

# Mark 16:1-8

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[ 0 : 00 ] I do turn to Mark 16. Mark 16. And this is 1 to 8.

So in the field of music, there are unfinished symphonies, aren't there? Schubert's 8th symphony, I'm told, is unfinished. It's an unfinished symphony. In the world of literature, you've got Charles Dickens' unfinished novel, Edwin Drood.

And here in the Bible, you've got Mark's Gospel. And some people think that it's unfinished. I think it was 9 to 20. Now, scholars agree that they are not part of the Gospel of Mark.

It's almost certainly an attempt by a ghostwriter to round off what was considered to be an unfinished Gospel. If you look at the margins on the footnote, if you look in capital letters in my Bible, it says some of the earliest manuscripts do not include 16 verses 9 to 20.

Everything from verse 8, I would want to argue, has been added. And actually, if you study it, I think you can see the join, if you're kind of familiar with Mark's style and Mark's content. Verse 9 to 20 is quite different in style and in content from the rest of Mark's Gospel.

[ 1 : 23 ] It's not that there's anything wrong with verses 9 to 20, but I think it's pretty clear that those verses were added later. And so Mark's Gospel ends very abruptly, doesn't it?

Look at verse 8, mid-sentence. Mid-sentence. For trembling and astonishment had seized them, and they said nothing to anyone, that for they were afraid.

It's a rather sudden ending. It's like when you go to the cinema, remember that, and the film ends unexpectedly. And everybody leaves the cinema kind of in stunned silence.

That is how Mark's Gospel is meant to leave you. I think intentionally, stunned. And of course, whenever there's silence, somebody feels they've got to say something, don't they?

And of course, that's probably where I think the ending of Mark has come from. Somebody feels that we've got to fill in the gap. Because it isn't quite complete. And so these other endings turn up later on.

[ 2 : 24 ] But neither of them should be there. So verse 8 ends, and it ends with a full stop, but really it should end with an exclamation mark, shouldn't it? Now, having said that, let's look at the four things about this dramatic ending on Easter Sunday.

And so first thing to notice is this. There's a problem faced by these women. A problem faced by these women. The stone.

The stone. The egg, isn't it? I've just told the children, it kind of represents the stone. I'm not sure. But there's a problem here, isn't it?

Mark tells us that Joseph of Arimathea, he was a secret believer, and he had rolled, I expect with his friends, a massive great stone. The other gospel writers tell it was a massive stone, and it was rolled against the entrance of the tomb.

Three times in Mark 1 to 8, the stone is mentioned. And that suggests, as one writer has put it, a vivid memory of a great problem. So you notice, as the women make their way to the tomb, we're told in those opening verses of Mark 16, they ask each other, don't they, who will roll the stone away from the entrance to the tomb?

[ 3 : 40 ] So guess what? When they get there, the problem is solved. The stone has been rolled out away. The stone has been rolled away, not to let Jesus out, but to let the rest of us into the tomb.

So that we can see that it is empty. Let's just think for a moment about that. You see, this story has got all the marks of authenticity. They'd come to pay their last respects to Jesus of Nazareth.

They didn't believe in the resurrection. Dead men don't rise. These women aren't stupid. They've come to anoint a body. And so if you'd asked them on the way there that morning about Jesus of Nazareth, they would have said, he's a great teacher, he's a miracle worker, and we'd hoped that he would be the Messiah.

But now he's dead. And they weren't expecting him to be alive that Sunday morning. They knew beyond any shadow of a doubt that he was dead. They'd seen the soldiers, these women. These same women were there at the end of chapter 15. They'd seen the soldier plunge the spear into his side and through his heart. They'd helped Joseph of Arimathea take down his body and carry it to the tomb.

[ 4 : 56 ] A very public tomb. Joseph of Arimathea was a very public person. And there was no way they'd mistaken the tomb on that very first Easter Sunday.

Everybody knew where Joseph of Arimathea's tomb was. And they carried the body there two days earlier. They'd helped lay the body in that tomb.

