

Finer Grounds

Mark Lesson 12: The End, and the Beginning!

Before You Begin:

Take the time to write down what you know and understand about the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. What was it like for Jesus physically? What was it like for him emotionally? Who was there? How long did it last? Why did things transpire the way that they did? Do you truly understand what it means to “take up your cross daily” (Luke 9:23,) and are you willing to do so?

Read Mark 15:21-25

After hours of abuse and humiliation, the time has come for the actual crucifixion. Much of what transpires in these verses directly correlate to Psalm 22, a man after God’s own heart foretold what would happen to the Son of God hundreds of years in the future. Verse 22 gives us an incredible glimpse into the heart and mind of our Savior as he faced tremendous agony for us. The wine Jesus was offered was mixed with myrrh to create a stupefying affect (Lenski 1961). This would have dulled Jesus’ senses, and therefore dulled the agony he was experiencing. As a mother, I cannot help but correlate this with childbirth. Childbirth is necessary for the livelihood of mankind. It is a beautiful end reached through a painful process. With modern medicine, a mother may now choose (for the most part) whether to take measures to ease the discomfort of this process, or whether to experience each sensation, each contraction, each movement to its full extent. This was the choice Jesus was faced with in his weakened and weary condition, yet he rejected the pitiful amount of

comfort he was offered in order to be fully aware and alert as he gave himself for us.

Think About It:

Why would Mark have specifically mentioned Simon’s children by name?

Why did the soldiers cast lots for Jesus’ clothes?

Jesus was actually hung on the cross at the third hour, how long did the actual crucifixion last?

Take Action:

Compare Psalm 22 and Mark 15, what correlations do you find?

Read Mark 15:26-32

The cruelty and hatred espoused by those at the crucifixion is also extremely ironic. Even the chief priests and scribes, while mocking Jesus, are acknowledging the miracles that he performed. By their own admission, at the least Jesus truly was a profit, and at the most he was exactly who he

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claimed to be, yet their hardness of heart blinded them from being able to accept the truth that they had seen with their own eyes.

Think About It:

Do our own desires and preconceived ideas ever blind us from seeing the truth of God's word? How can we overcome this?

Mark does not elaborate at all on the physical nature of what Jesus is enduring at this point in time, but instead focuses on the emotional/mental turmoil. Why is this?

Take Action:

Spend some time researching Roman crucifixions in order to better understand exactly what Jesus endured on the cross.

Read Mark 15:33-37

Darkness now comes over the land, although it is still hours from the end of the day. Amos 8:9, Jeremiah 15:9, and the ninth plague in Deuteronomy 10:21ff are all examples of when God has used darkness to proclaim judgment on mankind. Yet even still the hard hearts of man refused to acknowledge what they were seeing.

This is one of the most horrific passages in Scripture. Jesus has been mutilated and mocked, and is now hanging on a cross, and then his last lifeline, his connection with God the Father himself, is severed, leaving him with nothing but pain, agony, the sins of man's entire existence, and utter desertion. Many have tried to claim that God did not really forsake Jesus, that he was really there the entire time, Jesus just felt deserted

because of the intensity of all he was being put through. Yet from what I see in Scripture, I don't believe this to be the case. 2 Corinthians 5:21 clearly states that Jesus became our sin on the cross, and Isaiah 59:2 clearly states that sin creates a separation from God. Jesus literally bearing our sins on the cross made it necessary for God to turn his back on him, because the Holiness of God cannot be in the presence of sin. And from that moment on, for all those who submit to Him, Jesus has been there. Right between us and God as our mediator saying, "No, she's OK, I've cleansed her, she can come before you in prayer" (1 Timothy 2:5). Jesus allowed himself to be separated from the love, grace, and mercy of God the Father, so that we, as lowly sinners would never have to be.

