jesus is going to go and be restored with his disciples. He's going to go and be restored with Peter. Because of Jesus' death and his resurrection, he is coming to be restored to sinners.

Becoming to be restored to people like you and me. I don't want to distract us from our focus though, which is the response of these women.

And it's actually surprising in certain ways. Verse eight, we are told, they went out and fled from the tomb for trembling and astonishment had seized them.

They were literally shaking after encountering this angel. Which in some ways makes sense. This is an overwhelming experience.

And in some ways is very surprising. They've just received great news. Jesus has risen from the dead. And he's risen from the dead just like he told you over and over again.

[18 : 08] And so it's likely that they're remembering finally the things that Jesus was trying to communicate to them and they weren't able to hear. And so why is it that they are physically shaking and filled with astonishment?

And why is it that we're told they're not able to say anything because they're afraid? Well, in his book, *What Does It Mean to Fear the Lord?*

by a man named Michael Reeves, he says, trembling is actually the common denominator that we see throughout the story of the Bible for people who experience the fear of God.

Whether it is a fear of God from someone who's a sinner, who's afraid of his punishment, or someone who's experiencing the fear that the Proverbs talks about, the fear of all at God's majesty and love and his power, trembling is what those people experience.

And so what Mark is telling us here is that these women are overwhelmed by the demonstration of God's power and love.

[19 : 16] They are overwhelmed as they understand what has actually happened. They're trembling as they see what Jesus has done.

Reeves goes on to clarify, and this is an important thing for us to understand, that there are two types of trembling. The first kind of trembling, he says, is the kind of trembling that happens when a soldier is under heavy fire.

It's the trembling of terror. And that's the kind of trembling or fear we would expect from someone who is not a Christian if they encounter God. That they would have terror knowing that they're facing God's judgment for their sins.

He then goes on to tell us so there's another type of trembling. Trembling as a soldier under fire is not the only way. The other kind of trembling is the trembling of overwhelmed adoration as a bridegroom first seeing his bride.

That when we think about the fear of the Lord, the fear of the Lord for Christians is not a fear of God as if God is going to hurt us somehow.

[20 : 28] It is that kind of trembling as the bridegroom seeing his bride. It is the trembling that happens when we see something great and powerful and overwhelming.

Jeremiah 33 verse 9, talking about God's people, says this, they shall fear and tremble because of all the good and all the prosperity I provide for it. And so they're not afraid of God in Jeremiah 33 as if he's going to do something bad to them.

No, they have this fear of God because he is so good. In other words, they are overwhelmed by God and his goodness. They're trembling because God has been so kind to them.

They're trembling because they realize how powerful God is. it's the sort of trembling that you might experience as you look out on the Grand Canyon. It's the kind of trembling you might feel as you see the northern lights.

It's the kind of trembling that many people felt back in 2017 when we had a total eclipse. You guys might remember that. Nature is only a signpost to point us to God.

[21 : 42] If people tremble at a solar eclipse, imagine how much more they will tremble before the king of the universe. And so there's a trembling that comes from realizing God's greatness and our smallness.

There's a trembling that comes from realizing our wickedness and God's forgiveness. There's a trembling we experience when we are overwhelmed by the reality of our sin and we're also overwhelmed by God's mercy and His goodness and His love.

And so that helps us understand what it means for someone to fear the Lord because we're told in 1 John 4, verse 18, that perfect love casts out fear.

In other words, we need an understanding of the word fear that goes beyond just being scared. When a Christian experiences the fear of God, it is not being scared of God.

It is being overwhelmed by God's holiness, by His power, by His authority, by His love, by His goodness, by His mercy.

[22 : 59] And it's that fear of God that moves us to obedience and love and awe. It's true of the entire Bible and it's true of the Gospel of Mark.

Reeves also gives us a list of people in the Old Testament and the New Testament who trembled in God's presence. He tells us, Abraham, Joshua, David, Ezekiel, Daniel, Paul, and John all fell on their faces in God's presence.

Now, if I've lost you a little bit, this would be the time for you to come back in with me. The point is this. These women have trembling and astonishment because they have finally realized how great God is.

They have trembling and astonishment because they are overwhelmed by what it means that Jesus has died and risen from the dead. They have trembling and astonishment because finally they realize who Jesus is.

and so they have appropriate a true, a right fear. We might say in a sense they are falling on their faces like Abraham, Joshua, David, Ezekiel, Daniel, Paul, and John.

[24 : 42] They have a true fear of the Lord, not a fear of punishment, not afraid of God, but an understanding of God's greatness. And that understanding hits them so hard it knocks the wind out of them.

Now I only can remember a couple times as a kid that something knocked the wind out of me such that I actually wasn't able to speak and I've tried hard.

I can't actually remember what it was that happened to me. I think maybe one time I ran into a chair and I wasn't able to say anything for a certain amount of time. All I could do to my parents was mouth words.

