Fearsome and For Us

Mar 15:39-16:8

To The Village Church, Easter Sunday, April 16, 2006

Main Idea: The Son of God is fearsome as well as forgiving, so stand in fear and be forgiven.

Meditation:
Deep into that darkness peering, long
I stood there wondering, fearing,
Doubting, dreaming dreams no mor-
tal ever dared to dream before.
--Edgar Allan Poe, *The Raven*

Post-Sermon Song Theme: Awestruck

Benediction:
May the revelation of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, the encounter with the Living Son of God, bring your heart to fear.

Charge:
Go forth, enjoying your forgiveness in reverence and awe.

Fearsome and For Us

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Cranfield recommends, as best discussion of the angels, Barth, K.D. III/3, pp 426-608, or its summary in W.A.Whitehouse, Scottish Journal of Theology IV, pp376-382.

<u>The Apologetic</u>

The details about the women are to send a definite message about them as witnesses: Notice: They saw the death. They saw the burial. They saw the empty tomb, and it was more difficult to unseal than you probably think.[1]

[1] BAR 25:05 (Sep/Oct 1999) suggests the Greek word for "roll" could also mean "dislodged", and of the more than 900 burial caves from the Second Temple period found in and around Jerusalem, only four are known to have used round (disk-shaped) blocking stones.

I. A Surprise Ending: Who is the Son of God?

A. The Darkness is Past: Jesus can now be exalted

1. Says the songwriter, "The night-time is past. The sun must arise. The darkness cannot last."

2. In **V44**—It is the burden of the author to tell us that Jesus had really died. Hence the details of Pilate summoning the Centurion, whose very job was to ascertain the death of the crucified. And Pilate says: "My, this is surprising. Is he really dead?" Centurion: "Oh, yes, sir. He is REALLY dead." "All right, Joseph, you can have the corpse."

3. But now that Jesus died, descended in that moment to absolute shame and pain and isolation, we see the upward path to His exaltation. His downward mission accomplished, His death sealed, there is no longer need by the Father to keep at bay His deserved exaltation. The darkness cannot last.

4. Now are noticed the women, who are afar off, being attentive to His dead body.

5. Now enters Joseph of Arimathea,
   - **Vv42-46** Joseph of Arimathea, council = Sanhedrin. He is rich, to have such a tomb. He is prominent (`euvsch,mwn`). And he wants Jesus given a proper burial.
   - In asking for the body he was registering a dissenting opinion, which no doubt jeopardized his career and place in Judaism. Notice **v43**, that Mark calls this going "bold." Some of the Sanhedrin, like this prominent member, Joseph, must have really understood Jesus' innocence.

6. **V45** -But they weren't the only ones: Now Pilate expresses his real judgment.
   - That Pilate released the body of one condemned for high treason was highly unusual.[2]
   - Burial was not an automatic privilege, and was only granted by magisterial decree.
   - This is why, we know many crucifixions went on but we have scant evidence for them in graves because the bodies were normally left to scavengers.
   - And you could usually only get the body if you were a relative.
   - So Pilate's action here can only be because Pilate knew that Jesus didn't belong up there being eaten by crows. It is a testimony that Pilate knew, really, that Jesus was innocent.

7. From the moment after the darkness of His death, there are glimmers of a sunrise of His exaltation.

[2] Lane, 578-579 gives an excellent discussion of this point.

B. The Centurion's Ironic Confession exalts Jesus as the Son of God

1. And now speaks the Centurion.

2. This is how the book begins, and it is how the book ends: With the statement of Jesus identity:
   - **1:1** "The story of the Son of God"
   - And so it ends: **15:39**, He gets the same title.[3]
   - In fact, we can probably say more, how in the beginning of the book there is a rending of the sky, in **1:11** at His baptism, and a confession of Jesus as God's Son, so at the end of the book, there is a rending of the temple curtain (in the verse just before our passage, **v38**) along with this confession of the Centurion.

3. But let's note a difference, between the beginning and the ending. Here it is a title assigned ironically. The Centurion didn't mean it as we do. Not "The Messiah," nor "the second member of the Trinity," but this Roman soldier would mean the Hellenistic notion of <u>a special human being favored by the gods</u>[4] or, at most, somehow related to the gods.

