

## **“THE UNENDING GOSPEL.”**

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**Scripture Text: Mark 16:9-20**

### **Introduction.**

This text is very controversial, but not for the reasons you might guess, not because of the snake handling and drinking deadly poison. This text is controversial because there is a huge debate whether Mark 16:9-20 is original. Most modern scholars say it's not. Several of my newer commentaries don't even comment in these verses, they end with Mark 16:8. It's a debate in seminaries whether pastors should preach on these verses.

If you have an NIV Bible before verse 9 they have inserted a parenthetical statement: [The earliest manuscripts and some other ancient witnesses do not have verses 9–20.]

The ESV says: [Some of the earliest manuscripts do not include 16:9–20.]

That's true in so far as it goes but it leaves a lot out. It's true two of the earliest major manuscripts don't have these. But earliest aren't necessarily always best. The fact is there are also many early manuscripts that have this longer ending to Mark. In fact a majority of Greek manuscripts have this long ending.

Furthermore several early church fathers refer to verses in this part of Mark. Add to that the Christian church has recognized these verses as canonical for over eighteen hundred years. Our own Heidelberg Catechism quotes verse 16 in Q and A 26.

Some argue that the language of verses 9-20 is too different from the rest of Mark. But so what? If someone else finished Mark that doesn't mean it's not canonical. Someone else wrote the end of Deuteronomy that describes the death of Moses, but that doesn't mean it isn't the Word of God.

Many modern scholars say the original ending has been lost. That casts doubt on the authenticity of these verses and calls into question the doctrine of the preservation of the Scriptures by the Holy Spirit. If we say that here what about other parts? There's value to studying and comparing ancient texts but there's enough textual evidence to follow the majority of manuscripts, the majority of church fathers and the majority of the church through the ages and to trust the preservation of the Word by the Holy Spirit.

I know I am in the minority and I know it's possible I could be wrong, but I think too much is at stake to cause God's people to doubt the authority and authenticity of God's Word and put the judgments of man over the promises of God.

So let's proceed with the conviction that this is the Word of God, breathed out by the Spirit and profitable for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness.

### **Mark 16:9-13, the appearance to Mary and to the two on the way to Emmaus.**

Our text can be outlined and summed up as three appearances and a disappearance.

Mark lists three post-resurrection appearances as proof that Jesus is risen just as He said. He was seen, touched, heard, and watch eating food first by Mary Magdelene, then the two disciples on the way to Emmaus and finally by the eleven.

The other gospels list other eye witnesses and Paul adds that Jesus was seen by over 500 many of whom were still alive when he was writing.

Of all the facts of our Lord's history none is more public and more witnessed than that He rose from the dead.

Consider that Islam is based on a story that in 610AD Muhammed was in a cave praying and he says the angel Gabriel appeared to him and gave him a revelation and recited the Quran to him.

Consider that Buddhism is based on the teachings of Siddhartha Gautama or Buddha who lived sometime in the 5<sup>th</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> century BC, no one knows for sure. His teachings were first written down about 400 years after he lived. "Scholars are hesitant to make unqualified claims about the historical facts of the Buddha's life" ... "we have very little information that can be considered historically sound."

Consider that Mormonism is based on the word of Joseph Smith that at the age of 18 he was visited by an angel named Moroni, who revealed the location of a buried book made of golden plates which he later translated as the Book of Mormon. Later there was a claim that there were twelve witnesses of the plates before they disappeared.

They all started with a private dream or a private angelic encounter or a private idea, and then that one person told others what they saw or heard or thought.

The empty tomb wasn't proof of the resurrection, the countless eye witnesses, none of whom had any predisposition to expect it weren't proof. The resurrection appearances of Jesus Himself are the proof. Because of them:

**I Peter 1:8** Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, 9 obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

### **Mark 16:14-18, the appearance to the Eleven.**

Jesus' last words reveal what is most important, what is most central. "Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation."

Note well the supreme importance of the Gospel and of proclaiming it.

It's a universal Gospel, not just for the Jews, but for all the Gentiles as well.

It's not just for Israel or the Roman Empire, but for all the world, for all creation.

It's not just of universal significance but of eternal significance and of eternal consequence.

Wherever there are children of Adam there is the need for the gospel of Jesus' saving grace.

**John 3:16** For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

We have no justification for changing this mandate. We are not justified in changing it based on race, culture, skin color, sexual orientation, economic status, everyone needs the call to repentance and to faith in Jesus Christ.

Anytime anyone excludes any class of people they are propagating hate and not love. God's love and truth are a universal language. The proof of it will be seen in heaven when there will be gathered their people from every tribe, tongue, language, nation and people.

This is why we do missions and evangelism, this is why we send people and money near and far, this is why we support and pray, this is why we are salt and light across the street and around the world. The whole world needs the gospel.

### **Signs and wonders.**

With these last words to His apostles, Jesus is saying something else about the Gospel. Jesus knows the challenges they are about to face as the first proclaimers of the Gospel to the world.

They will be attacked, they will be persecuted, they will be told to be silent, they will be called liars and deceivers. And on top of all this they will be under constant attack from Satan himself who will do everything in his power to destroy the work of Christ.

So Jesus encourages and blesses His apostles with His power and authority, with signs and miracles to confirm their message. The message is crucial, the miracles are to support it.

Every sign and wonder Jesus promised here is seen in the Book of Acts except the poison.

What are we to make of these signs and wonders that Jesus and the apostles did, casting out demons, speaking in tongues, picking up serpents, drinking poison and not dying, laying on of hands for healing?

***Don't miss the forest for the trees.*** We tend to focus on the trees, the specific miraculous acts and miss the big picture, the purpose.

Remember Mark's purpose in writing his gospel.

