

Session 14

Torn: The Centurion's Confession and the Empty Tomb

Mark 15:16-16:20 | A Ransom for Many: A Catholic Journey Through the Gospel of Mark

Part 1: Leader Preparation Guide

Session Overview

Discovery Aim: Participants discover the ending every thread has been waiting for: a mock coronation that Mark writes as a true one, a crucified King praying Psalm 22, and then the Gospel's two climactic sentences in immediate sequence: the temple curtain TORN (the second and final use of the word from the baptism), and a Roman centurion, looking at a dead man on a cross, becoming the first human being in this Gospel to say it: "Truly this man was the Son of God." Tonight the sealed guesses are opened. Then the empty tomb, "he is going before you to Galilee, and PETER", and an honest, faithful treatment of how Mark's Gospel ends.

Catholic Touchstone: The Paschal Mystery whole: the redeeming death in which Christ bore our estrangement without ceasing to be the beloved Son (CCC 603), the torn veil opening the new and living way (Hebrews 10:19-20), and the Resurrection, "the crowning truth of our faith in Christ" (CCC 638), attested by an empty tomb, appointed witnesses, and a Church that has not stopped talking since the women ran from the garden.

What You Need to Know

The mockery (15:16-20) must be read with Mark's irony fully on: a whole battalion, a purple cloak, a crown (of thorns), homage on bended knee, and the acclamation "Hail, King of the Jews!" Every element of a Roman imperial accession is present, and every word the soldiers speak in jest is true. Mark writes the scene so that the reader watches a real coronation performed by people who think they are joking: this IS how this King is crowned, this IS his purple, and the title Pilate nails over his head, "The King of the Jews", is the only royal inscription he will ever receive and the truest ever written. Simon of Cyrene, compelled to carry the cross behind Jesus, is 8:34 made flesh (and Mark names his sons, Alexander and Rufus, as men his first readers evidently knew, this Gospel has living footnotes).

At Golgotha, keep three details in focus. First, Jesus REFUSES the wine mixed with myrrh (15:23), the customary narcotic: he has a vow running (14:25) and will drink this cup undulled. Second, "with him they crucified two robbers, ONE ON HIS RIGHT AND ONE ON HIS LEFT" (15:27), and here is the payoff you have carried since Session 10: James and John asked for exactly those positions "in your glory" (10:37), and Jesus said the places were "for those for whom it has been prepared." Mark has now shown us the throne room: his glory is the cross, his court is two criminals, and the seats the apostles wanted were already assigned. Let the group find this; do not hand it to them. Third, the mockers' taunt, "He saved others; he cannot save himself" (15:31), is the Gospel's deepest accidental theology: they mean it as scorn, and love makes it true: he WILL not save himself at the cost of the many; the ransom (10:45) is either paid or kept. "Come down from the cross, that we may see and believe" is the last temptation, glory without the cross, Caesarea Philippi's Satan-whisper with a crowd's voice, and the proof that seeing was never the problem: they will be given a sign greater than coming down, and most will not believe that either.

The cry of dereliction (15:34), "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?", requires your most careful preparation. It is the opening line of Psalm 22, and, as many interpreters note, citing a psalm's opening naturally evokes the whole. So first, walk the group through what Psalm 22 actually contains: verse 1, the dereliction; verses 7-8, mockers wagging their heads and taunting his trust in God (enacted across Mark 15:29-32; Matthew preserves the taunt verbatim, 27:43); verse 18, "they divide my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots"

(happening at Jesus' feet, Mark 15:24); and then the turn: verses 22-31, vindication, "all the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the LORD... they shall proclaim his deliverance to a people yet unborn." Jesus on the cross is PRAYING, praying the psalm that is simultaneously being enacted around him, a psalm that begins in abandonment and ends in worldwide worship and a message for the unborn (that is us). Second, the doctrine, held with precision (CCC 603): the Father did not cease to love the Son, and the Trinity did not crack; rather, the Son truly assumed us in our estrangement, genuinely experiencing, in his human soul, the full weight and darkness of sin's alienation, without himself being abandoned in fact or knowing sin. He is not despairing; he is descending, taking the "My God, why?" that belongs to every sufferer and praying it from the inside, so that no human darkness would ever again be Godless. The cry is not the wheels coming off the Trinity; it is the Shepherd going all the way down the ravine.

