

May 17, 2026

HE IS RISEN INDEED

Mark 16:1-8

(15 of 15 in a series through Mark 10-16)

As we end our study through Mark's gospel this morning, I want to use our time to answer three questions: 1) How is Mark testifying to Jesus' resurrection? 2) What do we make of the angel singling out Peter? And 3) Why are we ending this series at Mark 16:8? I think if we can answer those three questions, we'll have seen why it is that Mark wrote these eight verses that we're looking at this morning. So, let's start with our first question: How is Mark testifying to Jesus' resurrection?

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Here's why I'm asking this question. I think part of why Mark writes this resurrection account as he does is because he's making an apologetic. That is, he's showing some details about how this happened in order to combat those who would say that Jesus never rose from the dead. After all, we know from other gospel accounts that one of the lies that was spread in those days was that Jesus' disciples had simply stole Jesus' body to make it look like he's been raised from the dead. And though Mark doesn't give as many details about that Easter Sunday morning as some of the other gospel writers, he chooses the details he does include (I believe) in order to show that the resurrection really happened.

Now, the obvious details he points to in order to show Jesus rose from the grave is that he tells us that on that Easter Sunday morning, the women came to the tomb, it was empty, and an angel told them that Jesus, who was crucified, had risen and his body was no longer in the tomb. As those who rightly see the Bible as God's Word, that's enough. But I think he equips us with a couple of other notes to push back against those who are skeptical.

Now, again, there is so much we could say in defense of the truth that Jesus rose bodily from the grave. We could note that his followers were willing to die for this, that Paul went from being an enemy of Jesus and one who persecuted those who claimed Jesus rose to being one who proclaimed that Christ had raised and was martyred for it, and we could point to all the resurrection appearances of Jesus, including appearing to over 500 at one time. And we could say more. But Mark mentions none of those things, and so I want to limit us to seeing how Mark himself pushes back against this accusation that the disciples themselves stole Jesus' body and then falsely claimed that Jesus had risen.

I think there are two notes in our text that help push back against this. First, Mark notes that the women were the first witnesses of the resurrection and the ones who talked to the angel. The reason this bears authenticity is because women were treated as second-class citizens in that culture. They couldn't even bear witness in court. And so, if you were going to steal Jesus' body and make up the claim that he rose from the dead, you'd definitely not have women as the first

witnesses to the empty tomb. I mean, if you're fabricating a story and willing to die for it, you'd do better than that. It'd be like us fabricating some crazy claim and making our claim depending on some three and four-year-old children witnessing it. That's not a lot different than what Mark is saying here. He tells us the women were the first to see the empty tomb and heard from the angel that Christ had risen not because that was his elaborate scheme to ground his crazy tale. That would be foolish. He says it because they really were the first witnesses to the empty tomb and really did hear that from the angel.

Second, Mark makes clear that Jesus' disciples didn't anticipate the resurrection. When the women are on their way to the tomb that Sunday morning, they're not going to see if Jesus had risen. Rather, they're going to anoint his corpse with spices and, remembering the large stone blocking the tomb's entrance, become anxious about how they're going to get it out of the way. That's not the approach of people who anticipate the resurrection. Then, when the angel tells them Jesus had risen, their response isn't to say, "Oh, just like we thought." Rather, they're terrified, gripped with fear, run away, and initially say nothing. In other words, if the disciples were going to steal Jesus' body and fabricate this claim that he'd risen, they would have needed to anticipate the possibility of Jesus' resurrection in the first place, but they had no category for it. They thought that he'd still be in the tomb that Easter Sunday morning. So, with these two notes, Mark helps to remind us that Jesus really did rise from the dead. Now, for the second question: Why did the angel single out Peter?

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You'll notice that the angel says to the women, "But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going before you to Galilee" (v. 7). So, why single out Peter? Well, the gospel of Mark has always been thought of as Peter's gospel in that he's been the understood source for Mark's writing. But Peter's self-interest would only explain why Mark chose to record it, perhaps. But it doesn't explain why the angel *said it*. And I think the answer is that the angel says this because the last time we saw Peter, he was weeping for having denied Jesus three times. And now, the angel is telling him that he is not hopeless.

