

THE RESURRECTION

Mark 16:1-8

Mark's gospel ends in controversy.

Not only the controversy of the Resurrection, but a controversy regarding its original ending. Most Bibles set verses 9-20 in brackets noting that they are not included in the earliest copies of the Gospel of Mark.

Let's open our Bibles to Mark 16.

THE CONTROVERSIAL ENDING OF MARK (16:1-8 with 9-20)

Mark 16:1-20 (ESV)

¹ When the Sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him. ² And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb. ³ And they were saying to one another, "Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance of the tomb?" ⁴ And looking up, they saw that the stone had been rolled back—it was very large. ⁵ And entering the tomb, they saw a young man sitting on the right side, dressed in a white robe, and they were alarmed. ⁶ And he said 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. ⁷ 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." ⁸ 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.

⁹ *[[Now when he rose early on the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, from whom he had cast out seven demons. ¹⁰ She went and told those who had been with him, as they mourned and wept. ¹¹ But when they heard that he was alive and had been seen by her, they would not believe it.*

¹² *After these things he appeared in another form to two of them, as they were walking into the country. ¹³ And they went back and told the rest, but they did not believe them.*

¹⁴ *Afterward he appeared to the eleven themselves as they were reclining at table, and he rebuked them for their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they had not believed those who saw him after he had risen. ¹⁵ And he said to them, "Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation. ¹⁶ Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned. ¹⁷ And these signs will accompany those who believe: in my name they will cast out demons; they will speak in new tongues; ¹⁸ they will pick up serpents with their hands; and if they drink any deadly poison, it will not hurt them; they will lay their hands on the sick, and they will recover."*

¹⁹ *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. ²⁰ And they went out and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them and confirmed the message by accompanying signs.]]*

So what about verses 9-20?

I think the evidence indicates verses 9-20 are not the original ending; in other words, verses 9-20 were added later by someone other than John Mark. The Gospel of Mark ends with verse 8. The major facts that convince me are these: first, verses 9-20 are not included in the earliest copies of the Gospel of Mark. Second, there are multiple different endings in various copies. Third, the vocabulary and writing style contained in these verses is very different than the rest of the book. Fourth, it is more likely these verses were added than that they were removed; the abruptness of Mark's ending at verse 8 likely prompted the addition.

Verses 9-20 reflect details recorded in Matthew, Mark and Luke and in the book of Acts. They are historically accurate, but they are not the words of John Mark inspired by the Holy Spirit.

Opponents of Christianity and the Bible seize on this as an example that the Bible has been changed down through the years and cannot be trusted. But they do not understand the process by which our present text has come down to us. We have thousands of copies of the New Testament that date back very closely to when the original manuscripts were written. These copies have been rigorously compared to give us the text we have today.

Greg Koukl of *Stand to Reason* illustrates how the process works.

Reconstructing Aunt Sally's Letter

Pretend your Aunt Sally has a dream in which she learns the recipe for an elixir that would continuously maintain her youth. When she wakes up, she scribbles the directions on a scrap of paper, then runs into the kitchen to make up her first glass. In a few days her appearance is transformed. Sally is a picture of radiant youth because of her daily dose of what comes to be known as "Aunt Sally's Secret Sauce."

Sally is so excited she sends hand-written instructions to her three bridge partners (Aunt Sally is still in the technological dark ages--no photocopier) giving detailed instructions on how to make the sauce. They, in turn, make copies which each sends to ten of her own friends.

All is going well until one day Aunt Sally's pet schnauzer eats the original copy of the recipe. Sally is beside herself. In a panic she contacts her three friends who have mysteriously suffered similar mishaps. Their copies are gone, too, so the alarm goes out to their friends in an attempt to recover the original wording.

They finally round up all the surviving hand-written copies, twenty-six in all. When they spread them out on the kitchen table, they immediately notice some differences. Twenty-three of the copies are exactly the same. One has a misspelled word, though, one has two phrases inverted ("mix then chop" instead of "chop then mix") and one includes an ingredient that none of the others has on its list.