They knew he was dead. And they're coming to finish the whole process. The burial process had been interrupted by the Sabbath. And now they come early before it is light to finish off the whole thing.

And it doesn't dawn on them halfway until they're halfway there that they haven't got the foggiest idea of what they're going to do when they get there. Who is going to move the stone? It's got all the marks of authenticity.

Have you done that? I'm forever going to the co-op. And when I get to the co-op, I forget what I've gone for. And if you were making this story up, you wouldn't tell it like it is.

[ 5 : 59 ] Who is going to move the stone? And so no wonder they are stunned when they arrive and they find their problem is solved. The stone has really been moved, rolled away. Look at verse 5. And entering the tomb, they saw a young man sitting on the right side dressed in a white robe.

We assume that it was an angel. Mark's gospel doesn't tell us that, actually. And when they get there, it's no wonder that they're spooked out. They see a young man sitting on the right side. Can you see the detail? Note the eyewitness testimony. You wouldn't bother to put that in unless it was there. Where was this young man? He was on the right side of the tomb.

Like I say to you, if you want to go to the toilets, you go on my left, your right. That's the kind of explanation. Do you see the detail? He's a young man wearing a white robe sitting on the right side. And, the end of verse 5, they're alarmed. And he says to them, do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified.

[ 7 : 09 ] He has risen. He is not here. See the place where they laid him. Now notice this. Please read my lips, he says. He is not here.

He is not here. He is risen. Do you get it? He is not here. There are some, aren't they? They call themselves Christian theologians.

That's not what they are, but they flatly deny this. They kind of hold a, a John Brown's, body idea of a resurrection. Jesus, his body is a moldering in the tomb, but his soul goes marching on.

That's not what this guy in white says, is it? You see what he says? He says, he is not here. Come and see for yourself. Look where they laid him. He is not here.

He is risen. And that's the message of Easter, isn't it? So some say, I get really tired of this at the funeral, so people say, well, he lives on.

[ 8 : 13 ] This person, he will live on in the mind and the memory. And so some people think, don't they, that Jesus lives on in the mind and the memory of his followers. Woody Allen.

Woody Allen was once asked in an interview, don't you want to live on in people's hearts and minds? No, he said, I want to live in my apartment. It's great, isn't it? Now, Woody Allen, what did Woody Allen understand?

He understood he wanted a resurrection. So do I, don't you? I don't want to live on in someone's mind. I don't want to live on in someone's memory.

How long will they actually remember me? I don't want to live on in the thoughts of people. I want to live in the new heavens and the new earth. I want a resurrection body. I don't want to sit on a cloud.

Twanging a harp. That isn't the message of the resurrection. And that's not willful, wishful thinking. That is a solid hope that is grounded in the resurrection of Jesus.

[ 9 : 12 ] It is grounded in the fact that he is not here. He is risen. There are other people that say this.

They say, well, it's a nice thought, but surely it doesn't have to be true. It doesn't have to be true for its lessons to be valid. Do you get that? It's a kind of myth, they say.

So no one believes in the tale of Goldilocks and the three bears that it ever happened. But it's a good reminder, isn't it, not to leave your porridge unattended. And some people treat the

resurrection like that.

It's a myth, they say. It didn't actually happen. But that doesn't mean that it's got some helpful lessons for you and I. Read my lips, the young man says.

He is not here. Not here. Do you get it? The tomb is empty. There isn't a body in the tomb. He is risen. That's the message of Easter. That's the message of the resurrection.

[10:16] H.G. Wells says that the resurrection is a story invented by the church to give a happy ending. To the story of Jesus. And I guess there are many people who think like that.

But if this is a made up story, it would never be written in the way that it is. Mark would never have written in the women as witnesses. To an empty tomb.

Because sorry to say, in Jesus' day, a woman's testimony was worthless. Her evidence was inadmissible in a court of law. So if you were making up a story at that time, the last thing you would do is you would make the women the witnesses.

To the empty tomb. So why does Mark write it in this way? He writes it because it happened. It actually happened in that way. And not only that, not only that, he goes out of his way to give the names of the women.

