

Follow Me

Week 19: Following to Finish

- I. We're wrapping up a series through Mark's Gospel today and it's been exciting to look at the entire book of Mark and see the story that he shares about the life of Jesus. When we look at an entire book, we see the big themes that can otherwise be missed.
- A. Mark seeks to answer two very important questions.
- Q1. Who is Jesus?
- And
- Q2. What does it mean to follow Him?
- B. Answers:
- A1. Who is Jesus?
- Jesus is the Son of God. Jesus is of the same divine essence as the Father. Father, Son, and Spirit are One. As the Son of God, Jesus can heal the sick, raise the dead, calm the sea. Jesus has authority over the created order.
 - Jesus is the Son of Man. Jesus is fully human, and He will suffer and die as the humble servant of God. It is His divine and human nature that He fully possesses that makes His death as the King of the Jews the victory of God. Death had no claim on Jesus and 3 days after His death He was resurrected! Never to die again! His victory becomes our victory. His life becomes our life, when we trust Jesus as Lord and Savior.
- A2. To follow Jesus is to bury our lives with Christ and be raised to newness of life. It is to exchange our life for His life. Jesus has done everything to make the exchange possible. We simply accept the gift. We then follow Him in the way of self-giving love that is modeled in the life of Jesus. Our efforts aren't focused on winning the approval of Jesus. We aren't following to prove our worthiness. We are free to fight for the highest good of others because Jesus has already won the fight for me. I don't use the word "fight" flippantly. No one lives their life in a spiritual neutral zone. It's an uphill battle but we gain by losing. Losing our lives for the sake of Jesus which always manifests in how we engage those around us.
- II. As we finish up Mark today, I would like us to look at an important aspect of following Jesus that isn't always considered. It's the biblical charge that we follow to finish well. The apex of Jesus's earthly ministry occurred in the span of 3 days beginning with His crucifixion and ending with His resurrection.
- A. Jesus lived an extraordinary life. He had wise men who sought Him out with extravagant gifts. Jesus was a miracle worker who drew crowds that exceeded 5,000. He went before chief priests and Pontius Pilate. These are the ruling authorities of a nation. Jesus is one of the most well attested figures in all of human history. But what sets Jesus as distinct is not His extraordinary life. It is His death and resurrection. Those in authority mocked Jesus by calling Him the King of the Jews, but that's exactly who He is! He died and was raised as the victorious King!
- B. The Gospel of Mark gives us a unique view of the death and resurrection of Jesus. It's shocking in how the crucifixion and resurrection unfold and what is very shocking from a human perspective is who follows Jesus until the end and who does not. We looked at the resurrection on Easter Sunday through the eyes of the women who arrived at the empty tomb. I would like for us to consider the women that followed Jesus again today on both sides of the crucifixion and resurrection. They stand as the ideal disciples that faithfully followed to the finish!
- C. After the trial before Pilate, Barabbas is released, and Jesus is sentenced to be executed by crucifixion. The people didn't want the Lamb of God who would take away the sins of the people. They wanted a king who would give them power. Can we see that Jesus has a record of fighting for our highest good even when we think He's letting us down? When we have doubts about the character of God, draw near to the cross.
- Mark 15:25-27 - 25 Now it was nine in the morning when they crucified him. 26 The inscription of the charge written against him was: THE KING OF THE JEWS. 27 They crucified two criminals with him, one on his right and one on his left.
- From Mark 14:17 to Mark 15:25, it's been about 15 hours and most of which have been through the night. He hasn't slept. He's been questioned and beaten. And at 9:00 AM, He's crucified. The physical torture of crucifixion is said to be the worst form of capital punishment humans have ever developed. As Jesus is being physically tortured, He's being mocked by those who pass for the first 3 hours.

Mark 15:29-30 - 29 Those who passed by were yelling insults at him, shaking their heads, and saying, “Ha! The one who would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, **30** save yourself by coming down from the cross!”

2. For 6 hours Jesus suffered in agony on the cross. The first 3 hours, He was mocked by those who watched on and even the two revolutionaries on either side. But the atmosphere shifts at noon. Darkness covers the land. I don’t know what occurred. The Bible doesn’t give us an explanation other than a supernatural darkness fell over the land of Israel. It could have been some natural phenomenon that God clearly orchestrated with His supernatural timing, or it could have been a pure supernatural act of God. Either way the taunting stopped. God was making it known that judgment was falling upon the land. But the very judgment falling on the land would fall completely on the sinless Son of Man.

Mark 15:34-39 - 34 And at three Jesus cried out with a loud voice, “Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?” which translated means, “My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?” **35** When some of those standing there heard this, they said, “See, he’s calling for Elijah.” **36** Someone ran and filled a sponge with sour wine, fixed it on a stick, offered him a drink, and said, “Let’s see if Elijah comes to take him down.” **37** Jesus let out a loud cry and breathed his last. **38** Then the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. **39** When the centurion, who was standing opposite him, saw the way he breathed his last, he said, “truly this man was the Son of God!”

