

Mark 16:1-8

Despite its brevity, the gospel of Mark contains the most disconcerting report of Jesus' resurrection. For instance, rather than being comforted by the young man's words, the women at the tomb were alarmed. In addition, the conclusion of Mark's gospel with verse 8 — which has the earliest and most reliable attestation in the Greek manuscripts — ends on a decidedly disturbing note, since the women flee in fear. Finally, although the young man asserts that Jesus has been raised and that "he is going ahead of you to Galilee" (v. 7) where they will see him, there are no post-resurrection appearances of Jesus recorded in Mark's gospel.

This passage is exceptionally disturbing, particularly when read in isolation from the rest of Mark's gospel. Rather than presenting a case for faith in response to Jesus' resurrection, it chronicles three loyal followers of Jesus who fear, doubt, and flee.

Read against the entirety of the gospel, however, the passage is rife with subtle allusions to prior episodes and counterintuitively encourages disciples to believe. For example, two particularly relevant passages demonstrate Mark's skillful literary style. As with the synagogue ruler, Jesus' disciples are not to fear, but only believe (Mark 5:36). Mark's artistic skill for incorporating clever theological motifs into his gospel is also apparent in Mark 10:32. In this passage, Jesus and his disciples are on their way to Jerusalem. Mark's interest, though, is not primarily in presenting a travelogue, for he states that, "Jesus was walking ahead of them; they were amazed, and those who followed were afraid."

What is Mark's point? The disciples who were previously amazed and afraid when Jesus went ahead of them on the way to Jerusalem are once again alarmed (16:5, 6) and afraid (16:8) as Jesus goes ahead of them to Galilee. Just as they did not stop following him to Jerusalem, they are not to stop following him as he makes his way to Galilee. In short, believers are to follow Jesus even when they are alarmed and afraid, because he is a fearful pioneer to follow. Arguably, then, Mark's gospel concludes with a hopeful message because it subtly alludes to and resonates with his earlier vignettes that encourage believers to press on.

He Is Risen! He Is Risen, indeed!