



Mark 16 The Resurrection

Summary: Jesus rose from the dead, appeared to people, then commissioned them to spread the news – and, why we can trust Scripture.

We've come to the end of Mark's gospel and I need to take a few minutes to address something important before we dig in. You see, either in the middle of the text around vs 9, or in a footnote at the bottom of the page, you probably have a note saying that not all ancient manuscripts have the rest of the chapter.

So, what's going on? Is the Bible accurate or not? Well, the problem is, we don't have the original copy of Mark's gospel, the one Mark actually wrote. We only have copies of it.

Today, if you want to go see the original Declaration of Independence, you can go to the National Archives – it's there, the very first one, the original. You can't do that with Scripture. Instead, you can look at pieces and scraps of Scripture that go really, really, far back and get really, really close to the original, but no one has the actual original.

And the problem is, sometimes there's a little difference between, for example, an ancient copy found in Egypt and another found in Israel. So, what do you do?

The answer is, you document it. The footnotes in your Bible point all of this out. If there is ever a question about exactly what a passage should say, you'll find a footnote in your Bible telling you – there's some evidence this passage should say this, and some evidence that it should say that. We're not 100% sure which one it is – but here, here's everything we know. In other words, *no one is hiding anything from you.*

The problem is, we recently went through a phase of history where you could record and preserve everything. So now, if you can't guarantee me something is absolutely 100% accurate, I'm automatically skeptical of how much I can trust it.

But that phase is over. Now, with AI and advanced editing software it is increasingly hard to believe anything you see, hear, watch or read is real. It can all be faked.

We're entering an era in which we're going to have as much difficulty discovering and believing facts about the present as we do about the ancient past.

So, let me say a few things about the trustworthiness of Scripture since we're here.

First, certainty doesn't solve everything. Even if we had the originals for all sixty-six books of Scripture, I'm not convinced it would change anything because even when we have irrefutable evidence and precise data people still resist truth.

Take the issue of abortion for example. Science and technology have brought us to the point where there is absolutely no way to deny what is happening inside a woman. A viable human baby is developing. We can see it with ultrasound. We can measure how long the baby is, tell whether it's a boy or a girl, hear its heart beat. We can even see how much hair a baby has and perform surgery on the baby, in the womb! We have ALL the information we need to know – that's a living, growing, human being. And yet people still demand the 'right' to be able to abort that child - to end a child's life, as a matter of convenience and choice for an adult.



What does this have to do with the reliability of Scripture? I'm trying to make the point that precise, dependable data and certainty do not always drive our decision-making because there is more to life than the rational mind, there is also the eternal, spiritual soul that influences how we interpret the data and make our choices.

Now, I said there are, absolutely, some areas in Scripture where we have some questions – we don't have 100% certainty. We aren't sure, which of these possibilities is right? Most of them are tiny, almost inconsequential issues – none of them affect a single major doctrine, but every single one of them is documented for you – no one is hiding anything.

That's not the case for all religions. Take, for example, Islam. Muslims claim the Quran came down directly from heaven to Mohammed who passed it on to his followers in its pure form. Now, Mohammed lived around 600 AD – six centuries after Jesus, so there's less time for things to go wrong or get lost, and yet, there are still a lot of questions about the origins and reliability of the Quran today.

According to Sunni Muslims Abu Bakr became the second caliph of the faith, after Mohammed. A man named Uthman was the third. Uthman is said to have collected and standardized everything Mohammed received. He produced the standard text for the Quran, then destroyed everything else. But over the years, scraps have been discovered, and they have some differences from what you find in a modern Quran. They've even discovered scraps that have been dated to a time before Mohammed was born which causes all kinds of problems.

Listen to this summary of the current state of scholarship regarding the Quran. This was written by Dr. Fred Donner, Professor of Near Eastern Studies at the University of Chicago who has spent his entire life studying Islam and related issues. He had this to say, it's long, but important:

Qur'anic studies, as a field of academic research, appears today to be in a state of disarray. Those of us who study Islam's origins have to admit collectively that we simply do not know some very basic things about the Qur'an – things so basic that the knowledge of them is usually taken for granted by scholars dealing with other texts. They include such questions as: How did the Qur'an originate? Where did it come from, and when did it first appear? How was it first written? ... Who constituted its first audience? How was it transmitted from one generation to

another, especially in its early years? When, how, and by whom was it codified? Those familiar with the Qur'an and the scholarship on it will know that to ask even one of these questions immediately plunges us into realms of grave uncertainty and has the potential to spark intense debate.¹

The Quran contains the sacred Scriptures of the world's second largest religion, it's hundred of years younger than Christianity, thousands of years younger than Judaism, and it's got problems too. The fact of the matter is, no major world religion can produce the kind of 'evidence' of its origins that modern people demand.

If you are at all concerned about whether or not you can trust your Bible, I want you to know three things. First, no one is hiding anything from you – there are some things we're not sure of, and but it's all there for you to see. Second, even if we had Mark's gospel in Mark's handwriting, it wouldn't solve everything – even when we have absolute certainty, we still make irrational decisions. And third, this isn't just a problem with Christianity - no one else has a better, more trustworthy, dependable religious text.

So what do we do? We walk by faith. We do our best to understand and accept that not all things can be understood the way we want to. But think of it like a trial – the jury rarely makes a final verdict based on one piece of evidence – they draw their conclusion based on many pieces of evidence that are put forward. So too with our spiritual lives – we consider this, and this, and that – we might wish each of them was a little better, but when we put them all together, we find a reasonable enough foundation for our belief.

A faith that is capable of changing our lives. I'll tell you what I mean.

I am not Jewish. And neither are many of you. I'm a fifth-generation Californian descended from mainly European ancestry. So why am I here, living in the suburbs of Washington DC and why I am standing on this platform this morning? Because the gospel of Jesus Christ impacted my life and led to my salvation. God later called me into ministry then brought me, my wife, and our first child across the country to pastor a group of people I didn't know. We sold our house, left our extended family and wound up here in Northern Virginia.

I met my wife at a Bible Study. I was a Marine and she was studying to become a nurse. Today we're both in full-time ministry. Our children have Biblically influenced names. They attend three different schools but each is anchored in the truths of Scripture and the principles of the Christian faith.

And all of this because a carpenter turned rabbi, was crucified, buried, and raised from the dead outside of Jerusalem nearly two thousand years ago. Belief in Jesus of Nazareth – who He was, what He taught, and most importantly, what He had done, spread from Israel south

¹ Fred Donner, *The Quran In Its Historical Context*.

into Africa, east toward India and the rest of Asia, north into Europe then west across the Atlantic. And as the years went by so the borders of belief continued to spread – traveling across America and throughout time until they consumed my life almost thirty years ago in Southern California.

Many of you have a similar story – we are here, gathered in this room, not because we’re family, or grew up together, or have so much else in common, but because we’re drawn together by the gospel – the good news that Jesus died for our sins, was buried, and rose again. This truth has changed our lives. It affects our goals, our calendars, who we count as friends, and what we think is important.

There is life-transforming power in the gospel and we’ll see it on display today. Read with me –

Mark 16:1 Now when the Sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, Mary *the mother of James*, and Salome bought spices, that they might come and anoint Him. **2** Very early in the morning, on the first *day* of the week, they came to the tomb when the sun had risen.

These ladies were followers of Jesus. They had been watching from a distance when He was crucified. His body was buried hastily, there was no time for what we might call a proper memorial service, so the women have come to correct that now. They were not expecting the resurrection. They thought it was all over. But they want to honor His memory and prepare His body.



Today we often bury people in a concrete box set into the ground. Before you arrive with your family the staff at the cemetery have excavated a hole and placed the liner inside. Then you show up, put your loved one’s casket or urn inside the liner and when you leave, they put the lid on and cover the area with dirt.

In Ancient times, a cave was carved out of the hillside, and a round stone covered the entrance so you could go in and out, adding bodies over time. The stone would require the strength of several men to move though and the women were wondering how they would do that.



3 And they said among themselves, “Who will roll away the stone from the door of the tomb for us?”

4 But when they looked up, they saw that the stone had been rolled away—for it was very large.

Now, I want to make a small point here, and that is – **the difficulties we fear will sometimes disappear if only you press on.**

These ladies didn’t know how things would work out, but still, they got ready and they showed up.

Have you ever talked yourself out of something because you weren't sure how it was going to work? Well, how do you know it won't work? How do you know what God might do if you just show up?

So much of our anxiety and worry is about things we can't control or which never even happen. If your motives are good, and you've prayed and sought wisdom, then step out and see what God might do. The stone might be rolled away.

5 And entering the tomb, they saw a young man clothed in a long white robe sitting on the right side; and they were alarmed.

Luke tells us there were two angels at the tomb, but it seems that Mark only tells us about the one who spoke to the ladies.

6 But he said to them, "Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He is risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid Him.

The resurrection is absolutely central to the Christian faith.

- It is not enough to believe in God. Most of the world believes in some higher power.
- It is not enough to believe in Jesus. Many people, outside of Christianity believe that Jesus existed – Muslims respect and venerate Him as one of the five most important prophets.
- It's not enough to believe that Jesus died on a cross on a hill called Calvary.

People believe all of that and still put Him in the category of great teachers like Socrates, Gandhi, and Confucius – men who had something beautiful and helpful to say.

Christians believe Jesus died, was buried, and rose from the grave.

Why? Why is the resurrection so important? I'll give you three reasons.

First, it shows that **Jesus accomplished His mission.**

History is filled with men and women who laid down their lives for someone else. But none of these heroes ever returned from the dead. Jesus' death on the cross was not simply an act of bravery or courage or even misfortune, it was atonement – a payment for our sins – He died in our place and satisfied the wrath of God toward our sins.

And if the cross was the payment of our sins, then the resurrection is the receipt – proof that God accepted what Christ has done. And now, to those that will receive it, He shows us both His justice and His mercy in Christ. Justice because our sins are paid for, not just wiped away or ignored, and mercy because we were not the ones who paid.

Second, the resurrection gives us **hope for eternity**. If Christ has risen from the grave, then we have real hope of resurrection too. In fact, everything hinges on this. Paul would later write to the church in Corinth:

1 Corinthians 15:13 if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ is not risen. 14 And if Christ is not risen, then our preaching *is* empty and your faith *is* also empty. ... (17) if Christ is not risen, your faith *is* futile; you are still in your sins! ... 19 If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable.

Without the resurrection, Jesus is just another good man people wrote a few books about. But if He can rise from the grave, then we have hope of the same, which is what you want. It is hard to imagine not existing. We might want to escape this life, we might want out of present circumstances, but only so that we can be in “a better place.”

When we suffer the loss of a loved one, we draw sustaining hope from the knowledge that we will see them again. But if there is no resurrection, it's all done and over – you'll eventually become a pile of dust and ashes and the world will move on. The resurrection changes all of that, for those who will receive it, and that's because...

Third, the resurrection makes the gospel **good news, not just facts from history**. It brings the impact of what happened then into my life today instead of being an inspirational story.

I can be inspired by Winston Churchill's stand against the Germans, or Martin Luther King Jr and Rosa Park's stand for equality and human rights. But Jesus is different. Jesus didn't just do something good that I should emulate. He did something that changed me. Something that altered and transformed my life. I am no longer the same because of what He has done.

The gospel is good news about what *has* happened and how it affects me today. The actions of Churchill, King, and Parks changed the world I live in, *and the world needs changing*, but they didn't change *me*. The gospel changes *me*.

I have a different experience when I read Scripture than when I read a history book or biography because Scripture is not just about the life and times of Jesus the Messiah, it's also about His resurrection and the power that has over my modern life.

The resurrection brought transforming power from the very beginning, look at what happened as soon as these women discovered the empty tomb. The angel says:

7 But go, tell His disciples—and Peter—that He is going before you into Galilee; there you will see Him, as He said to you.”

These men had all disappointed and then deserted Jesus in the hours leading up to His death. But now that He has risen, He is eager to show them grace. He has not deserted or disowned them. His resurrection will impact their lives and they can't even imagine yet how significant the impact will be.

I want to emphasize the importance of this moment, especially for those of you who have backslidden. I want you to see, that He is eager to restore you. He knew what Peter had done, and He knows what you have done, or are doing. Still, His immediate priority is to say, *I want to see you*. And it's not to shame you, or punish you, or drag you face down through the mess you've made. It's to redeem you, renew you, and restore you because I've got greater things for you that lie ahead.

For those of you who are not where you need to be in your life or your relationship with God, the door is still open and Jesus, who always initiates reconciliation, is reaching out to you. [Tell the disciples, and Peter](#), that I want to see them again.

[8 So they went out quickly and fled from the tomb, for they trembled and were amazed. And they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.](#)

Here is the questionable part.

[9 Now when *He* rose early on the first *day* of the week, He appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom He had cast seven demons. 10 She went and told those who had been with Him, as they mourned and wept. 11 And when they heard that He was alive and had been seen by her, they did not believe.](#)

[12 After that, He appeared in another form to two of them as they walked and went into the country. 13 And they went and told *it* to the rest, *but* they did not believe them either.](#)

All of the information in this questionable part of Mark's gospel is repeated and verified by the other gospels. Matthew (28:9-10) and John (20:11-18) tell us about His interaction with Mary. Luke tells us about Him sharing with two disciples on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-35).

[14 Later He appeared to the eleven as they sat at the table; and He rebuked their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they did not believe those who had seen Him after He had risen. 15 And He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. 16 He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned.](#)

Matthew and Luke both repeat what we call the Great Commission (Matthew 28:16-20; Luke 24:46) where Jesus told the disciples to take the news of what He had done and share it with anyone who would receive it.

What is that gospel? I like to boil it down to three things that you can use as questions.

First, is there a God? Most people will say yes.

Second, is there a problem between God and us? And the answer is yes, we have broken His rules.

Third, what must be done about it? Well, like as with any broken rule, some form of punishment or penalty is deserved. And yet, Jesus offers to take that for us, allowing both justice and mercy. This is what happened on the cross.

Jesus wants us to share the *news* with anyone who will listen. And that's important – it's not advice, it's not self-help, it's not even a report of history, though it is a historical fact – it's the *news* of what He has done and how we can be forgiven, fully, freely, and forever, no matter what we have done, are doing, or ever will do.

17 And these signs will follow those who believe: In My name they will cast out demons; they will speak with new tongues; 18 they will take up serpents; and if they drink anything deadly, it will by no means hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover."

These are the things we find happening in Scripture. The disciples cast out demons and heal people countless times. Paul handled a serpent in Acts 28. The only thing we don't have a specific record of is the drinking poison. But the greater point here I believe is that *God gives us the power to do what He is calling us to do*. When we follow Jesus, when we make Him the center of our lives, we see miracles. Not every day, not always spectacular, but they do happen. He still reaches down and affects our lives today.

19 So then, after the Lord had spoken to them, He was received up into heaven, and sat down at the right hand of God. 20 And they went out and preached everywhere, the Lord working with *them* and confirming the word through the accompanying signs. Amen.

Jesus' ministry continues in Heaven where He intercedes and advocates for us. And it continues on earth as people share the news of what He has done and how it changes lives – like mine, and hopefully, like yours.

Earlier in our studies of Mark Jesus summed up His mission like this:

Mark 10:45 The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many.

And so, as we come to end of Mark's gospel, I want to ask: have you been served by Jesus? Has your life been ransomed? If so, you have something to celebrate. If not, why not? Why not be ransomed today?

We're taking time to remember His payment this morning by celebrating communion. To remember that Jesus Christ of Nazareth, born of a virgin, very God and very man, walked this earth, taught and touched lives and ultimately gave His life to change ours forever.

I opened this morning by sharing how what happened with Jesus two thousand years ago in Israel has shaped and is shaping my life today. I encourage you to take a moment now to reflect on how He's shaping your life.

Reflect on the way your life could change by receiving Jesus or on the way the shape of your life already reflects the imprints of His hand. Reflect on the power of the resurrection and what God has done for you and then if you have placed your faith in Christ for salvation, come, receive the elements and we'll consume them together.

If you have not, and you want to, simply pray something like this:

God, I see my sin. I see my faults and my failures and I know You do too. I ask You to forgive me, in the name of Jesus. I ask You to receive His payment for my sins. I want a new chance on life. I want to put You first. I need Your help, but I want this change. In Jesus' name, amen.

Let's pray.



Sermon Application and Discussion Questions

Mark 16 The Resurrection

Summary: Jesus rose from the dead, appeared to people, then commissioned them to spread the news – and, why we can trust Scripture.

- The gospel can affect where we live, what we do, whom we marry, and even the names of our children. How has your life been shaped by the Christian faith?
- Who did Jesus send to tell you of the resurrection, or how did He reveal Himself? Did you have trouble believing at first?
- Read 1 Corinthians 15:13-20. Why is the resurrection of Jesus so important?
- How would your life be different today if Christ has not risen from the dead? How is the resurrection more than just a fact to know, but a mechanism of change in your life?
- Have you ever had a moment where the stone was rolled away when you showed up? A moment when stepped out, not knowing how it would work out, and when you showed up you could tell God had gone before you and prepared a way?
- Why do you trust your Bible? What kind of questions do you have, or have you had about it's trustworthiness? What have you learned? What would you still like to know?
 - o If you were absolutely convinced of the answers to your questions, would anything still be hard to accept, believe, or trust?
 - o Why do people still make irrational choices even when they have all the 'facts'?
- What is your role in spreading the good news? How do you participate in this commission?
- What stands out to you most or what truth has impacted you the most from our time in Mark's gospel?