In fact, I think there's a good parallel in the angel's words to what had happened when Jesus was arrested. All his disciples fled, but Peter did something worse and denied him three times. Now, the angel, showing God's restoring grace tells the women to communicate to all those who abandoned Jesus (his disciples) and the one who denied him (Peter). He's saying, "You're not hopeless because of what you did."

And indeed he wasn't. Not only would the resurrected Lord eventually meet up with Peter, but this one who was cowardly and didn't want to be identified with his Lord eventually boldly preached, was persecuted, and even was martyred for the sake of his Lord. That turn from cowardly to bold is itself another piece of evidence for the reality of the resurrection.

But the words of the angel that day singling out Peter is a reminder that the Lord loves, saves, and forgives us—as *individuals*. He didn't set his love on a mass of people that happened to

include you. He set his love on you. He doesn't forgive the church. He forgives you. And though he loves the church and died for her, Paul also can say that Christ loved me and gave himself for me. The reason Peter is singled out is because our Lord is so gracious, loving, and personal in dealing with us, his people.

And now let's ask what is perhaps the prevailing question we have in our minds. Why are we stopping this series at Mark 16:8.

Why are we stopping this series at Mark 16:8?

The reason this question must be asked is because our Bibles do have more verses so that this last chapter runs all the way to verse 20. But I believe the last words Mark wrote in his gospel were the words of verse 8, namely, "And they went out and fled from the tomb, for trembling and astonishment had seized them, and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid." Now, that might seem like an odd argument to make, and it can definitely feel like that would be an odd way for Mark to conclude his gospel, so let me tell you why I think that verses 9-20 weren't written by Mark.

First, we need to understand that when the New Testament authors were writing the books that make up the New Testament, we didn't have a copy machine so that Mark could write this gospel and then go out and make exact replicas of what he'd written. Rather, there were scribes who would take the letters and hand write out copies of them. And then they'd pass that along and make more copies, and so on. And over time, some copies were lost or destroyed during times of persecution or war, and so we don't have the original documents that the New Testament writers wrote but only copies (and copies of copies).

Well, though the original New Testament documents were without error, occasionally these copyists *would* make an error. Sometimes one word would sound like another word, so they'd write down the wrong word or skip a line in the copying process or the like. And if one copyists made an error along the way, you'd see that error show up in later copies of manuscripts because now people would be copying his manuscript with that error. But all it takes is comparing the manuscripts available to us, see what changes (or errors) were made along the way, compare to the earliest and best manuscripts available to us, and it is pretty easy to see what the original manuscript actually said and how some errors had crept in during the copying process.

Now, hold that in mind, and I want to explain another way an error could be made. Actually, it's almost hard to call this one an error because it would be done intentionally. Sometimes a scribe would read a verse and think that he could make this verse a little easier to understand if he added a few words. This may especially be the case if he knew another verse in the Bible added words of explanation much like he himself wanted to add here. Now, he's know he's adding to the Bible but he'd probably think, "This will help the reader understand, and it's biblical, occurring in another place in the Bible."

Let me show you an example of this from an earlier place in Mark. If you look at Mark 11:25, you'll see that Jesus said, "And whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father also who is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses." And at that point our pew Bibles (the ESV) have a footnote that says, "Some manuscripts add: 'But if you do not forgive neither will your Father who is in heaven forgive your trespasses.'"

That line doesn't appear in the earliest and best manuscripts we have, so I don't think Mark wrote it. But it's pretty evident what a scribe did there, isn't it? The scribe would have been familiar with Matthew 6:14-15. There, Jesus had said that if we forgive others their trespasses, our heavenly Father would forgive us—just like Mark wrote in 11:25. But then Matthew added, "But if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses." So, when the scribe was copying Mark's words in 11:25, he added the words that he knew from Matthew 6:15. After all, he probably thought they clarified things a bit, and what he wrote was certainly biblical, since those words he had added to Mark 11 occur in Matthew's gospel. Moreover, it's not only biblical but, in the mind of the scribe, would help clarify things for the reader. Do you see how that might work?

