

# READ THIS FIRST

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## The Gospel of Mark: The King and His Kingdom

### Note from Pastor Luke Simmons

The mission of Second Mile Church is to “embody Jesus’ mission and message in every place that God sends us.” The Bible refers to the followers of Jesus as his “ambassadors” (2 Cor 5:20) and expects us to faithfully represent him to the world. In order to faithfully live out this mission we must grow intimately familiar with who Jesus is and what he has done. Thus, it makes sense to have our first weekly study focus on the life, ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus, as described in the Gospel of Mark.

Though this series, “The King and His Kingdom,” will not be an exhaustive study of the person of Jesus, we will become thoroughly acquainted with his message, mission, attitude and actions. Not only will we see Jesus in action, but we’ll also get a glimpse of what life looks like in Jesus’ Kingdom. Mark is a fast-paced, hard-hitting, action-packed book and we will spend fourteen weeks examining the highlights of his account.

This study guide, designed for individual study or for use in Community Groups, is intended to help us dive deeper into the Scripture and apply the things we learn. The Bible calls us to “be doers of the word, and not hearers only” (James 1:22). These study guides are designed to help us not just hear the word on Sunday, but put it into practice Monday through Saturday.

My prayer for this series is that God will use it to deepen your love for Jesus. Whether you are just beginning to explore what it would be like to follow Christ or you’ve trusted him for a long time, my hope is that your heart would be delighted by his majesty, power, humility, trustworthiness, sacrifice and victory. Only as we grow satisfied in Jesus will we be able to bring his love and grace to our hurting world.

Because the Tomb is Empty,

Luke Simmons  
Lead Pastor

### The Format

Each study begins with a **key verse** that summarizes the truth found in the entire section. These key verses, if memorized, would allow you to learn the big ideas found in Mark’s Gospel. Then there is an **introduction** to the passage that you can use for review or, if you miss a Sunday, you can track with us wherever we are. Next are some questions for **investigation** (getting into the text) and **implication** (applying these truths to daily life). Each study concludes with a section on **other issues**, which expand on any other issues or questions raised by the passage that we may not take time to cover during the sermon.

### Suggestions for Individuals

- Before you begin, pray that God would open your eyes to see what he is saying in the Bible and give you the spiritual strength to do something about it.
- Work through the study and write out answers to the questions.
- Resist any temptation to skip over the **implication** section. It is important to ponder how the truths apply to your life. Though these questions are sometimes penetrating and difficult, they are designed to help you think seriously about your life.
- Take what opportunities you can to share with others about what you’ve learned and how you’d like your life to change as a result.

### Suggestions for Community Groups

- It is recommended that you study the passage *after* it has been preached. This way you can discuss the issues raised by the sermon as well as the study itself.
- In your time together as a community, focus on the **implications** for your lives individually and as a group. Share with one another how you sense God calling you to change, pray for one another about these things, and invite one another to encourage you and hold you accountable to apply the truth.
- In your time together as a community, use this guide as a launching point for discussion and care for one another. Resist the urge to try to discuss every question or “get through the material.”

### Questions or Comments?

If you have feedback or questions about the series or studies, please feel free to email them to [info@secondmilechurch.com](mailto:info@secondmilechurch.com).

Week 14

# KINGDOM VICTORY

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Mark 15:42-16:8

.....  
*And he said to them, "Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has risen; he is not here. See the place where they laid him."*

.....  
(Mark 16:6, ESV)  
.....

## Introduction

There is nothing more thrilling for sports fans than to see their team experience a come-from-behind victory. Whether it's a quarterback leading a 2-minute offense or a clutch hit in the bottom of the ninth inning, few things are as exhilarating as seeing a team pull it out with their backs against the wall. Even if you're not a sports fan, you surely know the excitement of seeing a movie where at the last possible moment the hero comes through in the most improbable of ways.

The passage before us describes the greatest come-from-behind victory in history. While Satan and his demonic hosts were still celebrating the death of their arch-enemy, Jesus did the impossible. Suddenly, three words changed the trajectory of the universe: "He is risen."

