



The Gospel of Mark

A Living Word Independent Bible Study



The Gospel of Mark
Part 44
Mark 16:1-8

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Mark 16:1-8 (NIV)

INTRODUCTION

The earliest manuscripts of Mark's Gospel that have been found end with the eight verses in today's lesson.

Later manuscripts include a variety of additional endings that are typically set apart from the rest of the Gospel in modern translations. These endings will be the subject of the final lesson in this study.

The eight verses to be covered in this session contain Mark's telling of the events of Easter morning.

It should be noted that each of the four Gospels describes the events of Easter morning somewhat differently.

Just as four witnesses to one event may give their testimony to the event somewhat differently, the Gospel writers record the events somewhat differently as well.

Early in its history, the Christian church found value in keeping all four Gospels as part of its tradition, rather than attempting to consolidate the four Gospels into a single authoritative account of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

While these variations are not unimportant, in a study of a SINGLE Gospel, it is helpful to try to understand the perspective of that particular writer.

Mark 16:1 (NIV)

When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices so that they might go to anoint Jesus' body.

“Sabbath was over”

This implies that it was sometime after 6:00 PM on Saturday evening that the women went to purchase spices.

They would not have been permitted to “work” – purchasing or preparing perfumes and ointments – ON the Sabbath itself.

“Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome”

These are the same women named earlier in 15:40 and 15:47.

“might go to anoint Jesus' body”

Customs had been abridged because of the short interval of time between removing Jesus' body from the cross and his interment.

Joseph of Arimathea had had to act quickly, and the women had watched the interment.

The women now hope to complete the process as an act of devotion.

Mark 16:2 (NIV)

Very early on the first day of the week, just after sunrise, they were on their way to the tomb

“very early ... just after sunrise”

It is probably around 5:00 am.

“first day of the week”

That is, Sunday.

“on their way to the tomb”

They know the way, and the correct place, having seen it when Joseph interred the body (see 15:47).

Mark 16:3 (NIV)

and they asked each other, “Who will roll the stone away from the entrance of the tomb?”

“Who will roll the stone away?”

The women’s only concern here, in Mark’s Gospel, is gaining ACCESS to the tomb, not gaining PERMISSION.

But note that in Matthew 27:66-28:4, there is a guard posted, there is an angel there upon their arrival, who has already rolled away the stone in an earthquake!

Here, in Mark, there is no such description – the women simply arrive to find that the stone has already been moved.

This stone would have been five to six feet in diameter.

The thickness of such stones was variable.

They typically weighed hundreds of pounds.

Sometimes they rolled in a flat channel, but the usually just leaned tight against the outer wall.

The women here assume they will not be strong enough to move it, and are wondering who will help them – especially so early in the morning!

Mark 16:4 (NIV)

But when they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had been rolled away.

“had been rolled away”

Unexpectedly, the women’s problem is resolved, but they don’t know how!

“which was very large”

It was not easily moved, implying that perhaps a supernatural power is at work here.

Large, wheel-shaped stones were only used by the wealthy – typically, for the common person, a square block stone was used.

Joseph of Arimathea WAS a prominent man, and would likely have provided a tomb with a large round stone.

Mark 16:5 (NIV)

As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man dressed in a white robe sitting on the right side, and they were alarmed.

“as they entered the tomb”

According to John 20, Peter would have had to stoop to go inside:

John 20:5 – “He bent over and looked in at the strips of linen lying there but did not go in.”

The opening was typically about three and a half feet square.

The tomb itself would have been a small room with multiple “shelves” carved into the stone, onto which newer bodies were lain.

Eventually, bones would be gathered into an ossuary and placed in the back of the tomb. Multiple family members would thus be accommodated in a single tomb.

You could not really see inside, to this room, without entering through the small opening.

Mark portrays the women, then, as bending over to actually go inside the tomb.

Mark 16:5 (NIV)

As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man dressed in a white robe sitting on the right side, and they were alarmed.

“they saw a young man dressed in a white robe”

And, by implication, they did NOT see the body of Jesus!

This young man’s identity has been endlessly debated by scholars and students of the Bible.

Matthew’s Gospel says, explicitly, that it was an angel.

Mark’s language of “young man” can, and is, sometimes used Biblically to refer to an angel.

Sometimes, angels appear as “young men” and are later revealed to be angels.

The white clothing is also suggestive of an angelic being.

But this is inference and extension from the other Gospels.

Mark’s language is simply that it is a “young man” the women encounter inside the tomb.

Mark 16:5 (NIV)

As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man dressed in a white robe sitting on the right side, and they were alarmed.

“sitting on the right side”

Remember that we have seen earlier in this study that sitting on the right hand side is a place of honor.

This may imply that the young man has authority to speak for the risen Christ, as he is seated at the right hand of where Jesus was laid.