Then 15:37-39, the two sentences this study is built around, and they must be taught in sequence. "And Jesus uttered a loud cry, and breathed his last. AND THE CURTAIN OF THE TEMPLE WAS TORN IN TWO, FROM TOP TO BOTTOM." The verb is *eschisthe*, from *schizo*, and this is its SECOND and final appearance in Mark: at 1:10 the heavens were TORN at the baptism, and a voice declared "my beloved Son"; at 15:38 the veil is TORN at the death, and a human voice declares "Son of God." The *inclusio* your group was told about in Session 1, without being told what it was, closes here. Torn from TOP to bottom: God's side, not man's; sixty feet of barrier opened by the only hands tall enough. (Whether the outer veil or the inner sanctuary veil, ancient readers and modern scholars discuss both; either way the theology is Hebrews 10:19-20, planted in your Session 1 leader notes: a "new and living way" opened "through the curtain," and the curtain, Hebrews dares to say, is his flesh: one mystery, held in a single afternoon.) And THEN: "when the centurion, who stood facing him, SAW THAT HE THUS BREATHED HIS LAST, he said, Truly this man was the Son of God!" Weigh every element with the group. WHO: a Gentile, a Roman, the officer supervising the execution, the last person in the story anyone would nominate. WHAT he saw: not the Transfiguration, not a miracle, not the resurrection, he saw "that he THUS breathed his last": the manner of the dying. WHERE he stood: "facing him," the posture of the whole Gospel's question. This is the first human being in Mark to call Jesus the Son of God, and Mark has withheld that confession through sixteen chapters so that when it finally comes, it comes from a Gentile, at the cross, ABOUT the crucified. That is the Messianic Secret's final answer: you cannot know who Jesus is apart from the cross, and once you know him there, you cannot be silenced, and the "house of prayer for all the nations" has its firstfruits in Roman armor. OPEN THE SEALED GUESSES HERE. Structure the moment: read 15:39 aloud, let it land, then have everyone open their envelope from Session 1 and share what they guessed. Celebrate near-misses and direct hits alike; the point was never trivia but attention, and they have just watched a fourteen-week question resolve exactly where the Gospel always intended.

The burial (15:42-47) matters apologetically and tenderly: Joseph of Arimathea "took courage" (it cost something), Pilate double-checks the death WITH THE CENTURION (Rome's professional verdict: dead, a standing answer to every swoon theory), and the women watch where he is laid, the same women named at 15:40, including "Mary the mother of James and Joses," whom your group met in Session 4 as the OTHER Mary, the mothers are accounted for; the witnesses are continuous from cross to tomb to Easter. Then 16:1-8: the women come with spices to anoint a body (love's errand, faith's absence, they expect a corpse), worry about the stone, and find it rolled back; a young man in white: "Do not be amazed; you seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. HE HAS RISEN, he is not here; see the place where they laid him." And then the sentence that pays off 14:28 and completes the second touch: "But go, tell his disciples AND PETER that he is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him, as he told you." AND PETER: named separately, the denier singled out, not for censure but for retrieval, St. Gregory the Great's reading has anchored the Church's: had the angel not named him, the man who denied would never have dared to come. Mercy calls the worst failure BY NAME. And "to Galilee": the reunion Jesus booked before anyone fell (14:27-28), kept to the letter.

Finally, the ending, and be as honest here as this study has been everywhere: the two oldest complete manuscripts end at 16:8, "they said nothing to any one, for they were afraid," and verses 9-20 (the appearances,

the commission, the Ascension) have a different feel and a debated history, though they were known very early (St. Irenaeus quotes 16:19 in the second century). The Catholic position holds both truths without strain: textually, 16:9-20 may be an early, inspired supplement rather than Mark's own pen, and the Church has NOT defined its authorship; canonically, the Council of Trent received these verses as canonical Scripture, so Catholics read them as the inspired Word of God, full stop. And if 16:8 was where Mark laid down his pen, the abruptness is not failure but genius: the women "said nothing to any one", yet you, reader, know the story, so SOMEONE spoke, and the Gospel ends by handing you the pen. The reader is the ending. Either way, the longer ending's content seals the study's arcs: "he was taken up into heaven, and SAT DOWN AT THE RIGHT HAND OF GOD" (16:19), Psalm 110, the temple riddle and the trial claim, cashed, and "they went forth and preached everywhere": the embargo of the Secret fully lifted, the lamp on the stand, the Decapolis man's commission gone worldwide. The Gospel's last picture is the Church doing what your group is now equipped to do.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

