

A WINTER BIBLE STUDY ON THE GOSPEL OF MARK

Tuesday, May 11, 2021: Session 11 - Readings

Jerusalem: "The Resurrection of Jesus"

Mark 16:1-8

Chapter 16: The Resurrection of Jesus

When the sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him. And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb. They had been saying to one another, "Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?" When they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had already been rolled back. As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man, dressed in a white robe, sitting on the right side; and they were alarmed. But he said to them, "Do not be alarmed; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised; he is not here. Look, there is the place they laid him. But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you." So they went out and fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.

THE SHORTER ENDING OF MARK

[[And all that had been commanded them they told briefly to those around Peter. And afterward Jesus himself sent out through them, from east to west, the sacred and imperishable proclamation of eternal salvation.]]

THE LONGER ENDING OF MARK

Jesus Appears to Mary Magdalene

[[Now after he rose early on the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, from whom he had cast out seven demons. She went out and told those who had been with him, while they were mourning and weeping. But when they heard that he was alive and had been seen by her, they would not believe it.

1. Background: What is the "longer ending" of Mark?

Mark technically has two endings—the long and the short. Most Bibles will have a note starting in Mark 16:9 pointing out that the last two thirds of the chapter weren't in the oldest manuscripts. The long ending's also missing from over one hundred other manuscripts, and many of the early church fathers write as if they knew only the short ending of Mark. In addition, the tone and style of the original Greek in the long ending don't seem to match the rest of Mark's gospel, implying that it was composed at the very least much later if not by someone else entirely.

So why do we have it in our Bibles? The easy answer is that the large majority of manuscripts do include the long ending, and the early English translations of the New Testament adopted the long ending without question. Despite scholarly argument against the authenticity of the long ending, translational tradition kept it in each new edition of the English Bible. Even now, it's included almost as a nod to that tradition, despite nearly all English translations pointing out that it's probably not original to the Mark's gospel.

Should we be worried? Absolutely not. Virtually all scholars agree that the last twelve verse of Mark were added by someone else—most likely as a way to harmonize the Gospel of Mark with the other four gospels. That doesn't take away from the Bible's reliability, but instead shows us the importance of careful reading. Mark has a point to make, and he constructed his book in a very specific way. In order to honor his design, this study covers only the short ending of Mark.

Jesus Appears to Two Disciples

After this he appeared in another form to two of them, as they were walking into the country. And they went back and told the rest, but they did not believe them.

Jesus Commissions the Disciples

Later he appeared to the eleven themselves as they were sitting at the table; and he upbraided them for their lack of faith and stubbornness, because they had not believed those who saw him after he had risen. And he said to them, “Go into all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation. The one who believes and is baptized will be saved; but the one who does not believe will be condemned. And these signs will accompany those who believe: by using my name they will cast out demons; they will speak in new tongues; they will pick up snakes in their hands, and if they drink any deadly thing, it will not hurt them; they will lay their hands on the sick, and they will recover.”

The Ascension of Jesus

So then the Lord Jesus, after he had spoken to them, was taken up into heaven and sat down at the right hand of God. And they went out and proclaimed the good news everywhere, while the Lord worked with them and confirmed the message by the signs that accompanied it.]]

BACKGROUND ON THE GOSPEL OF MARK

What Do You Do With The End Of Mark's Gospel?

Paul Carter: June 25, 2018

(Source: <https://ca.thegospelcoalition.org/columns/ad-fontes/what-do-you-do-with-the-end-of-marks-gospel/>)

I don't own a commentary written in the last 100 years that argues in favour of the longer ending of Mark's Gospel. Not one.

“It is virtually certain that 16:9–20 is a later addition and not the original ending of the Gospel of Mark.” (James R. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark*, Pillar New Testament Commentary. Accordance electronic ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 497.)

“The earliest Greek, versional and patristic evidence supports the conclusion that Mark ended his Gospel at Ch. 16:8.” (William Lane, *The Gospel of Mark*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1974), 601.)

“The undisputed facts are that everything which follows 16:8 in any surviving MS (manuscript) can confidently be declared non-Markan on grounds of attestation, style, and content; thus the Gospel in the earliest form in which we can trace it ended at 16:8.” (Dennis Nineham, *Saint Mark*, The Penguin New Testament Commentaries. (London: Penguin Group, 1992), 439)

R.T. France doesn't even consider it an open question. He simply explains why he isn't asking it: *“The purpose of this note is not to argue again for what is the virtually unanimous verdict of modern textual scholarship, that the authentic text of Mark available to us ends at 16:8, but rather to set out as simply and clearly as possible (which inevitably will mean some oversimplification) the data which have contributed to that consensus.”* (R.T. France, *The Gospel Of Mark*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2002), 685.)