4. Perhaps watching the strength of Jesus at the moment of death, he was saying that Jesus was a hero. Perhaps seeing the strange events like this darkness that came and then went at his moment of death, the Centurion is saying that "God has something to do with this guy."

5. So you could translate it "a son", for there is no definite article. And because of the inherent ambiguity of this structure of nouns in Greek, I feel certain, that if Mark wanted to convey the idea that this Centurion came to faith in Christ, we would see the definite article.[5] We don't.

6. Which means, dear friends, that Mark is portraying irony. He must be taking something that really happened and yet he is not trying to change it, but he is using it to make a point about the story of Jesus. And you can really see this author using irony throughout the chapter:

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[3] Similarly, after the climax of part 1: Simon Peter recognized His identity as the Christ, the second half of the book is like an explanation of what kind of Christ He is.

[4] Notice Luke's report: Luk 23:47 "The centurion, seeing what had happened, praised God and said, "Surely this was a righteous man.'"

[5] I say this because Jesus' identity, and confessions about it, are THE major themes of the book. Hendricksen, 667, says that proper nouns and titles could still be definite without the definite article(s) and the discussion of Wallace, 250-252, about anarthrous noun-genitive noun constructions supports this, but it is but inconclusive since a Roman could use "god" to be indefinite. In fact, because of the possible ambiguity, I would expect Mark to have made it definite if he intended to convey that the Centurion made the confession knowledgably. I feel sure of this.

- Like in pointing out the notice above Jesus' head on the cross, "The King of the Jews." The "real" king, but certainly the charge isn't meant that way.
- Or in recalling the mocking of the chief priests: "He saved others," they said, "but he can't save himself!" Mark is saying, "See, the cross is about salvation, but how ironic that the very One doing the saving is being accused of not being able to save."
- This is an author, comfortable with irony. And so here.

7. Finally, ironically, unknowingly, not by the people he came to address, but by a Gentile, He is acknowledged as the Son of God. The claim of the parable of the wicked tenants, the confession that this is the Only Son, finally comes forth.

8. What we want to consider, this Easter morn, is what Mark means by that identity. Who is this Christ, this Son of God? <u>There are two answers</u>. Two answers that Mark is claiming history forces us to face. And these two answers are practically contradictory.

9. They are two answers that don't seem to go together in any other experience that we have:
   - The Son of God is fearsome and He is for us.
   - He is One Who serves us. And He is One to be Feared *by* us.

C. Textual Criticism shows that that book ends with 16:8

1. But before I talk about these two answers, I feel the need to defend Mark and his gospel ending. This book really ends at **16:8.**

2. If you are reading in a Bible, and have an older version, like the KJV, there might be some verses after v8, or you might have a note at the bottom about other endings, but I want to give you an explanation of why they don't belong there.

3. The way we can tell this is by the science of Textual Criticism. We do not have any of the original documents penned by the apostles. They were written on papyrus that decays and falls apart, unless it happens to be sealed up in jars and left in a cave for thousands of years. But what we do have are thousands of manuscripts, "manu" "scripts", meaning "copied by hand", which all documents were before the printing press.

4. And these manuscripts developed many small variations as they were copied over the early centuries.

5. There are so many NT mss that the very variations allow you to trace back through a given set of readings to obtain a high degree of certainty about the original reading. Having many mss with these variations is a great strength of the NT gospels.

6. For someone to suggest, as some do today, whether from media or academia, that this is a weakness of the NT texts, is patently ridiculous.

7. The NT gospels are the most well-attested set of ancient documents the world has ever known.

8. Scholars who study the integrity of any other ancient manuscript look with drooling envy at the situation of the NT gospels (M, M, L, J).
   - Herodotus, from which we get much of what we know about Greek history, survives to us in only eight manuscripts, the earliest copied 1,500 years after Herodotus lived.
   - Beowolfe, from just the Old English period (up to 1000 AD), survives to us in only one manuscript, and it is really burnt around the edges.
   - Contrast wit hthe NT, which exist in parts in over 5,000 manuscripts, beginning from the second century.