Can you see that? Have you noticed? Not only he tells us their names, but he tells us their children's names. Look at verse 1. Who are these women? Well, there's Mary Magdalene. There's Mary, the mother of James.

[11:24] And Salome. Why do we need to know that? Why do we need to know that? Well, so that the earliest readers of Mark's gospel could go and check it out for themselves.

That if Mary had passed away when this gospel was written, then they could talk with their children. They could talk with James and Salome. It's like the guy, isn't it?

Of carrying the cross for Jesus. Do you remember what he was called? Mark says he was Simon of Cyrene, the father of Rufus. Why do we need to know that?

Because Rufus is still alive. And you can go and talk with Rufus. And you can check it out for yourselves. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15, 1 Corinthians, again with Mark, written early on, very early, within a period of 20 years of these events.

Paul writes, and he says, Jesus appeared to very many on one occasion. He appeared to more than 500 at one time. And most of them are still alive. You go and interview them. Stick them on TV.

[12:29] So what I'm trying to say is this. Why do we Christians believe in the resurrection? Is it just because we believe, because we believe, because we believe it?

Do we believe the resurrection because it's a nice story and it makes us feel better? Is Jesus really a little bit like an imaginary friend that we've got?

How do I know that Jesus is alive? From my heart? We say that sometimes, don't we? You ask me how I know he lives? He lives within my heart.

No, no, no. He does live in my heart by his Holy Spirit, but that is different truth. It's a different doctrine.

That's the doctrine of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. No, Jesus is physically alive from the dead. And he is ascended physically into heaven.

[13:26] So tonight, in the glory, there is a man. And that is where Jesus is. And he comes and he lives in my heart by his Holy Spirit.

How do I know that Jesus is alive from the dead? Because there are certain incontrovertible facts that no serious historian can dispute. That on the third day, when the women went to the tomb, it was empty and the body of Jesus was not there.

And somehow you've got to come to terms with that. Somehow you've got to explain that. The authorities, they tried to explain it away, didn't they?

They said the disciples must have stolen the body. Well, if the disciples had stolen the body, why did all of them, without exception, go to a cruel, bloody death?

Why would you die for something that you know was not true? Liars do not make good martyrs. No, the tomb was empty.

[14:30] And if the authorities had not taken the body, all they had to do was to produce it. And yet they didn't. And on the day of Pentecost, over 3,000 people became Christians because Peter told them that this Jesus, whom you crucified, God has raised from the dead.

And just streets away was the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea. And all they had to do was go there. But they didn't. They didn't. Because he is not there.

He is risen. In one of the debates between Richard Dawkins, you know, the famous atheist, and John Lennox, who's a Christian professor, Dawkins said, heaven is a fairy story for people afraid of the dark.

To which John Lennox replied, atheism is a fairy story for people afraid of the light. Why do I believe in the resurrection of Jesus?

Am I trying to believe what I know isn't true? No. Faith is based on eyewitness testimony and facts. The fact of the empty tomb. Now let me hurry on.

[15:42] First of all, a problem faced. That's the empty tomb. And secondly, a prophecy fulfilled. Look at verse 7. The angel in white tells them, he says, come and see, he's not here, he's risen, now go and tell.

Do you get that? Come and tell. Come and see. He's risen. He's not here. Go and tell. Go and tell his disciples, his followers, and particularly Peter, that he is going before you to Galilee.

There you will see him just as he told you. I don't know if you can get them anymore. My dad had a 10-year preaching diary.

So, you know, you've got a diary, isn't it, for Sundays. Do you have one, Mr. Thomas? Do you have a preacher? Isn't it? So you'd have a diary of just Sundays for 10 years. And you'd flick through it, and there'd be some in the next couple of months, and then a few, six months later.

I can't imagine anybody was booked 10 years ahead. I would have thought, it's very, very unlikely, isn't it? You just wouldn't do that. Nobody books people 10 years ahead.

