

A Resurrection Epilogue: Mark 2.0

Mark 16:9-20

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These notes will address a few details from both sermons on Mark 16. As usual, this is mostly bibliography for further study and random notes/miscellanies.

On the short ending of Mark (that is, taking the text as ending at 16:8), see especially: *Endings*, Morna Hooker; *Let the Reader Understand*, Robert Fowler; *Reading Mark*, Sharyn Dowd; *Mark as Story*, David Rhoads; *Mark*, R. T. France; *Irony in Mark's Gospel*, Jerry Camery-Hogatt; and *Marking the End*, Lee Magness.

A good overview of all the issues involved in the Markan ending is found in the book *Perspectives on the Ending of Mark: 4 Views*, edited by David Alan Black. My view is probably most like Black's. While I do not agree with all the details of his reconstruction of NT history, I do agree with this claim: "Mark originally ended his Gospel narrative (comprised of the actual words of Peter) at 16:8 and then later supplied the last twelve verses himself as a suitable conclusion." In this volume, Black does the best job explaining why Mark has come down to us in both a shorter and longer version, both of which seemed to have wide acceptance in the early church. (Cf. Sinclair Ferguson's *Let's Study Mark*, which titles his chapter on v. 9-20 "A Later Postscript")

Bas van Iersel's *Reading Mark* points out that John's gospel also has a double ending; while reading Mark with the added epilogue certainly changes how we interpret and apply the gospel, that does not rule out the authenticity of a later epilogue. Literary analysis makes a strong claim for the fittingness of v. 9-20. For example, Mark has developed a Jesus-as-new-Elijah motif in his gospel; such a theme really needs an ascension to be complete (see Warren Gage's article "Jesus as the New Elijah"; Mk. 16:19 parallels the LXX's account of Elijah's ascension in 2 Kings 2:11). There are also obviously events recorded in these verses that fulfill predictions made in the earlier text of the gospel, completing the cycle of prophecies. Also, several key themes/words in the final section match the opening of the book. See Cornelius van der Waal's *The Covenantal Gospel*, 146ff,

especially his helpful chart on 147, which includes the following links: demons, to cast out, to believe, to baptize, to preach, the gospel, and Black, *4 Perspectives*, 68f. Here are some basic chiasm pairs:

1:1 King, Son of God // 16:19-20 sat down at right hand of God

1:2-15 Baptism and demons // 16:14-18 baptism and demons

1:16-20 disciples // 16:12-13 disciples

1:21-21-34 demons and woman healed // 16:9-11 woman healed of demons

I would add that the longer ending picks up on the “way” theme Mark has been building throughout his gospel.

Some argue the longer ending adds nothing of substance to other accounts. But see *4 Perspectives*, 72, for some unique contributions this passage makes.

The short ending (stopping at v. 8) has some interesting connections with the whole “new exodus” motif that Mark develops in his gospel. Rikki Watts has shown that Isaiah’s “new exodus” prophecies provide a framework for understanding Mark’s gospel as a whole. The original conclusion ended with fear and silence; note commands to “not fear” and to “proclaim” God’s salvation are prominent in Isaiah’s new exodus prophecies. See *Isaiah’s New Exodus and Mark*, 365ff.

Very few modern commentaries even deal with v. 9-20 since scholars generally reject its authenticity. Most preachers do not teach from it today. It can be hard to find any substantive commentary on these verses. For a defense of these verses as original, and a thorough exegesis, see R. C. H. Lenski’s commentary on Mark. Older commentaries like those by J. C. Ryle and J. A. Alexander provide commentary as well. One more recent commentary that takes up these verses is John Paul Heil’s fine volume, *The Gospel of Mark as a Model for Action*.

I am not really convinced by those who argue that v. 9-20 cannot be written by Mark because they differ in style from the rest of the gospel. These verses are very obviously a postscript, added later, and nothing requires that Mark use an identical style or vocabulary in this addendum. In fact, some new features, like the use of the title “Lord” for Jesus make perfect sense as a conclusion (see Lenski, 775).

N. T. Wright does not believe Mark’s gospel ended at v. 8, nor does he believe v. 9-20 are authentic. He believes the original ending to Mark has been lost. That seems unlikely to me both theologically (surely God would preserve his Word

for us!) and historically (surely the church would have copied and carefully preserved such a text, and if it was lost it would have been almost immediately replaced from memory).

I did not mention it in the sermons, but there is actually another shorter addendum to Mark's gospel, consisting of just a few verses, found in later manuscripts. But no scholars believe this could have been the actual ending, so I ignored it.

A good case can be made for reading verses 9-20 in preterist perspective, especially the sign gifts in v.17-18. See, van der Waal, 146ff. On this reading, the word "ktisis" is taken to mean not "every creature" but specifically the Gentile oikumene (cf. Col. 1:23). The sign gifts are then taken as special apostolic power signs, valid only during that era (Heb. 2:4; cf. Eph. 2:20 on the unique, foundation-laying role of the apostles). Tongues were not only a way of opening up the covenant to the nations, but signaled judgment on Israel, which was fulfilled in 70 AD (cf. 1 Cor. 14:21, Isa. 28:11, 12, Deut. 28:49).

