

March 31 Lesson 5 (NIV)

The Resurrection: Key to Faith

Devotional Reading: Exodus 14:10–14, 21–23, 26–31

Background Scripture: Mark 16

Mark 16:1–8

¹ When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices so that they might go to anoint Jesus' body. ² Very early on the first day of the week, just after sunrise, they were on their way to the tomb ³ and they asked each other, "Who will roll the stone away from the entrance of the tomb?"

⁴ But when they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had been rolled away. ⁵ As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man dressed in a white robe sitting on the right side, and they were alarmed.

⁶ "Don't be alarmed," he said. "You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him. ⁷ But go, tell his disciples and Peter, 'He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.' "

⁸ Trembling and bewildered, the women went out and fled from the tomb. They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid.

Key Text

"Don't be alarmed," he said. "You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him.—Mark 16:6

Examining Our Faith

Unit I: Faithful vs. Faithless

Lessons 1–5

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C. Lesson Context: Mark, the Gospel

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How to Say It

Arimathea *Air-uh-muh-**thee**-uh* (*th* as in *thin*).

Barnabas *Bar-nuh-bus*.

Clopas *Klo-pus*.

Magdalene *Mag-duh-leen* or *Mag-duh-lee-nee*.

Pontius Pilate *Pon-shus* or *Pon-ti-us Pie-lut*.

Salome *Suh-lo-me*.

Zebedee *Zeb-eh-dee*.

Introduction

A. Abrupt Endings

My wife had just finished reading Beatrix Potter’s classic *The Tale of Peter Rabbit* to our children. Surprised by its ending, my wife exclaimed, “That’s it? That’s the end?!”

The book tells the story of Peter, a playful and disobedient young rabbit who decides to steal vegetables from the garden of Mr. McGregor. Peter is discovered but flees before Mr. McGregor can catch him. In Peter’s hurry to escape, he leaves behind his jacket and shoes.

Once Peter returns home, he doesn’t tell his mother about his escape. Instead, he goes straight to bed. Peter’s mother wonders why her son lost his jacket and shoes. In the book’s

closing pages, the reader learns that Mr. McGregor used Peter's jacket and shoes to create a scarecrow, and the story ends at that point. The story's abrupt conclusion leaves the reader wondering whether Peter faced any consequences for his mischievous actions.

Abrupt endings can both frustrate and entice audiences. Clever storytellers use these endings to their advantage because audience members can be challenged to imagine the outcome. As you read today's Scripture, think about why the writer of this Gospel might have decided to end his account the way that he did.

B. Lesson Context: Mark, the Man

Tradition tells us that the Gospel of Mark was written by John Mark, an associate of Peter and Paul (see Acts 12:12; 1 Peter 5:13). This man was not an apostle. But he was a close relative of Barnabas (Colossians 4:10), who probably convinced Paul (Saul) to take John Mark on that apostle's first missionary journey (Acts 12:25). John Mark abandoned the trip before its conclusion (13:13). This put him in disfavor with Paul (15:36–39), although the two later reconciled (2 Timothy 4:11; Philemon 24). Students propose that Mark's Gospel account is based on Peter's firsthand experiences with the person and ministry of Jesus, given the closeness of Mark to Peter in light of Peter calling him "my son" (1 Peter 5:13).

C. Lesson Context: Mark, the Gospel

Although Mark's Gospel is the shortest of the four, its narrative packs a punch! Students frequently call it "the Gospel of action." This designation stems from the fact that Mark jumps quickly from scene to scene to chronicle Jesus' ministry.

The Gospel's description of the last week of Jesus' ministry highlights its inclination toward action. Of the nearly 700 verses of the Gospel, 241 of them—more than one-third of the Gospel—recount events from that week (Mark 11:1–16:8). In describing scenes from that week, the Gospel jumps quickly between scenes. Mark tells us how Jesus entered Jerusalem on that Sunday (11:1–11) and taught others regarding righteousness (11:12–25; 12:28–34). On that Thursday, he ate a final meal (14:12–31) before he was arrested (14:43–52) and tried (14:53–65; 15:1–15). Finally, on that Friday, he was crucified and killed at the hands of Roman soldiers (15:16–41).

