

Rewriting the Ending  
Mark 16:1–8, 9–20  
Sunday, May 10, 2026

Let us pray: God, by your very word, you created life. Speak your Word to us, and bring us to new life, in Christ. Amen.

One of my all-time favorite movies is a movie called *28 Days Later*. It's set in London, where a man named Jim gets in an accident, goes into a coma, and wakes up 28 days later to find that in the time he was in the coma, a virus has spread around the whole country, turning everyone into zombies. The whole movie is about him struggling to survive and find other people and get somewhere safe.

I went to see this movie when it first came out in the theaters back in 2002. Throughout the whole movie, you watch Jim fighting for his survival. You become emotionally attached to him. You *want* him to make it. Well, toward the end of the movie, Jim gets hurt, so he and two of the people he's banded together with are at this hospital trying to find supplies to help him. But there's nothing they can do. And Jim dies. His two friends start walking out of the hospital, presumably to go out and eventually die themselves, and the screen fades to black.

That's *it*. It just *ended* with the main character *dying* and the only other two survivors going out to *their* deaths. It was like this incredibly hopeless ending that was meant to emphasize that there's no silver lining here. All hope is lost. Everything and everyone is doomed. There is not always a happy ending. The movie ended and I was just sitting there in the theater like, "Ugh! You can't do that! You can't kill the hero at the end! You can't end it *that way!*"

And I wasn't the only one. As we walked out of the theater, everyone was *so upset!* Some people stopped and complained to the people working at the theater, like they could do anything about it. They

didn't *make* the movie. People were so upset by the way this movie ended, that the movie studio *actually changed it*. Like, the movie was already *in the theater*, and they went back and put a *new ending* on it. For the first week or so it had the original ending, which was just really awful. So they *pulled* it, put a new ending on it, and rereleased it a few months later.

So I had to go back and see the movie *again* to see how it ended *this time*, and it was a lot more hopeful and positive, more of a happy ending; *totally* different from the original ending. And when it came out on DVD, they actually included *multiple* endings (like three totally different endings to the movie), and you could watch *all* of them and decide for yourself how you want the story to end.

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That is just like what happens in Mark's gospel. The way Mark's gospel ends was so unsatisfying that people demanded a rewrite. Because of that, Mark's gospel actually has three separate endings. And I want to take a look at each of them real quick to show you what is going on there. When the gospels were written, there wasn't a "Bible" yet, the way we have it now. There were just a bunch of different gospels circulating. And because they didn't have photocopy machines or printing presses, if you wanted a copy of a gospel, it had to be copied out by hand. So there were a lot of copies floating around, and some of them were very different from each other. Mark's gospel is a prime example of this.

The earliest copies of Mark's gospel end like this: The women go to the tomb, but Jesus isn't there. An angel appears to them and tells them that he has risen, and to go back and tell the disciples to go to Galilee, and they'll find him there. And the final verse says, "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." That's it. It just ends. Jesus doesn't even *appear* in the earliest ending. The screen just goes black, and it ends with, "they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid." That's *not* how a story of good news is supposed to end, right?

Well, it was so unsettling for some people, they just couldn't deal with that kind of ending. They needed closure. They needed some kind of conclusion. They needed to know what *happened*. They needed answers. So what they did was, they tacked on a short, two sentence ending right after verse 8, that just says, "And all that had been commanded them [the women] they told briefly to those around Peter. And afterward Jesus himself sent out through them, from east to west, the sacred and imperishable proclamation of eternal salvation." So the women go from not telling anyone out of fear, to briefly telling the disciples, and then Jesus sends it out to the whole world. But still, it doesn't feel complete. It feels like they just rushed and crammed an ending onto it. It's not the full, satisfying ending that people were hoping for.

So *then* what they did was, some people just kind of said, "That ending's no good. Let's get rid of that," and they added a longer ending in its place that goes like this:

**Mark 16:9–12**

Now after he rose early on the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, from whom he had cast out seven demons. She went out and told those who had been with him, while they were mourning and weeping. But when they heard that he was alive and had been seen by her, they would not believe it.

