

THE ENDING OF MARK'S GOSPEL
FROM EXEGESIS TO SERMON IN FOUR "PAGES"

- I. Exegetical noodling (exegesis = our *attempt* to state as *clearly and precisely* as possible the message that the *human* author of a text of Scripture intended to convey to its *original* audience; cf. Michael Gorman, *Elements of Biblical Exegesis*)
- Textual criticism: How did Mark close his Gospel?
 - NIV: "The most reliable early MSS omit Mark 16:9–20." ESV: "Some manuscripts end the book with 16:8; others include verses 9–20 immediately after verse 8. A few manuscripts insert additional material after verse 14; one Latin manuscript adds after verse 8 the following: *But they reported briefly to Peter and those with him all that they had been told. And after this, Jesus himself sent out by means of them, from east to west, the sacred and imperishable proclamation of eternal salvation.* Other manuscripts include this same wording after verse 8, then continue with verses 9–20."
 - Eusebius' *Gospel Questions and Solutions Addressed to Marinus* (see Parker, p. 134): "nearly all the copies of Mark" in the fourth century ended at 16:8.

 - Literary criticism: Can a book end with "YAP"? (γάρ, a postpositive conjunction and last word in Mark 16:8) Is 16:7–8 a fitting conclusion to a Gospel?
 - Mark's storyline takes Isaiah 40 as its template (Mark 1:2–3): Jesus' way as the way of the LORD, the path by which God returns to Zion (cf. Ezekiel chap. 10) to establish his kingly rule over Israel and the nations.
 - Predictions in Mark's Gospel whose fulfillment is not narrated: the advent of God's kingdom (1:14–15) in power (9:1; cf. 11:10; 15:43); the public announcement of Jesus' transfiguration (9:9); eschatological judgment (9:41–49 et al.); the age to come (10:30); James and John sharing Jesus' cup and baptism (10:35–40); the disciples exercising the authority of the servant over one another (10:42–44); the transfer of God's "vineyard" to new tenants (12:9); resurrection of the dead (12:18–27); exaltation of the messianic son of David as Lord (12:35–37); leveling of the temple (13:2 et al.); the disciples' testimony before all the world amidst deceivers, unrest, and universal hostility on account of Jesus' name (13:6–13); the desolating sacrilege and the disciples' flight from Jerusalem (13:14–18); the tribulation of the end time (13:19–23); the advent of the son of Man with his angels to gather the elect (13:24–27); the report of the woman with the ointment "in memory of her" (14:3–9); the renewal of Jesus' table fellowship with the disciples in the kingdom of God (14:25); *Jesus' reunion with disciples after their desertion* (14:27–28); the high priest and council seeing the son of Man coming at the right hand of power (14:62).
 - Can a symphony end with a caesura? Can a Gospel end in silence and fear?

•Historical criticism: For whom was Mark originally written, and how did the Evangelist hope this story (including its mysterious ending) would impact this audience?

—Mark usually dated ca. AD 70

—Situation of Mark's audience: a church that's settled and established, subject to temptation by riches and the cares of the world (4:18–19) but living with (at least the possibility) of persecution (4:16–17; cf. 13:13)

—Two big shocks for the church of the second generation

1. Generational transition in leadership (James martyred in 62, Peter and Paul in 64, loss of Jerusalem church in 66)
2. Experience of persecution by the Empire, under Nero (64)

•Exegetical summary: Mark's Gospel follows the story of Jesus' first generation of disciples down to a point that parallels the situation of second-generation disciples ca. AD 70, facing the loss of recognized leadership (Jesus in 30, James, Peter, and Paul in 70) and the prospect of opposition and persecution if they remain faithful to their Lord. Mark's second-generation readers know how powerfully God worked in the first generation of disciples for a ministry that established the very churches in which they (2d gen. disciples) came to know and serve Jesus (cf. 1 Cor 15:1–11). They should conclude that whatever difficulties they face, God can empower them for faithful witness and effective ministry if they will entrust themselves to him as the first generation of disciples ultimately did.

For Further Study

Robert Gundry, *Mark: A Commentary on His Apology for the Cross* (Eerdmans).

Largely misses the big picture of Mark, but an excellent source of detailed information about each pericope of the Gospel.

Larry W. Hurtado, *Mark* (New International Biblical Commentary; Hendrickson).

Balanced exposition; nearest interpretation of 16:1–8 to the one above.

Donald H. Juel, *The Gospel of Mark* (Interpreting Biblical Texts; Abingdon).

Frequently suggestive comments.

James A. Kelhoffer, *Miracle and Mission: The Authentication of Missionaries and Their Message in the Longer Ending of Mark*. Book-length study of 16:9–20, situating the passage within the second-century transmission of Gospel traditions.

David C. Parker, *The Living Text of the Gospels* (Cambridge Univ. Press), pp. 124–147.

Helpful with the textual question, unnecessarily unorthodox on the interpretation of 16:1–8 as the conclusion to Mark.

II. Sermonic puttering: A “four-page” sermon on Mark 16:1–8 (cf. Paul Scott Wilson, *The Four Pages of the Sermon: A Guide to Biblical Preaching*)

- Text: Mark 16:1–8 as conclusion of Gospel
- Theme: The triumph of God’s Messiah and his people will come by the power that emptied Christ’s tomb and led to the proclamation, “He is not here; he has been raised.”
- Doctrine: Resurrection and the life of the church (cf. Acts 2:32–33)
- Need: Power for ministry
- Image: At dawn on the first day of the week a group of women, disciples of Jesus, peer into the tomb where Christ’s body was laid the Friday before. [Why have they come? How long does it take their eyes to adjust to the light? What do they see? How will they respond?]
- Mission: Affirm to another believer that God has raised Christ Jesus from the dead and bestowed the redeeming power of his Spirit on us; affirm this conviction to a non-believer.

Sermon Suggestion: “On Looking into a Tomb on a Sunday Morning”

Page 1, Trouble in the Bible: (1) Textual trouble in the Bible. (2) At dawn on the first day of the week, the sun appeared to rise on the end of the disciples’ hopes on Jesus; it looked for all the world like time to pay respects to a dead martyr and move on.

Page 2, Trouble in our world: Trend-watchers and those who make their reputations by showing us the future tell us that we’re entering a “post-denominational” era in which “brand loyalty” is declining and traditional distinctives no longer matter; some go so far as to speak of “the death of the church” as we have known it. It might appear time to pay our respects to a dying institution and move on.

Page 3, Grace in the Bible: When the women looked into the tomb it was difficult to see, but what they were shown was a tomb that had been emptied by the lifegiving power of God and a future that still involved their following Jesus. The disciples’ hopes would not be disappointed, but they would need to be reformed.

Page 4, Grace in our world: When we really take the time to look at the “postmodern” world, what we see is an enormous spiritual hunger for meaning and sincerely held convictions coupled with a rejection of ossified dogmas held exclusively out of a reverence for tradition — a critique our churches were once comfortable offering in reference to “denominationalism.” There is a future in ministry for convictions that answer the deepest need of modern people — the need for significance, the assurance that my life matters to God, and that it matters whether and how I live my life to honor him. Our hopes for the ministry of the church need not be disappointed if they can be reformed.