The resurrection of Jesus guarantees that there will someday be no more death, no more pain, no more suffering, and no more sin. It gives us hope that we too will be resurrected with indestructible bodies to inhabit a renewed creation. This hope for the future gives us power to endure the trials and challenges that we constantly face (1 Peter 1:3-6).

Not only does the resurrection of Jesus give us hope for the future, but it also gives us courage and power in the present. Consider the lives of the disciples, who almost completely abandoned their Lord at the time of his crucifixion. History tells us that all but one of them would later die for their faith. What could possibly explain this transformation other than the resurrection? Nothing.

This same resurrection power is alive in us today, helping us to have confidence in the power of our unbeatable God who is victorious over all. May we walk in the confidence that if God is for us, it doesn't matter who or what is against us.

## Investigation

Read Mark 15:42-16:8.

1. Mark records that Joseph of Arimathea "took courage" in asking for Jesus' body. Why would this act have required courage?
2. What are we to learn from the fact that the witnesses and people showing faithfulness here to Jesus are Joseph, a Pharisee (15:40-47), women (16:1-8), and a Roman centurion (see 15:39, 44)?
3. The angel tells the women to "go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going before you to Galilee." Why is Peter singled out?
4. What is the theological significance of Jesus' resurrection?

## Implication

5. Some people are embarrassed to admit that they believe in supernatural things or in Jesus? Why? How do we overcome this embarrassment?
  
6. Some people have said that even if the resurrection isn't true, at least Christianity is a good way to live. Do you agree with this? Why or why not?
  
7. Even after Peter had blown it so badly (14:66-72), Jesus was still looking for him and eager to forgive him. In what ways do you need God's forgiveness in your life right now?
  
8. In what ways does the truth of Jesus' resurrection impact *your* life this week? Try to list as many things as possible.

## Other Issues

### Should Mark 16:9-20 be considered an authentic part of Mark's Gospel?

The external evidence strongly suggests these verses were not originally part of Mark's gospel. While the majority of Greek manuscripts contain these verses, the earliest and most reliable do not. A shorter ending also existed, but it is not included in the text. Further, some that include the passage note that it was missing from older Greek manuscripts, while others have scribal marks indicating the passage was considered spurious. The fourth-century church fathers Eusebius and Jerome noted that almost all Greek manuscripts available to them lacked vv. 9–20. The internal evidence from this passage also weighs heavily against Mark's authorship. The transition between vv. 8 and 9 is abrupt and awkward. The Greek particle translated "now" that begins v. 9 implies continuity with the preceding narrative. What follows, however, does not continue the story of the women referred to in v. 8, but describes Christ's appearance to Mary Magdalene (cf. John 20:11–18). The masculine participle in v. 9 expects "he" as its antecedent, yet the subject of v. 8 is the women. Although she had just been mentioned 3 times (v. 1; 15:40, 47), v. 9 introduces Mary Magdalene as if for the first time. Further, if Mark wrote v. 9, it is strange that he would only now note that Jesus had cast 7 demons out of her. The angel spoke of Jesus' appearing to His followers in Galilee, yet the appearances described in vv. 9–20 are all in the Jerusalem area. Finally, the presence in these verses of a significant number of Greek words used nowhere else in Mark argues that Mark did not write them. Verses 9–20 represent an early (they were known to the second-century fathers Irenaeus, Tatian, and, possibly, Justin Martyr) attempt to complete Mark's gospel. While for the most part summarizing truths taught elsewhere in Scripture, vv. 9–20 should always be compared with the rest of Scripture, and no doctrines should be formulated based solely on them. Since, in spite of all these considerations of the likely unreliability of this section, it is possible to be wrong on the issue, and thus, it is good to consider the meaning of this passage and leave it in the text, just as with John 7:53–8:11.<sup>29</sup>

### What are the possible alternative explanations for the resurrection? How does Mark undermine these explanations?

Alternative explanations that have been put forth:

(1) It was a *resuscitation*. Jesus didn't actually die on the cross, but "swooned" and recovered later to show himself to his disciples.

