

First Serve

Studies in the Gospel of Mark

Text

Mark 16:9-20

Topic

The risen Lord gives His followers the Great Commission to go into all the world preaching the Gospel of salvation by grace through faith

Title

"Then I Saw His Grace, Now I'm a Believer"

Introduction

Although he first appeared way-back in 1954, and hasn't been in the daily comics since the year 2000, thanks to the recent *Peanuts* movie, all of us know Pig-Pen as the boy who has the cloud of dust and dirt constantly following him.

Charlie Brown once analyzed the cloud, saying, "Don't think of it as dust. Think of it as maybe the soil of some great past civilization. Maybe the soil of ancient Babylon. It staggers the imagination. He may be carrying soil that was trod upon by Solomon, or even Nebuchadnezzar."

Soon it will be time to watch, *It's the Great Pumpkin, Charlie Brown*. It's celebrating it's 50th anniversary.

Pig-Pen thinks he'll be disguised by his Halloween costume, but he is immediately recognized. **The cloud following him gives his identity away.**

In these closing words of the Gospel of Mark, we are told of things that **followed** the first believers as they were out in the world.

Is there something following you that gives you away? It is one of the themes we will explore.

These verses also discuss things that can **foil** us - and by that I mean things that can *hinder* and *hamper* our sharing.

I'll organize my thoughts around two questions, directed to believers: #1 Is There Something Foiling Your Belief In Jesus?, and #2 Is There Something Following Your Belief In Jesus?

#1 Is There Something Foiling Your Belief?

(v9-14)

If you have the NIV Bible, you'll notice that the translators set-apart verses nine through twenty with a special footnote. In the RSV, verses nine through twenty are printed in the margin.

What's up with that?

There is a scholarly controversy about whether these verses were originally part of the Gospel of Mark; or if they were later added to the manuscripts. Modern translations of the Bible suggest the Gospel ends with verse eight, and then acknowledge the disputed existence of what has come to be called "the longer ending" of verses nine through twenty.

The major concern is this: Two of the oldest existing Greek manuscripts (dated from 325 and 340AD) do not contain the longer ending; neither do about 100 other ancient manuscripts translated into other languages.

On the other hand, the overwhelming majority of manuscripts *do* contain these verses.

The question for us is this: Should we teach these verses as inspired?

What decides it for me is that many early Christian writers refer to this passage in their writings, which shows that the first Christians knew it was there and accepted it as inspired.

The Gospel of Mark was written somewhere between 65-75AD. Not too long after, it was being quoted by the following men:

- Papias, the bishop of Hieropolis, referred to verse eighteen, writing around 100AD.
- Justin Martyr, an early apologist, quoted verse twenty in 151AD.
- Irenaeus, a bishop in Gaul, quoted verse thirteen in 180AD.
- There are several others we could cite.

Additionally, the manuscripts which omit the verses often leave space where they should be, indicating the copyist knew there was a longer ending to the book.

There is no good reason to overlook them. We accept them, based on the testimony of the earliest Christians.

If you want to be controversial, and say that these verses should not be in the Bible, and therefore should not be taught as inspired, please admit that nothing they say contradicts anything in God's Word.

This section contains three of Jesus' post-resurrection appearances before His Ascension.

Mar 16:9 Now when He rose early on the first day of the week, He appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom He had cast seven demons.

Mary had already been to the tomb once, and upon finding it empty, she ran to tell the disciples. John outran Peter to the tomb, but waited outside while Peter went in.

Mary had followed them back. They left, but she remained at the tomb. As a result, she was the first person to see the resurrected Lord when He suddenly appeared to her.

This is the fourth mention of Mary by Mark, but he has waited until now to mention that she had previously been possessed by "seven demons." Why now?

Mark was ending the Gospel he wrote on a warfare footing. Mary is a reminder that Jesus came to defeat the devil, and that He did defeat him.

We need reminding because, post-resurrection, the devil still goes about, like a roaring lion, seeking to devour people. He is still the god of this world, the ruler of this world, the prince of the power of the air, the leader of malevolent principalities and powers.

We will be engaged in warfare against him until Jesus returns. We have the advantage, because we serve the One Who has defeated Him, and Who is returning one day to finalize the victory.

Mar 16:10 She went and told those who had been with Him, as they mourned and wept.

Mar 16:11 And when they heard that He was alive and had been seen by her, they did not believe.