9. They are like branches and trunks of a tree. And each of the trunks, are like little arrows. The more you have the more certain you can be of the root.

D. The Surprising Ending of 16:8

1. So this gospel, from external evidence, can be seen early to have ended with **v8**. The other endings were much later.

2. But you can see why the other endings developed. It means the last statement of the book is that they were afraid (lit., they were "fearing.") People thought that this is inappropriate to end a gospel this way.

3. And if you feel that way, how could Mark end his book so, I would ask you to consider the literary features of this work we have read. This conclusion is as <u>brief and surprising</u> as the introduction.

4. But you say, "I don't know if I like this ending. There are no resurrection appearances." Maybe not, but there is as clear a statement of the <u>resurrection</u> as any: "He is not here" says the messenger from Heaven in white. "He is risen."

5. The resurrection in Mark rests on clear revelation of God, more than on the empty tomb. The empty tomb has no evidential value apart from interpretation. The revelation, given through the messenger, is supposed to be sufficient.

II. He is the One to Fear

A. The Gospel ends as it has progressed: with Fear

1. Not much of an ending? Isn't it though. It is for Mark's gospel. Mark is not a sanitized Gospel. It emphasizes the demonic, the awful, the deadly. And Jesus is an awesome, authority-wielding power.

2. As Allen Mauwhinney once put it, "Mark's good news is not, "Oh, don't worry," it is: "See the Christ and tremble." It is not, "4 ways to heal your marriage," but rather, "Behold, fear the servant conqueror."

3. He's right. If there is one thing this book repeatedly portrays, it is the response of awe and fear to what Jesus does:
   - **4:39** And he awoke and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, "Peace! Be still!" And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm…**41**And they were filled with awe (`kai. evfobh,qhsan fo,bon`), and said to one another, "Who then is this, that even wind and sea obey him?"
   - **5:15** And they came to Jesus, and saw the demoniac sitting there, clothed and in his right mind, the man who had had the legion; and they were afraid (`f`).
   - **5:27** she came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak…**29** Immediately her bleeding stopped and she felt in her body that she was freed from her suffering…**33** But the woman, knowing what had been done to her, came in fear (`f`) and trembling and fell down before him...
   - **6:49** but when they saw him walking on the sea they thought it was a ghost, and cried out; **50** for they all saw him, and were terrified (`tarassw`)…
   - **10:32** On the road, going up to Jerusalem, and Jesus was walking ahead of them; and they were astonished, and those who followed were afraid (`f`).
   - **9:31** …He was teaching his disciples, saying to them, "The Son of man will be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill him; and when he is killed, after three days he will rise."…**32** But they did not understand the saying, and they were afraid (`f`) to ask him.
   - **11:18** And [even] the chief priests and the scribes…sought a way to destroy him; for they feared (`f`) him, because all the multitude was astonished at his teaching…
   - And so, as the book goes, the book ends: **16:8** And they went out and fled from the tomb; for trembling and astonishment had come upon them; and they said nothing to any one, for they were afraid (`f`).
   - The final event of Jesus produces just what He has been producing all along.

4. This was never a slap-on-the-back Jesus that Mark introduces to us. This was never a best-buddy-old-pal experience. The God of whom this is the Son is not One Who always invokes warm and fuzzy feelings.

5. The fear of these women is not fear of the authorities, or fear of not being believed, or fear of being thought mad. It is a religious fear. The Gospel is about people coming to fear, having their other fears abolished and transferring their fear to God.

B. When Aslan roars you cover your ears

1. Take the recent movie, The Lion, Witch & Wardrobe. How many saw it? They judged that market share right.

2. I'm not a purist. I don't mind "lion was too small, the beaver was too big." "That part with the wolves on the ice—they never went under water, that didn't really happen!" No, that didn't bother me, what is needed to translate a book into a movie.