Friday evening of that week, Joseph of Arimathea, a member of the Sanhedrin, approached Pontius Pilate to ask for Jesus' body (Mark 15:43). Before granting the request, Pilate wanted confirmation that Jesus was truly dead (15:44–45). There was to be no doubt on the part of Pilate that Jesus was indeed dead. Once Pilate received this verification, Joseph took Jesus' body and prepared it for burial.

To begin the burial proceedings, Joseph wrapped Jesus' body in linen (Mark 15:46a). The Gospels do not indicate whether or not Jesus' body was washed as was customary at this time (example: Acts 9:37). Joseph then placed the body in a rock tomb sealed with a stone (Mark 15:46b). After the burial, two women observed the burial location (15:47). They would return after Sabbath to finish caring for Jesus' body.

Some students believe that the original ending to this Gospel came at Mark 16:8 and that Mark 16:9–20 was a later addition in the decades after Mark wrote. Much of the information in verses 9–20 is reflected in the other Gospels (Matthew 28:19–20; Luke 24:13–43, 50–51; John

20:14–18). In this lesson, we will engage in a *what-if*. What if Mark did end at verse 8? What could that abrupt ending teach us today?

I. The Women (Mark 16:1–4)

A. Intention (v. 1)

1. When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices so that they might go to anoint Jesus' body.

Jesus died on a Friday, the day of preparation for the Sabbath (Mark 15:37–42). The Law of Moses prohibited work on the Sabbath (Exodus 20:8–11; Leviticus 23:3). Therefore, the burial process (see Lesson Context) would have to wait until *the Sabbath was over*. The task of treating the body of Jesus would fall to the women, some of whom were at the crucifixion (Mark 15:40; John 19:25) and subsequently had seen the tomb's location (Mark 15:47; compare Matthew 27:61; Luke 23:55–56).

The name *Mary* was common in the first century AD. By one estimate, one in four women in Palestine was so named at that time. The Gospels mention several women named Mary, so it is easy to confuse them.

One of the women with that name was *Mary Magdalene*, who became a devoted follower of Jesus after he freed her from spiritual oppression (see Luke 8:1–2). The designation *Magdalene* was not a family name. Instead, it might have indicated that she came from the town of Magadan (compare Matthew 15:39).

The second *Mary* is unknown to us. One possibility is that she is “*the mother of James the younger and of Joseph*” (Mark 15:40). Another possibility is that she was “*the wife of Clopas*” (John 19:25).

Matthew's account of the burial mentions a woman who is “*the mother of Zebedee's sons*” (Matthew 27:56). This woman could be *Salome*, thus making her the mother of James and John (compare 4:21; Mark 15:40).

Spices combatted the stench of decaying flesh (compare John 11:39). These treatments were an essential part of the burial process (19:39–40). The women prepared these things before the Sabbath (Luke 23:55–56). They waited for the conclusion of that day of rest to return to the grave and *anoint* the remains of Jesus.

B. Timing (v. 2)

2. Very early on the first day of the week, just after sunrise, they were on their way to the tomb

The phrases *very early on the first day of the week* and *just after sunrise* reveal the eagerness of the women to complete their tasks. We assume that they set out just in the dim, early morning light (compare John 20:1). The women were confident of their destination, having been there two days earlier (see comments on Mark 16:1, above).

C. Trouble (vv. 3–4)

3. and they asked each other, “Who will roll the stone away from the entrance of the tomb?”

What the women seemed to have forgotten up to this point is that a massive disk-shaped *stone* sealed the entrance to the grave (Matthew 27:60–61; Mark 15:46–47). Several strong individuals would be needed to *roll it away* from the entryway. The women’s question reveals that they belatedly realized that they would not be able to move it.

The women’s question also reveals the attitudes and behaviors of Jesus’ followers. The disciples fled at Jesus’ arrest (Mark 14:50). Peter, in particular, denied having known Jesus (John 18:15–18, 25–27). Others likely hid out of fear for what might happen to them (compare 20:19). Because of their grief, shame, or fear, some of Jesus’ followers had distanced themselves from being associated with him (contrast 19:38–42). They would not be of any help in removing *the stone away from the entrance of the tomb*.

