

Sermon: Mark 15:42-47, 16:1-8. “Our death in the hands of Jesus”

Rev. Bruce Stanley

Sermon text and audio available for download at www.waitara.anglican.asn.au

What do you think happens when you die? A lot of people have different ideas on this. For example...

- I'm not afraid to die. I just don't want to be there when it happens. -- *Woody Allen*
- I enjoy life. I think I'll enjoy death even more. -- *Cat Stevens*
- Life is pleasant. Death is peaceful. It's the transition that's troublesome. -- *Issac Asimov*
- The good news is there's no devil. The bad news is there's no heaven. There's nothing. *Kerry Packer*
- Thomas Lynn Bradford...

Bradford was an interesting guy. He killed himself in attempt to find out what was on the other side. First, he contacted a “fellow spiritualist” named Ruth Doran and they arranged that he would die and she was then going to “tune into his mind” to see what happened to him after his death. So he basically said: “I’ll kill myself and you tune into my thoughts and tell people what I experience.” On 6 February 1921, Bradford sealed up his apartment in Detroit, Michigan, blew out the pilot on his heater, and turned on the gas. He died. Ruth Doran got no messages from him...

What do you think about death? What happens?

Well, I thought we could start today by just following the body of Jesus from Friday to Sunday – from his arrest to his crucifixion and then his resurrection. Here’s what Mark tells us happened:

- First, Jesus is **arrested** in Gethsemane. Mark 14:46: “The men seized Jesus and arrested him.”
- Then all of his followers **abandon** him. Mark 14:50: “Then everyone deserted him and fled.”
- Then he’s put on **trial by the Sanhedrin** – the religious leaders. Mark 14:64: “They all condemned him as worthy of death.”
- Then he’s put on **trial by the Romans under Pontius Pilate** – Mark 15:15 “He (Pilate) had Jesus flogged and handed him over to be crucified”
- Then he’s **flogged and beaten** by the soldiers – Mark 15:19 – “Again and again they struck him on the head with a staff and spit on him.”
- Then he’s **crucified**: Mark 15:24 – “And they crucified him.”
- They he **died**: Mark 15:37 – “With a loud cry, Jesus breathed his last.”
- Then they took down his body and **wrapped** it up and **placed** it in a **tomb**: Mark 15:46 – “So Joseph bought some linen cloth, took down the body, wrapped it in the linen, and placed it in a tomb cut out of rock. Then he rolled stone against the entrance of the tomb.”

But then in chapter 16 it all changes... Jesus was arrested midnight Thursday, crucified on Friday, died about 3pm, buried that night before the Sabbath. And then on Sunday morning the women arrive with spices to anoint his dead body. And this is what happens as we follow Jesus **beyond** death:

- READ Mark 16:2-7
- He has risen.

Easter Sunday is a **paradigm shift** in the way we think about death. A paradigm is basically the typical way we think about something. It’s the way we **normally** see and understand things.

- In 1543 there was a huge paradigm shift for our world. (Can you guess?!) In 1543 Nicolaus Copernicus published a new understanding of the world which put the sun at the centre of our universe, instead of the earth. He suggested that the planets and stars revolved around the sun, and not the earth. It became known as the Copernican Revolution and it changed the way we looked at our universe. It was a paradigm shift.

A paradigm shift happens when the way we think about something is challenged. We might **assume** things work one particular way, but then someone challenges us to see things differently.

- Easter Sunday was a day where **our paradigm for death was shifted forever**.

Jesus was beaten, crucified and buried for a day and a half, and then he was not only raised from the dead, but raised from death **forever**. And he never dies again.

When we hear about Jesus' resurrection, when we read the accounts, that someone can come back from death and live forever, well, we've got to either **dismiss them as rubbish**, or **change the way we think about death** – and shift our paradigm. If it's rubbish, if it's a lie, then 2000 years ago, a whole lot of Christians somehow managed to write it down in historical records and then convince a lot of people at that time to believe it, and then they gave their life dying for that belief.

