

**Why I Believe In The Resurrection**  
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There is nothing more frustrating than watching a movie or reading a book and having it end before all the questions are answered.

Some movies and books, they just end. And it's not satisfying. You think, well what about so and so, and how did it all work out with the undeveloped sub-plot?

Anybody ever have that experience where the book ends, or the movie ends, and you just think "well wait a minute"...this can't end now. I don't get it.

Or maybe you just like the story/movie so much, as the credits go up you are just saying

"Don't end! Don't end!"

I had that experience watching some seasonal Netflix TV series like The Crown, or Stranger Things.

There's got to be more! You can't end it now...I am not satisfied...I want it to go on

At first blush, the gospel of Mark seems, in the same way, to end prematurely, leaving us a little unsatisfied

In Marks fast paced minimalist style, he rushes us through the entire account of Jesus' life, and then BAM its over in 16 chapters, and the women run away afraid.

*Sophia and Alyssa did a great job, being afraid as they went down the aisle. Hope you all noticed that.*

Some of you may have in your Bibles headings that say "longer ending to Mark" ...meaning that years later the early church felt that there needed to be a better way for Mark to wrap things up – to have a more satisfying closure,

So they added some things borrowed from the other gospels to make the ending more complete.

They sort of copy edited Marks gospel to their own likings.

But let's take a look at the the shorter ending, because the women running off and being afraid *was the original text*.

No add ons.

No embellishments.

Mark in his rushed minimalist style ends it right there.

***“So they went out and fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them, and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.” Mark 16:8***

That's it. The End. That's all folks!

So what does this truncated ending say to us today?

Other than leaving us wondering about these terrified women who don't say anything

Mark doesn't even include any appearance of the risen Christ.

You know what I think? I think it says everything – I think this ending was written for us for 21st century America.

This ending is more relevant for us today than any of the other endings in any of the other gospels.

Why?

Because, today, we are being asked to believe in Christ without seeing him and tell others about him– just like those women.

The women never see Jesus in Mark's original short and sudden ending. They see the effects of his resurrection.

The empty tomb, the place where his body had been put, they even see an angel. But they don't see Jesus.

In all the other gospels Jesus appears. The disciples hear, see and touch him. Not in Marks original text.

You and I in 2017 are called to believe without seeing.

I never have seen Jesus, but I want to tell you why I believe in the resurrection of Christ this morning.

The first reason is an academic reason. It has to do with the text and how the account of the resurrection is written down and told to us by those first witnesses.

The way the story is told has a ring of authenticity to it that cannot be manufactured.

For instance, **All the gospels including Mark, tell us that women were the first ones who received the news that Jesus was risen.**

If Mark had been writing propaganda to promote the resurrection of Jesus when it really didn't happen, he would never have used women as witnesses.

Women back in ancient times were considered to be flighty and unreliable and their witness did not stand up in court. No one believed a women's testimony.

In fact **Celsus, a Greek philosopher who lived in the second century AD and was very antagonistic to Christianity said that one of the strongest arguments against Christianity was the fact that women were the witnesses.**

Do you see what that means?

If Mark and the Christians were *making up these stories* to get their movement off the ground – to promote the resurrection of Christ when it really didn't happen – to give Jesus a good name, keep his good ideas going - they would never have written women into the story as the first eyewitnesses of Jesus' death.

**Women were not credible witnesses!**

The only possible reason for the presence of women in these accounts is that they really were the ones present and they reported what they saw – and Mark told the truth writing it down exactly as it happened.

Its very bizarre actually that there are no male disciples at all around to witness the angel, or to even get a clue about what's going on.

Especially since Jesus had repeatedly told the disciples all through Mark that on the third day he would rise from the dead. It's like resurrection 101...

*Mark 8:31 Then he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering and be killed and after three days rise again."*

*Mark 9:31 "The Son of Man is to be betrayed into human hands and they will kill him and three days after being killed he will rise again."*

*Mark 10:34 "The Son of Man will be handed over...they will mock him and spit upon him and flog him and kill him, and after three days he will rise again."*

These are only three examples of many. They seem pretty *clear to me*.

Its like the followers of Jesus, the women included, all got a serious case of resurrection amnesia.

The women are fraught with this amnesia, as they go to the tomb carrying spices expecting to anoint a dead body, worried about how to roll the stone away.

When they get there, they see that the stone is gone, and see the tomb empty, the angel tells the women, "**You will see him (Jesus), in Galilee, just as he told you.**"

That last part is something a tutor might say to a student who is having trouble catching on ...

Ever have a teacher or tutor say to you, "Remember? We went over this before?"

The angel says...

He told you this was going to happen? How many times?

Remember?

Here's the point.

The resurrection of Jesus was as inconceivable for the first disciples to believe, as it is for us.

Even though the disciples had been told over and over again – and the women were there too when Jesus did some of this teaching that he would rise, it was so out of their frame of reference that they couldn't comprehend it and therefore they didn't remember it.

In order to get a concept we have to have at least a rudimentary understanding of the basics.

I remember nearly failing Advanced Chemistry in high school because I had never taken Chemistry 1.

Everything I was learning in Advanced Chem was dependent on having some working knowledge of the periodic table.

I had never seen a periodic table before, having taken Botany the year before, and I had no idea what was going on.

I also couldn't understand the teacher who had a thick accent – it was probably mostly me – but I was lost in class.

I didn't have a clue.

I don't think the disciples had a clue either.

Rise from the dead? What does that mean?

I am sure the disciples were completely in the dark having no idea of what Jesus meant with all this dying and rising language.

So I think they never assimilated any of it.

It just kind of went in one ear and out the other, like me in Advanced Chem. I had no concept...

