

The Surprise Of Easter

Summary: Easter came as a surprise to the first followers of Jesus - and it may surprise us, too. Here we find Extraordinary Events, Unlikely Witnesses, Unforeseen Grace, and an Unfinished Story.

Easter tells us that fear and death doesn't win!
Hope is alive, love wins, salvation is among us!
Because Jesus is alive and that changes everything!
Through his resurrection Jesus is declared with power to be the Son of God!
The one who said I will lay down my life & I will take it up again.
Easter reminds us that God the Father has accepted the sacrifice of his Son for our sins,
then crowned him with glory and honour and put EVERYTHING under his feet!
This is the beginning of the new creation.
The promise of a better day is coming.

Well, Mark the Gospel writer wants us to know how much of a shock and surprise that first Easter was for the followers of Jesus. It gave Jesus words "Follow Me" a whole new meaning.

So much so that it left people shaking from head to toe.
I want us to see the 4 surprises of Mark chapter 16:1-8.

The first surprise is...

1. Extraordinary Events, vv1-6

Please look at verses 1-6 with me...

Jesus had been murdered on the Friday afternoon.

Sabbath began on Friday evening and continued until Saturday evening.

So Mark tells us that three women bought spices to anoint Jesus' dead body the next day.

That was a way of honouring the Master they loved.

These three ladies were disciples, devastated and traumatised by all they'd seen on Friday.

The men had all run away! So don't you love the courage and devotion of these heartbroken women.

V1, there was Mary Magdalene, who was so lovingly devoted to the man who'd changed her life. Then there was Mary the mother of the disciple known elsewhere, poor chap, as James the Lesser. The third woman was Salome, the mother of Zebedee's sons. James and John.

It's early Sunday morning and they're on their way to care for the body. In v3 it starts occurring to them that they might have problems getting into the tomb, because of the huge stone that's sealing it. When they get there, v4, they see that the stone, which was very large, had been rolled away.

So they go in and they see, v5, a young man dressed in a white robe sitting there. It scares the living daylights out of them. The man says something that changes everything, v6, "Don't be alarmed. You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here..."

Extraordinary unexpected events.

Some of us will have heard of an American called Lee Strobel. He wrote in a Wall Street Journal blog about when his wife came to faith in Jesus. Strobel was an atheist and legal editor of the Chicago Tribune. When he heard his wife say she'd become a Christian, the first two words to go through his mind were an expletive and the word 'divorce.' But as he watched her over the coming months he was intrigued at the positive changes in her character & values.

Still he decided he'd investigate the claims of the Christian faith and disprove them so he could save his wife from her crazy beliefs. The problem was that the more he looked into the life, death & resurrection of Jesus, the more his atheism fell apart. Much to his surprise, Strobel came to know Jesus for himself.

Maybe you've come here today because it's Easter and that's what you do at Easter. You go to church and that's great.

But maybe God's got something extraordinary for you to discover today!

That it really happened –that Jesus has risen from the dead.

That you came here thinking vaguely about a dead man and instead God is showing you an empty tomb. Extraordinary, unexpected events!

Here's the second surprise...

2. The Unlikely Witnesses, v7

Look at verse 7...

"But go, tell his disciples and Peter, "He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see Him, just as He told you.""

Now here's the thing. Jesus had told his disciples clearly that He was going to die and going to rise again. He told them in Mark 10:45 that He had come to give his life as a ransom for many.

In other words, his death would secure freedom from sin.

He told them these words in Mark 14:28, "After I have risen, I will go ahead of you into Galilee." So they shouldn't really have been surprised. But they are. Why?

Dead people don't usually come back to life again. Not even 2000 years ago!

Here's the point:

These three ladies are told to go tell the other disciples that Jesus was alive. In other words these ladies become the first preachers of the gospel! The first missionaries. The first witnesses. That my friends, is a very unlikely thing!

It's an unlikely thing because 2000 years ago there wasn't much sexual equality around. Women were treated as less than men. Women were not even allowed to be witnesses in a court of law. They were thought to be untrustworthy witnesses.

