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Supernatural Power

Stories from Mark’s Gospel

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# Week 16 | Mark 15:21–16:20

### Mark 15:21–16:20 Summary:

This week we’ll witness the suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Everything is unfolding just as he predicted. Jesus is crucified and buried, yet the tomb is found empty, leaving the disciples bewildered and confused. The long ending of Mark (16:9–20) gives a quick synopsis of what happened after the resurrection, though the consensus among scholars is that this section is part of the original Gospel.

# Day 1

## Read

### Mark 15:21–32 (NIV)

21A certain man from Cyrene, Simon, the father of Alexander and Rufus, was passing by on his way in from the country, and they forced him to carry the cross. 22They brought Jesus to the place called Golgotha (which means “the place of the skull”). 23Then they offered him wine mixed with myrrh, but he did not take it. 24And they crucified him. Dividing up his clothes, they cast lots to see what each would get.

25It was nine in the morning when they crucified him. 26The written notice of the charge against him read: the king of the jews.

27They crucified two rebels with him, one on his right and one on his left. [28] 29Those who passed by hurled insults at him, shaking their heads and saying, “So! You who are going to destroy the temple and build it in three days, 30come down from the cross and save yourself!” 31In the same way the chief priests and the teachers of the law mocked him among themselves. “He saved others,” they said, “but he can’t save himself! 32Let this Messiah, this king of Israel, come down now from the cross, that we may see and believe.” Those crucified with him also heaped insults on him.

## Study

* In ancient Rome, the execution of criminals was done publicly, with the condemned experiencing maximum pain and humiliation. As a means of execution, crucifixion served two purposes, according to Garland:

(1) It punished the criminal by prolonging the pain for as long as possible. Victims could linger on crosses for days as they slowly died from asphyxiation from muscle fatigue.

(2) The public exposure served also as a warning and a deterrent. The victim was paraded through the streets with a sign announcing the crime and was then hanged on a cross strategically placed beside well-traveled roads. His torment was meant to strike fear into the hearts of those who happened to pass by.[[1]](#footnote-2)

* “Normally, a condemned man carried the crossbeam, to the site of his crucifixion, where it was fastened to vertical beam already firmly embedded into the ground. Mark does not tell us why Jesus does not carry his own cross, but it is easy to guess. He is either too weak or too slow from the severe lashing, and the soldiers must conscript an innocent onlooker to carry the crossbar.”[[2]](#footnote-3)

## Think about

N.T. Wright helps us understand the horrific irony in the spectator’s mockery of Jesus:

“The crucifixion scene closes, as it opened, with mockery. This time it comes from Jewish passers-by, including the leaders. The claims Jesus made, explicitly and implicitly, and his warnings against the Temple, are thrown back in his face. He can’t even rescue himself, they say, let alone destroy and rebuild the Temple in three days. And—the sharpest cut of all—everyone knows that the Messiah should be defeating the Romans, not dying at their hands. If he really is the King, he should come down from the cross. That would give them reason to believe.”

It is because he is King of the Jews, that he *must* stay on the cross. That is his royal task and reign. That is what he has come to do.”[[3]](#footnote-4)

The passers-by cannot imagine that someone who had the power to do miracles would not save himself. The religious leaders have already demonstrated that they used whatever earthly power they had to only benefit themselves. This is not the way of Jesus. Jesus does the Father’s will and by allowing his own suffering and death, ultimately defeats the forces of evil for all of us.

## Pray

The cross is a central symbol of the Christian faith. We wear them as jewelry around our necks and use them as decoration in our homes. We do this because though Jesus’ execution was an atrocity, the act leads to salvation and hope. No one living at the time before Jesus’ resurrection would have associated anything other than shame, violence, and defeat with a cross. But now we see the conquering love, joy, and victory in Christ’s death, and we should praise him for it. Take some time today to reflect in prayer on the cross and how it has changed your life.

# Day 2

## Read

### Mark 15:33–40 (NIV)

33At noon, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. 34And at three in the afternoon Jesus cried out in a loud voice, “Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?” (which means “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”).

35When some of those standing near heard this, they said, “Listen, he’s calling Elijah.”

36Someone ran, filled a sponge with wine vinegar, put it on a staff, and offered it to Jesus to drink. “Now leave him alone. Let’s see if Elijah comes to take him down,” he said.

37With a loud cry, Jesus breathed his last.