But if we do believe this, then when we hear those words: **“He has risen! He is not here”**, then these are words that change everything we know about death. So today, let's think about this one question: –

- In whose hands do you place your death?

I know we often talk about placing our **life** in people's hands. We place our life in the hands of doctors, or in the hands of the driver of a car. Every time I cook dinner for people, people place their life in my hands. But let me ask you – in whose hands do you place your **death**? Because that's a pretty serious thing. You only get one death! What are you going to do with it? Who are you going to trust with it? In whose hands is your death?

- You see, when Jesus defeated death, it was like a needle and thread.

If you take a piece of cotton and try to sew on a button, you can't do it. It's **impossible** to thread that cotton through the button and the material. But if you thread that cotton through a **needle** and the needle goes through **first**, then the cotton follows. Once that needle goes through, the cotton follows.

Jesus is the needle. Jesus goes through death and comes out the other side. And if we thread our lives through him, then we will follow him through death and into eternal life with God. Before Jesus, there was no needle! There was no way through. But now there is! And that has changed everything!

- In whose hands have you placed your death? If it's in the hands of Jesus, then you can follow him through.

Now, if you're **not** a follower of Jesus, then today is a great day to think about what Jesus claims. Because if it's real, if it's true, then you would have to agree that it changes everything! But if you can't believe it's true, then there's still that question: in whose hands have I placed my death? Let me encourage you to investigate the **truth** about the claims of Jesus, because you only have one death. (Books available)

Now, if you **are** a believer, if you accept all of this, if you believe that that Jesus can overcome death and give you eternal life, then does that change the way you **live** today?

For example, if Jesus has power over death and can offer us eternal life, then why do we spend so much time worrying about our possessions?

People spend so much time thinking about their will. Have you thought about that much? What's going to happen to all your possessions when you die? We live so much of our lives accumulating these possessions and looking after all these things on this earth and worrying about how much we have, and then we have to think about who we'll leave it to when we die. We spend so much time thinking about these things that are temporary – that aren't really that important.

Through the resurrection, God tells us that our possessions aren't important. **We are.** **We are** important to him. God has a future for **us.** And he wants that future to affect our life today – the way we live today, the decisions we make, the way we treat people, the way we spend our time, the way we prioritise our life. It all changes because we know that we have an eternity with him.

- **III** – The last few weeks they've been advertising this lottery on TV. Win \$100,000 a year for 10 years. Would that change you? Knowing your future – knowing you had an extra \$100,000 each year? I think it would! It would change the way you plan your day, it would probably change your holiday plans. Maybe your job. Maybe your friends! But what if you KNEW that in your future you would win \$5 million? Or \$10 million? How would that future change you?

Many of you know I just celebrated another birthday. And I found myself thinking about my future. I was actually thinking "Well, my life is about half over. Another half to go." Birthdays are a good time to reflect on life and think about what's ahead. Think about the future. Think about what's certain and what's not. Maybe you're the same. Maybe you have a countdown for your life. Or maybe you just think about how much time you have and what you can do with that time. Or maybe you just think one day at a time.

Well, Easter Sunday changed all that. For the Christian, there is no countdown. There aren't 10 or 20 or 50 years left. Or even a day at a time. For the follower of Jesus, there is... eternity. There's an absolute guarantee of a future ***forever*** with God. That's bigger than any jackpot lottery! And it doesn't matter who you are. If your trust is in Jesus, you have that ***guaranteed future*** with him. A guaranteed victory over death. That MUST affect us today! To KNOW we have that future, to KNOW that death is gone, that MUST affect us every day!

- **III** – I want you to imagine for a moment that you got an invitation to the royal wedding next week. And let's pretend you actually really wanted to go. A free trip. Meet the Queen. Meet the Prince and Princess. How would that change the next few days for you? The way you acted? The way you planned? The way you talked to people?

Well, some day in the future, we will all meet the King. And he's going to ask us that question – each one of us:

- In whose hands have you placed your death?

Let's pray.