Now don't shoot me, but if 2000 years ago I was making up a story about my favourite dead man coming back to life again, there's no way I would choose women as my witnesses of the fact. I would choose male witnesses with at least some credibility!

I wonder how much of a credible witness you feel? Have you ever come away from talking to someone and you think, I blew it! Why didn't I tell them about Jesus because there was a perfect opening and I missed it. I could've said this or that or the other....

Not many of us feel like we're brilliant witnesses, do we?
We'd love to be able to answer the questions of our work colleagues or classmates like Ravi Zacharias.

(Google him if you don't know name & you won't be sorry!)

But most of us aren't like that!

And maybe some of us still believe that we could never impact our workplace or go on cross-cultural mission short or long term.

The truth is that many of us could! God's looking for willingness and God loves to work through unlikely witnesses.

The 3rd surprise...

3. The Unexpected Grace, v7a
'But go tell his disciples AND Peter.'
Did you notice that? 'AND Peter'

What's all that about? Why didn't the angel just say 'disciples'? Peter was one of the disciples.

Why 'AND Peter'?

Here's why: It's because Peter didn't feel like a disciple any more. Peter just felt like a big fat failure.

After boasting in front of everyone that, 'Even if everyone else lets you down Jesus, I never would' and then denies Jesus three times. So Peter's skulking away under a duvet somewhere, feeling like a failure. He thinks his best friend is dead and probably feels like he wants to die too.

Here we see Grace, undeserved and unexpected.

Message from Jesus via the angel:

Get Peter. Grab Peter. Tell him I'm alive. Tell him I want to see him. Tell him I'm not done with him yet!

Have you ever felt like Peter?

That you've blown it and God could never forgive you.

If that's you, I want to encourage you this Easter morning.

That Jesus isn't done with you yet. There's grace for you, too.

Unconditional, undeserved forgiveness and a plan for your life. Go and meet him! Go & get your unforeseen grace.

Here's the fourth and final surprise.

4. The Story Is Not Finished

Look at v8...

Trembling and bewildered, the women went out and fled from the tomb. They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid. Full stop. End of Gospel.

Now what kind of an ending is that?!

As you can probably see from your Bible footnote, the earliest manuscripts and some other ancient witnesses don't have verses 9-20 in them. It seems most likely that someone added those words on to the end of Mark's gospel and borrowed words from the other gospels. It felt like an unfinished story!

Matthew, on the other hand, has a great ending to his gospel:

Jesus meets with the disciples in Galilee and sends them out to make disciples of every nation on earth!

Luke also has a fantastic ending to his gospel:

Jesus sends the disciples out to be witnesses after the power of the Holy Spirit has come on them, and then he ascends into heaven.

John also has a good ending in his gospel:

The women DO go and tell the men the good news. Jesus shows himself to be alive to his disciples. Even doubting Thomas is doubting no more! Jesus heals Peter's broken heart as they walk on the beach together.

That's what I call a proper ending!

But Mark's Gospel just stops!

With these three surprised women, shaking all over and not telling anyone.

When we wanted to read about them telling the disciples and meeting Jesus – which, BTW, they eventually did.

So why the abrupt ending?

Some say that the original ending of Mark's gospel got lost.

And there are other theories, too.

My favourite is this:

Mark deliberately left the Gospel open. He left us wanting more! He's making the point that the Gospel story isn't over yet! 2000 years later, the story is still not over. Even today Jesus is still working in people's hearts all over the world.

Across the world tens of thousands of people start to follow Jesus every day!

My friend, the point is that this story isn't finished until you are part of it.

Close

So have you become part of the story yet?

If not, then let me be as clear as I can:

The point of this story – this eyewitness story –

is to let you know that Jesus is alive and that you can come to meet him too.

That you can ask and trust him to save you from your sins,

That you can receive new life from him,

And that you to start follow him from now on as your King and God.