

In the Shadow – Mark 16

This post and the next will be somewhat uncharacteristic of my writings of the past few months, as they will basically be devotional reflections on the final chapter of the Gospel of Mark. Wanting to focus on the resurrection of Jesus, I will offer a few thoughts that I hope will be encouraging.

Mark's 16th chapter is not without controversy. Some of our English versions end at verse 8. Others include verses 9 to 20. For this particular blogpost I will share some observations on the first eight verses.

Having read and studied all four Gospels, the first notable thing to me regarding Mark's account of the resurrection story is its brevity. Mark typically records events succinctly, so that's no surprise. Sometimes a lack of detail is annoying; sometimes it's helpful – just the facts, please. If this Gospel did indeed end at verse 8 (and there is a lot of evidence pointing to that possibility), Mark's retelling of the story gives us, in just a few words, some very important information. Since "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness..." (II Timothy 3:16), Mark 16:1-8 is no less (and no more) significant than any other passage.

Moving on from the brevity and importance of this Scripture, one observation of note is that the first witnesses of the empty tomb were women. Where were the guys? Were they busy licking their wounds after their abandoning of Jesus in the wee hours of Friday morning? Were they fearful of the guards at the tomb? Did they need more time to process the events of the past few days? Were they simply giving up now that Jesus was dead? Though we have no idea of what was going through their minds, it is obvious that the two Mary's and Salome were willing to set aside any fears and set out for the cemetery. It has often been mentioned to me after the death of someone that "so and so did thus and such" or "said thus and such," the implication being that the person speaking thinks the other to be wrong, or at least grieving inappropriately. My response – unless what was said/done was immoral or terribly harmful – is to say that everyone grieves differently. So to be somewhat defensive of the apostles, I'll give them some slack and just say that we all have different responses to grief.

My third observation is the one that motivates me the most. It regards Mary Magdalene. If there is any character that appears in the Gospels (other than Jesus) that is an inspiration, it is Mary. From the time of her miraculous deliverance from demonic oppression to the post-resurrection period, she remains close to the Lord. I'm sure some will argue that simply having had such a powerful life-change would elicit so great a loyalty. I will argue that the forgiveness of sin bought for each of us on the cross should move us to be every bit as faithful in our following of Christ. Quoting from notes on Mark 16 in the *Africa Study Bible*:

- When we remember what the risen Christ has done in our lives, we, too, should love him so much we are ready to sacrifice everything for his glory. The Jesus we serve truly rose from the dead in both body and spirit. Because he rose again and is alive today, we know that physical death is not the end for us. It is just the beginning of eternal life with God. We should not fear death for we follow one who is alive! This means we can face any hardship with the joy of Jesus' resurrection in our hearts even to the tomb.

My "life verse" is Philippians 3:10, "That I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death." Even when we are experiencing the dark times of life, there is joy as we live in the power of Christ's resurrection.

For the Master, Chris Elliott with the Church of the Brethren Rwanda.