- **Psalm 22 (whole).** The Passion's script: the cry (v. 1), the wagging heads and the taunt (vv. 7-8 = Mark 15:29-31), the divided garments and lots (v. 18 = Mark 15:24), and the ending nobody quotes at the cross but everybody lives in: the ends of the earth turning to the LORD, and deliverance proclaimed "to a people yet unborn."
- **Amos 8:9.** "I will make the sun go down at noon, and darken the earth in broad daylight": the prophets' sign of the day of the LORD, and Mark's darkness "from the sixth hour... until the ninth hour", noon to three.
- **Psalm 69:21.** "For my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink": the sour wine on the reed (15:36).
- **Genesis 22 (leader background, full circle).** The beloved son, the wood carried up the hill, and God providing the lamb: Session 1's third thread of the Father's voice, now fully unfolded on another hill outside the same city.
- **Hebrews 10:19-20 with Exodus 26:31-33 (leader background).** The veil that walled the Holy of Holies, and the apostolic reading of its tearing: "the new and living way which he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh." Planted in Session 1; harvested tonight.
- **Psalm 110:1.** "Sit at my right hand": the temple riddle (12:36) and the claim at trial (14:62), fulfilled in the longer ending's own words: "he sat down at the right hand of God" (16:19).

Voices of the Church

Voices of the Church: St. Leo the Great (Sermons on the Passion of the Lord)

In his Passion sermons, St. Leo hears creation itself confessing what the priests denied: the sun withdrawing, the earth trembling, and the temple's veil torn asunder as the old covenant's shadows ceased and the reality they had guarded stepped into the open. The mysteries once hidden behind the curtain, Leo teaches, passed at that hour from the Temple to the Church, from figure to fulfillment: what was veiled for one nation was torn open for all. And the Church has loved to add: the centurion's confession is the nations already walking through the breach.

Voices of the Church: Pope St. Gregory the Great (Homilies on the Gospels, Homily 21)

St. Gregory asks why the angel, sending word to the disciples, adds two words: "and Peter." Because Peter had denied, Gregory answers, and had he not been summoned by name, the man who remembered the cockcrow would never have dared to come among the disciples again. He is called

expressly, lest he despair; mercy does not merely leave the door open for the one who failed worst, it goes out and calls him by name. So the Church learned, from her Lord's first Easter message, how to treat her own deniers: by name, and toward Galilee.

Voices of the Church: St. Augustine (Expositions of the Psalms, Psalm 120)

St. Augustine observes that it is no great thing to believe that Christ died; pagans and enemies believe that much, for the whole world concedes it. The faith of Christians is the RESURRECTION of Christ: this is the article that divides, the claim on which everything stands, and the thing we hold precious. And Christ risen, Augustine adds, is the head whose resurrection is the pledge of the body's: what happened to him on the third day is what he intends for everyone the Father has given him.

Catechism Connection

- **CCC 603:** The cry of dereliction: Jesus did not experience reprobation as if he had sinned, but he assumed us in the depth of our estrangement from God, so truly that he could pray our darkest psalm from the inside, in the unity of an unbroken love.
- **CCC 638-640:** The Resurrection as the crowning truth of our faith; the empty tomb as its first step and essential sign, not proof by itself, but the opening of the door the appearances walk through.
- **CCC 641-644:** The witnesses: the women first (Mary Magdalene at their head), then Peter, then the Twelve, then more than five hundred; and the honest record that the disciples themselves doubted, so far were they from hallucinating what they hoped.
- **CCC 648, 651-655:** The Resurrection as the Father's power through the Spirit, confirming everything Christ did and taught, and opening for us justification and adoption: he rose as the first-born of many brethren.

Thread Watch

Thread Watch (leader only)

Torn (*schizo*): RESOLVES 1:10 heavens torn, voice: "my beloved Son." 15:38 veil torn, human voice: "Son of God." Two tears, two declarations, one Gospel-length inclusio. Let the group find the verb themselves (question 4 is built for it), then give them the top-to-bottom detail and Hebrews 10:19-20.

The Messianic Secret / SEALED GUESSES: RESOLVES at 15:39. First human confession: a Gentile centurion, at the cross, looking at the dying. OPEN THE ENVELOPES immediately after question 5 lands. The Secret's whole logic stands revealed: the title waited for the one place it could not be misread.