(2) It was a sincere *delusion*. The disciples had a passionate expectation that Jesus "just couldn't be dead". Thus they may have had a hallucination, or in some other way convinced themselves that they were experiencing him as alive.

<sup>29</sup> John Jr MacArthur, *The MacArthur Study Bible*, electronic ed. (Nashville: Word Pub., 1997, c1997). Mk 16:9.

(3) It was a *fraud*. All or some of the disciples stole the body away to hide it and to claim they'd seen him. It was a conspiracy.

(4) It was meant to be a *symbol*. The early disciples never meant us to believe that Jesus was literally and physically raised. Rather, these accounts were an artistic way to say his "spirit" and "teaching" live on.

(5) It was a *legend*. In the recent centuries, many have asserted that these accounts were legends that grew up around Jesus over the years and were written down many years after the events.

The details in these verses undermine each of these alternative explanations. Every part of this passage repeatedly seeks to eliminate the possibilities that the resurrection was other than a great miracle.

(1) A *resuscitation*? It seems that Mark may have been quite aware of this explanation, because there is quite a lot of information here to undermine that theory. The whole burial account is a way to "certify" that Jesus was really dead. Joseph of Arimathea is named here as an identified witness who actually had Jesus' body wrapped up and sealed it in a tomb (15:46). A Roman centurion (who would be an expert) bore witness of his death to Pilate (who would be the legal authority; 15:44). Finally, two women are cited as eyewitnesses to the burial (15:47). So multiple experts and witnesses prove he was really dead.

(2) A *delusion*? Obviously, the women who speak to the angel (16:5) are a group. People don't have group hallucinations! But perhaps the most overlooked bit of evidence in the gospel accounts is how completely un-expected the resurrection was to the disciples. Everything in the text indicates this. The fact that they had purchased spices (16:1) for the body (which were very expensive) shows that they loved him very much, but it also shows they did not expect him to rise from the dead! The reaction of the women to the angel also shows their inability to believe in the resurrection. Their first reaction is not: "I knew it! I knew he'd do it!" but instead they are shocked, confused, and afraid (16:8). And finally, it should be noted that none of Jesus' 12 disciples are there at all. Clearly, no one expected him to do what he had predicted.

But this raises another question. Why, despite Jesus' clear and repeated predictions of his resurrection was it so unexpected to his followers? It is often felt by modern people that ancient folks were much more prone to believe in miracles. But Mark shows the followers of Jesus acting just like we would have. The answer by some recent historians is very intriguing and helpful.

It cannot be stressed too strongly that "resurrection" for Jews of the period had nothing to do with mere "resuscitation". It was not a matter of coming back into the same sort of life. It was a matter of going through death, and out into the new world beyond... Nor [was] it the same as immortality, or the transmigration of a disembodied soul or spirit. It is what the Maccabean martyrs of the second century BC

were longing for when they spoke of Israel's God giving them back their limbs and organs after they had suffered horrible torture and death. People who believe that sort of thing would not be prepared to use the word "resurrection" unless something emphatically physical had taken place.

Equally, it must be stressed that first-century Jews were not expecting people to rise from the dead (in this sense) simply as isolated individuals, on a one-off basis, here and there... "Resurrection" for them was something that would happen to all dead Jews, and perhaps all dead humans. It would happen on the great future occasion when the True God finally brought history... into the new day... a whole new world order...

It will not do, therefore, to say that Jesus' disciples were so stunned and shocked by his death, so unable to come to terms with it, that they projected their shattered hopes onto the screen of fantasy and invented the idea of Jesus' "resurrection" as a way of coping with a cruelly broken dream. That has an initial apparent psychological plausibility, but it won't work as serious first-century history. We know of lots of other messianic and similar movements in the Jewish world roughly contemporary with Jesus. In many cases the leader died a violent death at the hands of authorities. In not one single case do we hear the slightest mention of the disappointed followers claiming that their hero had been raised from the dead. They knew better. Resurrection was not a private event. Jewish revolutionaries whose leader had been executed by the authorities, and who managed to escape arrest themselves, had two options: give up the revolution, or find another leader. Claiming that the original leader was alive again was simply not an option.