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

The Gospel accounts of Mark, Luke, and John do not reveal how *the stone was rolled away*. They only report that the stone was no longer blocking the tomb’s entrance when the women arrived (here and Luke 24:2; John 20:1). Matthew, however, discloses that “an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone” (Matthew 28:2). The massive nature of this *very large* stone is also noted in Matthew 27:60.

II. The Messenger (Mark 16:5–8)

A. Angelic Appearance (v. 5)

5. As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man dressed in a white robe sitting on the right side, and they were alarmed.

Mark’s Gospel does not provide further identifying information regarding the *young man in a white robe sitting* in the tomb. However, we can determine his nature from the other Gospel accounts.

Matthew 28:2 describes him as “an angel of the Lord.” Luke identifies “two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning” (Luke 24:4) who are “angels” (24:23); John 20:12 is similar. Scripture often describes heavenly beings in terms of the brightness of their garments (examples: Matthew 17:2; 28:3; Mark 9:3; Luke 9:29–30; Acts 1:10).

The women came to the tomb to care for the body of Jesus. Instead of seeing his body, they saw an unknown visitor. The sight of this mysterious person would have been a valid reason for the women to feel *alarmed*.

B. Remarkable Report (vv. 6–7)

6a. “Don’t be alarmed,” he said. “You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified.

Fear and alarm are common reactions to seeing an angelic messenger (examples: Judges 13:21–22; Matthew 28:4; Acts 10:3–4) or a supernatural occurrence (examples: Mark 4:41; 5:15; 9:4–6). When this occurs, a form of the reminder to *don't be alarmed* usually follows (examples: Judges 6:21–23; Daniel 10:10–12, 19; Luke 1:11–13, 30; 2:9–10).

The angel's designation *Jesus the Nazarene* referred to the location of Jesus' upbringing. The village of Nazareth was located about 70 miles north of Jerusalem in the hilly region west of the Sea of Galilee. Residents of that village were likely impoverished. As a result, others held them in low regard (see John 1:46). Jesus' parents were from Nazareth (Luke 2:4), and the family returned there after Jesus' birth (Matthew 2:21–23). Jesus remained in Nazareth until he began his public ministry (4:12–13).

6b. "He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him.

The angel's proclamation that Jesus *has risen* does not mean that his spirit went to Heaven, leaving behind his dead body. The empty tomb reveals that his physical body was resurrected from the dead. His post-resurrection appearances provided further evidence of this reality (see Luke 24:37–39; John 20:27).

The resurrection should not have come as a surprise to his followers. Jesus had prophesied to them numerous times regarding his death and resurrection (examples: Mark 8:31; 9:9, 31; 10:33–34). His disciples, however, rarely understood his teaching on this topic (see 9:10, 32).

Burial customs during Jesus' day began with washing the body (example: Acts 9:37). Then the body was wrapped with cloths, treated with fragrant spices and ointments, and laid upon a flat surface in the grave. The command to *see the place where* Joseph and others had *laid him* indicated that the tomb no longer contained the body of Jesus.

7. "But go, tell his disciples and Peter, 'He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.' "

The command to *go* and *tell* of the risen Lord indicates a change in emphasis for Mark. In his Gospel, he frequently mentions times when Jesus urged others to be silent regarding his identity and work (Mark 3:11–12; 5:42–43; 7:36; 8:29–30; contrast 5:18–20). Now that Jesus' resurrection had occurred, his followers would not need to remain silent about him (see 9:9).

Jesus' *disciples* had fled at his arrest (Mark 14:50). On that occasion, they were concerned for their safety. Rather than punish the disciples for leaving Jesus, the angel's message offered them a chance to reunite with their Lord.

The angel showed particular attention to *Peter* by naming him specifically. This apostle is known for his position of prominence, being named first in all listings of the apostles (Matthew 10:2–4; Mark 3:16–19; Luke 6:14–16; Acts 1:13–14) and for his impulsive behavior (examples: Mark 9:5–6; John 13:1–11). He had confidently proclaimed fidelity to Jesus, even if it led to death (Mark 14:29–31). Later that same night, however, Peter thrice denied knowing Jesus (14:66–72). Later, after Peter received the women's report, he still had to see the empty tomb for himself (Luke 24:11–12).