The Right and the Left: RESOLVES at 15:27, the seats "in your glory" (10:37-40) were crosses. Question 2 lets them find it.

The Way / The Bread / The Ransom: Already resolved (10:52; 14:22-25; 10:45 at the table); tonight gather them in the wrap-up (question 8) so the group sees the whole architecture at once. "And Peter" completes the second-touch arc from 8:25. The Gospel's final state: every lamp on the

stand.

Session Goals

1. Participants can read the mockery as Mark's true coronation and 15:27 as the answer to 10:37-40.
2. Participants can teach Psalm 22 as the cross's script and state CCC 603's precision on the cry of dereliction.
3. Participants discover the schizo inclusio and can articulate 15:38-39 as the resolution of Torn and the Secret together.
4. Sealed guesses are opened in a well-led moment, and each participant can say why the FIRST confession comes from a Gentile at the cross.
5. Participants can give the Church's honest, two-level account of Mark's ending, and answer the legendary-development objection with 1 Corinthians 15.

Time Note (90 Minutes)

Win 10 min | Build 55 min | Guess-opening ceremony 10 min | Send 10 min | Closing prayer 5 min. **Pre-chosen cuts if running long:** compress the burial question into a leader bridge (keeping the centurion-verification apologetic in one sentence) and shorten the Win to one question. Do not cut Psalm 22, the torn veil and confession, the guess-opening, or the ending discussion. This is the night the study was built for; protect it.

Part 2: Discussion Guide

Opening Prayer

Leader: Father, fourteen weeks ago you tore the heavens open over the Jordan and named your beloved Son. Tonight we stand where the tearing finishes. Give us the centurion's eyes: to look at the Crucified and say the truth out loud. We ask this through Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Win (10 minutes)

1. Fourteen weeks ago you wrote a guess and sealed it. Without opening it or revealing it: do you remember what you wrote? How confident are you tonight?
2. Has anyone ever seen you at your absolute worst and stayed? What did that do to you?

Leader bridge: Envelopes on the table, unopened. Everything this Gospel has planted, a torn sky, a silenced title, two requested thrones, four verbs, one loaf, resolves in the next ninety minutes. Bibles open, hearts open. Let's finish.

Build (55 minutes)

Read Mark 15:16-32 aloud.

1. **The mockery (15:16-20): battalion assembled, purple cloak, a crown, kneeling homage, the acclamation "Hail, King of the Jews!" List the elements of a Roman imperial coronation, and then say what Mark is doing with this scene. Is anything the soldiers say false?**

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

Every element of an accession is present: the gathered cohort, the royal purple, the crown, the homage, the acclamation, and every word spoken in mockery is TRUE. Mark's irony is total: the soldiers stage a fake coronation and perform a real one, crowning the true King with the only crown this world had for him. The inscription Pilate will nail up, "The King of the Jews," is the one royal title Jesus ever receives in writing, and it is accurate. The Gospel has trained us for fourteen weeks to hear truth from unlikely mouths (demons, prosecutors, and now executioners); the world keeps telling the truth about Jesus by accident. Watch for the scene's crescendo: one more soldier is going to speak before the day ends, and he will not be joking.

2. **Golgotha (15:22-32). Three details: (a) he refuses the myrrhed wine, why (recall 14:25)? (b) "And with him they crucified two robbers, ONE ON HIS RIGHT AND ONE ON HIS LEFT" (15:27), search your memory of Session 10: who asked for those exact positions, and what did Jesus answer? (c) "He saved others; he cannot save himself" (15:31), is the taunt true?**

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

(a) The narcotic would dull the cup he vowed to drink undiluted: "I shall not drink again of the fruit of the vine until that day" (14:25); he will take this cup awake, whole, and willing. (b) James and John: "Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, IN YOUR GLORY" (10:37), and Jesus answered that those places were "for those for whom it has been prepared." Mark has now shown us the prepared seating: his glory is the cross, his enthronement is Golgotha, and the positions of honor flank him as two crucified criminals. The brothers did not know what they were asking, and now we know exactly what they were asking for. Let this land in silence for a moment:

every ambition in the room just got re-priced. (c) The taunt is the truest theology spoken at the crucifixion, once its verb is corrected: he WILL not save himself at the cost of the many; omnipotence is not the question, love is. The ransom (10:45) is either paid or pocketed; love that saves itself saves no one else. "Come down from the cross, that we may see and believe" is Satan's Caesarea Philippi offer with a crowd's voice, glory without the cross, and it fails for the last time. They will shortly receive a sign far greater than coming down, and the demand for proof, as always (8:11-12), was never really about evidence.