**Mark 1:1** The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

How did Jesus establish His authority as the Son of God? How did Jesus prove He was who He said He was? He came to proclaim the kingdom of God is at hand, but how did He establish His claim to be the Son of God? Miracles.

More than any other Gospel writer Mark records the most miracles and gives the most detail. In chapter one alone there are three specific miracles and a general statement about healing many.

When Jesus calmed the storm what did the disciples say? "Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?" (Mark 4:41).

Jesus has authority over nature. Jesus has authority over demons and death. Jesus has authority over diseases, snakes, poison. Jesus has authority over all creation. All of nature submits to Jesus. Nature is His servant, it serves His purpose.

Without getting bogged down in the specifics of snakes and poison, what is this text saying? What does Jesus say?

**Mark 16:15-17** And he said to them, "Go into all the world and ***proclaim the gospel*** to the whole creation. 16 Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned. 17 And these ***signs will accompany*** those who believe.

**Mark 16:20** And they went out and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them and confirmed the message by accompanying signs.

Proclaiming the gospel. That's the mission of the church. And God will accompany the preaching with signs to confirm, many different signs faith. Once the Bible was written and the message confirmed, the supernatural miracles declined.

Now the dead are raised through the preaching of salvation. Blind eyes are opened with the truth.

Miracles still surround us. His constant provision and protection is just as much a miracle as manna falling from heaven and water coming from a rock.

His making a way for our salvation is just as much a miracle as the parting of the Red Sea. His delivering us from the bondage of our sin is just as much a miracle as raising Lazarus from the dead.

His rescuing us from the grasp of Satan and filling us with His Holy Spirit is just as great a miracle as His casting out of seven demons.

I was lame and now I walk, I was blind and now I see, I was deaf and now I hear, I was dead and now I am alive. Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift, for His indescribable power at work in me.

### **Handling Snakes and drinking poison.**

There are a few churches scattered throughout the Appalachian region that have made snake handling a sign of salvation. Similar to how some Pentecostal churches require speaking in tongues as a sign of salvation, of having received the Holy Spirit. A famous third generation Kentucky snake handler just died in February.

They base a central tenant of their faith on one or two verses and miss the larger purpose of those verses.

The misuse and abuse of these and other signs should not surprise us. Satan is a master of imitation and deception. There are always those willing for the purposes of pride, power or greed to mislead innocent and naïve people.

Christ warned us of this as did Paul

**Matthew 24:24** False christs and false prophets will arise and perform great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect.

**II Thessalonians 2:9-10** The coming of the lawless one is by the activity of Satan with all power and false signs and wonders, 10 and with all wicked deception for those who are perishing, because they refused to love the truth and so be saved.

Signs are just that, signs. You can judge them by what they point to. If they strengthen our faith, or confirm the Gospel, or point to Jesus then they are good. If they distract from those things or exalt man, they are false. If the focus is on the miracles rather than on Jesus then they are false.

**I Thessalonians 5:19-21** Do not quench the Spirit. 20 Do not despise prophecies, 21 but test everything; hold fast what is good.

### **Mark 16:19-20, the disappearance of Jesus.**

When Jesus' work on earth was done, He returned to where He came from and where He remains to this day. He returned to the glory He shared with the Father from all eternity.

As the victorious mediator, Savior, Redeemer, and advocate, He received the highest honor, the position of highest dignity and power in heaven. He is forever seated at the right hand of the Father, enthroned in glory, majesty, praise and power.

And He is not idle, He is not in retirement. He hasn't slept a wink since He got there, He never slumbers or sleeps. He ever lives to make intercession for all the saints (Hebrews 7:25).

In spite of every attempt of Satan to destroy the message of the Gospel, Jesus continues to confirm His word with His power and authority and fruit. Our testimony is not in vain.

**Galatians 6:9** And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up.

Consider how small a beginning Christianity had and how great a spreading tree it is today. Despite every obstacle, and despite the sinful weaknesses of all men and women, the good seed has borne much fruit. Take heart, be encouraged, don't give up, never cease praying.

Teach, speak, write, warn, testify, pray, labor on and rest assured what is done for the Lord and in His name is never in vain. Even if we never see the result, even if we don't get to enjoy the harvest, some plant, some water, some harvest, but the work is the Lords.

**I Corinthians 15:58** Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.

Jesus' protection and power, help and gifts are present with His followers, then, now and always, even to the end of the age.

### **Application and conclusion.**

We have finished Mark's Gospel, the first Gospel written, the Gospel written to encourage Christians in Rome, in other words, the Gospel written for Gentiles like us.

I concluded my first sermon on Mark's gospel with a hope and a prayer that this study of God's Word would draw us closer to Jesus, deepen our faith, quicken our repentance, increase our holiness and prepare us for the day of His coming.

Mark wrote his Gospel to show that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God, full of power and all authority. By all His mighty works on earth, Jesus is confirmed to us to be who He said He was and He alone is worthy to be believed and loved and served.

God raised Jesus from the dead and “you will see Him, just as He told you” (16:7).

**I John 5:11-13** This is the testimony, that God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. 12 Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life. 13 I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God that you may know that you have eternal life.

He who has ears to hear and eyes to see let him hear and see what the Spirit is saying to him.

Amen and amen.

**Prayer:**

Lord Jesus, our risen Savior, from your throne at your Father’s right hand, send your Spirit’s power upon us that we might be faithful witnesses, bearing testimony that you are the Christ, the Son of the living God. Stir in us a heart for your missionary task, motivate us to serve and share the Gospel, help us to encourage each other to not grow weary in the exercise of the gifts you have given to each of us. Make us salt and light that you may be exalted in our homes and community. Jesus, we want to see you made much of in our world, that you would increase and we would decrease. Intercede for us, even as we pray now in your most holy name, Amen.