



Sermon Notes: Cameron Webber,  
“The End of the Beginning” – Easter 2025

20 April 2025

Readings: Mark 16:1-8, 1 Peter 1:3-9, Psalm 118:22-24

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### **Pre-Introduction**

Welcome to Church on this Resurrection Sunday. If you are visiting, a special welcome, and if you are a regular - welcome also! And just so we are all up to speed, over recent weeks, we have been working our way through the first half of Mark’s account of the Life of Jesus. And then, in the last week, we’ve jumped to the appropriate passages for Palm Sunday, for Good Friday and just now, for today - Resurrection Sunday.

And we’ve been looking at Mark’s account under the heading of **Good News** because the opening words of what Mark has written, effectively give us the title for his Book... ‘**The Beginning of the Good News about Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God.**’ (Mark 1:1)

And today we come to chapter 16, and if Mark has written for us the beginning of the good news, then today in this final chapter we have come to the end of that beginning, the end of the Gospel of Mark, to the end of ‘the beginning of the Good News.’

It would be good to have your Bible or Bible App open at Mark 16, and let’s pray as we come to consider it together.

### **Prayer**

Lord Jesus, we give you thanks for this day, the day when we celebrate your resurrection. Thank you that you have conquered sin and death. Speak to us through your Word, and by your Spirit this morning, we pray. Amen

### **Introduction**

Is anybody here one of those people who five years ago developed a sudden interest in jigsaw puzzles? It was a bit of a thing during the Covid lockdowns with people posting photos of their achievements.

And whether it’s a big or small jigsaw, complicated or easy, whether it takes a long time or a short time, imagine when you come to finish a puzzle there is a piece missing. It would be rather frustrating to say the least.

I guess you could borrow a similar piece from another puzzle or try and cut one to fit from a piece of cardboard and colour it in with your crayons. But it wouldn’t be quite right, would it?

And it’s a bit like that at the end of the Gospel of Mark, the end of Mark’s account of the life and ministry of Jesus, and of the death and resurrection of Jesus. There seems to be a missing piece, and various attempts have been made to re-create the missing piece.

### **1. The end of ‘the beginning of the good news’**

As we heard read, ‘Trembling and bewildered, the women went out and fled from the tomb. They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid.’ (Mark 16:8) It seems a funny place to end, and if you look in your Bible you’ll see there is still more written, there is still 16:9-20.

But there is a disclaimer. In most Bibles there is a line before verses 9-20 and a comment or a footnote, ‘The most reliable early manuscripts *do not* have 16:9-20.’ Some manuscripts *do* have verses 9-20. And some manuscripts have other different endings. There is one quite short

ending, one longer one, and in each case, the vocabulary and style are different from the rest of Mark's gospel.

Most scholars, including 'conservative evangelicals' with a very high view of the Bible as God's Word, agree that it's unlikely that Mark wrote any of those endings. And so, what we have are various attempts to make what was perceived to be a missing piece out of cardboard and crayons.

And if that's the case, there are two possibilities. One, Mark's original ending was lost. Maybe the scroll was ripped. Or, two, that's how Mark wrote it and how he deliberately ended it. Maybe his end to 'the beginning of the Good news' is the women fleeing, afraid and saying nothing to anyone?

Now it does seem an unusual ending, but whether a deliberate end, or an accidental rip, what if (despite the efforts of early scribes) this is how God ordained this part of his Word, ending abruptly at verse 8, to come to us? At the very least, we know it circulated with the unusual ending for some time, and many of the early readers of Mark read just that. So what did they make of it?

Now it's important to note that a few bewildered and frightened women who are afraid to speak is not the end of the *whole story*. This is only the end of '*the beginning* of the good news.' We know they didn't remain silent, we know their confusion and fear gave way to understanding and peace, as they saw the risen Jesus. We see it in the accounts by Matthew, Luke and John and in Luke's sequel, the book of Acts.

But in Mark's account, we have come to the end, to the end of the Beginning of the Good News about Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God and by 16:8, Mark's case has been made, he has shown us that Jesus really is the Messiah and the Son of God, just as he introduced him in 1:1.

It's clear as you read through Mark and it crystalises in what we read on Good Friday when at the trial of Jesus (14:61 -62), the high priest asks him, 'Are you the Messiah, the Son of [God]?' and Jesus replies, 'I am.' And then at the crucifixion (15:38-39) when the centurion, who stood there in front of Jesus, saw how he died, he said, 'Surely this man was the Son of God!'

This profound! Mark has proved his case and with the bewildered, frightened women in 16:8 we have reached the end of the beginning of the good news about Jesus the Messiah the Son of God. And rather than try to tidy it up as some scribes did, there are things to learn by taking it as it stands because 16:8 is not only the end of the beginning of the Good News; it points us to the beginning of the continuation of the Good News .

## **2. The beginning of the continuation of the good news**

We know the fear of the women was replaced by faith as that day and as the next forty days unfolded. And we too are called to that same faith.

And for us, like the women in verse 8 there is an ambiguity. The women, at this stage, only have hearsay evidence (albeit from angels), but it's all a bit outside what they were expecting, despite what Jesus had said, and they are having trouble processing it all.

And we too, in one sense, rely on hearsay evidence. To be sure, we have the reports of eye-witnesses, but we were not there, we didn't see it, so, what are we to make of it? What do we do with this Good News of Jesus, who died and rose again?