I am drawn to such a reading in some ways, and I certainly believe tongues served as a witness against apostate Judaism in the apostolic period. But am not convinced by that "hard cessationist" reading, since tongues could also serve a more positive evangelistic function (basically a shortcut to Bible translation). I tend to think the gospel "Great Commission" texts extend far beyond 70 AD in Matthew and Luke, so why not Mark too? But this is certainly an issue worth wrestling with.

Mark 15 and 16 shows us that women witnessed the whole gospel – Jesus' death, burial, and empty tomb/resurrection.

The fact that the whole Christian gospel hinges on the testimony of woman is another sign that the gospel accounts are authentic. You can bet that if the later (male) evangelists could have told the story any other way, they would have done so. The fact that the whole Christian gospel hinges on the testimony of women is another sign that the gospel accounts are authentic.

In a sense, we're in the same position as the women at the end of v. 8. All there is to do is go and tell.

The resurrection was certainly not a matter of wish fulfillment on the part of the disciples. After all, they were stunned and incredulous. They did not even have the faith to hope for it. They really thought Jesus' death was the end, until absolutely irrefutable evidence forced them to conclude otherwise.

On snakes, see not only Acts 28, but also Psalm 91.

On drinking poison, see Rev. 12.

Whatever we do with these "miraculous" sign gifts, ultimately, the church herself becomes the sign/miracle that attests to the truth of the gospel. The sign gifts show us in hyper-concentrated ways the pattern of the kingdom.

Miraculous signs often accompany the in-breaking of a new covenantal order (e.g., the exodus period, the beginning of the prophetic era, the start of the new covenant). The special signs are transitional, attesting to the new work of God and to his messengers. After that, things tend to settle down into more "normal" patterns (though without excluding the possibility of God still doing miraculous things as he pleases). Miracles are often "speeded up" ways of doing things, e.g., tongues as a shortcut to the work of Bible translation, healing as a shortcut to mercy and medical work, etc. (cf. Jn. 2, where Jesus speeds up the fermentation process, turning water into wine).

On miracles and cessationism, I recommend Vern Poythress, especially his *Symphonic Theology*, which has an excellent discussion of miracles, and his essay, "Modern Spiritual Gifts as *Analogous* to Apostolic Gifts" (http://www.frame-poythress.org/poythress_articles/1996Modern.htm).

The “youth” or “young man” in Mk. 16:5, identified as an angel in the other gospels, is an enigma. The women don’t find Jesus in the tomb; instead they find this heavenly messenger. The same term for a youth is found in Mk. 14:51, when a naked young man ran away at the scene of Jesus’ arrest after the Romans attempted to seize him (the same word is used for seizing Jesus). What are the links? What’s going on here? Some thoughts:

- Jesus is seized so the young man can go free (cf. what happens with Barabbas – he is set free, Jesus is substituted for him)
- Perhaps the naked man represents Adam/fallen humanity, whereas the young man clothed in white represents resurrection glory. He’s clothed in white, the same way Jesus is described in the Transfiguration (Mk. 9:3).
- Or, perhaps, the naked young man represents Jesus in his humiliation, and the young man in white at the empty tomb represents Jesus in his exaltation
- The young man in Mk. 16 is sitting on the right – sitting is a posture of rule, signifying Jesus’ completed work, on the right, which is the position of power/glory (cf. Mk. 12:36).
- If the young man is a glorified Adam (or new Adam) figure, it reinforces the typology of Mary Magdalene as a new Eve figure.
- The young man at the tomb can also be contrasted with John the Baptist at the beginning of the gospel. John’s rugged clothing belongs to the old covenant era of preparation, whereas the angelic messenger’s joyous clothing symbolizes the new creation. Van Iersel says, “Both messengers bring a message about Jesus, and both express it in his absence: in the case of the former he is not there yet, and in that of the latter he is no longer there.”

N. T. Wright makes a helpful point about the resurrection/new creation. When someone is sick, we sometimes say, “He is only a shadow of his former self.” But in fact, we are only shadows of our *future selves* in the present. The resurrection body of Jesus shows us we will enter into a trans-physical existence at the last day. These bodies we presently inhabit will be glorified – not just physical, but super-physical.

Of course, new bodies will need a new world in which to dwell. The resurrection of the body implies a “resurrected” cosmos. The empty tomb points ahead an entirely renovated creation.

One feature of the gospel resurrection accounts is that people do not really believe Christ is risen unless they see him for themselves (think of “doubting Thomas”). This is very clear in Mark 16 – the three appearances of Jesus are necessary, even though eye witness testimony has already been given in each case.

In the sermon, I pointed out that this teaches us something important about faith: faith in the risen Christ is beyond us. We cannot believe unless he breaks into our lives and makes himself personally present to us.

But Jesus no longer walks the earth so how that can happen? This is where the “great commission” comes in. As the gospel of the resurrection is preached, and as baptism is administered, the risen Christ makes himself present and known to people. These means of grace serve the same purpose as the post-resurrection appearances. We do not “miss out” by living later. If anything, there is special blessing for those who receive the “invisible” presence of Christ through the word and water (cf. Jn. 20:29).