

“Textual Criticism”
Mark 16
(Preached at Trinity, September 16, 2015)

I’m supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord’s Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

Disclaimer: These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I’ll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. Well, we finally come to **Chapter 16** of the Gospel of Mark. We began our journey 6 ½ years ago in March of 2009. As I pointed out at the beginning, Mark’s Gospel is distinct in several ways. It is the oldest of the four Gospels and also the shortest. It is a compressed, tightly woven account of our Lord’s life and ministry, fast paced and vivid. Although it is the shortest it contains the most miracles.
2. There is another way the Gospel of Mark is distinct. There is disagreement as to where to mark the ending. The earliest English translations end it at **Mark 16:20**. This would include the Geneva Bible as well as the KJV – basically every English translation prior to the 20th century. Most newer translations believe it should end at **Verse 8** with a few at **Verse 16**. These translations usually put the verses in question in italics with a foot note like: *Some of the earliest manuscripts do not include verses 9-20.*
3. Tonight, I’m going to briefly share the basics of what we call “textual criticism.” This is the term we give to the science of examining ancient manuscripts as well as early documents from the church fathers to determine the most accurate and reliable Greek text.
The question is not of the inspiration of the text but of the transmission of the text. Mark’s Gospel in the original is inerrant and infallible. What must be established is what the original autograph actually said. This is the work of textual criticism.
I’ll wait until later in the sermon to tell you whether I’m planning to end my series through Mark at **Verse 8** or **Verse 20** and why.
4. The problem is none of the original manuscripts or autographs exist. They disappeared long ago. But they were preserved through the copying of scribes. Some fragments of these copies date back to the second century but the vast majority of the manuscripts are much later.
5. For many years the church did not place a priority on compiling and maintaining the entire Greek New Testament. Most manuscripts were of particular books or the Gospels. In fact, Jerome’s Latin Vulgate in 404 was the first known collection and publication of the entire 27 books of the NT into one volume.
6. Desiderius Erasmus is well known for his treatise “On Free Will” to which Martin Luther responded with, “The Bondage of the Will.”
Erasmus is also known for his substantial contribution in compiling a Greek text in 1514, primarily to serve to validate the quality of his Latin version. The truth is, however, his Latin text was actually the basis of his Greek text, not the other way around. There were times when Erasmus edited the Greek text to match his Latin text.
7. It was the third edition of 1522 that William Tyndale used for the first English translation and was the basis of the 1550 Stephanus edition used for the translation of the Geneva Bible.

8. Stephanus was a printer from Paris and he produced four editions that contained what we call “critical apparatus” where he quoted the manuscripts referenced in his text. The third Stephanus edition was used by Theodore Beza who edited it nine times between 1565 and 1604. These editions became the basis for the KJV.
 9. The origin of the term *Textus Receptus* came from the preface of the 1633 edition produced by Bonaventure Elzevir and his nephew Abraham Elzevir: “*so you hold the text, now received by all, in which (is) nothing corrupt.*”
The *Textus Receptus* doesn’t designate a single edition of the Greek text but a family of editions which differ from one another at various points. It represents a history of revision. These revisions have continued to the text we have today and the labor continues.
 10. In the 1700’s the early Greek manuscripts were divided into families and subfamilies. In 1881 Westcott and Hort published a new edition of the Greek text rejecting the *Textus Receptus*. This text was based primarily on the Codex Vaticanus.
 11. Frederick Scrivener produced a collation of the Codex Sinaiticus with the *Textus Receptus* which was published by Cambridge University Press in 1894 and 1902.
 12. So the question is, how do we arrive at the true Greek text? There exists about 4000 manuscripts in whole or part of the Greek NT. Some report as many as 5700. Besides the ancient Greek manuscripts there are ancient translations and ancient quotations from church fathers. All of these take a part in textual criticism.
 13. The ancient manuscripts are grouped together into families or text types.
 - A. One text type is the Alexandrian text. Best known in this family are codex Sinaiticus and codex Vaticanus. It is a very small text family but of the oldest manuscripts.
 - B. The Western Text – Was used by Tertullian and Irenaeus and most other Church Fathers but some textual scholars do not hold this text family to be as reliable as the Alexandrian text type.
 - C. Byzantine Text – the largest of the text types but not as old as the Alexandrian. It makes up 95% of the existing manuscripts but because it wasn’t quoted by the Church Fathers some do not consider it as reliable.
 14. Differences in the Greek texts should not overshadow the overwhelming degree of agreement which exists among the ancient records.
AND, although we have the serious question involving over half of **Chapter 16** there are no issues regarding doctrinal truth.
 15. Most textual scholars today embrace the Alexandrian text type. From this text type comes the Nestle Aland 27 and 28 editions. From this Greek text comes all modern English translations. And based upon this Greek text comes the conclusion that Mark 16 should end at **Verse 8**. That settles it for most scholars today. When John MacArthur preached through the Gospel of Mark he ended at **Verse 8**.
 16. But the matter isn’t that easy. If it was that easy and a matter of fact no English translation would include **Verses 9-20** in the Bible. If we were that sure we wouldn’t risk adding to Scripture. Forget the foot note. Leave it out!
- Let me give you several reasons why I’m going to include these verses in my exposition of Mark