3. But there was something that did. What I left the movie theatre talking about, the part:
   - when the White Witch—btw, she was one of best parts-whoever got Tilda Swinton into that role, whoever pulled that off-good job!—leaves the pavilion of Aslan.
   - And Aslan and the White Witch have made their arrangement, and she is going to her sled, and then she turns, and says, "How do I know that you will keep your promise?"
   - And, in response, Aslan roars. And the roar is supposed to be deafening and terrifying. And the White Witch runs for her life.
   - In the movie, all the creatures of the wood and the children cheer. At the sound of Aslan's roar, they cheer.
   - In the book, they're scared. Their ears are ringing.[6]

4. This is what bothered me about the movie. When Aslan roars, you don't give cheers. You cover your ears.

5. Those who are confronted with God's direct intervention do not know how to react. There are no categories available.

6. So with Jesus' resurrection in Mark's gospel. When confronted with God's actual intervention, with something that actually happens, is fully historical, and yet is of an altogether different texture from the rest of history, there is not a cheer.

7. The gospel's resurrection and its implications are awesome and frightening.

C. Applied: to Know God is to Fear Him

1. This is not the stuff of legend, but the stuff of encountering a living God

[6] This comes out on the first page of the next chapter, XIV, "The Triumph of the Witch."

2. If you don't know God this way, as One who at times is fearful to encounter, who confronts your life to uncover and challenge you in ways that make you tremble, you aren't knowing the real God.

3. You feel **v8** in your life, when you God is shocking you with an experience you don't understand. When you realize God is asking something of your life and He is not to be disobeyed. There is nothing that resists Him, not even death, certainly not you. Do you know this Son of God? Do you know a Son of God Who will
   - Challenge your ideology?
   - Challenge your way of knowing the world?
   - Confront you to your core desires, with issues that you are shocked to find that He has a say in?
   - A Son of God who conveys the truth that to know God is to fear Him?

4. You say, "I don't want that kind of God." Friends, yes you do.

5. Even if you are one of those who say, "I prefer to think of God as a loving God… (and let's leave that word, "loving" undefined, shall we?)." Even if you are one who says that, I ask you to consider deep down whether that is the God you want?

6. You don't want a wimpy God. A God who is really not God at all. You don't need a God Who is tame, for your life will stay the same.

7. Those who know this Son of God know the feeling of coming to a point where you just cannot resist,
   - Where you feel His will like a tempest that is just going to blow you and you will be moved with it.
   - Like a force of nature.
   - Like He is speaking out the whirlwind.

D. Applied: Our Worship Service embraces reverence and awe

1. This is why our worship service here at the Village Church attempts to embrace reverence and awe in what we do. Because we want to represent, and engage, the true Son of God.

2. If it is currently the trend to make going to church more casual, that is too bad. We would rather ask the question here, "What does this fear of **v8** mean for our worship?" Don't always know how to answer it, but it is a priority for us to ask.

III. He is the One Who Rises For Us

I mentioned that there was a second answer to "What is the Son of God?"

A. The women's failure shows our human inadequacy in face of judgment

1. This second answer seems to contradict the first. But if you learn to hold these two answers together, you shall know God.

2. The second answer Mark gives us is that this Son of God, though invoking awe and fear, is One Who has bowed to serve us. It is not in our experience that we fear our servants.

3. He is a Servant. It is not that He is a servant because He is weak, but because we are. This is the marvel of the Gospel.

4. In **15:40-41**, The women become the focus of the story because all the men, it seems, have fled. (Mark brings in these names again, in **v40**, of these people having nothing to do with the story. They are unknown to us, but the only reason to bring them in is because they were known to his audience. Mark is saying, "You know James and Joses? Well their mothers were there. They saw it all!")

5. But even the women weren't believing well.
   - **16:1**—The women were not doing well in bringing the anointing oils. People like to point out their intense devotion, but I don't see what devotion is worth without faith. Anointing oils were used to diminish the stench of decaying flesh.[7] If they had believed, they would have seen no need for wasting money on anointing oils
   - Vv2-3—They are worried about the stone. If they had believed what Jesus told them, no need to worry about that.
   - V6—The messenger rebukes their whole project of seeking Jesus here.
   - V7-And he tells them, "Again, you should be in Galilee. He's going to go there before you now."