After this he appeared in another form to two of them, as they were walking into the country. And they went back and told the rest, but they did not believe them.

Later he appeared to the eleven themselves as they were sitting at the table; and he upbraided them for their lack of faith and stubbornness, because they had not believed those who saw him after he had risen. And he said to them, "Go into all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation. The one who believes and is baptized will be saved; but the one who does not believe will be condemned. And these signs will accompany those who believe: by using my name they will cast out demons; they will speak in new tongues; they will pick up snakes in their hands, and if they drink any deadly thing, it will not hurt them; they will lay their hands on the sick, and they will recover."

So then the Lord Jesus, after he had spoken to them, was taken up into heaven and sat down at the right hand of God. And they went out and proclaimed the good news everywhere, while the Lord worked with them and confirmed the message by the signs that accompanied it.

So there we have a pretty well-rounded ending to this gospel story. Nothing leaves us hanging. We have the women telling, Jesus appearing, giving them all instructions, sending them out into the world, and then ascending into heaven. A nice, complete, satisfying ending.

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These three endings to Mark's gospel point to something a lot bigger than just an editing process. They point to our inability to handle uncertainty. The story originally ends with uncertainty. The women were afraid. They didn't know what to do. So they ran away and did nothing. It leaves the whole thing unresolved. So they added these endings because, on some level, every single one of us has an innate need for clarity and resolution and answers. We do not like it when things are uncertain.

We deal with uncertainty and fear and doubt on a daily basis in this world. And as people of faith, we are called to trust God in the midst of that uncertainty. But so often, we try to take matters into our own hands and force our own way and write our own ending that provides clarity and certainty. Like those women at the tomb, when we are faced with fear and uncertainty, we tend to run. Sometimes we *physically* run away from the things that we feel are threatening us, and sometimes we run mentally or emotionally. We *deny*, or we *distract* ourselves, or we *self-medicate*. And the reason we *do* that is because we are afraid that this uncertainty and upheaval is going to hurt us. And I think that we are afraid of that for two reasons. First, because we think that this life is all that there is, and if the life that we *live* or the *way of life* that we *love* comes to an end, *that's it*. We can't see a life beyond that. And the second reason we are afraid of uncertainty and upheaval is because we doubt God's ability to bring about something *new*.

It's *easy* to trust God when things are going well and it feels like we have all the answers. It's a whole lot harder to trust God when we *don't* have the answers and we don't know what's going to happen next. But that's exactly what we're called to do. What Mark's gospel shows us is that where one story *ends*,

another one *begins*. That's what resurrection is all about. Our stories may seem to end with fear or death or disappointment or uncertainty, but Christ is at work rewriting our endings so that death gives way to life, fear gives way to hope, tears give way to laughter, brokenness gives way to healing, sin gives way to forgiveness, uncertainty gives way to trust. Nothing ever really *ends*. It just turns into something *new*.

And we may not always be able to *see* that. But faith is about trusting where we cannot see and where we have no proof, trusting in the midst of the doubts and the fears and the uncertainty that God is with us, and that when we feel like the story is coming to an end and the screen is going black, God can bring about new possibilities and new life. Mark's story does not *end* with fear, and neither do *ours*. Mark's story does not *end* with uncertainty, and neither do *ours*. Mark's story does not end with *death*, and neither do *ours*. Mark's story ends with Jesus *showing up*, and so do *ours*. Mark's story ends with resurrection and new life, and so do *ours*. Mark's story ends and begins again, and ends and begins again, and so do *ours*. In Mark's gospel, the story is not really *ending* at all. It's only just beginning. And so are *ours*.

The challenge for us is to take all the moments in life when it seems like the story is coming to an *end*, and open ourselves up to the ways that God is beginning something *new* in us. Christ is rewriting our endings into new beginnings. Because through the grace of God, we can always start again.