For us, as 21st century Christians

It's easier with the passage of time, and all that has been written theologically, to have a much better grasp of the meaning and purpose of Jesus' life –

But with none of that in retrospect, you can see why those first century women went running, terrified from the empty tomb.

This experience was out of the realm of anything they had ever conceived of before.

Again, it was just as hard for first century Christians to believe as it is for us today...

So...

There is something very real about Mark's ending – running from the tomb terrified. It's got a ring of authenticity to it.

Now, in addition, we don't only have Mark telling us Jesus rose from the dead, and the other gospel writers, but we also have Paul (the Johnny come lately convert) who makes a long list of people who saw the risen Christ and then says in the text, "most of them are still alive" (1 Corinthians 15:6).

Now if Paul had said this, and it wasn't true, don't you think he would get into trouble with all those people he mentions?

Its just another example of the very believable manner in which the resurrection of Christ is documented.

One part I love in Mark is when the angel tells the women,

**"Go tell his disciples and Peter."**

**Why do you think the angel says, "and Peter"? Wasn't Peter a disciple?**

Well first, remember that Peter is Mark's primary source for his gospel.

Mark wrote down his gospel based on what Peter told him, and so we get the inner scoop on Peter in Mark's gospel.

The addition of "and Peter" is because Peter denied Christ

And the angel knows it, and he wants especially Peter to know that it is now okay.

That God has righted the wrong. That Jesus wants Peter back.

That Peter is still included as a disciple despite his denial, because I am sure he felt after his denial that he could never be a follower of Christ again.

It helps us recognize the specific nature of God's care.

That Christ didn't just die for the whole world en masse, but with each one of us specifically in mind.

We've all been Peter, at one time or another denying Christ with our words, actions or in our heart.

Jesus wants you to know, specifically you and you and you, that the wrong has been forgiven, and he wants you back.

**Finally, another great proof of the resurrection is that there has to be some explanation for how that cowardly group of disciples**, hiding in an upper room, afraid of the Jews  
Disciples who had all forsook him and fled at the crucifixion

**suddenly became bold proclaimers of the truth that Jesus Christ was risen indeed**

Disciples who were not afraid anymore of death or persecution  
Disciples who started the early church, preached in the streets, wrote the gospels, were martyred and killed  
(and by the way, you don't go to your death for something that you know didn't really happen – another great proof of the authenticity of the resurrection)

So the first reason I believe in the resurrection is the way that the story is told in scripture. It has a ring of authenticity to it that cannot be manufactured.

The second reason I believe in the resurrection – and perhaps even more compelling - is because after 35 years in ministry I have seen so many lives changed by the touch of the risen Lord, its harder for me not to believe, than to believe.

I feel so privileged to be in a profession where I get to watch Jesus Christ at work. I stand in awe of what he is still doing 2,000 plus years later...I stand in awe...

There are more stories than I can count, more people touched, changed, transformed than I can even mention; Just this morning you heard from Staci Yee, marvelous answers to prayer...an amazing account of the risen Christ at work...Let me share with you just a few more stories – for even though we don't see Jesus...we see what he does.

The first story is a story of a woman who was very young, newly married, a part of a former church I was in, who lay dying unconscious in a bed having contracted a rare illness.

Parents and friends stood round her bed concerned, not sure if she would make it.

After prayer and the laying on of hands by a group of church people, suddenly her vital signs came up so unexpectedly that nurses rushed into the room as beepers started going off -, she makes an amazing recovery and is back in church in two weeks volunteering for anything she can get her hands on.

She is so excited about God – she can't stay away from church!

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The addict, who no one paid attention to because he looked weird, was an extremely lonely guy, who had become dependent on heroine, told me how he had experienced the presence of Jesus with him one night as he cried to God for help.

He told me there was nowhere else to turn. Jesus was his last hope. Jesus came to him that night

“It was like fire burning through me,” he said.

His addiction was healed immediately – he never took heroine again – and he now is an active member of his local church community.

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The young man who had wandered in out of church all his life doubting sometimes, believing other times. Never really quite sure what Christianity was truly about.

He decides to get baptized cause he thinks that just might help.

He comes to me.

We go through the process and as kneels and receives the water on his head, he is immediately aware that Jesus is flowing through him in a way he had never experienced before. He is also aware that he is being called into the ministry.

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The woman who had suffered with a mental illness for years is finally hospitalized for clinical depression. In the course of her hospitalization she has many hallucinations. Yet she also has a vision of Jesus.

In her vision Jesus is calling to her with his hands open, asking her to walk out of the darkness of a long tunnel, towards him – into the light.

In her vision she begins that walk. After she has this experience she begins to recover – where before she had been going down hill. When she's released she goes back to her church, and with renewed energy creates a support group for others who suffer with depression. She is a phenomenal leader.

I asked her one day, "How do you know that when you saw Jesus it wasn't just another hallucination?"

She said, "Because seeing Jesus was the only thing that I saw that brought me hope. It was so different."

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Now everybody has a different story. Everyone's experience of the resurrected Christ is different.

By sharing these stories, its not to imply that you should have the same kind of experience as someone else.

All the disciples and followers of God in the Bible – all their stories are different.

God works with people in all different ways.

By telling you these stories though, I mean to encourage you, to strengthen your faith to know that God is alive, Jesus Christ has risen, and he is just as active in this world,

Just as in charge

Just as concerned about people

As he was 2,000 years ago when those women fled the tomb.

I'd like to end our series in Mark with a quote from Peter's letter – Peter was Mark's prime source of information (we do have a 1 Peter and 2 Peter in scripture)– a quote that brings us back to the short

ending of Mark that has no account of the women seeing the risen Jesus; they only see the effects of the resurrection as we do today, and are asked to believe.

Let's read together....

**1 Peter 1:8**

**<sup>8</sup> 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.**

**Let Us Pray**