[16:54] But here's a remarkable thing, isn't it? Jesus has made an appointment with his disciples, for after he is dead. Can you see that? So chapter 8, chapter 9, chapter 10, Jesus says, I'm going to be crucified, I'm going to be handed over, and on the third day, I'm going to rise again.

He's given notice to them that he will rise from the dead. But in chapter 14, he says, all of you will be scattered. They're going to strike the shepherd, the sheep will be scattered. But he says, after I've risen, I will go ahead of you to Galilee, put that in the diary.

And now the reminder comes in. Do you have reminders on your phone or your computer? I've got one reminder that I can't seem to turn off, and it says this, every Sunday morning, 9.45, remember refreshments at Drayton Manor High School.

Like, I don't know where it comes from. You can imagine it, can't you? The reminder comes in, meet Jesus of Nazareth, is due in two days' time in Galilee. Go and tell my disciples, I'm going on ahead of you to Galilee, and I want you to keep that appointment, and especially tell Peter.

Tell Peter we're going to have a team meeting. Jesus says, go and tell my disciples, I'm back from the dead. We've got team meeting in two days. And make sure Peter gets the message, because Peter's got his phone off.

[18:21] Peter is thinking to himself, it's all over, I've blown it big time, and there's no way back. There's no way I can be part of the team anymore. He won't want me, I've cursed him, I've blasphemed him, I'm not a very good advert for Christianity.

Peter's gone back fishing, which is where Jesus had called him from, do you remember? Why does Jesus single out Peter? Why Galilee? Because Galilee is where it all first began.

And Jesus is regrouping them, and Jesus is regathering them. There's a story about a social worker in the slums of Glasgow, you know, the notorious Gorbals district of Glasgow.

And the social worker knocks on the door, and she's visiting that area, and she says to the lady who answers the door, she says, how many people live in this house?

And the lady said, oh, and there's Jimmy, and there's Mary, and there's Sadie, and there's Billy. And the social worker says, I don't want to know their names, just give me the numbers.

[19:28] There are no numbers in this house, the lady said. They're all names to me. And I want to say to you tonight, that the risen Lord Jesus has given me the authority to say this to you.

He sent me to you. I'm not dressed in white, and I have no wings. I'm not an angel, but I am a messenger. And I'm a messenger from Jesus to say to you this evening, the risen Lord Jesus knows your name.

The risen Lord Jesus knows your name. And he went to the cross for you. And it wasn't the nails that held him on the cross, it was your sin.

That's why he went to the cross, and now he is back from the dead, and he has dealt with your sin, and he comes to you through the gospel tonight, and he says your name. And he wants you and I to know that like Peter, that there is full forgiveness, and free forgiveness, through the blood that he

shed.

And Peter had a debt to pay, didn't he? The old version of the Lord's Prayer, forgive us our debts. It's a good way of thinking about God. We owe him what we cannot repay him.

[ 20 : 49 ] And we are his creatures, and we're made in his image, and we're made in his likeness, and we have a debt, and every one of us has a debt that we cannot pay. But Jesus has paid that debt on the cross.

It is finished, he cried. It is done. And so tonight, how can I know that my sins are forgiven? How can I know that I am right with God?

How do I know because God has given me the receipt? And it's not written in a piece of paper that I can push away and forget about. It is written in history, and in time, and in space, because God has raised Jesus from the dead.

And in raising Jesus from the dead, God is saying to you, and to me, to Peter, and to Paul, who was the chief of sinners, who persecuted Christians, however bad your sin is, however far you've fallen away, God says to you this Easter, received full payment from the hands of my son.

There's a welcome at the table. There's bread and wine. Your sins are forgiven. If you will trust in Christ, you can join the team.

[ 22 : 06 ] The third thing I want you to notice, there's a problem faced, and there's a prophecy fulfilled. Jesus has come back, as he said he would, the third thing is, there's a pattern here to follow, isn't there?

Do you hear in those words, I showed you them in verses six and seven? There's a pattern of, come and see, and then verse seven, go and tell. Come and see, go and tell, and I want to encourage you to do that.

