



31st March 2024 | Resurrection Sunday

Is your life a sign and a wonder of God's resurrection power that resides within you?

Have you ever read a story or a novel that ends with a cliffhanger?

The kind of story that ends with stunning event or a big dramatic question.

You're happily reading along, when suddenly you're left in a precarious situation, and become desperate to know what happens next.

Well, that's exactly how Mark seems to have decided to end his historical account of Jesus life and death – with a dramatic cliffhanger.

Look at verse 8. The women had just discovered the empty tomb, and in response, we read, they "*fled from the tomb, trembling and bewildered, too frightened to talk ...*"(verse 8)

And that's it.

Imagine you *only* had Mark's account and you were investigating Jesus' life and death. You'd be left with a staggering number of questions:

- So the tomb is empty, but where is Jesus?
- Is Jesus really alive? Are the reports true that some grave diggers stole the body?
- What about what the women are saying. Did anyone else see Jesus?
- How did the disciples respond to the women's news?
- And ... if that is all the evidence for Jesus' resurrection, how can we be sure the women weren't just having a bad case of sunstroke causing a hallucination?

Mark's ending sure is a cliffhanger, isn't it?

Now ... as we look at Mark's account, I really need you to grab a Bible and have a look at the note printed after verse 8.

Do you see there is a little note that says, "The earliest manuscripts and some other ancient witnesses do not have verses 9-20".

I need to comment on this note, because it casts a shadow of doubt over these verses, questioning their historical reliability, their authenticity as God's inspired word, and whether we can rely upon them to shape how God expects believers to live.

Before a historical text is accepted as authentic, there are many tests that are applied to it. This is called 'textual criticism'.

Mark wrote his gospel around 66-74 AD. While the original has never been located, the earliest copies of Mark's gospel, which are mainly fragments of certain chapters, are dated around 200 AD.

And there is no shortage of these early fragments, we have about 620 of them. There are also around 1600 Greek manuscripts of Mark's Gospel to test the consistency of what Mark wrote.

Furthermore, everything mentioned in verses 9-20 can be cross-referenced with other verses throughout the New Testament.

Can you guess how many omit this longer ending?

Only two. All the others include these verses.

So, we can have every confidence God wanted these verses included in His word.

Let's take a step back to Resurrection morning.

The male disciples are astonished at the empty tomb. They've heard the testimony from the women that Jesus is alive, but they all stubbornly refused to believe them.

Verses 9,

When they heard that Jesus was alive and that [Mary] 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.

So, we are talking about a bunch of men [the women were the forerunners of faith at this point], who could not get their heads around what had happened to Jesus.

But their unbelief didn't stop Jesus from commissioning them onto God's mission:

"Go into all the world and preach the Good News to everyone. ¹⁶ Anyone who believes and is baptized will be saved. But anyone who refuses to believe will be condemned.

So, far it is sounding a lot like Matthew's (Matthew 28:18-20) and Luke's accounts (Luke 24:46-48).

But then Mark continues,

17 These miraculous signs will accompany those who believe: They will cast out demons in my name, and they will speak in new languages. 18 They will be able to handle snakes with safety, and if they drink anything poisonous, it won't hurt them. They will be able to place their hands on the sick, and they will be healed."
(Mark 16:15-18)

When the disciples first heard Jesus' words, they probably whispered to each other, "isn't he expecting a bit too much from us? We are just fishermen, ordinary everyday people."

Sure, they had the hands-on practical experience of ministering with Jesus' authority and power (Luke 10:1-12).

However, that was when Jesus was around to call upon if they had troubles – which we know they did have (Matthew 17:19).

But when we read these verses, we are left thinking: 'Is this really what Jesus expects of his followers? Aren't you expecting a bit much from us, Lord?

How on earth are we supposed to do such feats as these?

I think that's why Jesus reassured them,

"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." (see Matthew 24:49; Acts 1:8)

So, the disciples were to wait until they received the power of the Spirit BEFORE they went out to witness of what they had seen and heard.

And we know that verse 20 records what took place AFTER Pentecost,

20 And the disciples went everywhere and preached, and the Lord worked through them, confirming what they said by many miraculous signs.

That's why we can realistically surmise that verses 9 to 20 were written after the disciples' experienced the empowerment of the Spirit at Pentecost.

So, were does that leave us?

As we peer into the open empty tomb and hear the testimony of those who have seen the risen Lord, we are left to decide:

Do I believe that Jesus rose from the dead?

Do I believe that Jesus triumphed over sin and death, removing all the barriers that stood between me and God?

If so, then I must also believe that Jesus is alive and active in the world, moving and working not only in my life, but in the life of every believer.

Afterall, Paul revealed that *"if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies because of his Spirit who lives in you.* (Romans 8:11)

What an amazing Scripture!

Do you believe that the same power that raised Jesus from the dead is residing in you?

If so, how is God's resurrection power evident in your life?

Have you accepted God's invitation for his resurrection power to forgive your sins?

If so, then you are free to walk in the restored relationship with your heavenly father.

And for those of us who experienced God's forgiveness years ago, are you giving opportunities for the power of God to work through you?

Are you believing that God's Word will be accompanied by God's power?

If He prompts us to pray for someone who is sick, may we pray both obediently and expectantly.

If He prompts us to visit someone in hospital, may we be obedient knowing the angels of God accompany us.

If He prompts us to share why we are not anxious about the state of the world, may we be courageous in sharing our hope.

The same powerful Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead resides in us.

May we never shrink back from telling others about the miraculous work God has done AND is doing in our life.

And as we testify and witness to the Spirit's work, may we expect the Lord to work through us confirming what we proclaim by many miraculous signs, so that the name of Jesus is glorified through us.