

“Grow in Faith; Go and Share”

Mark 16:9-20

April 12, 2015

Well, another Easter weekend celebration may have come and gone. The after-Easter discount shelves of candy are probably empty by now—at least the good stuff, but the deep, pressing, personal implications of believing in the Risen Christ have yet to carve deeper grooves into our daily lives.

This morning we are going to be reminded of two great needs in response to the risen Christ: our need 1) to militantly fight unbelief in our own lives as believers and 2) to passionately forward the glorious news of the gospel to all people.

### Historical Textual Background

Before we launch into these essential topics, however, I must first take a moment to address a textual note (just before vs. 9) or footnote in your Bibles regarding the historical background of these verses. You should have a note that says something like, “some of the earliest manuscripts do not include vs. 9-20.”

Let me give you just a general overview of the historical background to these concluding verses of Mark.

The NT that you hold in your hands is based off of a large mass of ancient manuscripts throughout the history of the church. “Some ancient manuscripts of Mark’s gospel contain these verses and others do not, which presents a puzzle for scholars who specialize in the history of [NT] manuscripts.”<sup>1</sup> The earliest manuscripts that we have of Mark end with vs. 8. Most scholars believe that Mark did not originally end his gospel with vs. 8 but that possibly the final verses that he penned were lost very early on and that the church in the second century, not wanting to leave the gospel without a conclusion, included vss. 9-20 based on other NT writings, specifically the concluding vss. of the other gospels. There are two reasons

why vs. 9-20 are not considered the original ending of Mark. 1) the oldest manuscripts don’t include vs. 9-20, and 2) vs. 9-20 are very different in terms of style, grammar, and vocabulary as well as a change of flow in the content from the vss. that precede it.

So we have vss. 9-20 in our NT because it is included in the vast majority of manuscripts are available to us but we have this textual note informing us that it is not found in some of the earliest manuscripts that we have.

Now if I just left you with that information alone, you might walk away wondering, just how reliable is the NT? If we have multiple manuscripts and there are some variations between them, how do we know that what we hold in our hands is the Word of God?

Well in fact, because we have such a vast number of manuscripts to work with, we have the ability to attest to how established the Scriptures are historically. Every time you find a little textual note in your Bible, it is there because of a vast amount of information that we have to help us dial in precisely the way our modern translations should read. So when you hold and NAS or ESV (or older NIV—1984) in your hands, it is the most substantiated document in the history of the world.

Let me show you just how confident you should be in your NT. Let’s compare the NT to other classical works. Ancient Greek or Latin authors have on average less than 20 remaining manuscripts. But the NT has well over a thousand times as many manuscripts as the works of the average classical author.

How does the NT compare in the area of other ancient historical writings? Other historical documents range anywhere from 3 to 200 remaining copies, many only dating back as far as the 9<sup>th</sup> century while some date as early as the first century—that’s pretty impressive. Yet the NT as 5,700 remaining Greek manuscripts plus more than 10,000 in Latin. Of the various languages that the NT was translated into very early on, including Latin, we have between 20,000 and 25,000 handwritten copies. Yet, even if all these were destroyed, we have enough scripture quotations in the writings of the early

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<sup>1</sup> ESV Study Bible, pg. 1933.

church fathers to reconstruct the NT. “To date, over a million quotations from the NT by the church fathers have been catalogued.”<sup>2</sup>

Now of course, we didn’t have printers and copiers in those days. Every manuscript needed to be copied by hand by scribes who although they were meticulous, were more prone to small errors than copy machines. Most of the errors or variants that we find are extremely insignificant, like spelling errors from the change of single letter. Less than one percent of all NT variants affect meaning and none of them are substantial to Christian doctrine. The Bible that you hold in your hands is an incredible gift from God, preserved through the faithful scribes who devoted their lives to copying the Scriptures.

Do you see how significant this volume of manuscripts is? Let’s say I wrote a book and my original manuscript got destroyed in a fire. But what if before the fire, 100 of you had each made a handwritten copy. Certainly there might be some copying errors but when we put all 100 together and compared them, we could certainly reconstruct the original work.