17. All recognize that these verses have had a prominent place in the history of the church. This is why the vast majority of manuscripts contain them. In fact, the verses are missing from only two manuscripts, the codex Vaticanus and the codex Sinaiticus.

Verses 9-20 are quoted by Church Fathers—although Eusebius denies them. Irenaeus quotes from these verses.

Reformation Study Bible – “These verses are cited by writers from the late second century and are found in the overwhelming majority of existing Greek manuscripts of the Gospel of Mark.”

18. Most of those who hold that the Mark should end with **verse 8** concede that the longer version comes from a very early date.
Textual scholars Kurt and Barbara Aland, though rejecting the originality of the verses in question, nevertheless admit that the longer ending “was recognized as canonical” and that it “may well be from the beginning of the second century”
19. Our own Confession of faith makes reference to these verses - LBC 7:2
In addition, our Confession makes another important point regarding Scripture – LBC 1:8
“The Old Testament in Hebrew (which was the native language of the people of God of old),¹⁴ and the New Testament in Greek (which at the time of the writing of it was most generally known to the nations), being immediately inspired by God, and by his singular care and providence kept pure in all ages, are therefore authentic; so as in all controversies of religion, the church is finally to appeal to them.”
20. I find it very difficult to completely dismiss a passage used by the church for most of its existence. Throwing out these verses seems inconsistent with God’s preservation of His Word. It would mean that for almost the entire of history of the church they received as canonical a passage that was in fact not canonical.
Even if modern textual work has determined that these verses are non-inspired, we certainly find nothing in them that is contrary to sound teaching.
21. And finally, **Verse 8** seems to be a strange place to end the Gospel of Mark. It is so strange that the primary argument today is whether or not Mark *intended* to end at **Ver. 8**.
Reformation Study Bible – “if vv. 9-20 are not original then the Gospel of Mark ends with Verse 8. This would be a surprising conclusion for a document that purports to be a “gospel,” a proclamation of “good news.”
Mark 16:8 NAU - "they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid."
(Admittedly, **Verse 9** also seems forced.)
22. Because of the status of these verses in church history, many of those who doubt their authenticity still include them in their commentaries.
So, I plan to preach on Verses 1-20.
Verses 1-14 deal with the glorious event of the Resurrection. This will be our focus for the majority of this chapter.
Verses 15-16 is the Great Commission according to Mark’s Gospel. It is a powerful declaration of the blessings and curses of the Gospel.
Finally, **Verses 17-20** are a powerful reminder of the signs of the Apostolic office.
23. The main reason I am teaching you on this is to enhance your appreciation and respect for God’s Word. Some think teaching on matters of textual discrepancies create doubt in God’s Word. Instead it could cause you to rejoice in God preserving His Word. Of most ancient books there might be a handful of manuscript fragments. For the Bible to have over 5000 tells us of its significance. And it tells us that in an age when there were no printing presses God was able to preserve it, even in the midst of fallible men.
 - A. The Bible you hold in your hand is the amazing Word of God. God has breathed out His Word and preserved it for us.
Paul writes:

2 Timothy 3:16-17 NAU - "All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; ¹⁷ so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work. "
 θεόπνευστος – a hapex legomina – from two words θεος and a form of πνεῦμα which means to breathe. Literally it means "God breathed"

- a. God illuminated their minds and prompted them to write.
- b. God acted upon the writers in harmony with the laws of their inner being – He used them as they were – their character and temperament, gifts and talents, education and culture, their vocabulary and style

B. In this passage we find God as Author of the Scriptures which are the infallible rule of faith and practice.

1689 London Baptist Confession

Chapter 1:1 - Of the Holy Scriptures

The Holy Scripture is the only sufficient, certain, and infallible rule of all saving knowledge, faith, and obedience.

C. In **Verse 15** Paul describes the Bible - **2 Timothy 3:15 NAU** - "and that from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus."

24. Discussions regarding the work of textual criticism should not diminish our confidence in the Word of God but rather confirm it. The church has a sure Word from God. May God always use His Word to teach us and build us up.