It is also interesting to note that Jesus now accepts a drink, when before he had refused. At this point in time Jesus has fulfilled his purpose on earth, and he is preparing to succumb to death. Yet he will not die quietly or subserviently, he accepted this drink to wet his parched throat so that with his final breath he could proclaim that he has fulfilled his purpose (John 19:30).

Think About It:

How does Deuteronomy 21:22-23 relate to Mark 15:34, and Jesus taking on the sins of the world?

Read Mark 15:38-41

In a beautiful act of symbolism and finality, as Jesus breathed his last the curtain dividing the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies, the curtain dividing God from man, was torn in two. Sin no longer had to separate man from God, Jesus had made the sacrifice once for all (Hebrews 9:28) for those who are willing to submit their lives to him (John 14:15).

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This passage also demonstrates the beautiful influence that Godly women can have. Jesus' apostles, the men closer to him than all others, fled during his greatest hour of need. Yet these amazing women stood vigil throughout his entire crucifixion. While the apostles traveled and ministered with him for three years, these women ministered *to* him during his mission on earth. You see, it is not necessarily to be up front publicly leading and teaching to change the world, true world change, true ministry, also takes place behind the scenes. In the encouragement and hospitality, in the support and understanding, in the listening ear and the nurturing touch, in the food and clothing for those in need. These are the greatest opportunities to touch people's hearts and minister to their souls.

How important was the ministry of these women to Jesus? How important is our ministry today?

Take Action:

God's plan is clearly for men to be the leaders of His church (I Timothy 3:1-13, I Timothy 2:8-15), yet our attitudes as the women they are leading can make or break them. In order to do their job effectively, elders and ministers desperately need to be ministered *to*. This week, do something specific to edify and encourage the men leading your congregation: write them cards, bake them some cookies, have them over for dinner, anything to let them know that you love and appreciate them for their service to God and your congregation.

Read Mark 15:42-47

Pilate was shocked to hear that Jesus had already died, because crucifixions were notoriously long and cruel, at times lasting several

days. Yet Jesus was unique even in his death, dying early enough that there was time for a basic preparation and burial of his body before the beginning of the Sabbath. Here we also learn that not all of the Jewish leaders wanted Jesus dead. Joseph of Arimathea risked a great deal to care for the body of the dead the Messiah, at a point at which it did not seem there was much to gain.

Think About It:

What does this passage tell us regarding when Jesus was crucified?

What did Joseph of Arimathea risk in order to give Jesus of Nazareth a proper burial?

Read Mark 16:1-8

And now we come to the end, and the beginning. Jesus has been born, ministered, and been crucified all in the fulfillment of Scripture. And yet now, he is no longer in the tomb! This is the beginning of hope, of grace, of life and of salvation! Because of these verses we no longer have to fear death, death has been conquered! We no longer have to fear sin, sin has been conquered! We no longer have to fear judgment, for we have a Savior who will stand before God Almighty and say, "I have paid the price for her sins, she is clean." Is it any wonder that these precious women were seized with wonder and amazement?

It is interesting to note, however, that Peter is specifically mentioned apart from the other apostles. Some claim that this is because Peter was the favored apostle, while others claim that it is because of Peter's relationship with Mark. There is another explanation, however, that Peter

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is specifically mentioned so that he, and everyone else, will know that he has been forgiven for denying Christ (Lenski 1961). How could Peter ever face Jesus again, knowing how horribly and publicly he had denied his Savior, without that promise of forgiveness?

Think About It:

Do we ever let our own guilt, or fear of not being forgiven, prevent us from reaching out to those we have hurt? How can we prevent this from happening in the future?

Read Mark 16:9-13

I really love this passage, specifically for the sake of dear Thomas. For generations now Thomas has been given the name of “Doubting Thomas,” and I think this is completely unfair. First of all, how many men had ever before, or since, raised themselves from the dead? But completely aside from the bewildering and astounding nature of this particular miracle, Thomas was *not* the only one who doubted! Verses 11 and 13 both plainly state that *none* of the apostles initially believed! Yet it was true, Jesus the Christ had risen from the grave, and nothing would ever be the same.

