

Mark 15:33-16:8      “The Time Is Fulfilled, and the Kingdom of God Is at Hand; Repent and Believe in the Gospel”  
December 27, 2009

We have come to the conclusion of Mark’s gospel.  
Yes, that is right – I did say “the conclusion.”

There are a couple of alternate endings that are found in later manuscripts,  
but they appear to have been crafted by those  
who couldn’t believe that Mark would have ended his gospel this way!

What makes the “long ending” (verses 9-20) suspect  
(besides the fact that it doesn’t appear in the earliest manuscripts)  
is that it reads like a summary of material from Matthew, Luke, and Acts.  
In other words, it doesn’t really flow from Mark’s narrative.

The alternative “short ending” (likely found in your footnotes)  
sounds very much like an attempt to tidy up Mark’s hanging ending.

And I’ll admit – v8 is a very strange ending:  
but we’re not there yet!

If you would understand the strange ending, you must first pay attention to the gospel.

I have used Mark 1:15 as the title for this sermon,  
because Mark himself refers to his book as  
“the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.”

And truly Jesus’ first words in Mark’s gospel  
form a fitting theme statement for the whole of the book:

*The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand;  
repent and believe in the gospel.*

When Jesus first said that, his hearers may not have understood.  
But now, at the end of Mark’s gospel, *we* understand.

*The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand;  
repent and believe in the gospel.*

### **1. The Death of Jesus (15:33-41)**

33 *And when the sixth hour had come,  
there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour.*

We saw last time that Mark structures his narrative of the cross around various time references:  
verse 1 – daybreak – he is delivered to Pilate  
verse 25 – third hour – crucifixion

verse 33 – sixth hour – darkness begins  
verse 34 – ninth hour – cry and death of Jesus  
verse 42 – evening had come – burial

Remember that the ancient day is divided into 12 hours.  
Every day has 12 hours of daylight and 12 hours of darkness.  
An hour (by definition) is 1/12 of daylight.

When Mark speaks of the 6<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> hours he is not referring to “clock” time –  
but to the general time of day:  
from the middle of the day to the middle of the afternoon,  
there was darkness.

Some have wondered about Genesis 2,  
“why is there no evening and morning to the seventh day?”

It was because God had entered his rest.  
There was no need for that rest to end!  
But due to man’s rebellion, man could not enter God’s rest.  
The seventh day – the Sabbath – the blessed day of rest –  
was also a perpetual reminder that man had fallen short.  
That is why Hebrews 4 tells us that there must be another day –  
a day beyond the seventh day –  
so that man *can* enter God’s rest.

This emphasis on a day beyond the seventh day runs through the whole OT.  
Circumcision is performed on the eighth day.  
The priests could only offer sacrifices on the 8<sup>th</sup> day of their consecration.  
Lepers were restored to the people of God on the 8<sup>th</sup> day.  
All the feasts of Israel are oriented toward the 1<sup>st</sup>/8<sup>th</sup> day.

In other words, Israel could only enter God’s rest on the 8<sup>th</sup> day.

And so here on the cross, darkness falls.

The seventh day ends.

And God goes back to work.

But this time his work is not creation out of nothing – creation *ex nihilo*.  
This time his work is a new creation.

This time he does not say, “let there be light” –  
this time darkness falls,  
because the Light who was in the beginning with the Father  
is now preparing to descend into the grave.

Or to use another image,  
think of the Exodus.  
What were the last two plagues?  
Darkness fell upon Egypt.  
And then God struck down the firstborn of Egypt.

Darkness – then death of the firstborn.  
The deliverance of Israel whereby God created a people for himself  
is now recapitulated in the deliverance of humanity in the cross of Jesus Christ.  
As God brought darkness and death to Egypt  
as an intrusion of his eschatological judgment against the nations,  
so now that final judgment is poured out upon Jesus.

The Father is now pouring out his wrath and curse –  
the final judgment that we deserved –  
the eschatological wrath that was promised to rebellious humanity.

*34 And at the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, “Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?”*

Jesus takes on his own lips the cry of David in Psalm 22.

*which means, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”*

The Son of David must take upon himself the curse of Egypt –  
and if you think back to Deuteronomy 27-28  
God had told Israel that if they rebelled against him and worshiped other gods,  
then all the curses of Egypt would come upon them.

Israel has continued to rebel.  
And so the curses of Egypt come upon the Son of David.

And yet this one is innocent.  
There is no lack of faith here –  
notice that even as he takes the curse upon himself  
he cries, “My God.”

In Mark’s gospel these are the last words we hear from Jesus.  
The last words we hear from Jesus is his cry of dereliction.  
By giving us only this word from the cross  
Mark wants us to hear the agony of Jesus on the cross.  
Mark does not explain it.  
He does not attempt to show how the one who is both God and man  
could be forsaken by the Father.  
There is here no Trinitarian speculation regarding how the *one* God  
could be divided in such a way

that the Son did not experience the union and communion  
that he had had with the Father for all eternity.

