

Wrap Up: Knowing the Reality of Jesus  
Pastor Larry Kroon  
Wasilla Bible Church  
May 25, 2008

Today we finish one of the most enjoyable, encouraging, refreshing, and for me, personally, renewing sermon studies I've ever been through. Very simple...we just started last fall at the beginning of the school year, and we just said, 'you know what? We're gonna read through the gospel of Mark together, out loud. In a high-tech world, with a lot of visual effects and a lot of excitement, we're gonna just do somethin' really simple—we're gonna read the scriptures out loud together. And we've been doing that. We started in September; we've been doin' it all the way through the school year; every week together we open up another part of the gospel of Mark and read it together out loud.

And today we're at the last time, the last sermon, the last one in this entire set of sermons. And we're gonna be reading the same passage we read last week—it's the ending. And we're gonna re-read it. We read it last week; we're gonna go back and read it one last time. The reason being that we're taking twice through this short section right here is because it is such a short ending. When people look at it they say, 'man, that stops really abruptly, really suddenly.' If you look at your bible you'll see there's more verses that follow, verses 9-20. But we looked at that passage last week; we noted the footnote that is there, that there is really...that the verses that follow are really suspect. The manuscripts they're based on are really suspect. And so we can't be confident, after verse 9, that we're really dealing with the gospel of Mark—both from external evidence and when you look at the words in the Greek the vocabulary changes, the style changes, and everything else. And so that appears to have been an addition, as the footnotes will say that it's either a...that either the original ending was lost or Mark did stop that abruptly, that suddenly at verse 8. So it does seem like a really short ending.

Secondly, it's kind of a strange ending when you read it. A lot of the other gospels end with celebration, a sense of wonder, a sense of summary, a sense of closure. And Mark's gospel at verse 8 ends in a really strange way. So let's take a look at it. Let's read it through one more time.

*Our Father in heaven,*

*As we get ready to read and we close out this study, I pray once again as we have every week that, Father, as we spend time in Your word looking at the reality of Jesus, in order that we can see Him clearly and accurately, and speak of Him with clarity and accuracy, Father, we pray that Your Spirit would be with us; that we would have eyes to see, ears to hold, and minds to understand the wonder and the glory of Jesus.*

*We pray this in His precious name, amen.*

Let's begin at verse 40. Jesus has died, He's on the cross, He's breathed His last, He's cried out for one last time, and He's dead. A centurion soldier sees that, and we're told that

*There were also some women looking on from a distance, among whom were Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James the Less and Joses and Salome. And when He was in Galilee they [these three women] used to follow Him and minister to Him; and there were many other women who came up with Him to Jerusalem.*

Jesus had a lot of followers, and they weren't all just men. There were women among them, and they had come to Jerusalem with Him. These three women had been among them. And now, from a distance, they had watched Him die. And there is a slight change at verse 42. We're told that

*When evening had already come, because it was the preparation day, that is, the day before the Sabbath, Joseph of Arimathea came. He was a prominent member of the Council,*

...the Council that had condemned Jesus to death. He had not voted with that Council in favor of the death, but he was a member of that Council.

*...he, himself, was waiting for the kingdom of God; and he gathered up courage, he went in before Pilate,*

...the governor who had condemned Jesus...

*...and he asked for the body of Jesus.*

*Pilate wondered if He was dead by this time, and summoning the centurion, he questioned him as to whether He was already dead. And ascertaining this from the centurion, he granted the body to Joseph.*

*And Joseph bought a linen cloth, he took Him down...*

...he took that body down off the cross...

*...he wrapped Him in the linen cloth, and he laid Him in a tomb which had been hewn out in the rock; and he rolled a stone against the entrance of that tomb.*

And we have a reference to the women again.

*Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joses were looking on to see where He was laid.*

*When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome, bought spices, that they might come and anoint Him.*

*And very early on the first day of the week, they came to the tomb when the sun had risen. 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 away, although it was extremely large. And entering the tomb, they saw a young man standing at the right, wearing a white robe; and they were amazed.*

They were awe-struck by his appearance.

*And he said to them, "Don't be amazed; you are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who has been crucified. He has risen; He is not here; behold, here is the place where they laid Him. But go, tell His disciples and Peter, 'He is going ahead of 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 gripped them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.*

That's the ending. Nine months of reading, and this is where we finish. And I will acknowledge that it's kind of an odd ending. It's shorter than what the other gospels have, and it's strange, abrupt. But that ending, that ending says enough. It says enough. It says the matters of first importance. Jesus Christ...crucified. Jesus Christ...buried. Jesus Christ...raised. It gives us the essentials. And it gives those essentials to us, it states them, it says them, as eyewitness testimony—eyewitness testimony with the witnesses named, and identified within their own lifetime, written down and recorded as witnesses. It isn't written as tradition two hundred years later. It's eyewitness testimony within the lifetime of the eyewitnesses, going on record by name, saying, 'We saw Jesus crucified, buried, and we saw the empty tomb. And we heard the proclamation, "He's raised."'