Before Jesus' arrest, he had prophesied that his disciples would "fall away" and "be scattered" (Mark 14:27). In the same breath, however, he promised, "But after I have risen, I will go ahead of you into *Galilee*" (14:28). The angel's message to the women indicated the pending fulfillment of Jesus' promises.

The selection of Galilee as the location of this promised reunion was made with intent. Jesus began his public ministry there (see Mark 1:9, 14). It was in that region that he called his first disciples (1:16–20). The angel’s message sent the apostles back to where their relationship with Jesus began.

C. Fearful Flight (v. 8)

8. Trembling and bewildered, the women went out and fled from the tomb. They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid.

Three strong emotions overwhelmed the women as they *went out and fled from the tomb*. Their feelings were decidedly mixed; this is the only verse in the New Testament where the Greek words for *trembling*, *bewildered*, and *afraid* occur together. The picture was one of uncertainty as the women found themselves in an in-between state: the empty tomb was initial evidence of a miraculous occurrence, but they had not yet seen the risen Jesus personally.

Conclusion

A. Singular Event

Today’s Scripture abruptly ends with a declaration of the women’s fear. If this were all we knew of the story, we would wonder what happened next. Praise God that we know the conclusion to this story—a story that continued with Jesus’ ascension to Heaven (Acts 1:1–9) and will culminate with his promised return to earth (Revelation 22:20).

The resurrection of Jesus is a singular event in history. It is distinct from other resurrections in the Bible (examples: 2 Kings 4:32–37; Luke 7:11–15; 8:49–56; John 11:38–44). Those were instances of the temporary restoration of physical life—temporary because all those people died again later. The resurrection of Jesus, by contrast, is permanent (Revelation 1:18a).

That permanence has vital implications. Death is God’s penalty for sin (Genesis 2:16–17; Romans 5:12), but now the risen Jesus holds “the keys of death and Hades” (Revelation 1:18b).

Another characteristic that sets Jesus’ resurrection apart from the others noted above is that his body was transformed, not merely resuscitated. After his resurrection, he appeared and disappeared in ways he had not done previously (Luke 24:31, 36, 51; John 20:19, 26), although he still had a physical body that other people could touch (Luke 24:37–43; John 20:27). The transformation of Jesus’ body prefigures the promised transformation of those who belong to him when we are raised on the last day (1 Corinthians 15:42–57).

B. Vital Reality

From our vantage point some 2,000 years later, the empty tomb is the universal image of Christ’s victory over death. The women who found the open tomb that morning had prepared themselves to be confronted with death. Instead, they were confronted with the announcement of life.

The reality of death confronts all, and we make preparations for it. We help friends and family members with funeral planning. We purchase cemetery plots. But the best spiritual preparation is to let our thoughts dwell on resurrection life.

Jesus has promised that what was accomplished in him on that third day will also be accomplished in us when he returns. The power of life over death that he demonstrated for himself is the same power that will instantly and forever transform us (see Philippians 3:21). Jesus is Lord over death, having conquered it. That makes him Lord over eternal life—our eternal life.

Therefore, as we prepare for death, we keep in mind that “the last enemy to be destroyed is death” (1 Corinthians 15:26). Death is our enemy, but it is ultimately a defeated enemy. When Jesus returns, we all will be changed. In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, death will be no more.

Consider the abrupt ending to verse 8 as an invitation to proclaim the good news of the resurrected Christ. The women at the tomb that morning ran in fear; our task today is to run in joy with the message of the empty tomb. May we ever proclaim Christ’s victory over death; may we never lose sight of the fact that his victory is ours as well—for eternity. Death could not permanently silence Jesus or obstruct God’s plan. Will fear silence you from sharing this good news?

C. Prayer

God of resurrection, where there is death, you bring life. We hope for the day when we will experience resurrection and new life. In the meantime, encourage us when we feel we cannot proclaim this good news. When fear overtakes us, keep us from forgetting that you are the source of life. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

D. Thought to Remember

Fear not—Jesus has risen!¹