3. **The cry (15:33-36).** Darkness from noon to three (someone glance at Amos 8:9), and then: "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?", "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" This verse has troubled believers for centuries, so we will do it justice. **DISCOVERY**, in three teams: Team 1 read Psalm 22:1 and 7-8, then Mark 15:29-31. Team 2 read Psalm 22:18, then Mark 15:24. Team 3 read Psalm 22:22-31, the ending. Report. What is Jesus DOING on the cross, and what is he not doing?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

He is PRAYING, praying Psalm 22, whose first line, as many interpreters note, evokes the whole. And the teams just proved the psalm is not only being prayed but ENACTED: the mockers wagging their heads (15:29) and the rulers' sneer that he saved others (15:31) enact Psalm 22:7-8 without knowing it (Matthew preserves the taunt verbatim, 27:43); the soldiers dividing his garments by lot are performing 22:18 to the letter. David's psalm of dereliction turns out to have been the crucifixion's script, written a millennium early. And Team 3 holds the key: the psalm Jesus chose does not end in verse 1. It ends in vindication, "all the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the LORD... they shall proclaim his deliverance to A PEOPLE YET UNBORN." He is praying a psalm whose last word is worldwide worship and a message to the unborn, which is to say, to this room. Now the doctrine, precisely (CCC 603): the Father did not stop loving the Son, and the Trinity did not fracture, God cannot abandon God. What is happening is deeper and better: the Son has assumed US, all the way down, truly experiencing in his human soul the full crushing weight of sin's estrangement, the felt Godforsakenness that is sin's shadow, without ever being forsaken in fact and without despairing (you do not address despair "MY God"). He is not losing his faith; he is carrying ours through the bottom of the world. From that Friday afternoon onward, there is no human darkness, no depression, no abandonment, no death, where "My God, why?" is a Godless prayer: he prayed it first, from the inside, and wore it like the crown. The Shepherd went all the way down the ravine.

Read Mark 15:37-39 aloud. Read it twice. Then hold the silence for a moment before the next question.

4. **Verse 38:** "And the curtain of the temple was TORN in two, from top to bottom." Mark chose that verb with fourteen chapters of intent. **DISCOVERY:** turn back to Mark 1:10 and read it. What word appears in both verses, and nowhere else in this Gospel? What was declared each time something tore? And why "from TOP to bottom"?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

The verb is *schizo*, TORN, and Mark uses it exactly twice in sixteen chapters: the heavens torn open at the baptism (1:10), and the temple veil torn at the death (15:38). And each tearing is answered by a declaration of sonship: at the Jordan, the Father's voice, "You are my beloved Son"; at Golgotha, wait one verse. The whole Gospel hangs between two tearings: God ripping through the barrier from above at the beginning, and ripping through the last barrier at the end, "from top to bottom", from GOD'S side, sixty feet of woven separation opened by the only hands tall enough, and opened

irreparably (remember Session 1: a door can be shut again; something torn cannot be neatly restored). Whether Mark means the outer veil or the inner curtain of the Holy of Holies (readers ancient and modern weigh both), the tearing at the ninth hour is God's own declaration that the separation is over: the new and living way is open "through the curtain, that is, through his flesh" (Hebrews 10:19-20; the letter's bold figure lets us hold the temple's curtain and his flesh together in one mystery). Isaiah's prayer, "O that you would rend the heavens and come down" (64:1), which was answered at the Jordan, is now answered to the uttermost: he came all the way down, and tore his way back out through death itself, leaving every door open behind him.