The first nonbelievers were the believers. Jesus had repeatedly told them, over the last six months, that He would be crucified, then rise from the dead on the third day. They had been to the empty tomb, and now they had eyewitness testimony from a reliable source; but they refused to believe Jesus was risen from the dead.

People sometimes accuse Christians of having blind faith, but disbelief is much more prevalent and powerful. The average non-Christian has to ignore a ton of evidence that Jesus is risen.

Mar 16:12 After that, He appeared in another form to two of them as they walked and went into the country.

Mar 16:13 And they went and told it to the rest, but they did not believe them either.

These "two" are the famous disciples on the road to Emmaus. Jesus hid His true identity from them, asked them why they were so sad, then gave them a Bible study, pointing out everywhere in the Scriptures where the suffering of the Savior was predicted. When He broke bread with them at their house, they realized it was the Lord. He disappeared, and they ran back to tell the disciples Jesus had appeared to them.

"But they did not believe them either." One reason it is important to demonstrate the disbelief of the believers is that there is a theory that the disciples stole the body of Jesus to simulate His promised resurrection. Not true; they were totally committed to **not** believing, or promoting, the resurrection of Jesus.

Mar 16:14 Later He appeared to the eleven as they sat at the table; and He rebuked their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they did not believe those who had seen Him after He had risen.

In a moment Jesus will articulate the Great Commission that sent the eleven out upon their mission to share the news of His resurrection with the whole world. How interesting that they were given first-hand experience with what it would be like when people disbelieved them.

A person's disbelief cannot alter the facts. Jesus is risen.

The eleven, along with many of the other first-followers of Jesus, were initially foiled by their disbelief of His resurrection.

Do you think they should be weeping and cowering in fear? Or do you think that they ought to have been rejoicing and heading to Galilee, where Jesus told them He would meet with them?

They had the Word of God that He would rise, given to them repeatedly by Jesus Himself. They saw the empty tomb. They heard eyewitness testimony from credible individuals whom they personally knew.

I don't think anyone here, who is a believer in Jesus Christ, has any doubts whatsoever about His resurrection from the dead. We are not foiled by disbelief that He is alive.

So let me ask you this: Do we ever weep or cower in fear? Are we always rejoicing and excited about the places where Jesus can meet with us, e.g., in the midst of our trials and sufferings?

I submit to you that there are things we believers disbelieve; or that we have a hard time believing.

For some, it could be a disbelief that you are saved. Many Protestant churches have regular altar calls for believers to come forward and receive Jesus again and again and again. It foils a Christian, keeping you from going on to maturity in the Lord.

For some, it could be a disbelief that God loves you. There are any number of ways this is manifest, but one is when God allows suffering to invade your life. Satan once said to God, concerning Job, "stretch out Your hand now, and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will surely curse You to Your face!" (2:5). Even if you don't go so far as to "curse" God, too many believers have been stumbled by suffering.

Probably the thing that foils us the most is a disbelief in the power of the resurrection. We touched upon this in our last study in the Gospel of Mark. I know this is a problem because of the prevalence, in sermons and in books, of the promotion of the idea that there are several things I must do in order to be able to experience the power of the resurrection.

How many times have we been told, from the pulpit, that there are two things... Or three things... Or ten things, that we must do as Christians, if we want to be victorious?

Jesus promised to give us God the Holy Spirit as a gift. What do you need to do in order to earn, or deserve, a gift?

Sadly, we sometimes promote the idea that gifts must be earned or deserved. I remember a story in one of the *Little House on the Prairie* books in which an older child told his younger sibling that there was no Santa Claus.

His parents punished him by giving his younger sibling Christmas gifts, while giving him nothing.

We use gifts to manipulate people. When God talks of gifts, we unfortunately project our own attitudes upon Him.

Jesus promised to give, and to send, God the Holy Spirit, to every believer. There are no steps to receiving Him; it is all of grace, through faith.

That means I should believe that I can do all things through Jesus Christ. **Right now** - without taking any steps. I simply believe Jesus, and appropriate His overcoming power in my life.

True, I can quench the Holy Spirit. I can grieve Him. He is, after all, a Person.

When I do, I can repent, and immediately receive His empowering.

The eleven had the Word of God that He would rise. They saw the empty tomb. They heard eyewitness testimony from credible individuals whom they personally knew.