The first thing is, check it out! Most of us here have probably done that, but maybe like the women at the tomb, it can all be a bit hard to take in, but don't stay bewildered, check it out.

There are helpful resources. The classic books, 'More than a Carpenter' and 'Who Moved the Stone' look at evidence for Jesus and his resurrection. More recently John Dickson, himself a historian, notes in the 'The Christ Files' that historians (including non-Christian ones) all recognise that in the historical record - that is the Bible and other historical documents - there is what he

calls a 'resurrection shaped dent.' The historical records, at the very least, point to the reasonableness of the resurrection in explaining what was going on.

Of course, there is still a step of faith is required, but that's not a leap in the dark, rather it's a step into the light.

Leaving it at verse 8, focuses on the human failure and inadequacy, and on the lack of understanding and weakness, and in doing so, it actually highlights the power and action of God.

And with all that, it invites us to be part of the continuation of the Good News about Jesus, the Messiah, the Son of God. So how can we be part of that continuation? How can we be part of the Good News?

Jesus himself has already told us in his first words that Mark records for us. "The time has come. The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!" (Mark 1:15)

To repent is to make a U-turn, to turn from self to God, to acknowledge that we are sinners who have fallen short, to confess that to God, accepting what Jesus has done for us in the events we are celebrating this weekend.

And we are to believe the Good News, that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God who has taken the punishment we deserve. We are to place our faith, our trust in Him - in his perfect, sinless life and in his death in our place, and his resurrection.

As you do that, you can know the joy and peace of a restored relationship with the God who made the universe, the God who made you, knowing him as your heavenly Father now, and having the assurance of life with him forever.

If you are here today and haven't done that, or if you've got questions about this Jesus and what it all means, I would urge you to find out more, because God has created each of us with a thirst that only He can quench. Or if I can reuse the image we started with, God has created each of us with a space, with a missing piece that only he can fill.

The French scientist and philosopher, Pascal, called it the God-shaped vacuum in our hearts. Augustine put it, 'Our souls are restless until they find their rest in Thee.'

But we try and fill that space with a piece of roughly cut cardboard coloured in with crayons. We look for eternal answers among temporal things. But they can never provide them.

If you are here with friends or family who can help you, talk to them. Or talk with Steve or Brendan or me or someone else here. We are always happy to enter into a conversation with you. One way we can do that is through a short, structured series of conversations called **Christianity Explored**. It gives a framework for discussion and covers the key issues, using Mark's account as a base, so you can respond and be part of the continuation.

### **3. The continuation of the continuation of the good news**

On the other hand, if you are here on this Easter Sunday as one who has accepted the salvation offered by Jesus then you are part of the Continuation of the Continuation of the Good News that has been continuing for 2,000 years. And for the continuation to continue we have to share that good news.

Right back when we began this series, right back in chapter 1, when Jesus calls his first disciples he calls them to be 'fishers of men,' to be sharers of Good News.

And I asked back then, 'What are you doing to fish for people; to share the good news?' And I asked, 'What will you do in 2025 to share, to fish?' So the question today, two months on is, 'What have you done in the last two months to see the continuation of the continuation?' And I ask myself the same question!

If we have received this Good News, then Good News is for sharing and, like Paul, we need to say, 'I am not ashamed of the good news, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes. (Romans 1:16)

I know it can be tricky, looking for the right time and setting, not wanting to push too hard and damage a friendship, and there's always tomorrow... But is there?

We must share the good news, because although we live in the time of the continuation of the continuation of the good news, what lies before us, is the coming of the end of the good news.

#### **4. The coming of the end of the good news**

That word 'end' can be used in a couple of senses. 'End' in the sense of 'goal' or 'purpose', because although right now we can know God as Father and enjoy the restored relationship we have with him, there is more.

What is the end, the goal of the good news? The completion the good news, the consummation of it is when Jesus returns to reign fully and finally as King and all those who have trusted in Jesus will be with him for eternity.

Peter put it this way, 'Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. This inheritance is kept in heaven for you, who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time.' (1 Peter 1:3-5)

That is the end, the goal of the Good News of Jesus.

And we and others can only be part of that goal, that future, that end, if we respond in this time, this age because now is the time to respond, because when Jesus returns that is the end of the good news in another sense. It is the end of the time to share it and the end of the time to respond to it.

#### **Conclusion**

So having come to Mark's **End of 'the Beginning of the Good News'** we see Jesus, the Messiah, the saving King, the Son of God. We see the good news of forgiveness through his death in our place.

The abrupt ending to Mark, the seemingly missing piece invites us to take our place in the story, to respond in repentance and faith and be part of the Continuation of the Good News as we allow God to fill our missing piece, and be part of the continuation of the continuation as we share that Good News, because we are Coming to the End of the Good News, the end, when there is no time left to respond; the end, the goal, the fullness of salvation.

And so as Peter says, 'Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the end result of your faith, the salvation of your souls.' (1 Peter 1:8-9)

This Easter, this Resurrection Day, if that is all true, as we believe it is, I urge you to find out more, to respond, because 'now is the time of God's favour, now is the day of salvation' (2 Corinthians 6:2) and that is Good News!

And if you have responded, as J.C. Ryle once said, 'Let us cleave to Christ more closely, love Him more heartily, live for Him more thoroughly, copy Him more exactly, follow Him more fully, share Him more boldly.'

Amen.