It’s on the basis of thousands of manuscripts that FF Bruce could say, “*there is no body of ancient literature in the world which enjoys such a wealth of good textual attestation as the New Testament.*”<sup>3</sup>

The reason I share this with you today is because Mark 16:9-20 is one of only two larger sections of scripture that is questioned as a variant.<sup>4</sup>

So what should we do with Mark 16:9-20 which is in our Bibles because it is included in so many manuscripts yet not in the oldest ones that we have?

- Humbly recognize that though most scholars are sure it is not original to Mark’s gospel, we could be wrong in our conclusions and recognize that earlier centuries of the church had a closer perspective to this than we do. So we should not quickly discount

how prominently these verses have been regarded as the conclusion to Mark’s gospel by the church for many centuries. This is why it has been included in our modern Bibles and therefore it is good for us to consider its meaning.<sup>5</sup>

- We should be careful to not build doctrines on these verses *alone*, apart from the wider teaching of the NT.
- Note: What is expressed in vs. 9-20 is consistent wider NT teaching and doctrine.<sup>6</sup> In fact, it is a compilation of other NT incidents and references.<sup>7</sup> For example, vs. 9-11 about Mary Magdalene are parallel to John 20:11-18. The two men to whom Jesus appears in vs. 12-13 are the men on the road to Emmaus in Luke 24. The Great Commission in vs. 15 is a summary of the Great Commission in Matthew 28; and so on.

Now, with all that’s been said, let’s take a closer look at vs. 9-20 which have for centuries served as the conclusion to Mark’s gospel. I want to offer you two general exhortations from these verses that are abundantly taught throughout the NT:

### **1. All believers must fight the persistence of unbelief in their lives with militancy.**

[vs. 9-14]

We have repeatedly seen the theme of hardened unbelief all throughout the Gospel of Mark.

For example, back in Mark 6 Jesus fed 5000 men (not counting women and children) with just a few loaves and fish. Then in Mark 8 He again fed 4000 people with just a few loaves of bread. So the disciples have seen Jesus miraculously provide for well over 10,000 people but later when they forgot to bring bread on the boat they worried about how their little band of 13 will

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<sup>2</sup> ESV Study Bible, 2587-2588.

<sup>3</sup> McDowell, Josh. *A Ready Defense*. Pg. 44.

<sup>4</sup> Also John 7:53-8:11.

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<sup>5</sup> MacArthur Study Bible, pg. 1469.

<sup>6</sup> Sroul, RC. *Mark*. pg. 419.

<sup>7</sup> Hurtado, Larry. *NIBC: Mark*. pg. 287.

manage on one loaf of bread. Even though they repeatedly saw Jesus provide, they struggled to believe. We are not different much of the time.

The very nature of unbelief is stubborn. Unbelief has a persistent personality. I'm not just talking about unbelief in nonbelievers who are blind to the truth, but in believers who struggle to walk by faith.

But unbelief is not only persistent, it is also deadly and destructive. Don't forget all the millions of Israelites who died in the wilderness over a 40 year period. Why? Hebrews 3:19 gets to the very root of their sin of disobedience when it says, "so we see that they were not able to enter [the promised land] because of unbelief."

Just think of the destructive nature of unbelief when you decide to worry and take matters into your own hands rather than trusting in God—rather than praying and keeping your perspective under the custody of God's Word. What is the spill over into the lives of our kids?

We tend to treat unbelief (or lack of trust) in our own lives politely as though it is innocent and we can't do anything about it. Rather we should treat unbelief (or lack of faith) militantly as though it is deadly, as it strangles out faith and God's glory.

The disciples struggled to believe, in fact they refused to believe, that Christ had risen—at least for a time. But God has the power to overcome unbelief in our lives. He has the power to open blind eyes to give them spiritual sight. Do you believe that Christ has indeed been raised? Not just as an orthodox tenant of the Christian faith, but as a personal reality in your own life? If your answer is 'yes,' keep listening.

Faith in the risen Christ is not just basic and essential to your salvation. It also has implications for your daily life. In 2 Cor 1:20 the apostle Paul said, "For as many as may be the promises of God, in Jesus they are yes." You can take all that God has promised to His people and apply it with confidence to

your life as you walk by faith because Christ has risen to establish every promise as true.