The gospels do not provide such speculation for us.  
Rather, the gospels bear witness that it *happened*,  
and in so doing, they tell us that the time is fulfilled,  
and the kingdom of God is at hand;  
therefore, repent and believe in the gospel.

*35 And some of the bystanders hearing it said, "Behold, he is calling Elijah."*

These are bystanders – neither the faithful nor the priests.  
They hear his words, but they misunderstand them.  
They don't understand the reference to Psalm 22 –  
they think they here the name of Elijah,  
which is not surprising, given the expectation of the return of Elijah.

*36 And someone ran and filled a sponge with sour wine, put it on a reed  
and gave it to him to drink, saying,  
"Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to take him down."*

This may be intended kindly –  
but the broader context still implies mockery.  
And even if it was intended kindly,  
it so plainly misconstrues Jesus' mission that its effect is mocking.

Elijah will not come.

Jesus wasn't calling Elijah.

*37 And Jesus uttered a loud cry and breathed his last.*

We are not told here what Jesus said.  
We are still left with "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me,"  
as the last words of our Savior.

But with this cry our Lord expires,  
and in his death he accomplishes what *only* his death could do:

*38 And the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom.*

Jesus had said that he would destroy the temple.  
And in his death he began that work by starting with the curtain of the temple.  
(There were actually two curtains in the temple –  
an outer curtain that all could see,  
and an inner curtain that divided the holy place from the holy of holies)

We are not told here which one was torn.)  
Notice especially that it is torn “from top to bottom.”

It is as though God has reached down from the heavens  
and ripped the temple curtain in half.

*39 And when the centurion, who stood facing him,  
saw that in this way he breathed his last, he said,  
“Truly this man was the Son of God!”*

Why would a Gentile come to this conclusion?  
It may be in part that Jesus is still able to cry out!  
After hanging on a cross for several hours  
his lung capacity would be severely impaired.  
And yet twice Jesus has given a great cry!

But this centurion does not merely say that this was an innocent man,  
or a great man.

Rather, his point is that “this man” (and he uses the word “anthropos”  
which highlights the humanity of Jesus – that Jesus truly is “man”)  
but “this man” was truly the Son of God.

The disciples have not yet figured this out!  
The priests have howled in horror at the thought.

And yet this Gentile centurion – with little evidence to go on –  
sees by faith that Jesus was the Son of God.

What did he understand by it?

We don’t know –  
but then again, we are not invited into the head of the centurion!  
Rather, we are to hear his confession of faith,  
and we are to believe and confess with him the truth:

that “this man was truly the Son of God.”

*40 There were also women looking on from a distance, among whom were Mary Magdalene,  
and Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joses, and Salome.*

*41 When he was in Galilee, they followed him and ministered to him,  
and there were also many other women who came up with him to Jerusalem.*

The disciples have run away.  
But these women still stand faithfully at a distance.  
They had ministered to him in Galilee –

and they continue in faith, hope, and love,  
as they minister to him in his death as they had ministered to him in life.

Only here at the end of Mark's gospel do we discover that these women had followed him.  
And they were his most faithful disciples.  
When all the men had chickened out –  
still the women followed him.

## **2. The Burial of Jesus (15:42-47)**

*42 And when evening had come, since it was the day of Preparation,  
that is, the day before the Sabbath,*

Darkness had already fallen on Jesus.  
Now it falls on everyone else as well.

What was Jesus doing in his three days in the grave?  
We are never really told.  
This has commonly been referred to as his “descent into hell”  
because it was in this time that he remained under the power of the grave.

In other words, on this final Sabbath day –  
which, incidentally, is the last Sabbath  
on which the people of God are said to have rested! –  
our Lord was engaged in his new creation labors  
of bearing the curse that we deserved.

But because it was the day before the Sabbath  
it was important for them to bury him before nightfall –  
since the work of burial was forbidden on the Sabbath.

*43 Joseph of Arimathea, a respected member of the Council,  
who was also himself looking for the kingdom of God,  
took courage and went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus.*

This was a brave request, to identify oneself with “the King of the Jews”!  
But Joseph was a respected member of the Council.  
He was undoubtedly wealthy –  
the fact that he had a grave near the city proves that!  
But the main thing that we need to know about Joseph  
is that he was looking for the kingdom of God.

In spite of the fact that Jesus was dead –  
in spite of the fact that everything had gone *wrong* –  
Joseph still believed the message of Jesus:

*The time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God is at hand;*

*therefore repent and believe in the gospel.*

He believed the good news of the kingdom.  
And so, as a faithful disciple of Jesus,  
he denied himself, took up his cross, and followed Jesus.

*44 Pilate was surprised to hear that he should have already died.*

It usually took much longer for a person to die by crucifixion.

*And summoning the centurion, he asked him whether he was already dead.*

*45 And when he learned from the centurion that he was dead,  
he granted the corpse to Joseph.*

*46 And Joseph bought a linen shroud, and taking him down,  
wrapped him in the linen shroud and laid him in a tomb that had been cut out of the rock.  
And he rolled a stone against the entrance of the tomb.*

*47 Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joses saw where he was laid.*

There is an interesting grammatical note here.

