

## DAY 7: DEATH COULD NOT HOLD HIM

### Mark 16

*“If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile”* (1 Corinthians 15:17). Thus the apostle Paul summarizes what the church has always believed and taught about the Resurrection. The Resurrection gives meaning to the life and death of Jesus.

**ON THE THIRD DAY HE WAS RAISED FROM THE DEAD (MARK 16:1-8)** The disciples may have considered it remarkable that the first witnesses of the Resurrection were women. Women were held in low esteem, especially in religious matters. Later accounts, not surprisingly, verify the Resurrection by male testimony. The eyewitness accounts of Mary, Salome, and Mary Magdalene, give the Resurrection narratives the highest degree of credibility, precisely because the early church would never have made them up.

*“Very early ... when the sun had risen, [the women] went to the tomb.”* “Very early” usually means sometime between 3 and 6 a.m. En route to the tomb, they discuss how they will gain access to the body in order to anoint it with spices. However, *“an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled back the stone”* (Matthew 28:2). God had resurrected Jesus and sent an angelic messenger to roll back the stone to reveal what He had done. *“Entering the tomb, they saw a young man ... dressed in a white robe”* (Mark 16:5). The manner of dress and even the term “young man” clearly designate an angel.

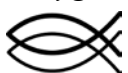
His first words respond to the women’s fear: *“Do not be alarmed.”* He adds, *“You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has risen; He is not here.”* The messenger’s last words—*“See the place where they laid Him”*—are clear evidence of an empty tomb. The angel instructs the women to *“tell [Jesus’] disciples and Peter that He is going before you to Galilee.”* The first work of the resurrected Christ is to gather the scattered sheep.

**THINK ABOUT** how *“Go, tell His disciples and Peter”* is one of three mentions of Jesus’ concern for Peter after His resurrection. We cannot doubt that their time together was one of forgiveness and healing. God’s grace is always greater than we imagine. He comes to us when we need Him; and our need is the greatest when our sin is the greatest. Never be afraid to throw yourself on the mercy of God. He never turns away from a repentant sinner.

**HOW DOES THE STORY END?** It is almost universally held that 16:9-20 is a later addition, not Mark’s original ending. The two oldest and most important manuscripts of the complete Bible, codex Vaticanus and codex Sinaiticus, omit 16:9-20. So do several early translations or versions of the New Testament and the writings of several early church fathers. It is true that the majority of ancient manuscripts include 16:9-20, but this fact simply attests that the longer ending, once it was added, was naturally included in subsequent copies of the Gospel.

If 16:9-20 was added later, a big question arises: How did Mark originally conclude his Gospel? There are two possible answers. The first is that Mark concluded it where the best manuscripts do—at 16:8. Most recent interpreters of Mark move in this direction. In this view, Mark brings the Gospel to an open-ended conclusion on the note of mystery and revelation that has characterized his presentation of Jesus all along.

Others point out that Mark’s Gospel generally conforms to the *kerygma*, an early preaching outline of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. It seems illogical that a Gospel otherwise faithful to the *kerygma* would depart from it at the crucial point of the Resurrection. What might have happened to



the original ending is, of course, speculation. Perhaps it was lost due to inevitable wear-and-tear at the end of a scroll. Perhaps Mark died (under Nero?) before completing it. It is doubtful that this mystery will ever be solved.

**A MOSAIC OF EARLY CHRISTIAN FAITH (MARK 16:9-20)** The secondary ending of Mark’s Gospel can be divided into four parts: a Resurrection appearance to Mary Magdalene, an appearance to two

travelers, an appearance to the Eleven (Judas had committed suicide), and the Ascension. Jesus' appearance to the two travelers summarizes His meeting with two discouraged disciples on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-35). The note here that Jesus appears "*in another form*" explains why He was not recognized in the original story.

The words of Jesus when He appears to the 11 disciples read like an early Christian catechism. Verse 15 recalls the Great Commission of Matthew 28:19; the division between the saved and damned in verse 16 recalls John 20:23. The charismatic activities of Mark 16:17-18, which appear elsewhere in the New Testament as miraculous episodes, have now become some of the "*signs [that] will accompany those who believe.*" The Ascension combines Acts 1:9-11 with Psalm 110:1, and the subsequent mission of the disciples reflects Acts 14:3 and Hebrews 2:3-4. Thus, we have in the longer ending of Mark an amalgam of New Testament stories as a 2<sup>nd</sup>-century attempt to compensate for the "lost" ending to this original first Gospel.

**THE END IS ONLY THE BEGINNING** There may be no Resurrection appearance at 16:8, but the angel's announcement can be construed in no other way than that Jesus was raised from the dead. Although Mark is the earliest of the Gospels, it is not the earliest Resurrection account. Writing to the Corinthians some 10 years earlier (perhaps AD 57), Paul gives the first and perhaps most reliable record of the event (1 Corinthians 15). The Resurrection happened: those who were closest to Jesus never doubted it. God raised His Son, Jesus, from the dead.

The Resurrection banished the disciples' fear and galvanized them into joyous proclaimers of the gospel. Death, the last enemy, had been conquered. May that same joy and certainty move us to live and speak so that the gospel is seen and heard today.

**PERSONALIZE** this lesson. Our journey through the Gospel of Mark has concluded. What will you take with you from the trip? Skim back over all 16 chapters of Mark and all 18 lessons in this study. What new insights, truths, and challenges most stand out to you? Jot them down. Now spend some time talking to God about what you have learned. Ask Him what He wants to do in your life as a result of this study, and how you can partner with Him. Write a commitment based on what He shows you. You may want to share your commitment with a friend who can encourage you as you live it out.

#### **REVIEW: DEATH COULD NOT HOLD HIM**

9. What encouragement or challenge did you receive from your own study, Core Group discussion, the teaching, or the Commentary about the triumphant resurrection of Christ?