“they were alarmed”

The word may also be translated “amazed” or “distressed”.

The word implies intense emotion – as seen in Mark’s use of the same word after Jesus’ descent from the Mount of Transfiguration:

Mark 9:15 – “As soon as all the people saw Jesus, they were overwhelmed with wonder and ran to greet him.”

Both Matthew and Luke, in their versions, enhance the supernatural elements of the story here.

Mark 16:6 (NIV)

“Don’t be alarmed,” he said. “You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him.”

“Don’t be alarmed”

The young man gives the women the assurance that all is well, everything is as it should be.

“You are looking for Jesus”

The young man knows the purpose of their visit. He knows that they are followers of Jesus, who have come to honor him.

“He has risen!”

This is the essential Easter proclamation! Along with the declaration, “Jesus is Lord!”, it became one of the earliest creeds of the early church.

“See the place where they laid him”

The women know exactly where the body had been. This comment may be in response to their looks of disbelief or incomprehension.

Mark 16:7 (NIV)

“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.’”

“Go, tell his disciples and Peter”

This is given as a word of **COMMAND**.

They are to report back to Jesus’ disciples, and especially, Peter.

The denial of Peter is in mind here by his being singled out.

The fact that these women are the conveyors of the story strongly urges the historicity of the account.

Pious fiction would resist giving such an important role to “minor” followers of Jesus – whether in terms of the role of women in ancient Israel, OR in terms of their role as characters in the story that has been told.

“going ahead of you into Galilee”

Remember, this is where the disciples had been primarily doing ministry with Jesus before setting off for Jerusalem.

The implication is that the ministry of proclaiming and advancing the kingdom of God, that was broken off to make the journey to Jerusalem, is now to resume!

Presumably, the disciples have already begun their journey home to Galilee, leaving their dead master behind.

BUT ... they young man says Jesus will actually get to Galilee first!

Mark 16:7 (NIV)

“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.’”

“There you will see him”

Faith in the resurrection of Jesus rests on eyewitness, firsthand experiences of the risen Christ!

NOT simply on the empty tomb!

“just as he told you”

Note the final emphasis on trustworthiness of Jesus’ words and promises.

He has spoken of his resurrection in each of his passion predictions.

But he was also explicit about seeing them in Galilee when he predicted Peter’s denial and the abandonment of the disciples:

Mark 14:27-28 – “You will all fall away,’ Jesus told them, ‘for it is written: “I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered.” But after I have risen, I will go ahead of you into Galilee.’”

The young man’s words, that the women are to relay to the disciples, should not, therefore, be a surprise to the disciples!

Mark 16:8 (NIV)

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

“Trembling and bewildered”

The words suggest that their bodies are literally shaking with excitement and wonder.

“fled from the tomb”

The women run away, quickly!

“They said nothing to anyone”

We cannot help but note that this is completely contrary to what the young man had commanded them!

But the astute reader, the reader who has come to faith through the story, KNOWS that the risen Christ WILL appear to his disciples in Galilee, even though that story is not told.

Why? Because in the story, Jesus’ predictions have ALWAYS come to pass, and he has SAID he would meet them in Galilee after he has risen!

“they were afraid”

Are we surprised that their fear paralyzes them into inactivity and silence? Why?

Perhaps, Mark ends the story here as a way for us to ask ourselves – what will WE do with the story, and the command?

Perhaps, we are to assume that when the women recovered, they WOULD follow through!

Mark 16:1-8 (NIV)

SUMMARY

Mark's description of the events of Easter morning is shorter than that of any other Gospel.

But note well that NO Gospel attempts to describe the moment of the Resurrection itself.

Events SURROUNDING IT are reported, but the actual transformation of the Resurrection of Jesus itself is not.

This implies that the Resurrection is intended by God to remain a mystery.

We are able to grasp the FACT of the Resurrection, but we don't have enough information in Scripture to understand the nature of the PROCESS of Resurrection.

Mark 16:1-8 (NIV)

SUMMARY

The evidence of the Resurrection provided to early Christian believers consisted of:

An empty tomb, as discovered first by the women.

The young man's announcement, which interpreted the empty tomb to the women.

The witness of Resurrection appearances as recorded in other Gospels.

The witness of the Holy Spirit, convicting and convincing human beings of God's truth, drawing them to faith in Jesus.

Our privilege today, as Christians, is to similarly bear witness to Jesus' Resurrection.

Mark 16:1-8 (NIV)

SUMMARY

You will probably find additional verses in Mark's Gospel in your Bible.

In our final session, we will look at these additions, which contain a collection of traditions regarding Resurrection appearances of Jesus from the other three Gospels, as well as Acts.





Bibliography

The following materials have been used as sources for this Bible study:

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