5. **Verse 39. "And when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that he **THUS** breathed his last, he said, 'Truly this man was the Son of God!'" Take it apart: **WHO** is speaking (his job, his nation, his religion)? **WHAT** exactly did he see, list what he did **NOT** see? **WHERE** is he standing? And the question your envelopes have been waiting fourteen weeks for: what has just happened, for the first time in this entire Gospel?**

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

WHO: a Roman centurion, a Gentile, a pagan, the officer commanding the execution squad, the last man in Judea anyone would nominate, professionally responsible for this death. **WHAT** he saw: not the Transfiguration, not a feeding, not the walking on the sea, not the resurrection; he saw "that he **THUS** breathed his last", the **MANNER** of the dying: the refusal of the narcotic, the prayer in the darkness, the loud cry, the way this man died. **WHERE:** "facing him", squarely in front of the cross, the posture this whole Gospel has been maneuvering every reader into. And what has just happened: the first human being in the Gospel of Mark has called Jesus the **SON OF GOD**. Not Peter at Caesarea Philippi (he said "the Christ"). Not the crowds, not the disciples, not the Twelve at the Supper. The demons knew and were gagged; the Father declared it twice from heaven; the narrator told US in verse one; the high priest sneered it as an accusation. But the first free human confession, the thing every silence command was protecting, comes from a **GENTILE, AT THE CROSS, ABOUT A CORPSE**. That is the Messianic Secret's final answer, fourteen weeks in the making: the title was embargoed until it stood in the one place it could not be misread, because you cannot know who Jesus is apart from the cross, and once you have seen him there, truly seen him, you say it out loud, even in Roman armor, even at your own execution site. And the nations' firstfruits have arrived: the house of prayer for all the nations (11:17), the mustard tree's nesting birds (4:32), the seven hampers (8:8), all of it walks through the torn veil in the person of one soldier. Mark 1:1 called this book "the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God"; at 15:39 the Gospel's thesis is finally spoken inside the story, and the speaker is the Church of the Gentiles, one man strong.

OPEN THE SEALED GUESSES (10 minutes)

Now. Have each person open their envelope from Session 1 and read their guess aloud: **WHO** did they predict would be the first human to call Jesus the Son of God, and **WHEN**? Celebrate everything: direct hits, near-misses (Peter and the high priest were excellent wrong answers, and the discussion of why they fall short **IS** the theology), and wild guesses. Then ask the room the summary question: knowing what you now know, why did it have to be here, and why did it have to be him? Close the ceremony with this: fourteen weeks ago, Mark told you the answer in his first verse and then dared you to watch the world catch up. Tonight you caught up. The question "who do you say that I am?" now has only one thing left to determine: whether the centurion's sentence is also yours.

Read Mark 15:40-16:8 aloud.

6. **The women, the burial, the tomb (15:40-16:8). Track the witnesses: who watches the death, who watches the burial, who comes at dawn? Then the message at the tomb: "go, tell his disciples AND PETER that he is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him, AS HE TOLD YOU." Two payoffs are hiding in that sentence, find them (one is from 14:27-28; the other has been running since 8:25).**

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

The witnesses are named at every step: the three women watch the death (15:40, including Session 4's "other Mary," still accounted for), the two Marys watch the burial (15:47), and the women return with spices at dawn (16:1); the two Marys connect death, burial, and empty tomb without a gap, and note their errand: SPICES, to anoint a corpse. They expect a body; the empty tomb ambushed even love. (The burial scene also quietly retires the oldest skeptical theory: Pilate, surprised, verifies the death with THE CENTURION, Rome's professional sign-off; nobody swooned on a Roman's watch.) The message: "He has risen, he is not here; see the place where they laid him. But go, tell his disciples AND PETER..." Payoff one: "to Galilee; there you will see him, AS HE TOLD YOU", 14:28 kept to the letter: before anyone fell, on the way to Gethsemane, Jesus had already scheduled the post-Resurrection reunion, "after I am raised up, I will go before you to Galilee." The desertion was foreseen, and the mercy was pre-booked. Payoff two: AND PETER. The denier is named, singled out, not for censure but retrieval, St. Gregory the Great's reading: had the angel not named him, the man who heard the cockcrow would never have dared to come. Mercy calls the worst failure BY NAME, and the second touch that began with tears in a courtyard (14:72; remember 8:25) is completed by two words in an Easter message. Every person in your group who has ever been Peter needs to hear this slowly: the first Easter announcement in history contains a personalized invitation to the man who failed worst.

