

MARK ENDS AT 16:8 BUT THIS IS NOT AS ABRUPT AS IT SEEMS

The Gospel of Mark tells us many interesting things about the ministry of Jesus Christ including his death and his empty tomb with a view to helping us discover him as the saviour from sin and way to eternal life and the Son of God.

The Gospel stops with the story of Jesus' death by crucifixion and men in white announcing to women who visited his tomb that he had risen from the dead. It ends with Mark 16:8, "Trembling and bewildered, the women went out and fled from the tomb. They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid" (NIV). A whole forged section has been added in and accepted by the Churches. It can be safely dismissed for there is nothing to indicate that it came from a source that deserves some consideration.

Mark is not the only work to end and leave us hanging in the air. It only leaves you unsatisfied if you assume that everybody then who was interested in Jesus thought he rose or that this rising mattered.

Mark if he knew reports that the women had supposedly told others could have been dismissing those as nonsense. The women must have said something eventually but Christians need them to speak there and then to protect the notion that Jesus rose three days after being nailed and started engaging with people then.

Does the 16:8 Ending Sidestep the Resurrection?

David Edwards (*Edwards, D. and Stott, J., Essentials Hodder & Stoughton, 1990 p. 209*) states that it is wrong to say Mark stopped at 16:8 and he never knew of any resurrection appearances because his gospel has it predicted that the risen Jesus will appear in Galilee. But a prediction does not amount to knowing of any resurrection appearances. My view is that Mark, though he knew of no other gospels, could have wished to leave it to them to say what happened next. But it is more likely that the end of Mark really is missing. The reason the gospels agree so well to the burial but there are problems in the subsequent event reporting in the four different gospels is that the end of Mark really was missing. Mark was the one who needed to give them the template of the story and it never happened which is why the other resurrection accounts steered off in different and contradictory directions.

What about the argument, "Mark reported that the tomb was empty, that a man who seems to be an angel said Jesus was risen and that he had communicated a desire to meet some his followers. The essentials for belief in the resurrection are there, the empty tomb, Jesus being alive and the appearances are predicted. Mark would not have mentioned the prediction if they had not been fulfilled." That is speculation for nobody really knows what Mark would have written after.

It is said that Mark would not have seen the resurrection as unimportant but as of supreme significance. Theorising Mark ended at 16:8 suggests that he could have seen it as insignificant. It is objected that Mark would not have downgraded the resurrection of Jesus. Why? They say it is because his gospel speaks of the Son of Man, Jesus, promising to return in glory. But that surely means that Jesus' glorification matters not his resurrection as such! The contortions of logic we get from Christian scholars is alarming.

One reason for the seemingly sudden end might have been to bring glory to the humanity and ordinariness of Jesus Christ as recorded in the gospel. Perhaps Mark wants us to feel incomplete and unsatisfied so that our thirst for knowledge of Jesus will take us back to the start of the gospel to read it all again. This really implies that the example created by the living Jesus matters more than him now. It is as if his resurrection was to his benefit and not ours.

The way Mark ends leaves us with only a man in white to testify that Jesus rose. The implication is that testimony sent from God is enough. If each Christian needs to be indwelt by the risen Christ and be vitalised by this presence, then Mark is simply mentioning the angel to remind us that God does not lie or deceive. Christians say we must trust the Holy Spirit when he testifies to us in our hearts that Jesus Christ is the risen Son of God. It is good that they show us that thinking God is talking to you entitles you to be sure that he is! How dangerous!

Mark sees no need to try and provide historical evidence that the resurrection happened. He does not indicate that he rejects or accepts that approach – he simply does not use it. Christians say that Mark recognises that evidence is valuable but it cannot make a trust relationship. Unless one experiences the living Jesus and enjoys a relationship with him person to person one never really knows him. Because the saviour is risen and transformed we can have a relationship with him that transcends time and space. This experience of the love and power of the resurrected saviour does what no survey of the historical evidence can do. A man who respects his wife because he keeps a record of her is trusting the evidence not her. There is something distant and impersonal in his approach. It seems possible that Mark intended us to find Jesus risen for

ourselves rather than learning from the witnesses to the resurrection. But in reality reading all that is reading too much into Mark. Maybe the real reason he had such a lack of concern for evidence is because that it was no good for showing anything definite about Jesus.