Well, I think the same thing happened with Mark 16:9-20. I think these words were added by a scribe who thought these additional words would be helpful for the reader, and then other copyists started copying his copy with this addition, and so on. There are a number of reasons why I think that's the case.¹ First, the earliest and best manuscripts don't have verses 9-20. They end at verse 8. That's the strongest evidence. But there's more. Some early church fathers—like Origen and Clement of Alexandria—show no knowledge of any verses after Mark 16:8, which they certainly would have if verses 9-20 had originally appeared in Mark's gospel. And though some of the later copies have verses 9-20, even some of those have scribal notes that these verses weren't present in the earliest manuscripts.

Also, when you look closely at verses 9-20, it reads like a compilation of resurrection appearances that are cited in the other gospels. Verses 9-10 recount the appearance to Mary Magdalene, as recorded in John's gospel (John 20:11-18), and the reference to her having demons cast out of her is recorded in Luke 8:2. Verses 12-13, about Jesus appearing to the two disciples, is found in Luke 24:13-35, as we read of the two men on their way to Emmaus. Jesus' commission, ascension, and world-wide proclamation of the gospel in verses 15-20 is found in Luke 24 and Acts. In other words, all the additional details of these verses are found in other places in the gospels, so a scribe would have comforted himself by telling himself that what he's adding here is biblical.

Finally, the language and writing in verses 9-20 don't fit with the rest of the letter. There are fifteen words used in those verses that don't appear anywhere else in the gospel. Verse 9 begins with a masculine participle, referring to Jesus while verse 8 had ended speaking of the women.

¹ A number of these arguments can be found in: Mark Strauss, *Mark*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), 728-29.

Magy Magdeline is introduced to us in verse 9 as if she's a new character in the story, though Mark has spoken of her in three previous episodes (15:40, 47; 16:1). And, for that matter, the other women that were commissioned by the angel to tell Peter and the disciples about Jesus' resurrection disappear from the scene altogether after verse 8 and only Mary Magdelienne becomes the focus. And, finally, though verse 7 speaks of Jesus going before them to Galilee, the appearances of Jesus in verses 9-20 all occur not there but in and around Jerusalem. In other words, it's quite clear to me that verses 9-20 were an addition by a scribe who pulled from other gospel references to Jesus' post-resurrection appearances and included them here. But why would he do that?

I think it's because Mark ended his gospel with the words, "And they went out and fled from the tomb, for trembling and astonishment had seized them, and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid" (16:8), and the scribe was uncomfortable with that ending. Moreover, he himself knew that much more happened. The other gospel writers had written about more, so he added it on as verses 9-20. But these additions weren't Mark's words. I think Mark had ended his gospel at verse 8.

But that raises another question. Why would Mark end his gospel that way? He ends it about the women hearing the angel tell them that Jesus isn't in the tomb because he'd been raised, being told to go tell Peter and the others, and then their immediate response was to be silent because they were gripped with astonishment and were afraid. Why in the world would Mark end the gospel that way? Well, I think I can tell you why. I think he's been building to this moment.

If you've noticed throughout Mark's gospel, each time Jesus reveals more about who he is or what he's come to do, those around him are gripped with fear, recognizing more of who Jesus is or what he's capable of. In Mark 4, as a storm was whipping around the sea while Jesus and the disciples were in the boat, they'd woken up Jesus, thinking they were going to die, and after he woke, he spoke to the storm and calmed the wind and waves. And immediately after doing that, Jesus asked his disciples, "Why are you so afraid?" (v. 40). When Jesus healed the Gerasene tormented by a legion of demons, we read in 5:15, "And they came to Jesus and saw the demon-possessed man, the one who had had the legion, sitting there, clothed and in his right mind, and they were afraid." After the woman with the issue of blood touched Jesus' garment and was healed, we're told, "But the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came in fear and trembling and fell down before him" (5:33). In chapter 6, when the disciples saw Jesus walking on the sea, Mark tells us that "they all saw him and were terrified" (6:50). When Jesus was transfigured before Peter, James, and John in chapter 9, we're told that "they were terrified" (9:6). In chapter 10, when Jesus tells his followers that he's going to Jerusalem and walks on in front of them, Mark writes, "and those who followed were afraid" (10:32). Again, every time Jesus reveals more of who he is or what he's doing, they're gripped with fear in light of what this means about who Jesus is. And now, it happens once more. The three women come to the tomb, Jesus isn't there, the angel tells them he's been raised just like he said, and they're gripped with fear. But why build to that moment, then? Perhaps a movie illustration can help us here.