7. **The ending, with full honesty. The two oldest complete manuscripts of Mark end at 16:8: "they went out and fled from the tomb... and they said nothing to any one, for they were afraid." Verses 9-20 have a debated textual history (though they are quoted as early as St. Irenaeus). Two questions: How does the Catholic Church hold this honestly, and, if 16:8 was where Mark stopped, what would that ending MEAN? Then read 16:19-20 and find two last payoffs.**

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

The Catholic position holds two truths without strain, and this study has practiced that honesty all along (the Abiathar note, Mark 1:1's variant, "nor the Son"). Textually: yes, the oldest complete manuscripts end at 16:8, verses 9-20 read like an early summary of the appearances known from the other Gospels, and the Church has never defined that Mark's own hand wrote them. Canonically: the Council of Trent received Mark 16:9-20 as canonical Scripture, so Catholics read these verses as the inspired Word of God, whoever the Spirit's human instrument was, inspiration attaches to the text the Church received, not to a byline. Now the beautiful possibility: if 16:8 was Mark's deliberate last line, the abruptness is genius, not accident. The Gospel ends with silence, "they said nothing to any one", and yet you are holding the story, which means someone spoke; the silence was broken, and the Gospel ends by handing YOU the pen. Fourteen chapters of "tell no one" resolve into an ending that asks: now that the embargo is lifted and you know everything, what will YOU say? The reader is the ending. And the longer ending, as canonical Scripture, seals the arcs regardless: "the Lord Jesus... was taken up into heaven, and SAT DOWN AT THE RIGHT HAND OF GOD" (16:19), Psalm 110:1, the temple riddle (12:36) and the claim at trial (14:62), cashed in full: the

Son of David is David's Lord, enthroned. "And they went forth and preached EVERYWHERE" (16:20): the Secret's final state, every lamp on the stand (4:21-22), the Decapolis man's one-sentence commission gone global, and the mustard seed a tree with your group nesting in its branches.

8. **STEELMAN, one last time, build it strong before you answer it. A skeptical friend says: "Mark proves the resurrection legend grew over time. The earliest Gospel originally had NO appearances, just an empty tomb, frightened women, and silence. Then Matthew and Luke add appearances, John adds more, and someone even patched an ending onto Mark. That is exactly what legendary development looks like." Build it at full strength; it uses real textual facts. Then answer. DISCOVERY: someone read 1 Corinthians 15:3-8 aloud, and note when Paul says he RECEIVED this.**

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

Grant the facts: the manuscript history is as stated, and the objection reasons from real data, respect that. Now the answer, and it turns on chronology the objection has backwards. First, the earliest detailed resurrection tradition, with its named appearance list, is not in any Gospel: it is 1 Corinthians 15:3-8 (and 1 Thessalonians, earlier still, already professes the risen Jesus, 1:10), written in the 50s, in which Paul recites a formula he says he RECEIVED, creedal tradition he was handed, which many scholars date within a few years of the crucifixion: "Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures... he was raised on the third day... he APPEARED to Cephas, then to the twelve... then to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom are still alive." Appearances, named witnesses, a public dare to check, decades BEFORE Mark wrote. The highest claims are the EARLIEST; legend requires the opposite slope. Second, Mark at 16:8 does not lack resurrection faith, he presupposes appearances in the text everyone agrees he wrote: "he is going before you to Galilee; THERE YOU WILL SEE HIM" (16:7). The seeing is announced; Mark's abruptness is a literary choice, not an evidential gap. Third, the criterion of embarrassment, twice: the first witnesses in every Gospel are WOMEN, whose testimony carried little weight in that world (no inventor chooses them), and the disciples are portrayed as doubting, fleeing, and denying, a church fabricating its origin story writes itself braver. Fourth, geography: the movement exploded in JERUSALEM, walking distance from a checkable tomb, against every incentive of the authorities; and the apologetic inference has always pressed: producing a body would have ended it, and nothing in the record suggests one ever was. Fifth, the witnesses: men who fled a courtyard's questioning went on to suffer for this claim, several to attested martyrdoms, and none, so far as any record shows, ever recanted, for a claim they were positioned to know was true or false; people die for beliefs, but not for inventions they themselves authored. The resurrection is not the soft spot in the Gospel; it is, as St. Augustine says, the precise thing that makes the faith the faith: anyone will grant that Christ died; "the resurrection of Christ is the faith of Christians." And it is the reason a study of a Roman execution ends in hope: the centurion's sentence was spoken over a dead man, and God's answer, three days later, was to agree with him, publicly, permanently, and in person.