That's enough. That's enough to answer with faith. That's enough testimony to have reason for belief. There still may be question that you would want to raise. In fact, you may still want to hang back in debate. But with this eyewitness testimony you do have good reason to believe. I wanna underscore that. See, the thinking is that when you become a Christian you have to take a desperate leap of faith against the facts. The reality is in becoming a Christian you take a confident step because of the facts. And the gospel does not come to you as a moral, ethical system. It doesn't come as a speculative religious philosophy. It doesn't come to you as a tradition developed within some context of story telling. It comes to you as statements of eyewitness fact. And in so doing, it gives you good reason to believe. And the eyewitness testimony here is Jesus crucified, buried, raised. That testimony gives you good reason to believe.

It is strange—I will grant that. But it also...not only is it enough, it fits well, as strange as the ending may seem. When we come to that last verse it reads like this:

*They went out and they fled from the tomb, for trembling and astonishment had gripped them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.*

We look at that and we say, 'Whoa, what's happenin'? Why weren't they jumping up and down in excitement? Why weren't they screamin' it out?'

When I read this particular element of the story it is so consistent with what we find in other parts of the story. It's so consistent with those other discipleship moments in the lives of these early followers of Jesus. Mount of Transfiguration, where the Apostle Peter, and James, and John, are alone with Jesus on a mountain—and suddenly probably the most awe-inspiring miracle of the whole story of Jesus...at least it's the one when Peter was near death, he went back and recalled this one and described it...it's when Jesus was standing in front of these three men and He suddenly was transfigured before them; His clothing turned white and His face shown with the glory. And for a minute they got a glimpse of Jesus in His heavenly glory and wonder and majesty. And we're told that immediately after that Peter began to...he just began to stammer. And he said, 'let's build some little tents here, and honorarium places for You, Jesus, and for Moses and Elijah.' And he's just stammerin' and he's just fumblin' over himself, trying to come up with an idea to do. And the text says he was afraid. He'd encountered something bigger than he'd ever anticipated in the reality of Jesus.

And then there's the time the disciples are in the boat, and it's rocking and it's storming, and it looks like the boat is going to go down. And we've got these commercial fishermen that are panicked. And Jesus is asleep in the bow of the boat; and they wake Him, and they say, 'don't you care? We're gonna die!' And Jesus stands up and He looks at the storm, and He just says, 'Be quiet!' And suddenly the storm dies; the wind stops. And the ocean...or the Sea of Galilee just goes calm, dead still. We're told that at that moment the disciples were terrified. They were more afraid *after* the storm than they were *during* the storm. They'd come up against the reality of Jesus to a degree and dimension that they'd never fully anticipated or experienced before.

And I'm convinced that's what's happening to these women. The One who said He'd be crucified, buried, and rise again really did! They stood there and they watched Him die. And they heard Him cry out. And two of them actually saw that crumpled, tortured, twisted body brought down off the cross, wrapped in linen, put in a tomb, and sealed. They saw that. And now the tomb's empty, and an angel's told them He's alive! And I'm convinced it's a level of experience that went beyond anything they had ever anticipated at that moment.

It's a bit like the first time I ever climbed Pioneer Peak. And I remember coming up...just coming over the very little lip of the edge and hitting the peak. And I'd been thinking about this, and I'd planned for it, and I'd approached it, and it'd been an exciting trip. And I finally reached the peak and I was right on the edge. And I had this awesome view, this panorama of the Valley! And just below me was 2,000-3,000 feet of straight drop. And for that moment, I was terrified. I stepped back.

And that's what this moment was like for these ladies, these women. I'm convinced that's what it's like in our life with Jesus—there'll be moments when we come up against His reality in a way...in a way that goes beyond anything we ever anticipated. And it will rock your world. It may be an odd ending, but it fits well, given the reality they were dealing with—Jesus.

My concern with this text is not really at all about how short it may be, or how strangely it may end. My concern is how, when we reach the end and we're done with nine months of reading, how easy it is for it to seem unreal; how we can close the book on this after nine months of reading it, and we can feel kind of distant and detached from all the reality it speaks of; how we can look at these people who, at times, were more frightened after the storm than they were during it; who, when Jesus did what He said He would do...it shook 'em to the core of their being! We find ourselves saying, 'I've never had Jesus rock my world like that. I read what's in the pages, and it reads differently from what's in my life. How do I know the reality they know, so long ago, in my life here and now?'

So as we finish the gospel of Mark, the last little thing I'm gonna do is speak to that particular issue in question. How is it we can know the reality of what this talks about? How can it be real to us, this Jesus—living and alive? I'll state it this way...I'm gonna state it more complicated, then I'm gonna boil it down. But my first response is this—you will never know the reality of Jesus unless you personally and deliberately live the reality of Jesus out in your everyday life. I'll repeat that. You will never know the reality of Jesus—He will always remain a distant figure on ancient pages written long ago—you will never know the reality of Jesus unless you deliberately and purposely live out His reality in your life.