Robert Gundry simply concludes his commentary with 16:8 and doesn't even bother discussing the longer endings.

And yet. When I preached on the ending of Mark's Gospel yesterday at my church and explained this, by way of explaining why I was only preaching on verses 1-8, the most common piece of feedback I received was some version of this: “How come we've never heard of this before?”

That's a good question. As pastors, few things are more important than helping our people understand what is and is not the Word of God. I should have done this sooner. But for better or for worse I did it yesterday. This may not be the answer but it is at least an example.

Even though scholars from across the theological spectrum are now virtually unanimous in understanding the Gospel of Mark as ending at verse 8 most Bible printers and publishers continue to include the extra verses. The ESV does so after a paragraph break and a brief

disclaimer. It then puts verses 9-20 inside a set of double brackets. The TNIV goes a step further and shrinks the font and puts the verses in italics.

But one way or another, they still appear in most modern versions of the Bible and therefore even if you aren't ever planning on preaching a sermon on the ending of Mark's Gospel you need to know how these verses ought to be handled. Towards that end I offer the following 3 suggestions:

1. Read them but don't treat them as Holy Scripture

I think you should treat the longer ending of Mark's Gospel exactly the way you treat *The Didache* or *The Gospel Of Thomas* – interesting but not inspired.

Reading the longer ending of Mark is very useful from a historical perspective primarily because it tells us about some of the early theological controversies within the early church. Verses 17-18 for example, appear to be making an argument for a more charismatic understanding of the Christian life and mission. About those verses James Edwards says: *“the prominence given to charismatic signs in vv. 17–18 stands in stark contrast to the reserve of Jesus in Mark with regard to signs and sensation (cf. 8:11–13).”*^[1]

Throughout the actual text of Mark's Gospel Jesus appears to be very cautious with respect to signs and wonders. He heals people because he loves people but almost every time he does he strongly warns them to say nothing to anyone – Jesus is aware that signs and wonders can become a huge distraction. Apparently, not everyone in the early church embraced his sense of caution. We see that certainly reflected in Paul's concern in 1 Corinthians. Paul wants to deprioritize without delegitimizing signs and wonders. He wants the focus more on love and less on particular gifts of the Spirit. The longer ending of Mark's Gospel reveals to us that this problem was not isolated to the church in Corinth. Apparently charismatic distortions of the Gospel have existed almost as long as the Gospel itself.

That's good to know.

So read the longer endings of Mark's Gospel but don't treat them as Holy Scripture. Don't try and prove your spiritual bona fides by handling poisonous snakes. Don't insist that everyone who believes ought to be able to speak in tongues. Read the longer ending of Mark as a testimony to some of the things people wanted the Bible to say, that thankfully, it did not.

2. Don't deny the problem – and don't be ignorant of the solution

If you are going to share the Gospel with people living on planet earth in the internet age you need to be at least somewhat equipped to defend the authority and reliability of the Bible. First year philosophy students and internet aficionados tell a story about the Bible that goes like this: “The Bible doesn't really tell us anything about what God said or what Jesus said or what the Apostle said. Rather it tells us what the early church wanted God, Jesus and the Apostles to have said. These documents after all, had to be copied and reproduced every 20-30 years. Do you really think that they didn't pull out a few things or put in a few things that served their own agenda? Of course they did. The Bible has evolved over time.”

That's the story – but like a lot of good stories these days, it has very little to do with the facts.

The truth is that the text of the Bible is the most rigorously attested text in the history of human literature. The truth is that when we compare all the thousands of scraps and fragments of the New Testament from all over the Mediterranean, from every stage of the reproduction timeline, there are remarkably few significant textual variants. The one exception to that generally happy rule is the longer ending of Mark's Gospel.

You should know about this problem but you shouldn't be freaked out by it.

You should know that scholars and linguists have known about this issue for over a thousand years. You should know that some of the scribes who made the first copies of the longer ending flagged it as likely unoriginal. Scholars have been investigating these verses ever

since. And you should know that scholars from across the theological spectrum – scholars who would deny the historicity of the resurrection and scholars who would affirm it – now agree that verse 8 is in fact the original ending of Mark’s Gospel. There is no serious dissent from that position.

Therefore, contrary to what your internet friends may say, this controversy actually proves the opposite of what they contend. It proves that the Christian community has been rigorous, thorough, transparent and dogged in their preservation and reproduction of the original text. Any potential insertions have been flagged, documented, researched, reviewed and if deemed unoriginal removed. Therefore we can be very confident that what we have before us is in fact the unvarnished, unedited, unevolved Word of God.

The Bible is a miracle and you don’t need to be ashamed of it.

3. Love and use what is there

Whether Mark intended to write more or whether he did write more and it was somehow lost or obscured, the fact is that what God has preserved is entirely adequate for Mark’s purposes. The Gospel of Mark in many ways resembles a well written High School essay. He presents his thesis in the opening verse: *The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.* (Mark 1:1 ESV)

Mark’s goal is to convince us that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. He then begins to assemble and present compelling evidence. He tells us that Jesus forgave sins, fed 5000 people in the wilderness, walked on the water, commanded the wind and the waves, had authority over demons, disease and even death itself. Everything Jesus did and everything Jesus said spoke in favour of his unique identity.

Mark also tells us what Jesus said about himself when placed under oath by the High Priest of Israel. The High Priest asked him: *“Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?”* (Mark 14:61 ESV).

And Jesus said: *“I am, and you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven”* (Mark 14:62 ESV).

Mark also recorded for us the words of the Roman centurion. Even though he was not a Christian and not even a Jew and not even up to speed on the things that Jesus had said and done – at the moment of his death he said this: *“Truly this man was the Son of God!”* (Mark 15:39 ESV).

And then finally, as if that wasn’t enough, Mark gives us one more thing. He gives us the evidence of the empty tomb. When the women arrive to attend to his body they find the stone rolled away from the tomb and an angel standing guard who tells them: *“Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has risen; he is not here. See the place where they laid him.”* (Mark 16:6ESV)

He has risen. He is not here. See the place where they laid him.

The empty tomb is Mark’s LAST WORD on the identity of Jesus Christ.

If you don’t believe my contention, if you aren’t satisfied by the words and works of Jesus, if you don’t credit what Jesus said under oath, if you aren’t impressed by the testimony of the Roman soldier then at least consider the evidence of the empty tomb. Consider the word of the angel: *“He has risen; he is not here. See the place where they laid him”* ([Mark 16:6](#) ESV).

What do you say about that? How do you argue with an empty tomb?

The empty tomb is Mark’s LAST WORD on the identity and significance of Jesus. If he had ended his story there no one could accuse his Gospel of being incomplete. He has said and done everything he intended to do. He has presented evidence in support of his contention that Jesus Christ is in fact the Son of God.

You don’t need to be embarrassed by the ending of Mark’s Gospel. And you don’t need to be embarrassed by the reaction of the women.

Many modern readers think that Mark should have had the women dancing or singing or clapping or something more positive than what he tells us. He says that they were terribly afraid. He says that they

were trembling and entirely overwhelmed. And that seems weird to us – but maybe it shouldn't.

In the Old Testament when people realized that they had been talking and relating to God they usually behaved like these women – they trembled with fear and with awe. When Samson's father realized that he and his wife had been speaking to God, he nearly had a heart attack. He said, "*We shall surely die, for we have seen God*" (Judges 13:22 ESV).

So maybe the reaction of the women wasn't weird after all. Maybe it was wise. In Psalm 2 it says: "*be wise; be warned... Serve the LORD with fear, and rejoice with trembling. Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and you perish in the way, for his wrath is quickly kindled. Blessed are all who take refuge in him.*" (Psalms 2:10–12 ESV)

The Bible tells us to serve the LORD – to serve the SON – with fear and trembling. To fall down and kiss his feet lest we perish in the way. For his wrath is quickly kindled. Blessed are all those who take refuge in him. So maybe their response wasn't weird after all.

Maybe it was absolutely spot on.

Maybe it isn't Mark's ending that is odd – maybe it's us.

Maybe we have become a little too comfortable with the person and Majesty of Christ.

Maybe we are the ones who need to be wise.

Because if Jesus is who he said he was and if he has accomplished what he said he would accomplish then the time is fulfilled, the Kingdom of God is at hand and everyone who is wise unto salvation ought to repent and believe in this Gospel.

Because this IS the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God!

^[1]James R. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark*, Pillar New Testament Commentary. Accordance electronic ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 499.