And as a parent you realize, okay, this kid's not going to be able to talk for a while because the force is so great. We know from the other gospels that these women went forward and did exactly what this angel told them to do.

They went and shared the news with Jesus' disciples. disciples. And so what do we make of these last couple phrases? They said nothing to anyone for they were afraid.

[25 : 57] God's greatness. God's goodness and his love. Jesus' power and authority overwhelmed them so much it knocked the wind out of them.

God's goodness. God's goodness that's what happens when we see God for who he truly is. That's why we don't want the gospel of Mark to be merely an intellectual exercise.

That's what happens when we understand how great God is and how small we are. That's what happens when we see how terrible our sin is and how great a forgiveness we have in Christ.

It does not lead us to make simply an interesting note in the margin of our Bibles although that's certainly not wrong. It does not cause us to think theoretical thoughts at the end of the day and at the very end of Mark's gospel if we understand who Jesus is it will take the wind out of us.

If we understand what Jesus has done we will have no choice but to tremble. when we see God we will be like Joseph of Arimathea who gives up his kingdom for God's kingdom.

[27 : 46] We will be like these women overwhelmed with who God is. And so you can see why I think this is an appropriate ending to Mark's gospel.

Mark actually tells us multiple times in other parts of the gospel about people having this fear of God. Mark chapter 9 we had the transfiguration remember Peter, James, and John got to be part of this elite group that went with Jesus and they saw Elijah and Moses at the top of a mountain and what are we told?

Peter did not know what to say for they were terrified. Now they Moses was going to hurt them right?

No they were terrified overwhelmed by the power and grace that was present. We're told the same thing Mark chapter 4 remember Jesus calms the storm and they were filled with great fear and said to one another who then is this that even the wind and the sea obey him?

And so verse 8 here the last verse of Mark's gospel completes the pattern. This is what happens when people see God for who he truly is.

[29 : 09] When we grasp our sin and God's grace this is what happens. When we grasp God's power and our weakness this is how we respond.

When we understand how loving God is that there's no one who loves you more than Jesus loves you we will have trembling and astonishment.

One of the reasons scholars are dissatisfied by this ending even as they know that the addition is not original is that there's been all these references throughout the gospel to what's going to happen next.

We're told Jesus has gone on to Galilee. And that they're going to meet him there. They're told we're told these women are supposed to go and spread the news. And the other gospels tell us about those things.

And so some people say well Mark must have had an ending that got lost. He must have gone on to tell us those things like the other gospels. When in fact I think Mark is saying this.

[30 : 27] Yes there are many things that happened after Jesus' resurrection. Yes the women went and they shared the good news that was given to them by the angel. Yes they went on and met Jesus in Galilee.

Yes we're told at the beginning of Acts and at the end of Luke the continuing ministry of Jesus and all of that is downstream of knowing who God is.

None of that matters if we have not stood in the presence of God and none of that will last unless we see Jesus for who he truly is.

and so as we move on to Judges and we look back at Mark what I don't want you to do is to think of it as just another book that we studied.

Instead I want you to remember that Jesus was the one who came and worked miracles because he is the king of all heaven and earth.

[31 : 51] I want you to remember that Jesus is the one who cast out demons because there's no evil power that does not submit to him. I want you to remember that he's the one who was in darkness for three hours as he hung on the cross because he received God's judgment and wrath.

I want you to remember that as Jesus prayed in the garden of Gethsemane he was abandoned by his disciples because in the end he was all alone.

I want you to remember that Peter denied Christ and when Jesus rose from the dead he said tell the disciples and Peter.

I want you to remember that when the enemy comes knocking to accuse you as the liar that he is that Jesus suffered under Pontius Pilate.

He received the guilty verdict so that we could be declared innocent. The gospel of Mark and Jesus' life and death and resurrection are meant to change us forever.

[33 : 07] We are meant to have trembling and astonishment and in a true and right sense to be afraid.

Of course as we come to the end of Mark's gospel it is not the end of the story. There are many many more things to come and all of them are downstream of this.

What comes first is who is Jesus and how do you respond to him? And who is Jesus?

He has more power than anyone else. He has more glory than anyone else. He has more love than anyone else.

And how do we respond to him? Verse 7 of your worship guide says this, To encounter the living God truly means that we cannot contain ourselves.

[34 : 16] He is not a truth to be known unaffectedly or a good to be received listlessly. Seen clearly, the dazzling beauty and splendor of God must cause our hearts to quake.

not quake in fear but overwhelmed by God's love, power, authority, and holiness and glory.

That causes us to follow him and to love him and obey him. So that's why we're going to sing now. Behold our God seated on his throne.

Come let us adore him. Behold our king, nothing can compare. Come let us adore him. Let's pray. Let's pray.

Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray.