

Week 21: Mark 16:1–20: Passion Week: Sunday

Hook



Main Point: The mission of believers is to share the Gospel with the whole world.

Construction on the Berlin Wall began on August 13, 1961, when the Communist government of East Germany abruptly sealed off the border to stop the massive flow of people escaping to the freedom of West Berlin. The Berlin Wall—concrete, barbed wire, and heavily guarded—instantly divided families, crushed hopes, and over the next 28 years led to the deaths of at least 171 people who tried desperately to get over, under, or around it. Then, on November 9, 1989, everything changed. During a press conference announcing a new policy allowing East Germans to travel, an East German Communist Party spokesman—unsure of the details—was asked when it would take effect. He answered, “As far as I know... effective immediately, without delay.” Those words spread like wildfire. By the end of the day, a city that woke up in despair was celebrating in the streets, as more than 2 million East Berliners flooded into West Berlin to rejoice in a freedom they had only dreamed of.¹

Q: How would you react if your world suddenly changed dramatically for the better in one day?

Q: Have you received surprising news that changed your outlook?

Q: Would you share world-changing news or keep it to yourself? Why?

Transition: If the collapse of a concrete wall could ignite hope across a divided world, imagine the power of an empty tomb—God breaking through the ultimate barrier of death itself. Today, we discuss the resurrection of Jesus!

RECAP: In Part 1 of Mark, the story moved quickly, showing Jesus’ great power and the urgency of His mission: His preparation for ministry (1:1–13), His ministry in Galilee (1:14–9:50), His journey to Jerusalem (10), and His ministry in Jerusalem (Mark 11–13).

Now that we have arrived at Passion Week, the story slows dramatically, showing us that this is where Jesus' ministry was leading all along.

In lessons 17–19, we saw the events of Tuesday through Thursday night – the plot to kill Jesus; His anointing at Bethany; the Passover dinner; His prediction of Peter's denial; Peter, James and John unable to stay awake with Him in the garden; His betrayal by Judas; His arrest and sham trial before the Sanhedrin, which was illegal by their own standards; His appearance before Pilate; the crowd's rejection of Him in favor of Barabbas; and His beating by the soldiers.

Things really slowed down as we got to Friday and the Crucifixion. This is the climax of the story, the point that all hope seems lost. Except we know He will rise again. Which is what the last lesson is about – Resurrection Sunday and the hope and mission we find in it.

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Book

Main Point: The mission of believers is to share the Gospel with the whole world.

Mark 16:1–8 [Read]

Talking Point 1: Jesus' followers are supposed to tell others the good news that He is risen!

Q: Why were the women scared when they saw the empty tomb?

Q: Why didn't they tell anyone what they had seen at first?

Q: What do you think you would have done if you saw the empty tomb?

Because Joseph and Nicodemus had buried Jesus in a hurry, they had not completed the entire anointing ritual of the body. Bodies were normally anointed with oil, then rinsed with water, but that part had not been done. Mary Magdalene and Jesus' mother, Mary, had been watching where they had buried Him, so after Sabbath was over, they went to the tomb to finish the anointing of the body. Preparing a body for burial in two parts was not typical; it happened this way because they'd had limited time to finish before the Sabbath. Everything had happened so fast. His arrest, "trial," conviction and death all happened within 24 hours. Not only was an innocent man wrongly convicted, but the whole process was illegal. According to Jewish law, no capital offenses should be tried at night or on a festival day, and a trial for a capital offense should never been concluded in one day.² The speed with which it happened shows just how unjust His death really was.

For Jewish people of that time, giving a proper burial to a stranger was as important as giving bread to the hungry and clothes to the naked.³ Even more so, the proper burial of a loved one was a sacred act, particularly such an important person in their lives. He was their precious rabbi. Salome, the mother of James and John, had followed Jesus along with her sons for a long time and had even felt close enough to Him to ask for her sons to sit at His right and left (Matthew 20:20–21). Mary, the mother of James and wife of Clopas, was the sister of Jesus' mother, Mary, and so she was His aunt (John 19:25). Her connection to Him also had a family intimacy; she had watched Him grow up as a perfectly righteous young man who never sinned and had incredible wisdom, even from a very young age (Luke 2:41–52). Mary Magdalene had been freed from demon possession by Jesus and had become one of His most devoted followers, supporting His

ministry financially out of her own means, along with many other women followers (Luke 8:1-3).

At this point in the story, the female followers of Jesus took on a more prominent role because the men, except for John, had all scattered. This is theologically interesting because in their culture, women's eyewitness testimony was not considered reliable; it was not even allowed to be used as evidence in court. Had the disciples or Gospel writers been making up this story, the women would never have been the first eyewitnesses to the Resurrection. This detail makes the Gospel story even more believable. It is also interesting that God would have allowed the story to play out this way. It shows again how upside-down His kingdom is from the world.

When the women arrived at the tomb, they were surprised to find the stone already rolled away. They thought they would have to find some men to help them move it. When they went inside, they saw a young man in white sitting on the right side. Angels were normally clothed in white robes, and the right side is the side of honor. When angels appeared to human beings in Scripture, they often (but not always) opened with "do not be afraid" because angelic appearances in Scripture are overwhelming, radiant and terrifying, not cute or gentle. In this case, Scripture doesn't describe any glowing or booming voice that might make them afraid. It seems more that they were startled to find the tomb empty and a stranger there.

The angel told them Jesus had risen and would meet the disciples in Galilee, just as He had said two chapters earlier (Mark 14:28). That is where His ministry had begun, and it was away from the turmoil and danger of the religious leaders in Jerusalem at the moment. On a mountain in Galilee, Jesus would challenge his disciples with the Great Commission, just as they had seen Him transfigure on a mountain in Galilee (Matthew 28:16-20). He would appear to them and teach them about the kingdom of God over a period of 40 days before He ascended back to the Father (Acts 1:3). This was the same number as the years the 12 tribes of Israel wandered the wilderness before they entered the Promised Land. When He ascended, He would tell them to go back to Jerusalem and wait there until the Holy Spirit came upon them (Acts 1:1-12).

In the two earliest complete manuscripts of Mark we have, the Gospel ends at 16:8; the women fled from the tomb, scared and confused, and didn't tell anyone what they had experienced.⁴ Most scholars believe verses 9-20 were added by scribes very early in the process to give it a tidier ending that fits better with the other Gospels. This kind of abrupt ending may seem odd, but it fits well with Mark, who said he was writing "the beginning of" the Gospel about Jesus (1:1) and who started his Gospel just as abruptly, as if already in the middle of the story. The abrupt ending points to the fact that this was

only the beginning of the Gospel and the mission is now ours. Mark was inviting us to pick up where his story left off.⁵ With the women initially not telling anyone their testimony of what they had seen out of fear, Mark was asking his readers, what will you do?

Q: What fears do you have about sharing the Gospel with others?

Q: In what ways might God be leading you to step out of your comfort zone for the kingdom?

Q: Who in your life most needs to hear that Jesus is alive—and what might hold you back from telling them?

Mark 16:9–14 [Read]

Talking Point 2: Some of the first disciples didn't believe He had risen until they saw Him.

Q: Whom did Mary Magdalene tell she had seen Jesus? Why didn't they believe her?

Q: When did they believe? What does this tell us about faith?

Although the rest of the ending of Mark was not included in the two oldest manuscripts we have of the New Testament, it is included in the vast majority of them – 1,653.⁶ If this ending were not originally written by Mark himself, it was a very early addition by those who copied and distributed the New Testament. These scribes took their job incredibly seriously; this was sacred work to them. They would not have included this ending unless they considered it to be God's Word as well. Most of the content of these verses are found in the other Gospels, and nothing in verses 9-20 contradict Scripture in any way. The way the ESV has handled this text is appropriate, including it but noting that it is not included in the earliest manuscripts. For more information, [please watch this video from Senior Associate Pastor Jason Snyder](#), especially minutes 51:34–54:09.

Verse 9 tells us Jesus appeared first to Mary Magdalene, as John's Gospel says (John 20:11–19). Verse 10 says the other disciples didn't believe her when she said she had seen Him. This fits with Luke 24:11, which says the rest of the disciples didn't believe the women, that their words seemed like "nonsense." This word is only used here in the New Testament, but in classical Greek, it was a medical term for delirious speech caused by fever or madness. This would be an appropriate term for Luke, the physician.

It might make sense that the rest of the disciples did not believe the women, as women's testimonies were not considered reliable. Though they had been following

Jesus together, there were likely still traditional cultural dynamics at play. But the next two verses tell us they didn't believe the next two disciples who saw Jesus either. Verse 12 also fits Luke 24, when Jesus appeared to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, one of whom was perhaps Clopas⁷, the husband of "the other Mary" who went to the tomb to anoint Jesus with Salome and Mary Magdalene (Luke 24:13–35). Verse 13 tells us that the rest of the disciples still didn't believe them.

They only finally believed when Jesus appeared to the 11 Himself in verse 14. When Jesus appeared to them, He rebuked them for their unbelief and hardness of heart. The phrase "hardness of heart" is a term used of the wicked in the Old Testament, like Pharaoh, but also many times of God's own people in the wilderness and throughout the prophets, who called the people to repentance (Deuteronomy 29:4; Isaiah 6:9–10; 63:17; Jeremiah 7:24, et.al.). In Mark, Jesus used this phrase twice with His disciples, when they didn't trust Him during the storm although they had just seen the miracle of the feeding of the 5,000 (Mark 6), and at the feeding of the 4,000, when they were worried about having enough bread after having seen Him multiply the loaves before (Mark 8:17). How could they have had such lack of faith when they had seen Jesus do miraculous things in the past?

When Jesus appeared to Thomas, who had said he would not believe unless he touched the nail marks in Jesus' wrists and the hole in His side, Thomas responded by confessing, "My Lord and my God!" Jesus responded, "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed" (John 20:29). This is what faith is, "assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen" (Hebrews 11:1). The original disciples did not believe until they physically saw the resurrected Jesus, but thousands would believe based on their testimony and the testimonies of generation after generation for thousands of years.

Based on the historical evidence we have both in the Bible and outside of it, there is more evidence that the Resurrection of Jesus actually happened than not,⁸ yet it still takes faith to believe it. Why does God require faith? Why doesn't He just prove Himself to all of us, so all people would trust in Him? There will always be some who believe and some who will never believe, even if someone came back from the dead to tell them (Luke 16:31). In the wilderness generation, people who saw God part the Red Sea, bring water from a rock, and rain manna from the sky still didn't have faith. God has revealed enough for us to believe in the Gospel and put our trust in Him to follow Him. But there will always be some who believe and some who don't. This is the nature of the human heart.

Q: How did you come to faith in Jesus? Why do you believe in the Gospel and trust in Jesus?

Q: What evidence would you use to try to convince someone else to believe?

Q: What role do eyewitness testimony and personal experience play in Christian faith?

Q: Can you relate to the disciples' struggle to believe without seeing? Why or why not?

Mark 16:15–20 [Read]

Talking Point 3: As Jesus' followers, it is our mission to spread the Gospel to the whole world.

Q: Compare and contrast this ending with that in verse 8.

Q: Why are believers given the mission to preach the Gospel to the world? Why doesn't God just supernaturally reveal Himself to each person or each new generation?

This longer ending parallels the Great Commission in Matthew 28:16–20 and the mission given to the apostles in Acts 1:8, the continuation of Luke's Gospel. Instead of ending with the women being confused, scared, and not telling anyone what they saw, it ends with Jesus appearing to the 11 and commissioning them to carry on His mission of sharing the Gospel with the whole world.

In verses 17 and 18, Jesus was saying God would do miracles *like this* for His people as they shared the Gospel with the world as Jesus was commissioning them to do. This list describes events in the lives of the apostles in the book of Acts as they were spreading the Gospel to the whole world. At Pentecost, they spoke in new tongues (Acts 2), Paul was bitten by a poisonous snake and not harmed (Acts 28), and they healed people many times (Acts 3:1–10; 5:12–16; 8:6–8; 9:32–42; 14:8–10; 19:11–12; 20:9–12; 28:8–9).

This passage isn't an invitation to test God's power. When He was being tempted by Satan, Jesus told us not to test God. That is something Satan asks us to do, not God (Luke 4:12). This is a description of the miracles God would do in the lives of the apostles as they went out into the world to preach the Gospel. Signs and miracles accompanied the spread of the Gospel both in Jesus' ministry and the ministries of the apostles *because* it helped people believe the message they were preaching. This very passage says so in verse 20; they went out and preached everywhere as Jesus had told them to do and the Lord confirmed their message by the signs.

The focus on this passage isn't on the miraculous signs; it's on the commission. Jesus called His original disciples to continue His mission of spreading the Gospel to the world. But the Great Commission wasn't just for those eleven, it was also for the 120 who were with them in the Upper Room at Pentecost (Acts 1:15). It was also for the deacons who were commissioned in Acts 6:1–10. It was for Paul, who was called to the mission a little later (Acts 9:15), and all his coworkers such as Timothy, Silas, Barnabas and Mark himself. Mark knew this commission personally; he traveled on missionary journeys with Paul and Peter. The commission wasn't just for those first 11, it is for every follower of Jesus in every time and place. The question this ending of Mark leaves us with is the same question the more abrupt ending in verse 8 leaves us with – what will you do? Will you share the Gospel message with the whole world? This is the calling of all believers. Will you join the mission the Church has had throughout every generation?

Q: How has studying the Gospel of Mark deepened your understanding of Jesus? The Gospel? The mission of the Church? Your own faith journey?

Q: In what areas of your life could you be more intentional about sharing the Gospel?

Q: Is sharing the Gospel something you plan for—or something you hope happens naturally?

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Took

Main Point: The mission of believers is to share the Gospel with the whole world.

Q: What impressions did the Gospel of Mark leave on you? In what ways did the Holy Spirit minister to you through the Gospel of Mark during this study?

As we conclude our time in this study, allow Mark's emphasis on action to spur you on to greater faithfulness. Share the good news of Jesus with someone this week. Teacher, provide an example of how you might share the gospel – whether it's the Three Circles method of evangelism (<https://www.namb.net/evangelism/3circles/>) or something else. Challenge your LifeGroup to share the gospel "immediately", as Mark was fond of saying. Conclude your LifeGroup meeting with a prayer that the Lord would provide divine encounters today, setting the stage for wonderful Gospel conversations.

CHALLENGES

THINK: Reflect on how the followers of Jesus felt when they were first told He had risen. Why did they doubt? What made them finally believe? Why do you believe it took physical evidence? Why were they afraid? Now reflect on how they shared the Gospel boldly after Pentecost in the book of Acts. What made the difference? What does this tell you about your own faith and how you can find the boldness to share the Gospel?

PRAY to have the boldness and passion to share the Gospel with everyone you meet, using both words and actions. Pray for the courage to step out of your comfort zone to share the Gospel. Ask God to give you the power and wisdom to know what to say and do and how and when to say and do it most effectively. Now pray that the Church universal would be empowered by the Spirit to share the Gospel all over the world and that people's hearts would be softened to hear the Gospel message.

ACT: Reread Mark. Take time this week to reread all of Mark in one sitting. It's relatively short; it should take between 1 ½–2 hours. Set aside enough time to read it straight through, letting all you've learned over this course to be refreshed in your mind. Ask God to reveal what He wants you to learn from Mark and what life changes He wants you to make going forward.

¹ <https://www.history.com/articles/berlin-wall>

² Mishnah, "Sanhedrin" IV, 1

³ Tobit 1:17–18

⁴ Codex Sinaiticus and Codex Vaticanus, early 4th century. There are older manuscripts that are only fragments. Papyrus 45 is the oldest fragment, but it doesn't contain chapter 16 at all due to damage. T. C. Skeat, "The Codex Sinaiticus, the Codex Vaticanus, and Constantine," *The Journal of Theological Studies* 50/2 (Oct 1999).

⁵ Joel Marcus, *Mark 8–16: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary AB* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009).

⁶ Eight manuscripts have the following after v. 8 and also vv. 9–20: "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. Amen."

⁷ Craig S. Keener, *The Bible Background Commentary: New Testament* (Intervarsity Press, 1993). Note: Scholars believe Clopas and Cleopas were the same person.

⁸ See: Lee Strobel, *The Case for Christ* (Zondervan, 2016) and Dr. Norman L. Geisler and Frank Turek, *I Don't Have Enough Faith to be an Atheist* (Xulon Press, 2013).