Here is the critical question: Do you think Aunt Sally can accurately reconstruct her original recipe? Of course she could. The misspelled words can easily be

corrected, the single inverted phrase can be repaired, and the extra ingredient can be ignored.

This, in simplified form, is how the science of textual criticism works. Textual critics are academics who reconstruct a missing original from existing manuscripts that are generations removed from the autograph.

The science of textual criticism is used to test all documents of antiquity--not just religious texts--including historical and literary writings. It's not a theological enterprise based on haphazard hopes and guesses; it's a linguistic exercise that follows a set of established rules. Textual criticism allows an alert critic to determine the extent of possible corruption of any work.¹

So we don't need to worry that our Bibles have been corrupted or are not reliable; in fact, just the opposite is true. We can be very confident we are reading what the original manuscripts contained.

And in his original manuscript John Mark did, indeed, choose to end his gospel account very, very abruptly!

THE RESURRECTION (16:1-8)

Mark 16:1-8 (ESV)

¹ When the Sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him. ² And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb. ³ And they were saying to one another, "Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance of the tomb?" ⁴ And looking up, they saw that the stone had been rolled back—it was very large. ⁵ And entering the tomb, they saw a young man sitting on the right side, dressed in a white robe, and they were alarmed. ⁶ And he said 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. ⁷ 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." ⁸ 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.

Why did Mark end his gospel so abruptly?

No appearances of the resurrected Jesus.

No mention of the disciples except in the angel's instructions.

Nothing but the three women encountering the empty tomb and the angel.

The gospel ends with a statement about the women leaving in fear and telling no one (16:8). There is irony - when Jesus asked people not to reveal his identity they did so (7:31-37); but when they were asked to do so, they failed.

So why did Mark end his gospel so abruptly?

I believe the answer lies in the angel's instructions.

¹ <http://www.str.org/blog/aunt-sally-s-secret-recipe#.V31t7pMrJE4>

And he said 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.⁷ 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.”

By ending so abruptly, Mark was artistically pulling his original Roman readers into the story. By ending it here the emphasis is on the decision that stood before the disciples; will they go to Galilee and continue to follow Jesus? By ending his Gospel with such incredible abruptness, he forces the audience to put themselves in the shoes of the original disciples. Although his audience surely knew that the disciples all saw Jesus in his resurrection body—and all, ultimately, embraced him fully—by ending his Gospel *immediately* he subtly invites his audience to make the same decision.

But why is there any question what the disciples will do?

Because of their previous abandonment.

What overcame their loyalty and love for Jesus? Fear. Fear of physical pain and suffering. Fear of suffering an agonizing death. Fear of what would happen to their families.

We might think, “Maybe so, but the resurrection changed all that. After the resurrection there is nothing fear.”

But was that really the case? Did the resurrection of Jesus lead to a change of heart among the Sanhedrin or Pilate? Did the resurrection of Jesus lead to mass acceptance of His messianic claims?

Twenty five years after the resurrection of Jesus, the original recipients of Mark’s gospel, Roman citizens, new all too well that Jesus’ resurrection did not lead to universal acceptance, but to persecution.

And so for Mark’s audience his abrupt ending begs the question: “Will your fear deter you from following Jesus?”

What will they do?

What will we do?

Will fear deter us from following Jesus?

How do we overcome such fear?

It is Peter, himself, who shows us the way.

1 Peter 4:12-19 (ESV)

¹² Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. ¹³ But rejoice insofar as you share Christ’s sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed. ¹⁴ If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. ¹⁵ But let none of you suffer as a murderer or a thief or an evildoer or as a meddler. ¹⁶ Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name. ¹⁷ For it is time for judgment to begin at the household of God; and if it begins with us, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God? ¹⁸ And

“If the righteous is scarcely saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?”

¹⁹ Therefore let those who suffer according to God's will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good.