38The curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. 39And when the centurion, who stood there in front of Jesus, saw how he died, he said, “Surely this man was the Son of God!”

40Some women were watching from a distance. Among them were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joseph, and Salome.

## Study

Gombis interprets the darkness coming over the land, and the temple curtain being torn in two, this way:

“The darkness, then, signals a crescendo of judgment, since it lasts for the three hours leading up to Jesus’s death, at which point the temple curtain is torn in two. This is the climax of judgment, which gathers and stands over the whole of Israel, but lands with a crash on the temple and the temple leadership.

The darkness covering the whole land for three hours recalls the plague of darkness that had covered Egypt for three days in Exodus 10:21–22:

*Then the Lord said to Moses, “Stretch out your hand toward the sky so that darkness spreads over Egypt—darkness that can be felt.” So Moses stretched out his hand toward the sky, and total darkness covered all Egypt for three days.*

This sign of judgment also alludes to God’s declaration of destruction against the temple in Amos 8:9, when darkness would again cover the land during the noon hour:

*“In that day,” declares the Sovereign Lord,“I will make the sun go down at noon and darken the earth in broad daylight.”*

The darkness does not occur at Jesus’s death but rather concludes when he dies, and that is when the temple curtain is torn. The death of Jesus, then, is God’s accomplishment of salvation for his people, but it is also God’s judgment on Israel—specifically the temple and its leadership.[[4]](#footnote-5)

## Think about

Jesus’ ghastly cry, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” which are the last words he speaks in this Gospel, continue to perplex Christians. Gombis offers this explanation:

“At three in the afternoon, “Jesus cried out in a loud voice, *‘Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?’*” (v. 34). Mark translates this anguished cry from Aramaic: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” Jesus has been abandoned by his disciples and dies utterly alone. On the cross, he is the focal point of the turning of the ages, bearing judgment and accomplishing salvation for God’s people. He utters the awful cry of the psalmist from the opening lines of Psalm 22:

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

Why are you so far from saving me,

so far from my cries of anguish?

My God, I cry out by day, but you do not answer,

by night, but I find no rest. (vv. 1–2)

Jesus’s words dignify for all time the agonized laments uttered by God’s people who feel forsaken by God, *as he becomes the God-forsaken one*.” [[5]](#footnote-6)

However we interpret Jesus’ words, we know that Jesus edured pain, betrayal, abandonment, humiliation, and hatred so that we could be saved and reconciled to him for all eternity. In our darkest moments, Jesus is there in our pain. He knows firsthand what it is to suffer. Yet he does far more than simply empathize with us. Jesus’ victory over evil and death is complete, and one day we will experience that victory firsthand.

Of all the people who witnessed Jesus’ death, it’s a Roman Centurion who recognized him as the Son of God. He does this after seeing how Jesus died. While others mocked him from beneath the cross for not displaying his power and saving himself, the centurion sees divinity in Christ’s sacrifice.

## Pray

Take time to thank Jesus for enduring the cross. Confess your sin and express your gratitude for Christ’s gift by receiving his forgiveness and repenting of your actions. We honor Jesus’ sacrifice when we turn from sin.

# Day 3

## Read

### Mark 15:42–47 (NIV)

42It was Preparation Day (that is, the day before the Sabbath). So as evening approached, 43Joseph of Arimathea, a prominent member of the Council, who was himself waiting for the kingdom of God, went boldly to Pilate and asked for Jesus’ body. 44Pilate was surprised to hear that he was already dead. Summoning the centurion, he asked him if Jesus had already died. 45When he learned from the centurion that it was so, he gave the body to Joseph. 46So Joseph bought some linen cloth, took down the body, wrapped it in the linen, and placed it in a tomb cut out of rock. Then he rolled a stone against the entrance of the tomb. 47Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joseph saw where he was laid.

## Study

* Mark notes that it was “Preparation Day,” the day before the Sabbath (verse 42). Because on the Sabbath, no work was to be done, Jesus’ body needed to be taken down from the cross before sundown when the Sabbath began.
* Joseph of Arimathea gives Jesus a proper burial so Jesus’ body will not remain on the cross for another day. According to Gombis, Joseph is “an ideal disciple who, like the woman who anointed Jesus for burial, performs a beautiful service to Jesus.” He was “a prominent member of the Council,” which likely means that he was part of the Sanhedrin (verse. 42). “Joseph takes his place alongside other characters who do not behave like the group to which they belong.”[[6]](#footnote-7)

## Think about

At the time Mark was written and today, the story of Jesus’ burial is important because it confirmed the reality of his death. The disciples weren’t perpetrating some elaborate hoax so they could claim a resurrected Messiah. Mark and the other Gospel writers included details about his burial, such as the name of a prominent religious leader who was involved. For Mark’s original hearers, these facts could be verified. Jesus of Nazareth died on a cross outside Jerusalem and was prepared for burial and placed in a tomb. Anyone who wanted to claim that stories of a risen Christ were false because Jesus didn’t actually die would have to deal with these claims.