The word for “corpse” is neuter.

Usually when you have a neuter noun  
the pronouns are also neuter.

But the pronouns here are not neuter.

It does not say that they took “it” down from the cross.

It says that they took “him” down from the cross.

They did not wrap “it” in a shroud.”

They wrapped “him” in the shroud.

And they did not lay “it” in the tomb”

but they laid *him*.

A minor oddity of grammar, perhaps.

But one with profound implications.

This sometimes happens with the Holy Spirit.

Pneuma is neuter – but often the biblical authors will use masculine pronouns  
to refer to “him.”

Likewise, here *ptoma* (corpse) is neuter.

But the masculine pronouns are used to emphasize that Jesus’ body – his corpse –  
is not something extraneous to “him.”

It was not just an “it” that they laid in the tomb.

It was Jesus.

You cannot talk about “Jesus” without his body.

When I saw my mother lying there on that hospital bed –

it was my mother lying there.  
It is true that her soul had departed from her body –  
but we dare not say that the soul is the “real” you,  
and that the body is just an empty shell.

And the reason we cannot say that is because of Jesus.  
It is because *Jesus* was buried.

We do not merely confess that Jesus died and rose again.  
We also confess that *Jesus* was buried.

The hope of the resurrection begins here.  
The hope of the resurrection begins when we say not that “it” was buried,  
but that *he* was buried!

Incidentally, this is why the Christian tradition has *always* rejected cremation.  
You don’t need to do the fancy coffin and the expensive funeral.  
You can throw all the family bones together in one pit, if you like!  
(Though it would be prudent to follow state law as well!)  
We bury our dead because we confess that as we share in Christ’s death,  
so also we shall share in his resurrection glory.  
If a believer gets cremated, it is not as though God can’t find them and raise them up!

No, of course he will!

But the point is that how we *think* about our bodies *matters*.  
And what we *do* with our bodies *matters*.

And you see this as well in how Jesus’ disciples planned to treat his body first:

### **3. The Resurrection of Jesus (16:1-8)**

*16:1 When the Sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene  
and 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.*

Notice again the emphasis on the Sabbath and on the first day of the week.  
The timing of the resurrection demonstrates the coming of the new creation.  
The Sabbath is past:  
the seventh day is finally over!  
The first day of the new creation has finally dawned!

As the sun rises upon the earth,  
so also the Light of the world dawns anew as Jesus Christ is risen from the dead!

But they do not know – not yet!



They have come, bringing spices for his burial.

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.*

Plainly this is no ordinary young man – clearly he is an angel.

Notice the staccato nature of his message:

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.*

And then in verse 7 he gives a command.

The message of the resurrection of Jesus never exists as an end in itself.

It is always the basis for a command!

When you hear that Jesus is risen,

you may *not* say, “Oh that’s nice,” and walk away.

If Jesus Christ is risen from the dead

then *The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand;*

*repent and believe in the gospel.*

And so the angel says to them:

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.*

The ending is unfinished.

It is very strange that the angel commands these faithful women

to go and tell his disciples and Peter –

and yet they said “nothing to anyone.”

In Mark’s gospel the message of the resurrection is terrifying.

And that’s it.

The last two words of verse 8 are indeed very strange:

Ephobounto gar.

For they were afraid.

Ending a sentence with “gar” (for) is very odd.  
Ending a book with “gar” is unheard of.

Did Mark intend to conclude his gospel this way.

We don’t know.

It is possible that he wrote more,  
but that the end of his manuscript got cut off accidentally  
(or perhaps on purpose!).

If that is true, then we should conclude with R. T. France:

“What then, happened to Mark’s ending? We can only guess...  
and there seems no point in speculating.” (p673)

What is more important, however, is that what we *have* is Mark’s text  
as it has come to us.

And so whatever *Mark’s* point may have been,  
God has given us this abrupt ending.

(One could argue that the later additions could be seen as providentially added –  
but I’m reluctant to treat as inspired  
texts that seem rather obviously to have been tacked on.  
It is one thing to accept the post-Mosaic parts of the Pentateuch,  
because in the case of the books of Moses,  
they do not seem to have reached their final form  
for generations after his days.  
And further, there were still inspired prophets operating during that period,  
and so we can easily see how a later prophet might have updated Moses,  
but it is less easy to argue for a 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> century “prophet”  
updating Mark!).

So what is the effect of giving us this truncated message –  
this abrupt conclusion in which this all-important message of the resurrection  
brings terror and silence?!

Remember where Mark started:

“the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.”

All we have is the beginning.

There is some similarity to the book of Acts,  
which concludes in the middle of Paul’s ministry –  
before Paul is martyred.

There we saw that Luke intended to cut the narrative short  
so that we would see that the death of Paul  
is not really important to the message of the gospel.

Here we see that the response of the women and the disciples  
is not the central message.

It was not important to the Holy Spirit that we should hear any more than this:  
that because Jesus is risen from the dead,  
therefore:

*The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand;  
repent and believe in the gospel.*