Let's put it another way. You will not know the reality of this Jesus unless you personally and you deliberately choose to believe with a commitment to the consequences of your choice. You will never know the reality of this Jesus in your life, here and now, unless you choose to believe with a commitment to the consequences of that choice at every point in your life, willing to accept the if/then reality that if this is true, then I will live that way. If Jesus did that, then I will do this. If I am convinced that Jesus said that, then I will do this. Unless you're willing to choose to believe and live out the consequences of that choice, you will never experience His reality here and now. It will always be a distant conceptual idea on ancient pages when Jesus is spoken of.

Let's put it in its simplest way. Unless you listen to this word, this message, you read the gospel and respond with faith.

Give you an analogy. You may have heard that the greatest experience in fishing in the state of Alaska is a king salmon on your line. And I mean on your fishing line, not one of those great big nets, commercial fishing. It's on your line, it's between you and that fish! And there's nothing grander; there's nothing that grips you better; there's nothing that exciting; there's nothing that'll get your adrenalin going; there's nothing greater and grander in fishing experiences in the state of Alaska than landing a king salmon. Now, some people may dispute that, and they debate that. And they say, 'You know what? Lugging one of those three hundred pound halibuts up from the bottom, like a big rock that you're pulling up—that's exciting.' I don't think so, but they can say that's exciting. Or maybe it's the guy out there with that fine little fly fishing rod and his hip boots, standing in the river and casting out there and catching that rainbow on his ultra light line, and bringing it in, and picking it up and unhooking it, and releasing it again to be tortured once again. I don't know. Ooh, I just got in trouble, didn't I? Ha!

No, your daddy told you...your mommy told ya, you've seen the DVDs, you've listened to the people, you've talked to the stories, you've been around there at breakfast when the guys tell about landin' the Big One, and it came up and it flopped, and the pole broke, and they had to pull it up by the line, and they flopped it, and it was so big it knocked the guy down off his chair, and you know it's gotta be fishing for kings and catching the kings, and you're ready to stand there and ready to argue that anytime...anytime...that *it's best to catch a king!*

But you've never caught one! And as a result, you do not know the reality. And you're ready to go to the grave claiming it's the truth, but you have never, ever, known the reality, and you will not until you're ready to go sit in that stream bed, in the cold of the morning when the rain's coming down, and getting the lines snagged hour after hour after hour, 'til finally that fish hits and you've got the ride of your life.

It is exactly the same way with Jesus. Until you take the evidence that's been give—and there has been sufficient evidence given—and step forward with faith, you'll never know the reality.

So what would that faith look like? Give you three quick things. One—that sort of faith involves repentance, a change of direction. Number two—that sort of faith involves trust. And number three—that sort of faith involves obedience. Anything short of that, you're not fishing.

Repentance—scary word. It simply means rethink everything in light of Jesus and His claims. You rethink your priorities. You rethink your foundational principals. You rethink the practices you put out for your lifestyle. You rethink your perspective of things. You rethink it all—that's what repentance means.

And then you trust—you rely on Him. You rely on Him to give you an accurate perspective of reality. You rely upon Him to set your priorities. You rely upon Him to establish your foundational principals. You rely upon Him to direct your life and practices. That's trust.

And then you live that out, and that's all obedience is. You live it out in action. You do the things He says should be done. And not only that—you adopt the attitudes He says we should have. He says be thankful...then be thankful. But...No! Be thankful. But...No! Be thankful! In fact, oftentimes and most often with Jesus, it won't be somethin' to do; it will be something to feel. It will be 'Don't worry. Trust. Don't panic. Believe. Don't want. Be content.' And probably, and this is the hardest thing for us to grasp, not only is it a matter of being obedient in action and attitude—this sort of faith will be obedient in thought. I'm gonna state this carefully, 'cause it's the hardest thing for us to grasp. It means you put your mind in submission to Jesus. If He says this is the way the world is, you think that way. If He says this is what God is like, you think that way.

I'll never forget the first time I heard somebody say the phrase, "As a Christian, you believe what Jesus believes." It struck me so strange. I'd never heard it put that way. It's exactly right. The Apostle Paul said his goal is to bring every thought captive to Jesus, to the reality of who He is and all that He is. And so long as you think you can think independently of Jesus you have not yet...you have not yet stepped into faith.

I wrestled with how to close this whole series. I was tryin' to think "How can I wrap it up? How can I put together the right stories, the right sequences, the pictures of Jesus' ministry? How can I come up with the most powerful illustration I can think of? How can I do it in such a way that I can make every person here *feel the reality of Jesus?*" Then I recognized that's a responsibility I can not take on. It's yours. You want the Jesus of this book to be real to you? Then you, personally—not me, not the person sitting next to you, not Mom or Dad, sister or brother, husband or wife—you, personally, must repent, trust, and obey. Because you dare to believe on the evidence given that Jesus is all that He claimed to be. And until you do that He will never, ever, be real to you.

Let's stand.

*Our Father in heaven,*

*I pray for us as a people. My desire, even at the very beginning of this series, was that we as a church would know the renewal and the reality of Jesus in our lives—personally, individually, congregationally. Father, in reading through the gospel we set the base for that. I pray now that as Your word and Your Spirit have called us to faith, You would sustain us in a response, and meet us in our faith with the reality of Jesus at a level and a degree that really does rock our soul to the very core of our being.*

*In His name we pray, amen.*