Jesus died as a criminal. Although we know the end of the story, Mark makes it clear that the people surrounding Jesus did not anticipate what would come next. As far as they were concerned, Jesus was a defeated enemy of the Roman empire. So, Joseph of Arimathea and the women who helped prepare his body for burial did so at great personal risk. They were determined to care for Jesus, even at his death.

## Pray

Imagine what Jesus’ followers must have felt when their Lord was pronounced dead and placed in the tomb. They’d experienced the darkness of pain and loss and didn’t know that light would soon break like the dawn. We don’t have to experience their despondency in our dark days, because we know that Jesus lives. Ask the Spirit to increase your faith in the resurrected Messiah!

# Day 4

*This week’s Pastor’s Pregame Podcast will be the final episode of Season 1. Thanks to all of you who have listened and engaged! We’re taking a break and will be back in August with more great content. Listen at* [*CFhome.org/pregame*](https://subsplash.com/christfellowship-tx/lb/ms/+hg732gk) *or subscribe through* [*Apple Podcasts*](https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/pastors-pregame/id1582563644) *so you’ll get a notification when new episodes are available.*

## Read

### Mark 16:1–8 (NIV)

**16** 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. 2Very early on the first day of the week, just after sunrise, they were on their way to the tomb 3and they asked each other, “Who will roll the stone away from the entrance of the tomb?”

4But when they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had been rolled away. 5As 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. 7But go, tell his disciples and Peter, ‘He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.’ ”

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

## Study

* Even though the women had walked with Jesus and presumably heard him predict his death and resurrection, they expect to find his body in the tomb. As Gombis says, “while they are well-motivated, *their imaginations are limited by the horizons of this present age*.”[[7]](#footnote-8) Their reaction to the empty tomb and the announcement that Jesus is risen warns us that it is possible to know Jesus, yet still misunderstand much about him.
* The angel tells the women that Jesus has risen. He offers as evidence the empty tomb. “See,” he tells them. Once again, we see in Mark’s Gospel the importance of perception. Over and over Jesus has encouraged people to see and hear *in order to understand*. “The women behold the evidence of the reality-transforming work of God,” and the angel calls on them to process it faithfully—*to see it for what it really is*.[[8]](#footnote-9)

## Think about

Most scholars believe that the Gospel of Mark ends here (we’ll talk about why in tomorrow’s Engage God Daily). It’s an abrupt ending. We don’t get any of Jesus’ post-resurrection appearances or his instructions to his followers. Not only is the reader left with questions about what the women did with the news of Jesus’ resurrection and how the other disciples reacted, the tone feels off. Where is the rejoicing? Where is the excitement? As the screen fades to black on Mark’s Gospel, our final image is of trembling and bewildered women.

It's likely that this sense of unease prompted scribes to add material to the end of this Gospel. Yet, we should consider if Mark had a particular reason for concluding his Gospel this way. Gombis believes that he does:

“What response does Mark want to elicit from his audiences? Rather than providing a conclusion that relieves tension and brings resolution, Mark is far more interested in provoking readers and hearers to continued reflection on his Gospel narrative. Just as he has done throughout his Gospel, he challenges audiences to probe more intensely into the character of Jesus and the nature of the kingdom he inaugurates, in order to make sure they truly understand.”[[9]](#footnote-10)

## Pray

Mark’s account feels unfinished because in one sense, it is. We are still living out the reality of what the women discovered on the first Easter morning. The tomb is empty, and Christ is risen. So, now what? What does a resurrected Messiah mean for us? How does it affect our relationship with God? With others? How should it change our priorities and the way we live? Pray over these questions now and ask the Lord to help you see.

# Day 5

## Read

### Mark 16:9–20 (NIV)

9 When Jesus rose early on the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom he had driven seven demons. 10 She went and told those who had been with him and who were mourning and weeping. 11 When they heard that Jesus was alive and that she had seen him, they did not believe it.

