

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.

- a. [Mark 16:8](#) Some manuscripts have the following ending between verses 8 and 9, and one manuscript has it after verse 8 (omitting verses 9-20): Then they quickly reported all these instructions to those around Peter. After this, Jesus himself also sent out through them from east to west the sacred and imperishable proclamation of eternal salvation. Amen.

## The End

*"It is a far, far better thing that I do, than I have ever done. It is a far, far better place that I go, than I have ever gone."* Are the closing words of a Tale of Two Cities. *"Tomorrow, I will think of some way to get him back. After all, tomorrow is another day."* Are the closing words of Gone with the Wind. Finally, *"I reckon I got to light out for the Territory ahead of the rest, because Aunt Sally she's going to adopt me and sivilize me and I can't stand it. I been there before."* Adventures of Huck Finn.

Sometimes the end of a book is just as memorable as the beginning. Then again sometimes the end of a book is just as bad as the beginning. But there is something about the ending. An author can make or break a book, an entire novel can be ruined by a disappointing ending. Each book or sermon written by someone of great skill can be ruined as the finale flops into a "They lived happily ever after..." or "That's all folks!". The end should bring together the loose ends, it should provide closure, unless you're writing a series of books then open ends are possible. But opening up another can of worms at the end which won't be resolved is never a good idea.

So what does this have to do with the book of Mark? We arrive at the end. The finish is in sight but how does it end? Honestly, I'd like to know a lot more. There are loose ends. There is no 2nd book of Mark. And at the risk of calling John Mark a bad writer... I want to know so much more. What happened? Did the women ever tell the disciples? Did Jesus meet with them in Galilee? I want to know more. I want the characters to ride off into the sunset. I want the end to finish with a bang.

Especially on Easter Sunday - I don't want to end on, "*Trembling and bewildered, the women went out and fled from the tomb. They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid.*"

Can you imagine if your life ended on the same note, "Trembling and bewildered, Josh fled from life, said nothing to anyone, because he was afraid." If you were to have someone write the story of your life how would you want it to end? How would you want to be remembered? Trembling, bewildered, and afraid. Generally we want to be remembered for the good things we've done, the great things we've accomplished, not the mistakes we've made. We want to tie up the loose ends in life and hope that it ends when we are ready but sometimes the end is sudden and unexpected.

You've probably seen the fine print after verse 8, "*the two most reliable early manuscripts do not have Mark 16:9-20*". That's not much a problem for us because we don't practice snake handling, moreover everything that is written in Mark 16:9-20 is repeated in one of the other gospels. It's not so clear whether or not the extended ending should be there. The two most reliably manuscripts Sinaiticus and Vaticanus omit the longer ending but they do leave space for it. Scribes are usually hesitant to leave anything out that might truly be scripture, so documents tend to grow with age.

But look at this ending? The women—who have just been commanded to tell the disciples the Good News that Jesus had been raised from the dead—running off in fear not telling anyone anything. The best news the world has ever heard, has just been given...but the news is never communicated. Mark's Gospel ends in silence. And fear. "*Trembling and bewildered, the women went out and fled from the tomb. They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid.*" Jesus may live, but as far as Mark is concerned the Good News dies with the women at the tomb.

That doesn't sound good...Not only is Mark harsh with the women he leaves us hanging like a book ending mid sentence, "What's the worst that could..." The worst that could happen is some scribe comes along and tries to make the Mary's look better, finish his story, and add a few verse. What we do know is Mark is honest in his portrayal of everyone. He doesn't create heroes. He may be harsh with the women, trembling in fear, bewildered, but that's not much better than the men, the disciples, who aren't even present or willing to go to the tomb Sunday Morning. The men who are cowering in fear behind locked doors instead of waiting by the tomb with a welcoming party. They were all afraid and terrified. That's the end.

That's like us as well. Mark knows that the reader knows this isn't the end. The women eventually went on to tell the disciples. The disciples of course didn't believe them and in turn rushed to the tomb to see for themselves. But Mark wants us to realize how often we too are afraid to talk about this great news. It's as if he looks directly at us and says, "Will this story begin and end with you?" Often it does.

We're afraid. We're afraid that someone may slam a door, say some not so nice things to us, ridicule, and then they could always kill us for confessing, "Christ has risen." It's happened. It still

happens. A shooter asks are you a Christian, “Yes.” That’s the end. The first person has it easy, but can you imagine the second Christian standing in line... What about you? I’m afraid to die. I’m afraid of all the loose ends that I haven’t taken care of. I’m afraid that often I have denied Jesus just like Peter. Often we run away from him and won’t associate with him. Often we don’t look or act like Christians. That should be the end of us.

But *“this is the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.”* And no John Mark wasn’t known for amazing introductions either. This is just the beginning of all that Jesus said or did. The beginning of the good news skips Christmas and jumps straight to Easter. An angel announces, *“You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified, He has risen! He is not here.”* Mark leaves us at the empty tomb questioning, “What now?” only for us to start again at the beginning, *“This is the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.”*

It wouldn’t be good news if Mark announced, “Jesus has risen from the dead and boy is he ticked off.” It wouldn’t be good news if he ended with, “Run and hide... Run and hide..” The good news is that Jesus is risen he has forgiven our every fear and sin. He goes ahead of us and even instructs the women, *“Tell his disciples, and Peter,”* Tell Peter the one who doesn’t even feel like a disciple, *“I’ll see you in Galilee, just as I said I would.”*

They don’t have any reason to be afraid. They don’t need to worry about anointing a dead body with spices. They don’t need to worry about a stone standing at the entrance to the tomb. They don’t need to be afraid of Jesus the one who lived, died, and rose for them. They don’t even need to worry about death because they know someone who has the power over life and death. Jesus is not there because his lifeless corpse is locked away behind a barrier; he is not there because the stone is removed and he is alive! That is just the beginning and all that Mark set out to accomplish. While John Mark ends here, we know the women eventually said something. *We know the disciples didn’t believe them, because their words seemed to them like nonsense” (Luke 24:11)* But we also know Mark recorded these words. We know someone told him. He in turn told others. Someone in turn told us.

That’s the tension Mark leaves us with. You know the story. Will it end with you? Don’t be afraid Jesus is upset with you. Don’t be afraid that he’s asking you to do what you can’t. You don’t have to sell everything and become a missionary and move stones beyond your ability but to be faithful with what you have. Continue among God’s people.

Don’t be afraid. Christ died for yours sins as well. You have a risen Lord who has forgiven your every denial and sin. Rejoice. Be glad. There is good news for you. This may be the end of Mark but it isn’t the end of Christianity. This is just the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. It is a far, far better thing that he has done for us than we ever could do for him. It is a far, far better place that we go, than we have ever been. Tomorrow is a new day. God has got us back, adopted and sivilized in Christ. Amen.