In the movie *Inception*, Dom Cobb is a professional thief, who is able to enter into people's dreams and plant thoughts in their minds. Now, if you've not seen the movie, this is probably creating a lot of questions, but ignore them since it's not important for the illustration I'm making. So, Dom Cobb can enter people's dreams. That's all we need to know. But there's a risk in doing it. Being in these dreams feels so real to him that he's unsure at any point whether he's living in someone's dream or in reality. But he's developed a mechanism that can reveal to him whether he's in a dream or not. He has this top, and he spins it, and waits, and if he's in a dream, it just keeps spinning. But if he's in the real world, the top eventually falls over.

Well, in the last scene, Dom finds himself in a great setting. He hears his children outside playing. It feels like a perfect world. Then, he spins the top, but before it finishes spinning, he runs outside to be with his children, leaving the top behind. But as the viewer, you're locked in on the top, as the camera doesn't follow Dom. You watch it, wondering if it's going to keep spinning or fall over, wondering if this is simply another dream or reality. Then, as you're watching the top spin, filled with all kinds of intrigue at what will happen, the screen suddenly goes black, and the credits roll. And in that moment, if you watched it in the theater, the second those credits start to roll, the conversations start to happen. Everyone turns to the person next to them and says, "Wait, so that means . . ." and they begin discussing it. In other words, Christopher Nolan, the director, with that ending invites you in to discuss and debate. His ending won't allow you just to receive that movie passively.

Well, I think about 2,000 years before Christopher Nolan ended the movie *Inception* that way, Mark had already pulled it off. Think about it. We're following Jesus all throughout the gospel. He's teaching and doing amazing things throughout. And every time he does or says something spectacular, those around him are gripped with fear and start talking with each other about who this Jesus of Nazareth really is. And all along the way, Jesus keeps telling his followers that in Jerusalem, things aren't going to go the way they think. He tells them that he'll be betrayed, arrested, condemned to death, handed over to the Romans, and crucified. And then he keeps adding that on the third day he'll rise from the dead. And all along the way—we've seen it—the disciples don't understand what he means. Perhaps even as the reader, you're letting their confusion put questions in your mind. Surely, he doesn't mean that he'll physically and bodily rise from the dead? And then the moment happens.

It's early on Easter Sunday morning. Jesus' body had to be rushed to the tomb that Friday because they had to get him buried before the Sabbath began, and so there'd been no time to anoint his body with spices. And three women, who had seen where Joseph of Arimathea had buried him are on their way to the tomb. As they're going, it dawns on them that they should have thought ahead. They didn't account for moving the huge stone that sealed the entrance to the tomb. And then they get there, and the stone is already moved. And so they go into the tomb to inspect and see what's going on. And as they walk in, they see a young man dressed in a white robe. We know from other gospel accounts that he's an angel (Matt 28:2). And the angel says to 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. But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going before you to Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you" (v.v. 6-7). And the

women are terrified. Their hearts start racing. They can't speak. They're overwhelmed. And as they run away in terrified silence, the screen goes black, and the credits roll.

And everyone feeling this abrupt ending of an empty tomb and women running, saying nothing, being gripped by fear as the screen turns black, turns to each other and says, "Wait, so that means . . .?" And I think that's exactly what Mark is doing. He won't let his reader take in this gospel passively. You've got to engage. You've got to respond. You've got to say, "So that means Jesus really is who he says he is." You've got to answer Pilate's question: "What then shall I do with Jesus, called the Messiah?" And the only acceptable answer is that you must bow the knee to him, trust in him, declare our allegiance to him, and obey everything he commands us as the crucified and risen Lord. And so let's show that this is our response this morning as we come to the table. Amen.