

Mark 15:33-16:8

THEME SENTENCE:

Mark tells us clearly how to understand the death of Jesus

Mark's theology of the cross

8:35, 9:35, 10:45 have prepared us for Mark's description of the cross as the place where, again and again, things are the very opposite of what they seem:

On trial

14:55-65 presents a silent Jesus (61) who is blindfolded, spat at, punched and beaten. The high priest seems to hold all the cards. But in the few words of 62, Jesus completely turns the tables: he is the one who will be universal Judge of all (cf 13:26-27). He will be holding all the cards! (And their arrogance in this trial, relying on false testimony, will be the true testimony against them that will condemn them.)

'Crucify him'

The one thing we know about Barabbas is that he is guilty (7); the one thing Pilate recognises about Jesus is that he is innocent (14). Envious chief priests (10), a stirred-up crowd (11, 13) and a crowd-pleasing Pilate (15) conspire to orchestrate a terrible miscarriage of justice ... but the resulting penal substitution of Jesus is the very heart of the gospel. (And their act of injustice is actually the means for God to demonstrate his justice cf Romans 3:25-26!)

Salvation

15:31-32 tells how the chief priests and scribes mock Jesus. But it is dripping with irony. If Jesus had 'come down from the cross' and so saved himself, then he would not have saved any others. The truth is: he is saving others, and that is precisely why he is not saving himself.

The death

15:33-39 is carefully a very constructed paragraph – two events/two cries (where the cry and the event interpret one another) and two reactions:

	shout	34a	37	
	explanation	33 judgement from God 34b forsaken by God	38 way to God open for all	
	reaction	35-36 Jews don't recognise	39 a non-Jew does recognise	

The centurion's verdict (39)

'It is crucial for Mark's theology that the centurion's believing response arises not out of any overt claim made by Jesus, nor out of any preconceived notion on the centurion's part about who Jesus is, but only on the basis of what is accomplished in Jesus' death. Precisely there, in the obscurity, lowliness and humiliation of the cross, and not in any miraculous display of power such as unbelieving world demands in proof of God's presence, the God of Jesus confronts men. Only in and through his death on the cross can it be known who Jesus really is, the one in whom God seeks out men to save them. Then and only then can true discipleship to this Jesus become possible' (Hugh Anderson Gospel of Mark, New Century Bible).

Two paragraphs to end: he really died (15:40-47) and he really rose (16:1-8). The fact that Jesus rose is crucial; but the emphasis remains on the cross.

Virtually all scholars agree that 16:9f is not part of the original gospel written by Mark because

- 1 it is not in the earliest and most reliable manuscripts
- 2 it has a different Greek style to the rest of Mark's gospel (eg Jesus is only called 'the Lord' here [19-20]; the word for 'go' [15] comes nowhere else in the gospel; etc)
- 3 it doesn't join on well (eg Mary Magdalene is introduced in 9b [as if for the first time although she's only just appeared in 15:40]; there's no scene in Galilee despite 16:7; etc)

But the decision not to include 16:9f may worry people because it seems that we are saying that some part of our Bible isn't part of our Bible! Some may suspect that this is part of an anti-charismatic agenda. It isn't! There's no issue over the theology (because all that is described here happens anyway in Acts [except drinking deadly poison 16:18]). Actually it would be more convenient if it were genuine because the gospel would end more neatly if the disciples were told to 'go ... and preach' (16:15)!

16:8 does seem to be an abrupt ending. And there are two possibilities:

- 1 Mark intended the gospel to have a longer ending (which either is now lost, or which Mark never managed to finish off writing). The reasons for this view are ...
 - (a) to end with the word 'for' (as in the Greek) is unlikely;
 - (b) to end with 'fear' is unlikely;
 - (c) the lack of Great Commission is unlikely.
- 2 Mark intended the gospel to finish at 16:8. The reasons for this view are ...
 - (a) to end with the word 'for' is not impossible in Greek;
 - (b) 'fear' is a characteristic response to Jesus' power in Mark (cf 4:41);
 - (c) it is clear that Jesus has risen and that the disciples will be commissioned (7);
 - (d) the emphasis remains on the cross. Now we must wait for Jesus to return.

These notes take the line that Mark intended his gospel to finish at 16:8.