3. The death of Jesus is marked by two supernatural events on both sides of His last breath. One is the darkness that fell on the land and the other is the splitting of the temple veil that broke open the Holy of Holies. There would no longer be a sacrifice given for the sins of people annually in the Holy of Holies. Jesus had just given His life as the sacrifice to pay the full penalty of sin. The anguish that Jesus cried out in being abandoned by His Father is due to the full weight of sin, and the wrath of God that it demanded, falling on Jesus as He physically died. It was a sight that even the Roman centurion (who had seen many executions) recognized as unique. He expressed the divinity (or essence of God) on Jesus as He took His last breath! This is a staggering sight to behold!
4. At some point the disciple John (according to John 19) does come to observe the crucifixion of Jesus, but none of the other disciples are recorded as being present! So how do we have witness of this beyond the centurion and others who may have become Christ followers? Surely some of Jesus’ followers were faithful to Him in His time of greatest need?

Mark 15:40-41 - 40 There were also women watching from a distance. Among them were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joses, and Salome. **41** In Galilee these women followed him and took care of him. Many other women had come up with him to Jerusalem.

- D. Three times in the crucifixion and resurrection narrative, Mark tells us that it was the women who followed Jesus faithfully to the finish! They were there when Jesus breathed His last which stands in sharp contrast to the disciples who fled in fear. We have testimony to the crucifixion and resurrection because of the boldness of faith demonstrated by these women and their resolve to follow to the finish.

1. Mark tells us that Joseph of Arimathea who was a prominent member of the Sanhedrin went to Pilate and petitioned for the body of Jesus. Isn’t that interesting that this prominent man who was looking forward to the kingdom of God broke from the pack and did the right thing. He did the best he could to honor the body of Jesus. But he was in a hurry as the Sabbath approached, and we know what happens when men get in a hurry. Our heart is in the right place but sometimes the details are not.
2. But look who is still following Jesus and looking on!

Mark 15:47 - 47 Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joses were watching where he was laid.

These ladies are observing the events as they transpire. Even in the death of Jesus, they still are following.

They are quietly following on the periphery of the action, but they are following to the finish.

Mark 16:1-4 - 1 When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, so that they could go and anoint him. **2** Very early in the morning, on the first day of the week, they went to the tomb at sunrise. **3** They were saying to one another, “who will roll away the stone from the entrance to the tomb for us?” **4** Looking up, they noticed that the stone-which was very large- had been rolled away.

3. Mark's account gives us testimony of at least 3 women who were committed to following Jesus to the finish. They approached the tomb with anointing spices. That means they weren't going to a tomb in anticipation of a resurrection. They didn't have everything right. Their picture of the event wasn't complete, but they were still following to the finish! They remind us that miraculous things can happen in our lives when we: Keep showing up!

4. What miracle might we experience by following to the finish? These women were the first in human history to know that Jesus was alive because they saw the empty tomb with their own eyes!

Mark 16:5-6 - 5 When they entered the tomb, they saw a young man dressed in a white robe sitting on the right side; they were alarmed. 6 "Don't be alarmed," he told them. "You are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they put him.

On Easter morning it was the women who were following to the finish and in position to experience the miracle. The first to receive the good news that Jesus has risen and has vacated the premises. In case they needed some evidence, the young man charged them to look at the stone table where the body should be. It's not there!

Mark 16:7-8 - 7 But go, tell his disciples and Peter, 'He is going ahead of you to Galilee; you will see him there just as he told you.'" 8 They went out and ran from the tomb, because trembling and astonishment overwhelmed them. And they said nothing to anyone, since they were afraid.

5. If we take Mark's Gospel as the earliest gospel account, then what we have here is staggering. This is as raw or unfiltered an account as we could ask for when it comes to the way the resurrection unfolded. In the 1st Century world (and in much of the world today) the testimony of a woman was automatically dismissible. And Mark's Gospel account, that would give testimony to the death and resurrection of Jesus, has no man to be found! It is the women who faithfully follow to the finish. It is the women who first experience the empty tomb. And it is the women who are empowered to be the first: Evangelist!

a. Notice the charge to the ladies isn't to go and get the disciples and bring them back to the empty tomb. That's what ended up happening but that wasn't the task that was given! "But go, tell his disciples...."

6. The first eyewitnesses to the empty tomb would be the women. They followed faithfully to the finish, and they were the ones in position to experience the miracle! The Bible lets the authentic account stand because it's what happened that morning! It was the women who were the ideal disciples. They followed to the finish when the others fell away.

E. One noticeable aspect of Jesus's ministry is the way that He elevated the women who partnered with Him in ministry. I believe it's easy for us to miss the significance that it was the women who faithfully followed to the finish. Yes, the disciples were restored and came around, but it was the women who were in position to experience the miracle firsthand. They showed up on Easter morning! They were the ones charged as the first people to share God's good news!

1. The heritage of our Christian faith is one of elevating women. We are to demonstrate to a watching world what it can look like when men and women love and respect one another as equals. We are both made equally in the image of God. There isn't one passage in the New Testament that limits a specific spiritual gift to a male. We need to continue to lean in as a church and empower the women of Tab to use their spiritual gifts to the fullest. We falsely think that all women are given the gift of hospitality. That's just not true! Women have the gift of teaching, serving, evangelism, and leadership. There is nothing in Scripture that divides the spiritual gifts in a male and female category.

2. Let's be a church that:
Reflects the Reality of Heaven

3. We don't always think of gender in terms of diversity, but we should. A unified diversity that celebrates the gifts and talents of us all and what each of us brings to the table! We've got some work to do, but I'm excited to see what God has in store.

Happy Mother's Day! I'm so thankful for the godly women of Tab Church who have a great track record of showing up and following to the finish. Our church is blessed because of the leadership of so many godly women who use their gifts for the honor of Jesus!