
The Story Continues

SCOTT HOEZEE

Recently, a well-known literature professor put together his top-23 list of the best last lines of well-known novels. Great last lines can transform an already good novel into something even better; or maybe the ending makes sense of the rest of the book; or, sometimes the ending makes an observation that is so surprising, yet retrospectively transforms the way you think of everything that led up to that ending. Endings are important. Well, the Gospel of Mark has one of the most striking and surprising endings of any book in the Bible. Today on *Groundwork*, we will see why. Stay tuned.

DAVE BAST

From Words of Hope and ReFrame Media, this is *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Dave Bast.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I am Scott Hoezee; and Dave, we are now at the end of a six-part series on the Gospel of Mark; a series in which, Dave, we have been trying to highlight the main themes—the main patterns—the main characteristics of Mark’s Gospel. We have seen that it is a dramatic gospel that hits the ground running. We have seen that it has a lot of themes that relate to what we have called kind of the overarching question: Who is Jesus? And so, we have seen themes that nobody understood Jesus when he was here; that Jesus sometimes did conceal his identity when he was here; but that through a lot of the stories and parables, like the feeding of the five thousand, Jesus did, for those with eyes to see, reveal that he was the great shepherd of the sheep—the Son of God, as Mark identified him already in verse 1 of Chapter 1...the Messiah.

DAVE BAST

Right; as Mark’s readers now, I think it is important that we always keep in mind...and we will emphasize this a little bit later in the program, as we wrap up the book and the series...the distinction between Mark’s readers and the characters in the story; and we have advantages that they didn’t have, because Mark says right at the outset in his very first verse: The beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God...that is who he is; and then, the climactic scene of the crucifixion, where after Jesus dies and there is no longer any possibility of misunderstanding what kind of Messiah he will be, the Centurion proclaims: Truly, this was the Son of God. So, that is who he is...Mark says that at the beginning and the end; but we as readers note the cues all along that tell us this.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And now we come to the end of it; and as we said at the top of the program just a minute ago, Dave, authors work hard on endings. Sometimes people don’t even like...some authors will say: Ah, I didn’t like the ending; I didn’t know what else to do. We mentioned that literature professor who gave kind of a top-23 list, because good endings to a book stick with you. So, you think of F. Scott Fitzgerald’s classic novel, *The Great Gatsby*. It’s last line ends: So we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past; or the lyric ending to Marilyn Robinson’s wonderful novel, *Gilead*, narrated by the Reverend John Ames, who ends with: I will pray and then I will sleep; and then this famous one that probably almost everybody knows; the last line from Charles Dickens’ *A Christmas Carol*: And so, as Tiny Tim observed, “God bless us, every one!”

DAVE BAST

“God bless us, every one.” There it is. So, what is the ending of the Gospel of Mark? Well, it is the whole of Chapter 16, and it goes like this:

When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices so that they might go to anoint Jesus’ body. ²Very early on the first day of the week, just after sunrise, they were on their way to the tomb, ³and they asked each other, “Who will roll the stone away from the entrance to the tomb?” ⁴But when they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had been rolled away. ⁴As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man dressed in a white robe sitting on the right side; and they were alarmed.

SCOTT HOEZEE

⁶“Do not be alarmed,” he said. “You are looking for Jesus, the Nazarene who was crucified? He has risen. He is not here. See the place where they laid him. ⁷But go, tell his disciples—and Peter—he is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.” ⁸Trembling and bewildered, the women went out and fled from the tomb. They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid.

DAVE BAST

Period.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And that is it. So, we noted in the first program, Dave, that in lightning speed, Mark spends all of fourteen verses to get Jesus’ ministry launched. He gets through Jesus’ baptism and through the temptations in the wilderness in fourteen verses, and then Jesus preaches his first sermon. Now, we come to the end, and he gets the whole Easter story in eight verses that end with the word *afraid*.