Unless, of course, he was. (N.T. Wright, *Who Was Jesus?*)

(3) A *fraud*? Mark reveals the remarkable fact that Joseph, not the disciples, buried Jesus and that the women, were concerned to anoint and honor the body. Where were the disciples? Their cowardice and depression and abandonment of their Master is obvious. Everything indicates that they were too demoralized to carry out a hoax. If they were going to carry out the fraud, surely they would have been at the burial to see exactly where the body was. But there are two other major difficulties with this theory.

First, as we have seen, the complete lack of belief in an individual resurrection makes the "Delusion" theory highly unlikely, but it also makes the "fraud" theory unlikely. We said that Jews who did believe in the resurrection only believed in a general resurrection at the end of time; the idea of one individual raised by himself into the new world order was preposterous. What then would have made the disciples think that they could convince others that Jesus was raised from the dead?

Unless Jesus really *was* appearing to people, there is simply no way that a movement based on this belief would have gotten off the ground. Everything in their belief system resisted such a claim.

Second, history tells us the disciples all lived lives of sacrificial service and died terrible deaths to spread the gospel of the risen Christ. Could a hoax have transformed them like that? Do you die for something you know is a lie? Do you live lives of service for something you know is a lie? Self-sacrifice comports with delusion but not with a hoax.

(4) *A symbol or a legend?* As we have seen, first century Jews did not have the Greek idea of an ‘immortal soul’ or the modern idea of someone’s ‘spirit living on’. They would not have used the term ‘resurrection’ for anything non-physical. (See the N.T. Wright quote above.)

And a legend? Mark is careful to name and identify real, historical individual witnesses. In 15:40,47 and 16:1, the women are named repeatedly. The fact that one of the Mary’s is called “*the mother of James... of Joses and Salome*” indicates that these people were well known in the early church. (Remember also the reference in chapter 15:21 to Simon of Cyrene ‘*the father of Alexander and Rufus.*’) Mark does not merely say “some people saw” — then there would be no way to authenticate the account. The naming of people is Mark’s way of saying, “All I am writing can be verified. Check it out for yourself!” Remember, Mark was written 30-35 years after the events (roughly our relationship to the first walk on the moon), so this account is well within the lifetimes of (probably) the Mary’s and (certainly) of James, Joses, and Salome. This is a way to show that the resurrection was a historical fact.

Also, as we have seen, Mark’s record that women were the first witnesses to the resurrection attests to the authenticity of the record, because in that culture no one would have made up a story with women as the primary witnesses. By claiming that only women were the first witnesses (and by giving readers their names and family records), Mark’s account has all of the “ring of truth.”

“The more one examines into the various factors which seem to account for the extraordinary victory of Christianity, [in the ancient world] the more one is driven to search for a cause which underlies them. It is clear that at the very beginning of Christianity there must have occurred a vast release of energy, unequalled in the history of the race. Without it the future course of the faith is inexplicable. That burst of energy was ascribed by the early disciples to the founder of their faith. Something happened to the men who associated with Jesus. In his contact with them... in the assurance of his resurrection and continued presence with his disciples... is to be found the major cause of the success of Christianity.” (K. S. Latourette)

**Summary:** The resurrection of Jesus was neither a lovely myth, nor a symbol of new life developed decades after Jesus’ life, nor a hallucination based on wishful

thinking, nor a trick. Rather, it was a historical phenomenon, witnessed to and attested by numerous reliable sources. The Biblical evidence cannot “prove” beyond a shadow of a doubt that the resurrection occurred. But the evidence is nearly irrefutable that hundreds of people, often in large groups, who had no cultural or religious reason to believe it—testified that they saw the risen Christ, often repeatedly, over a 40 day span after his death. What do we do with that?<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Timothy J. Keller, *The Gospel of Mark Study Guide*, 213-216.