We have the Word of God that He has risen. We see the empty tomb. We have credible testimony from millions throughout the Church Age that Jesus transforms lives as we are born-again.

Don't be foiled into disbelief - not for any reason.

#2 Is There Something Following Your Belief?

(v15-20)

These last verses are tricky. As a Bible teacher, you find yourself on the defensive. Instead of explaining what they *do* mean, we spend a lot of time on what they *don't* mean.

Mar 16:15 And He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.

This commission may have started with the eleven, and the few other followers of Jesus; but it is binding on every disciple after them.

We are to tell the story of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, everywhere we go, to everyone we can.

It is a brilliant strategy. Mathematically, if you lead one person to Jesus Christ each year, then disciple the new believer and train him how to do the same with someone else, you will multiply yourself.

After one year, there are 2 disciples. At the end of the second year, there are 4. Third year, there are 8 followers of Jesus. Fourth year, 16. It doesn't sound like much.

However, by year 33, **you will have more than 8.5 billion Christians.**

Mar 16:16 He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned.

This is where it gets tough, and we start explaining what this doesn't mean. "Believes and is baptized." It sounds like you need both to be saved - belief *and* baptism.

Do you need baptism to be saved?

The answer is, "Yes!" But hear me out before you think I've lost my mind.

Whenever we read the word "baptism," we assume it means the ritual of *water* baptism. **It does not.** There are other biblical uses of the word "baptism."

- Jesus told His followers they would be "baptized" by drinking the cup of His suffering (Matthew 20:23). That isn't ritual water baptism.
- The apostle Paul said that the Israelites were "baptized" into Moses (First Corinthians 10:2). That isn't ritual water baptism.

Most importantly, John the Baptist said of Jesus,

Luk 3:16 ... "I indeed baptize you with water; but One mightier than I is coming, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to loose. **He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.**"

John the Baptist, who was baptizing folks as a ritual, in water, was obviously speaking of a different type of baptism altogether. He was talking about a **spiritual baptism.**

Now we can take a fresh and informed look at the words of our verse:

Mar 16:16 He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned.

The "baptism" in this verse is *not* water baptism. It is Spirit baptism, an operation of the Spirit, and it **is** necessary for salvation.

G. Campbell Morgan stated it this way: "*He who believes* is the human condition; *and is baptized* is the divine [inward] miracle" that takes place.

In simplified terms, when a person's will is freed by grace to believe the Gospel, that person is born-again of the Spirit. Jesus baptizes that person into salvation.

In his *Systematic Theology*, Lewis Sherry Chafer writes, "every believer the moment he believes in Christ is regenerated, baptized, indwelt, and sealed [by the Spirit] for all eternity, and has the duty and privilege of continually being filled for life and service."

After *real* Spirit-baptism, we practice *ritual* water baptism, to signify and give an outward testimony as to what has occurred in the heart.

In the letter James wrote, he says "even the demons believe" (2:19). They do not believe to salvation; they are not "baptized" by the Lord.

You can believe but not be saved. You must be born-again, born of the Spirit - **baptized by Jesus with the Spirit.**

"Yes," baptism is necessary for salvation, but Spirit-baptism, *not* water baptism.

"He who does not believe will be condemned." Eternal conscious punishment in the Lake of Fire is part of the Good News.

It cannot be overlooked or understated. People who refuse to believe, and are therefore not Spirit-baptized, will be consigned there.

How is that Good News?

- For one thing, *no one needs to be condemned*. Jesus was lifted up on the Cross to draw all men to Himself. He conquered sin and death and the devil. He is not willing that any should perish, but that all would come to eternal life. He is the Savior of all men - especially those who believe. His grace frees the will to enable anyone to believe and be baptized.
- For another thing, it is Good News that one day, in the future, believers will inherit an eternity characterized by purity and righteousness. Sin will be no more; death will be no more; there will be no more tears. After every opportunity has been given to people to receive Jesus Christ, those who willfully refuse must be absent from the perfections of Heaven.

Just when you thought all the tough commentary was over, here come verses seventeen and eighteen:

Mar 16:17 And these signs will follow those who believe: In My name they will cast out demons; they will speak with new tongues;

Mar 16:18 they will take up serpents; and if they drink anything deadly, it will by no means hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover."

Dr. J. Vernon McGee commented on these "signs," saying,

The infant Church needed them, the adult Church is not without them. They disappeared even in the early church, but they do manifest themselves on some primitive mission frontiers even today.