6. And they, at first, run out, and do nothing from their fear. They are weak.

7. **Vv7-8** And even when they are told what to do they don't do it.

8. So no one did what He said, at least not at first. Nobody packed their bag and headed to Galilee. There is failure upon failure.

9. These women well represent us. We're making mistakes and failing one another and failing God in faith all over the place, bumbling through our lives. But what is Jesus' response?

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[7] Lane, 585.

10. William Lane[8]: "The focus upon human inadequacy, lack of understanding and weakness throws into bold relief the action of God and its meaning."

B. We meet with Forgiveness rather than Judgment

1. With the resurrection, there is an anticipation of the roar of judgment. Part of the fear of these devout Jewish women came from understanding that if the resurrection had begun, the end of all things was at hand. And that meant, to them, the Day of Judgment.

2. And with their inadequacy, they should expect judgment. But instead what do they meet?

3. Jesus is willing, as we've seen Him do before, to modify His plan and address them in Jerusalem anyway. This is brought out especially in the other gospels. But certainly in the messenger at the tomb here. Look into this willingness, to deal with them here instead of in Galilee, for it shows the other answer: He is intent upon serving them.

4. He has come to serve. Judgment does not come on these women because of what He just did. Because this Fearsome one is For them.

5. And you need to know this about Him too. This Fearsome One is For You. Has acted for you. Behold, the meaning of Easter: we are met with forgiveness rather than judgment.

C. Forgiveness is offered even to Peter

1. Nor does judgment come upon Peter. The second to last verse, **16:7**, is probably the most meaningful verse in the book, after all we have read about Simon Peter.

2. We'll do one last comparison here with the other NT gospels. The other gospels say, "Go and tell the disciples."[9] This is the one gospel that notes, with "Go tell His disciples," to "<u>Be sure to tell Peter too</u>." The final detail of this gospel, Peter's gospel, is that Peter is forgiven.

3. Do you see Christ serving Peter in the midst of his failure here? Christ rose, not only to bring people to appropriate fear of meeting the living God, but also to bring them forgiveness. He rose to tell Peter that all that darkest darkness of his denial is now destroyed. That darkness that was darkest before the dawn.
   - And His resurrection brings power to change their lives.

4. Recall the ironic mocking of the chief priests: "He saved others," they said. Mark told us by that that the cross is about salvation. About your forgiveness. He does save others by what He did in not saving Himself.

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[8] Lane, 592.
[9] Compare Mat 28:7 with Mar 16:7.

D. The ending is left for our own lives

1. The story of that morning didn't end there. At the point where Mark seems to end his narrative, confusion breaks out. All sorts of things happen at this point. And the chaos among the disciples is reflected in the confusion of the different accounts. There are a number of people involved, and a number of visits to the tomb. It is even hard to piece the four gospels together at this point because they are obviously remembering different things about what happened. And it was simply a swirl of actions. But here Mark ends his narrative.

2. Friends, this story is meant to be completed in our lives. As Norman Peterson put it, "The end of a text is not the end of the work when the narrator leaves unfinished business for the reader to complete...."[10]

3. Mark is like an art film, that is meant to be completed by you after you leave the theatre. You walk out asking your wife, "What did that mean?"

4. Mark was writing to Romans. In relating the Roman Centurion's acknowledgement of Jesus at His death, he is encouraging these Christians to understand that the meaning of the Son of God extends even to Rome. The truth of Jesus can be acknowledged even by a Roman. I.e., Roman Christians, this is about your real life.

5. If it extends to Rome, it extends to New York City. This is about our real life.

6. So it is left to you, dear Listener, to know this Son of God, by understanding
   - That He is fearsome. His roar in your life does not necessarily elicit a cheer but holy fear.
   - But He is for you. He has risen to assure you that your inadequacies, your failures, even your past sins, will not keep you from Him.

7. So go on to Galilee in your life, and meet the true Son of God.

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[10] Norman Peterson, as quoted by John H. Agustine in "Mark," *The Complete Literary Guide to the Bible,* 396.