DAVE BAST

Afraid, yes; and of course, it has led a lot of people to wonder what is going on here, and there are some things I think we need to point out, especially if you happen to have your Bible open and you are reading along, you will notice that there are extra verses after verse 8; in fact, it goes on to verse 20; but in most modern editions of the Bible, whatever the translation, those verses will be marked off somehow. They will be bracketed or they will be in parenthesis or they will even be in italics maybe; and there will be a footnote explaining that they don’t appear in the oldest versions of the Gospel of Mark. So, Mark...you know, there are no appearances of the risen Jesus; he doesn’t meet his disciples in the upper room; he doesn’t give the great commission. Some of that is sort of shoehorned into these extra verses, but most scholars today think that the ending should come, really, at verse 8.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Indeed, Dave. Scholars have very reliable methods by which to try to figure out...we don’t have the original copy of any book of the Bible, including Mark. What we have are copies of copies of copies, because there weren’t copy machines, there weren’t even printing presses throughout most of history. So, monks often, in monasteries, copied it by hand; and as they did so, sometimes they goofed. They missed a word; they misspelled a word; and sometimes they well-meaningly added some stuff to try to clear up what they thought was confusing. So, somebody here kind of thought: Well, that verse 8...that is too sudden; let’s help Mark out here and start adding something. So, what scholars do is they try to find the oldest copies they can, and those are more likely reliable. It is like playing post office or telephone, right? Line up fifteen people and have somebody whisper something into someone’s ear, and then have that person whisper it into the next person’s ear, and so on and so on; and by the time you get to the end of the line, what was originally said gets changed. There are some mistakes that get made along the way and then repeated; and when you get to the end of the line, usually the story, whatever was originally whispered, got longer, if anything. So, how would you...if you had to figure out what was originally said...and let’s say you couldn’t get to the first two or three people. Well, you could go to person number seven in the line of fifteen. Okay, that is a little bit closer to the original; but, if you can get to person three, now you are getting pretty close to whatever was said

before it started to get messed up and added to; and that is what scholars do.

DAVE BAST

And we should also point out...I think you alluded to this, Scott...that we don't have the originals...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

Of the four gospels, or any part of the Bible, for that matter; but we have our copies of copies of copies. The oldest bits of the New Testament that are in existence that have been discovered go back to about the middle of the 2nd Century. So, it is already over a hundred years or more that we have the earliest copies of Mark; and the earliest copies of Mark, which would be the most accurate, we presume, because they are closest in time don't have these extra verses...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Nine through 20, yes.

DAVE BAST

It is as simple as that. So, we can understand how some well-meaning people would want to make Mark kind of line up with the other gospels, but what we should do probably is stick to what we know to be authentic, which is the story as we read it.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, he ends with verse 8: The women didn't tell anybody. They were afraid. Why would Mark end that way? Let's think about that in just a moment.

Segment 2

DAVE BAST

You are listening to *Groundwork*, where we are digging into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Dave Bast.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I am Scott Hoezee; and Dave, we are looking at Mark 16, only eight verses long, incredibly brief. It constitutes the entirety of Mark's account of Jesus' resurrection. The first part of the story that we read in the previous segment was familiar enough. It is the day after the Jewish Sabbath. It is the first day of the week, and the women go to the tomb to anoint Jesus' body. They wonder about rolling the stone away...they get there; it is already rolled away. Most of that is very familiar from all four gospels.

DAVE BAST

It is; they are stunned, they are astonished; the angel announces the incredible news...the incredible *good* news, who says to them: Don't be alarmed; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth—Jesus the Nazarene—who was crucified. He is risen. He is not here. See the place where they laid him. That is exactly what the other two synoptic gospels say was the announcement. The tomb was empty; Jesus' body was gone; and the explanation was: He is risen from the dead; and then the angel adds: ⁷Go tell his disciples—and Peter—he is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you. Interesting that he adds that little tidbit: And Peter.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; that is *not* in the gospels, so why specifically single out Peter? I mean, if you are going to say: Go tell his disciples, you would think that includes Peter by definition; but of course, we know that Peter had denied Jesus; even though he swore he wouldn't do it, he did deny Jesus. Maybe Peter himself felt he was no longer worthy of the title *disciple*; but of course, they all abandoned Jesus. They all essentially denied him, so that

wouldn't make Peter unique. So, why single him out? Well, obviously it is a signal that Jesus is going to forgive him and restore him, and the biggest narrative of that we get is in John 21. So, it is a sign that Peter is going to be forgiven; but interestingly, Dave, scholars think...you know, Mark...whoever Mark was, wasn't one of the original twelve. So, where did he get his information to write this gospel? A lot of people think Peter. A lot think Peter dictated a lot of this gospel, because there is some stuff in Mark only Peter would have witnessed. So, maybe Peter was the voice behind the Gospel of Mark; and if so, you can see why he might want to say: Now remember, the angel mentioned my name. Put that in there, Mark...write that down.

DAVE BAST

Yes, right; put it down; and rather amazingly, there is an ancient tradition that Peter is the source behind the stories that Mark records—the earliest gospel; and a lot of modern scholars agree with that, that this is essentially the testimony of Peter. So, we've got this wonderful little bit of Peter's name dropping in there...

SCOTT HOEZEE

A little grace note.

DAVE BAST

Yes, but then, we come back to this frankly weird and abrupt verse 8: Trembling and bewildered, the women went out and fled from the tomb. They said nothing to anyone because they were afraid. We think: Huh? Wait; that's how it ends?

SCOTT HOEZEE

Boom! That's it—last verse. You can see why somebody added verses 9 through 20. It is like, nah, nah, nah...

DAVE BAST

Actually, some have suggested, well maybe the ending was lost. Maybe, you know, there was another sheet of papyrus, but there is no evidence that that is the case. This seems to be the way Mark intended to close out the story.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I like to picture it like a still photograph—a freeze frame. You think of the resurrection as like this giant explosion, and the women are hurled outward from that explosion; and it is like somebody snapped a picture of them. Their eyes are wide, their mouths are hanging open, arms are thrust in front of them; their feet are blurry because they are running so fast. They are terrified, as they walk away...run away, rather, from what the angel said. Terrified; silent; fleeing. In fact, in the Greek text, the last word in Mark's Gospel is the word *gar*, which in Greek is the word for *because*. Now, my Greek professor told me that it is not as unusual in Greek as it would be in English to end a sentence with the word *because*, but I kind of like it because you could literally translate it this way: The women went out and fled from the tomb. They said nothing to anyone. They were afraid because...

DAVE BAST

Because what? Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Dot, dot, dot, right? Like an ellipsis. So, let's assume we didn't lose the next page of Mark. Let's assume Mark never wrote a verse 9. Why would he and this way in silence? What does it cause you as a reader to think about?

DAVE BAST

Well, and maybe that is exactly what Mark intends for us as readers, to have a kind of similar reaction. You know, I like your image, Scott, of a frozen in time photograph that captures these women's expressions of

astonishment...of surprise...of awe...of amazement...of who knows what? And the fact is, they're stunned because the resurrection is not some kind of gradual dawning feeling in their heart that Jesus is somehow still with them. It comes absolutely from outside of them, and it blows them away.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes.

DAVE BAST

This is unbelievable; and yet, it happened.

SCOTT HOEZEE

This is also an argument against more liberal theologians over the centuries who have said: Well, of course people back in the 1st Century believed Jesus rose again. They were such bumpkins; they would believe anything!

DAVE BAST

Yes. They believed anything, yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

These women didn't expect Jesus to rise again. People don't do that. They weren't that gullible or naïve. They were shocked that this might be true. Now, of course, Mark would have no story to tell if they had stayed silent and just headed for the hills and nobody ever saw them again. They found their voices back; but what Mark's ending forces you as the reader to say is: Wait, something is wrong here. Wait! The Gospel cannot end in a silence! And you can almost see Mark looking at you as the reader and saying back to you: You're right; the Gospel cannot end in a silence. So, are you telling the story?

DAVE BAST

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Are you silent?

DAVE BAST

Do you get it? Can you see yourself there? Are you blown away by the fact that the tomb is empty? That Jesus' body isn't there? That he is risen from the dead. Do you get the earth-shattering significance of that? You know, are you willing to let that sort of blow your life up; and then, what are you going to do about it? That is the question, I think, that Mark wants us all to wrestle with. What are we going to do about it?

SCOTT HOEZEE

You know, I heard a fairly liberal pastor from my city one time say in a newspaper interview some years ago that he didn't really believe Jesus rose again from the dead—not bodily. Oh, the idea of Jesus rose; but one of the reasons he said he didn't believe in the physical resurrection is he said: Well, if I believed that, I would be running up and down the streets telling people; but I don't even see Christian people doing that; so, I am not even sure most church-goers believe it because they don't tell it very often. I mean, you cannot end the resurrection story in a silence.

DAVE BAST

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And he has a point. We need to tell the story.

DAVE BAST

It's a little too tame; it has become a little too familiar. It needs to shake us up a little more; and you know, maybe Mark intends us to go back to the beginning of the Gospel, because as we pointed out, I think in maybe the very first program, the first sentence of Mark is the beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God; and we ask the question: What is the beginning? Just that sentence? Just that one verse? Is it all of Chapter 1? Is it the first few verses? Is it maybe the whole book?

SCOTT HOEZEE

And it may just be the whole book. Maybe the whole book is just the beginning, and the story now has to continue in you.

DAVE BAST

And this is just the beginning of the resurrection story...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

And what is going to happen to the world once we get over our surprise and our shock and open our mouths and bear witness.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And tell the world he is risen; but Dave, there is one other thing that we will look at as we close this program and this series that does exactly what you just said: It sends you back to the beginning; and we will take that up as we close the series in just a moment.

Segment 3

DAVE BAST

I am Dave Bast, along with Scott Hoezee, and you are listening to *Groundwork*, where we are looking at the 16th chapter of the Gospel of Mark in this final program; a series on Mark, and the abruptness of Mark's story of the resurrection, and his unusual, to say the least, ending with these women being bewildered and afraid; but let's look back and read once again what the angel said to the women at the tomb:

⁶“Do not be alarmed. You are looking for Jesus, the Nazarene, who was crucified. He is risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him. ⁷But go, tell his disciples—and Peter—he is going ahead of you into Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you.”

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, we miss this sometimes; and of course, we do know from Luke and John and so forth, Jesus will make a couple of brief appearances right there in Jerusalem on the day of his resurrection, and even a week later with Thomas; but ultimately, all of the gospels agree that Jesus spent most of his time after what we call Easter in Galilee, which was about 70 to 80 miles to the north. It was a hike, and they had to walk it. There was no bus; they didn't have a car. So, for some reason, you know, to spend more time with Jesus, they couldn't stay close to where the resurrection happened. They had to take a long trek. I mean, think how long it would take you to walk 80 miles. So, that is interesting.

So, the angel says: Go to Galilee; there you will see him; and that is, of course, Galilee...a city to the north. It is a literal place; but symbolically it might mean something else, Dave.