Maybe tonight you're watching, online, or you're here tonight, and you're just not sure about these things. And I want to say to you, come and see. Keep coming. It's the best thing you can do.

You can read a gospel with someone. Drop us an email. Don't ignore what happened on that first Easter Sunday. Don't ignore it. Explore it. Look at the evidence. Check it out.

The angel says, come and see if these things are true. You owe it to yourself, don't you? Because if Jesus did rise from the dead, that is not something that you can ignore, surely, so check it out.

[ 23 : 13 ] But for those who are convinced, for his church who do believe, let me say to you, the message from the angel to us is, go and tell. Let's go and tell.

Verse eight, it's exactly what they didn't do. Go and tell, the angel says, verse eight, they leave trembling and bewildered. And the women went out, and they fled. And they said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid.

And I think that's why Mark leaves it hanging, because perhaps Mark wants you and I just to feel the uncertainty. Will they or won't they?

And if they don't, who will? Who will go and tell this news to the world? And implied is this massive anticlimax, but actually it's a massive challenge to the church of Jesus Christ.

Jesus says, no, are we as a church going to say, Jesus says, go, are we going to say no? And so the empty tomb is not the finishing line, is it? It is the starting point.

[ 24 : 18 ] That you and I, as part of Christ's church, are under starting orders. And I know that that is a scary thought, isn't it? But this is the message of Jesus' people, go.

The gospel must be preached to all nations before the end, Jesus says. So who will go? And it's all very well as sitting here in our trendy new building. And it is scary, isn't it, to think of going.

Who would listen? Who would be convinced by what they say? A problem faced, a prediction fulfilled, a pattern for us to follow, and then lastly, a pronouncement of the Father.

And here's the big encouragement. And again, let me take you to Romans 1.4. In Romans 1.4, Paul says, Jesus is now declared to be the Son of God with power by his resurrection from the dead.

I remember at his baptism, you'll remember that the heavens were torn open and a voice was heard, this is my beloved son with whom I'm well pleased.

[ 25 : 27 ] And that's heaven's imprimatur on Jesus. That is the Father owning his son. But not everybody heard that voice. In fact, we're told that some in the gospel thought that it was thunder.

at the moment of transfiguration, Jesus revealed his glory to James and John, Peter. There was a voice that was heard from heaven, this is my beloved son, you need to listen to him.

But it was only Peter, James and John that heard that voice. But now, Paul says, through the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, he is declared to be the Son of God with power.

It's interesting, the word literally is the word we get horizon from. Horus, thentos. We get the word horizon from it.

Literally, Paul is saying, by the resurrection, Jesus is horizon. He's horizon. Let me illustrate that. You might not make much sense. So think of the news.

[ 26 : 36 ] Think of TV news. BBC, Who Edwards, you know, the news reporter. And the lights and the cameras go on. And Hugh Edwards is beamed across the country, across the world.

A few moments before, he occupied, didn't he, just a few cubic feet. He was just standing there. But suddenly, he's horizoned into every home.

All around the UK, perhaps the world. Moments before, if you stood outside the door, you wouldn't have heard him and you wouldn't have seen him. If you were a quarter of a mile away from the broadcast, you wouldn't have even known that he existed.

He's invisible. He's inaudible. But now, thanks to the wonders of technology, he is a horizon and the newsreader is broadcast to millions all around the world.

And so it's not just you. It's not just us as a church when we go out trembling to tell the news and share the gospel maybe in our workplace or in our family when that opportunity comes.

[ 27 : 50 ] You're not on your own. God declares his son, Jesus, to be his son with power through the resurrection from the dead.

He never owned a home. He never wrote a book. He never had a family. He never held office. He never went to college. He never put his foot inside a big city.

He never traveled more than 200 miles from the place where he was born. He died penniless and powerless at age 33. And yet he has been horizoned and billions of people all over the world own him to be the Lord.

And they embrace him as their saviour. And they know that he is alive from the dead. And that their sins are forgiven. And they have a future and a hope beyond this world.

And so check it out for yourself. And then go and tell others the good news. Let's pray.