12 Afterward Jesus appeared in a different form to two of them while they were walking in the country. 13 These returned and reported it to the rest; but they did not believe them either.

14 Later Jesus appeared to the Eleven as they were eating; he rebuked them for their lack of faith and their stubborn refusal to believe those who had seen him after he had risen.

15 He said to them, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. 16 Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned. 17 And these signs will accompany those who believe: In my name they will drive out demons; they will speak in new tongues; 18 they will pick up snakes with their hands; and when they drink deadly poison, it will not hurt them at all; they will place their hands on sick people, and they will get well.”

19 After the Lord Jesus had spoken to them, he was taken up into heaven and he sat at the right hand of God. 20 Then the disciples went out and preached everywhere, and the Lord worked with them and confirmed his word by the signs that accompanied it.

## Study

The verses printed above are one of the endings to Mark’s Gospel. There is also a shorter ending. Why do scholars believe that these verses were added later? The Faithlife Study Bible has a short, helpful article that explains this conclusion. Under the note on [Mark 16:9–20](https://biblia.com/books/fsb/Mk16.9-20), there is a link to this free article.

But if you are a TL;DR kind of person (Too long; Didn’t read). Here are some key points:

* The oldest and most reliable manuscripts of Mark’s Gospel do not include these verses, but end at 16:8.
* The style and vocabulary of these verses are decidedly different from the rest of the Gospel.
* The long ending seems to be a compilation of material from Luke and Mark, with some additional material included.

Wright makes this helpful observation:

“We can’t say for certain that nothing in this passage comes from the original Mark, but it doesn’t seem to me likely. That’s not to say there’s nothing we can learn here. The passage tells us, at least, how some fairly early Christians—nobody can say how early, but some time perhaps in the late second or early third century at the latest—saw the events of Easter and their significance.” [[10]](#footnote-11)

## Think about

As we noted yesterday, if we assume Mark ends at 16:8, the ending feels abrupt. In answering the question of why Mark’s Gospel ends this way, Morna Hooker concludes, “This is the end of Mark’s story, because it is the beginning of discipleship.”[[11]](#footnote-12) Jesus is our crucified and raised Messiah, the Son of God, who came “not to be served, but to serve and give his life as a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45). As his disciples, we are called to follow his example.

We have worked through the entire Gospel of Mark over the last several months. Take some time today to reflect and [read](https://biblia.com/books/niv2011/Mk1) through the whole Gospel again. Ask the Spirit to highlight stories, images, or phrases that help you answer the central questions of Mark, “Who is Jesus?” and “How should we respond to him?” Then pray over your understanding of who Jesus is and what he’s asking of you. What is your next, best step in following Christ?

## Pray

As you pray over your biggest takeaways from Mark, pray not only for your own growth as a follower of Jesus, pray for those around you. How can you encourage others to find and follow Jesus? Pray for the opportunities to have meaningful conversations where people experience Christ in you.

If the Son of God came to serve, how much more should we serve those around us. How can you better serve the people in your life? Pray for opportunities.

Praise God for the gift of his Spirit and his Word so that we can know Jesus!

1. David E. Garland, [*Mark*](https://ref.ly/logosres/nivac62mk?ref=Bible.Mk15.21-47&off=3199&ctx=erved+two+purposes.+~(1)+It+punished+the+), The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1996), 586. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. Garland, 587. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. Tom Wright, [*Mark for Everyone*](https://ref.ly/logosres/evry62mk?ref=Bible.Mk15.16-32&off=7742&ctx=ed+as+King+(10:40).%0a~The+crucifixion+scen) (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2004), 213–214. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. Gombis, [*Mark*](https://ref.ly/logosres/strygdcm62mk?ref=Bible.Mk15.33-39&off=1291&ctx=+temple+leadership.%0a~The+darkness+coverin), ed. Scot McKnight and Tremper Longman III, The Story of God Bible Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2021), 548. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. Gombis, 548–549. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. Gombis, 552. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
7. Gombis, 561. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
8. Gombis, 564. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
9. Gombis, 560. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
10. Wright, 226. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
11. Morna D. Hooker, [*The Gospel according to Saint Mark*](https://ref.ly/logosres/black62mk?ref=Page.p+394&off=438&ctx=low+where+he+leads.+~This+is+the+end+of+M), Black’s New Testament Commentary (London: Continuum, 1991), 394. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)