What circumstances has God brought into your life recently that are opportunities to trust Him; opportunities that could be spoiled by unbelief? Hint: you don't call them opportunities; you call them problems.

The reality of Christ's resurrection should be transforming our daily personal perspective to growing faith and confidence in the Lord. Yet progress will be minimal if you are not applying spiritual discipline in your mind and heart.

It's essential for us to be vigilant against unbelief. Whenever it shows up, call it what it is and refuse to entertain it, rebuke it. But beware it wears lots of masks like discouragement, unwillingness to trust God, fear, insisting on doing things one's own way, allowing common sense and reason to be your god instead of trusting in His supernatural ability, lack of prayer, etc.

It is essential for us to be vigilant against unbelief in our lives and its essential for us to form allies with other believers to help us in this battle. We can't do it alone.

Heb 3:12-13—"Take care, brethren, lest there should be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart, in falling away from the living God.

13 But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is *still* called "Today," lest any one of you be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin."

Downward spiral of unbelief:

Unbelief → sin → hardening of heart → deeper unbelief → etc.

You are not sufficient to fight unbelief alone.

- Who do you have in your life who is close enough to you that you will allow to speak truth into your life when you don't

want to hear it because you are caught in the downward spiral of unbelief?

- Are you giving the Scriptures adequate opportunity to militantly fight unbelief in your soul on a daily basis? You must be aggressive if you will win the fight of faith!

By the way, just as we see in Mark 16 and earlier in his gospel, unbelief is worthy of rebuke because unbelief at its core is prideful. So beware, rebuking unbelief is not naturally received with humility. When you allow someone to call out the sin of unbelief in your life, beware that your natural inclination will be to respond with pride.

## **2. All believers must proclaim the gospel with their words and lives.** [vs. 15-20]

The Lord Jesus left us with a singular mission—*“to go into all the world and preach the gospel...”*

Now the assumption is that is the preacher’s job, and it most certainly is. But the great commission was not just given to preachers. It was given to the church. If we will be a true biblical church—in order for us to not be a fraudulent church—the very heart and pulse of TEFC must be forwarding the gospel to people with in our sphere of influence and loving, praying, and sending to those who are beyond our immediate sphere of influence. But here’s the key. While being faithful to the mission of the gospel must permeate our ministries and programs, we will not powerfully influence our world with the gospel without the people of Trinity having lives aflame for Christ with true faith that is living and active—who see their purpose as a believer to bring Christ to those who are without hope in this world. It’s ultimately people, not programs, that make a church truly faithful to the gospel.

- Every believer should think of him/herself as representative of Jesus.

- Every believer should view every relationship as eternally significant. Every relationship should be viewed through a lens of representing Jesus to that person.
- Every believer should view every circumstance and moment as a divine opportunity to live for the glory and honor of God.
- Every believer should live with the confidence that as we take the gospel to the world, the power of God will accompany the proclamation of the gospel and rule of God will reorder the lives of those who believe.

I believe that the best way to summarize what is being said in vs. 17-18 about the signs that will accompany the gospel, is that the proclamation of the gospel will be accompanied by the rule of God intervening and reordering what is natural in this world. In other words, where the gospel is proclaimed and believed, the kingdom of God (the rule of God) is manifested. Remember, this is where the gospel of Mark began with Jesus preaching, “the kingdom of God is at hand, repent and believe in the gospel!”. The way you experience the reordering rule of God is through believing the gospel of Christ.

Church, take courage from vss. 19 and 20 that as we faithfully present the gospel, Jesus works with us and through us from His position of authority where He is now seated at the right hand of God. Jesus said it this way in Matthew 28: *“All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age” (18-20).*

### **So we conclude our study of Mark’s gospel praying for two things:**

1. Increasing faith in the Risen Christ producing a life of confident trust in Him as our living Hope.
2. Increasing vision and spiritual empowerment to take the gospel to those God has placed in our sphere of influence (and beyond) who are without God without hope in this world.

*Father, thank you for the precious gift of the Word of God through which we may grow in confident faith and increasing passion to fulfill our God-given purpose of showing others the way to your glorious grace. Amen.*