Jesus speaks of the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit a sin that cannot be forgiven in this world and the next. He said this when the scribes and Pharisees attributed his power as an exorcist to the Devil. The reason this sin cannot be forgiven is that it expresses a refusal to turn to God for forgiveness. To say the Holy Spirit's works are evil, is to say that you have closed your heart. There is no salvation for one who will not let the Holy Spirit reveal Jesus to them. Thus Mark indicated that we must find the truth about Jesus ourselves through the power and influence of the Holy Spirit. He was teaching mystical knowledge not the kind of knowledge that evidence bestows on us. Clearly, he was embarrassed about the legends he was spouting about Jesus and how unhistorical they were.

Some contend that Mark may deliberately refuse to record evidence that the Risen Jesus actually appeared as he thinks his account of Jesus' ministry provided indirect but sufficient evidence. Giving honest and reliable eyewitness testimony to the resurrection appearances would be one way to justify faith in the resurrection. Another way would be to show that Jesus gave evidence during his ministry that he was the Son of God and if he said he was going to rise from the dead that is what he was going to do. His word was sufficient. If this understanding of Mark's intentions is correct then clearly Mark was indicating that he was intentionally writing new scripture. His gospel was the word of Jesus Christ and therefore the Word of God.

Is it possible that Mark knew that the other gospels, Matthew, Luke and John were being compiled? Did he have a good idea what was going to be in their post-resurrection stories? If he did, then was his abrupt ending his way of saying, "Do not take this gospel as the only true one. There will be others and go to them to see the rest of the story." That is speculation and worthless.

The fact that Mark 16:9–20 borrows all its main details (except the reference to miraculous protecting from poison – though it may be held that this is just an expansion of the reference to handling serpents) from other gospels and from the Acts of the Apostles is taken as evidence that Mark did want us to consult other gospels is far-fetched. There may be no direct relationship. And it hangs upon the notion that whoever wrote that section knew Mark well enough to write it and convey that Mark wanted other gospels read alongside this one. If the person intended that then he did not need to write the section.

The primitive Church recognised the Old Testament writings as the word of God. The Lord Jesus had explained that he was prefigured and predicted in the Old Testament. Through the Old Testament, God had prepared for the coming of Jesus Christ. Jesus in Mark (2:20) uses the symbol of a bridegroom going away to picture his death. Jesus sees this death as forecast in certain prophecies in the Old Testament He views it as fulfilling Old Testament prophecy (12:10-11, 14:21 and 14:27). If we examine the Old Testament influence on Mark we gain a better understanding of what he was saying to us.

We decide that if Mark ended abruptly but deliberately then he was trying to say something - something which to the rational mind undermines the resurrection. The Holy Spirit making us witnesses to the resurrection makes no sense.

The abrupt ending forces us to look at the teachings of Jesus to see if he indicated or said that he would rise again. We have the testimony of two men in white that Jesus rose. But if we are Christians, we prefer the testimony of Jesus speaking as prophet of God. They say he is the one through whom God reveals himself. If the abrupt end was deliberate then Mark directs us to the only person fully qualified to testify to the resurrection: Jesus himself.

The Mark Gospel makes a case for religion being based on feelings and imagination rather than on evidence and history. The historical feel of Mark is a literary device. Nothing more.

If Mark ended abruptly then the resurrection tale is implausible.

If Mark's account was lost then was it removed on purpose for saying something that did not fit the Christian fantasy?

If Mark's account lost the most important part then how could God allow this? It was the first account and its gone! Does not sound like the resurrection had as much to do with God as people are led to believe.

Whatever happened, it might be thought that nobody seems to have seen whatever came after Mark 16:8 for as we said the other gospels act as if there was nothing despite using Mark's passion tale for their own.

Mark is the first gospel and the way it treats the resurrection contradicts the other gospels. Historically it is the one that has to be listened to as it is the one that reads most like history and because of its preeminence in time.

Mark has Jesus objecting to being called good as in good teacher for only God was good. Good teacher and good man are different and Jesus' wanted to take the opportunity to affirm that he was not sinless. An imperfect Jesus rising again then

would not mean we should centre this miracle in our faith. It would mean we repudiate orthodox Christianity.