I think that's fair; I can live with that as a solid, biblical analysis. Only I would change it slightly. Instead of "they do manifest themselves on some primitive mission frontiers even today," I'd say, "they do manifest themselves *anywhere according to the will and working of God.*"

"In My Name they will cast out demons." If you read the New Testament, you'll see incredible demonic activity when Jesus was ministering the Gospel. Demonic possession, and the casting-out of demons, continued in the Book of Acts, but not to the extent that it had been. Throughout church history there have been exorcisms, right up to the present day; and not *only* or *always* on primitive mission frontiers.

When Jesus was ministering on earth, one of Satan's primary strategies was to have his demons possess as many people as possible. He unleashed a veritable army of demons against Jesus.

Whenever and wherever Jesus encountered demons, He defeated them by casting them out. He could do it if there were one demon possessing a person; or seven demons, as in Mary; or a legion of demons, as He had encountered in Gadera.

I think Satan has adapted his strategy over the intervening centuries.

Instead of having his demons possess vast numbers of people, he has them busy on other assignments; like inventing the internet. (I'm only half kidding).

It struck me this week that nonbelievers read the accounts of demonic possession in the Bible and say it was all undiagnosed mental illness, while believers want to say that all modern cases of mental illness are really demonic possessions.

It's obvious there are fewer instances of demonic possession today than there were when Jesus was battling the devil. But if you ever encounter a real case, you will have the power to cast-out the demon.

"They will speak with new tongues." The Bible distinguishes between "tongues" and the "gift of tongues."

- "Tongues" refers to known human languages.
- The "gift of tongues" refers to a personal prayer and praise language that is unknown.

We see a fulfillment of "tongues" on the Day of Pentecost when the 120 disciples gathered in the Upper Room had the Holy Spirit suddenly and powerfully come upon them. They spoke in other "tongues," defined for us in the passage as all of the known native languages of the Jews gathered in the Temple from all over the world.

This promise in Mark sixteen has nothing to do with the gift of tongues that is defined and described by the apostle Paul in First Corinthians. He says,

1Co 14:2 For he who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God, for no one understands him; however, in the spirit he speaks mysteries.

I can't say how often it happens, but don't you think that if God needed you to speak in a language you never learned in order to share the Gospel, that He could still do it?

"They will take up serpents; and if they drink anything deadly, it will by no means hurt them..." If you wrangle snakes, and try to poison yourself, in order to fulfill this promise, you are tempting God. It is similar to Satan's temptation of Jesus to throw Himself off the pinnacle of the Temple, because God promised to care for Him.

This was, and is, a promise that God can keep you safe from things like poisonous snakes. The one example we have is Paul, shipwrecked on Malta, being bitten by a viper, but showing no signs of its deadly venom.

At the same time, *Paul had just been shipwrecked*. It's therefore not a blanket promise that no harm will ever come to you.

"They will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover." Even among the eleven, and on into the Book of Acts, the believers could not go around healing everyone. There were times of remarkable healing ministries; there were individuals who were healed; and there were those who grew sick and died - like some in Thessalonica.

The bottom line is this: Preach the Gospel and whatever God wills, it will follow the preaching.

Know this: We live in an era where God's strength is made perfect in our weakness. We might prefer a more aggressive strategy of healings and exorcisms, while poisonous snakes are hanging from our extremities, and we're drinking poison... But the Lord has deemed our weakness to be a more powerful testimony in the church age.

Mar 16:19 So then, after the Lord had spoken to them, He was received up into heaven, and sat down at the right hand of God.
Mar 16:20 And they went out and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them and confirming the word through the accompanying signs. Amen.

Every morning, with its new mercies, this is our situation. Jesus, poised to return; disciples, tasked with proclaiming His death and resurrection while we patiently endure.

Any of these signs *can* follow you. That's up to the Lord. I trust Him to know when, for example, a healing is a greater testimony than the patient endurance of suffering by the grace of God.

I think we can ask ourselves, the question, "Is there something following **our** belief?"

Let's put it this way: "What do you leave behind?"

- Are people encouraged about the Lord when you're done talking with them?
- Are their burdens lifted?
- Are they ministered to by your compassion?
- Can they see the difference Jesus has made in your life?

The answer to all those questions can be an effortless "Yes" as you appropriate the gift of the Holy Spirit to live out the life of Jesus Christ.