Think About It:

What does it take for us to be convinced of Biblical truths? Are we willing to look openly and honestly at the facts, or do we let our assumptions and preconceived ideas cloud our understanding of God’s word?

Read Mark 16:14-20

Jesus decides to put all of the “rumors” to rest at once, and personally comes to all eleven apostles at once. Once again, Mark records a rebuke of the apostles for their lack of belief, reminding both us

and them of their human fallibility. What a comforting thought, that as many times as they messed up, Jesus never gave up on them, and he will never give up on us.

Think About It:

What does Scripture explicitly say in Mark 16:16

What is the purpose of the miraculous signs Mark describes in verses 17-18?

In this context (verse 20), what group is Jesus specifically saying will be given these miraculous abilities?

Jesus has now fulfilled his earthly ministry. He has finished his task, and man’s reconciliation to God has now been made possible for all eternity. And now, the time has come for the apostles, and for us, to boldly proclaim this reconciliation to all the world. How are we doing?

Side Study

Within the world of religious scholarship, there is much debate and disagreement concerning Mark 16:9-20. This is due to the fact that these verses do not appear in any of the original manuscripts we have found to date (France 2002). In fact, there are five different endings to the book of Mark found in various manuscripts (Orbison & Petrillo 2004). While there is not room in this study for an exhaustive look at the historical manuscripts concerning these passages, I will briefly outline the two primary opinions: that Mark truly ends with verse 8 and nothing else should be included, and that all 20 verses were intended by Mark, however please keep in mind that this is by no means an exhaustive list.

Ending With Verse 8:

- Our two oldest and most complete manuscripts: the Codex Sinaiticus and the Codex Vaticanus both end at verse 8. Additionally, both manuscripts have a

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blank space at the end indicating that the scribes new of the longer ending, and yet chose not to include it (Orbison & Petrillo 2004).

- Some feel that the language and style of the last 12 verses is very different from the rest of the book (France 2002).
- Some feel that the abrupt ending of verse 8 is exactly what Mark had intended in fitting with the dramatic style of his book, and was intended to create a desire in the listener to learn more (France 2002).

Ending with Verse 20:

- Some believe that the abruptness of verse 8 necessitates a more thorough conclusion (Lanski 1961).
- These verses are found in all of the later manuscripts (Orbison & Petrillo 2004).
- Some believe that the style fits perfectly with the rest of the book, and therefore must have been written by Mark (Lanski 1961).

Conclusion:

This is, in fact, a tremendous example of the authenticity and reliability of our modern Bible. This passage is certainly the largest, and one of the only passages found in Scripture that can not be consistently traced back through the manuscripts. Yet, it doesn't really matter. There is nothing found in these 12 verses that contradicts other Scripture, or that cannot be found elsewhere:

Mark 16:9-13	-----	Luke 24:1-11
Mark 16:14	-----	Luke 24:36
Mark 16:15	-----	Matthew 28:19
Mark 16:16	-----	I Peter 3:21, Acts 2:38
Mark 16:17-18	-----	Acts 5:12, Acts 2:1-12, Acts 28:3-6

If you believe that Mark's gospel account should have ended at first 8, the message is clear: they were told to go and proclaim Christ, and they did not. If you believe that Mark's gospel account

rightfully ends at verse 20 the message is clear: "proclaim the gospel to the whole creation." If we truly believe that Jesus is the Christ the son of the living God, we cannot help but proclaim him. If I'm not proclaiming him, do I really believe?

Think About It:

How are you personally proclaiming Jesus the Christ, and what are specific ways that you can, and will, do better?

France, R. T. (2002). *The Gospel of Mark: a commentary on the Greek text*. Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press.

Lanski, R. C. H. (1961). *The Interpretation of St. Mark's Gospel*. Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House.

Orbison, G. and Petrillo, D. (2004). *A Study of the Gospel of Mark*. Workshop in the Word. Durango, Co