Dig Deeper

The study's whole architecture, gathered (walk it with the group as a closing recap): the WAY, from "prepare the way of the Lord" to Bartimaeus following on it (1:2-3 to 10:52). The BREAD, from green grass through crumbs and one loaf to "this is my body" (6:41 to 14:22). The RANSOM, from the road-sentence to the cup "poured out for many" (10:45 to 14:24). TORN, heavens to veil, declaration to declaration (1:10-11 to 15:38-39). The SECRET, from "be silent" to "they went forth and preached everywhere" (1:25 to 16:20), with its logic revealed at the hinge (8:31) and its expiration at the

mountain (9:9). The SEATS, requested in ambition, filled by robbers (10:37 to 15:27). The FOUR WATCHES, prophesied and struck (13:35 through 15:1). And PETER: confession, collapse, cockcrow, and a name spoken at an empty tomb (8:29, 14:72, 16:7), the two-stage healing of every disciple who has ever seen men like trees walking. Mark wasted nothing. Neither, this Gospel insists, does the God who wrote your story.

Send (10 minutes)

1. The centurion looked at the Crucified and said the truth out loud. You have spent fourteen weeks looking. Say your version of his sentence, out loud, to the group, right now: who is Jesus of Nazareth? (Leaders: go first.)
2. "Go, tell his disciples and Peter": the first Easter message retrieves a failure by name and points him to a reunion. Who in your life is standing where Peter stood, certain they have disqualified themselves, and how will you carry "and Peter" to them this month, by name?

Live It This Week (and After)

- Finish Mark's sentence: if 16:8 hands the reader the pen, take it. This week, tell one person, plainly, what you found in this Gospel, the Decapolis commission ("how much the Lord has done for you") is still the whole job description.
- Read the Gospel of Mark whole, in one sitting, this month, ninety minutes, the length of one session. You will hear the threads you now know: the tearing, the bread, the way, the watches. It will feel like rereading a letter from someone you have since come to love.
- Take the centurion's post once this week: fifteen minutes before a crucifix, "facing him," saying nothing but his sentence: "Truly this man is the Son of God." Let the torn veil mean what it means: nothing now stands between you.
- And Peter: if there is a cockcrow in your past that still keeps you from the room, hear yourself named in 16:7, and go to Confession this week. Galilee is scheduled. He got there first.

Closing Prayer

Leader: Father, you tore the heavens at the Jordan and the veil at the ninth hour, and nothing now stands between us and you. Lord Jesus, Son of God, you came not to be served but to serve, and to give your life as a ransom for many, and we were the many. Holy Spirit, put the centurion's sentence on our lips and Peter's retrieval in our hearts, and send us out like the women from the tomb, except talking. Through Christ our Lord. Amen. (Together: one Our Father, and, if your group is willing, the Creed, the long form of the centurion's sentence, which the Church has been expanding on ever since.)

Scripture Memory Verse

"Truly this man was the Son of God!" (Mark 15:39, RSV2CE)

Part 3: Leader Reference Card

Primary text: Mark 15:16-16:20

Every passage used this session, in order:

- Mark 15:16-20 (the mock coronation)
- Mark 15:21 (Simon of Cyrene; cf. Mark 8:34)
- Mark 15:22-32 (Golgotha; the refused wine; the right and the left; the taunts)
- Mark 10:37-40 (the requested seats, paid off at 15:27)
- Mark 15:33-36 (the darkness; the cry; the sour wine)
- Amos 8:9 (sun down at noon)
- Psalm 22:1, 7-8, 18, 22-31 (the Passion's script and its ending)
- Psalm 69:21 (the vinegar)
- Mark 15:37-39 (the tearing; the confession)
- Mark 1:10-11 (the first tearing, the inclusio)
- Isaiah 64:1 (rend the heavens, from Session 1)
- Hebrews 10:19-20 with Exodus 26:31-33 (the veil and the new way)
- Mark 15:40-47 (the women; Joseph; the verified death)
- Mark 16:1-8 (the empty tomb; and Peter; Galilee)
- Mark 14:27-28 (the pre-booked reunion)
- Mark 16:9-20 (the longer ending; the right hand of God; preached everywhere)
- Psalm 110:1 (sat down at the right hand, paid off at 16:19)
- 1 Corinthians 15:3-8 (the earliest resurrection creed, steelman chain)
- CCC 603, 638-644, 648, 651-655
- Memory verse: Mark 15:39