DAVE BAST

Well, back to Chapter 1, because when we do that, we discover—or we are reminded—that Jesus first showed up in Galilee—that Jesus' ministry began there—that those early chapters, as we have said in earlier programs of the miracles and the teaching—they all took place in Galilee, around the perimeter of the Sea of Galilee: Nazareth, Capernaum, places like that. So, in Mark 1:14, we read:

After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. Literally proclaiming the Gospel of God—the *euaggelion*—the announcement—the message that God’s kingdom had drawn near in the person of Jesus. So, it starts in Galilee.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; and there are a couple of New Testament scholars who have influenced my thinking and the thinking of a lot of people on the artistry of Mark and what is going on. So, there is a man who used to teach at Princeton named Donald Jewell, and another scholar, Ched Myers, who wrote a book called: *Binding the Strong Man*, about Mark’s Gospel, and so forth; and they both think that although the angel who says go to Galilee; there you will see him...okay, literal Galilee...literal city. The disciples had to trek up there; but they both think that, indeed, it is a cue to go back to Mark 1:14, and it is Mark’s way of saying: Dear Reader, reread it. Reread the gospel, because you maybe didn’t understand it the first time either. Maybe you were like the disciples and the crowds and the religious teachers who were perpetually rejecting Jesus, or misunderstanding him, or taking his words the wrong way, or seeing the feeding of the five thousand and not understanding what it really meant. So, you have been to the cross now, you now know what it takes to be the Messiah, so go back to Galilee, will you please? Mark 1—reread, and see if you can get it better this time. I think it is a very clever hypothesis.

DAVE BAST

Yes, that is really interesting. It makes me think of musical notation. You know, if you have a piece of sheet music and you get to the end of a line and there is a double bar with two dots in front of it...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

Like a colon? That is the *da capo* sign. It means back to the beginning...go back; and this reference to Galilee...the repetition of the word Galilee...the place Galilee...is Mark’s *da capo* sign saying: Go back to the beginning of the gospel...go back yourself to Galilee...start again with Jesus, and this time read it with your eyes a little bit more open; and keep doing that—keep looking and keep watching for these signs. We refer to, again, another musical analogy in an earlier program: Overtones—the chords of the piano—other parts of the scriptures that illuminate the story of Jesus and show him for who he is.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And of course, if you do that, you are going to get back to Mark 16:7 again: Go to Galilee. Is Mark also maybe putting in what we call sort of an ever-repeating feedback loop here? Keep rereading the gospel...keep rereading the gospel...and keep telling the story.

So, we just said, Dave, in the previous segment, one of the very first words of Mark’s Gospel in Mark 1:1 is *arch?* in the Greek—the beginning—like Genesis—the beginning; and as you said: What is the beginning? Well, it now looks like the whole story is only the beginning. You are a character in it now, too, dear reader—dear Christian reading it all of these thousands of years later. You are still part of a story that is only now continuing to unfold, new every generation. So, go out; live the gospel; tell the gospel; take up your cross. Only after you have been to the cross do you understand why Jesus had to go there. So when Jesus, in Mark 8, at the center point of the gospel, as our guest, Gary Burge, pointed out in one program, Jesus says you have to take up your cross. I have to go to the cross; and Peter said: No; no, no, no, no. That won’t work. Well, now we know it did work; so, we keep reading the gospel through the lens of the cross, through the lens of sacrifice, and we understand how the world gets saved; not through power from the top down, but through humility and sacrifice from the bottom up.

DAVE BAST

And we understand that Jesus is who he claimed to be. The resurrection proves that; and that he is with us, even in the wilderness; even in the desert places of our lives—the places of death. Someone has said, you know, the whole gospel can be summed up in these two wonderful phrases: God is for us; and God is with

us; and that is really the story that Mark was written to tell. The earliest of the gospels, the briefest, this fast-paced, really interesting and moving story of who Jesus was and what he came to say and do, ultimately dying and rising again so that God truly would be with us and truly for us in life and in death.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Hallelujah! Well, thanks for listening and digging deeply into scripture with *Groundwork*. We are your hosts, Scott Hoezee and Dave Bast, and we hope you will join us again next time as we will continue to dig deeply into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives.

Connect with us at groundworkonline.com, our website. Share what *Groundwork* means to you. Tell us what you would like to hear discussed next on *Groundwork*.

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