

Main Idea: If we really believe the message of the cross, we cannot keep it to ourselves. This reality is made even clearer by the unusual ending to Mark’s gospel in Mark 16:9-20. There are three post-resurrection scenes.

- I. The appearances of Jesus (9-14)
  - A. Jesus appeared to Mary Magdalene (9-11).
    1. She told others about Jesus.
    2. She encountered unbelief.
  - B. Jesus appeared to two others (12-13).
    1. They told others about Jesus.
    2. They encountered unbelief.
  - C. Jesus appeared to the Eleven (14).
    1. They were rebuked for their unbelief.
    2. They learned how difficult it is to believe in someone you have not seen.
- II. The assignment from Jesus (15-18)
  - A. He said to go and preach the gospel (15).
  - B. He said people should believe and be baptized (16).
    1. Baptism doesn’t save a person.
    2. Baptism is evidence that a person really believes.
  - C. He said signs of power would accompany those who believe (17-18).
- III. The ascension of Jesus (19-20)
  - A. Jesus returned to heaven (19).
  - B. Jesus continues to work with His people (20).
    1. Our part is to preach.
    2. His part is to provide the power.

Make It Personal: If we really believe, there will be evidence.

1. Are you living in dependence upon Jesus?
2. Are you living in obedience to Jesus?
3. Are you telling others about Jesus?

Today we turn our attention to the final verses of Mark’s gospel. During the past month, we’ve been surveying the wondrous cross, working verse by verse through Mark 15-16. We’ve seen...

March 3 – “The Injustice of the Cross” Mark 15:1-15

March 10 – “Mockery at the Cross” part one, Mark 15:16-24

March 17 – “Mockery at the Cross” part two, Mark 15:25-32

March 24 – “Alienation on the Cross” Mark 15:33-41

March 31- “The Triumph of the Cross” Mark 15:42-16:8

But there’s one final section. I could have entitled this message, “*Spreading the Message of the Cross.*” But I’ve chosen a different title, “*An Unusual Ending to a Message We Must Not Keep to Ourselves.*” What we’re about to see is indeed an *unusual ending*, and we’ll discuss why. But it’s an unusual ending that makes it clear that we have responsibility for what we have learned. This is a message that must be shared. If we know it, we must believe it, and share it with the world.

*Scripture Reading: Mark 16:9-20*

When I was fifteen years old, I became a “green hand” in an organization that many of my freshman friends in high school were joining. *The Future Farmers of America.* I know I’ve shared this before, but it’s really a good illustration of what we’ll be talking

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\*\*Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

<sup>1</sup> For a previous look at this passage, see the Mark series in 2007.

about shortly. To become a member of the FFA, I had to learn the FFA creed, which was five paragraphs long. Here's how it begins:

*I believe in the future of farming with a faith born not of words but of deeds - achievements won by the present and past generations of agriculturalists; in the promise of better days through better ways, even as the better things we now enjoy have come to us through the struggles of former years.*

*I believe that to live and work on a good farm or to be engaged in other agricultural pursuits is pleasant as well as challenging; for I know the joys and discomforts of agricultural life and hold an inborn fondness for those associations which, even in hours of discouragement I can not deny.*

Looking back, it's sort of humorous. I wasn't a farmer. Now Joe was a farmer—he raised hogs and planted fields of corn to feed them. So was Kelly—he milked Brown Swiss cows every morning and evening. And Steve, too—he knew how to drive a tractor and back up an attached wagon into a narrow barn lot. Those guys were farmers.

But me, a farmer? Oh, I lived in a farmhouse, meaning in a house where farmers *used* to live before my family bought it. And I grew up on a 120 acre farm, meaning there were crops all around us. But I never planted any, except for the garden out back. The truth is, we rented the acreage to a local farmer who planted the corn, the soybeans, and the alfalfa hay, driving his John Deere tractor in the spring and combine at harvest.

If you had asked me at age fifteen, “Brad, are you a farmer?” I could have told you, “Yes sir! I sure am! I live on a farm. I look at crops out my bedroom window every morning. I can recite the FFA creed. *I believe* in the future of farming with a *faith* born not of words but of deeds!”

And you could have justifiably challenged me. Why? Because living near farmers doesn't make a person a farmer. Nor does claiming to be a farmer. Nor does reciting a creed in an organization made up of real farmers.

It's so easy to *say* you believe something. It's easy to believe you *are* something. But *saying* you believe something and *believing* you are something doesn't necessitate that it's true. I claimed to be a farmer. I could have convinced myself I was a farmer. Would that make it so?

This is the question of the morning, and it's filled with eternal implications. How can you tell if someone believes in Jesus?

“Just ask them,” you say. “If a person says he believes in Jesus, then he does. He is a *Christian*.” But Jesus said in Matthew 7:21, “Not everyone who *says* to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who *does* the will of my Father who is in heaven.”

This is sobering. Just two verses later, Jesus says that at the final judgment *many* will claim to know Him, yet His response to these *many* individuals will be, “I never knew you. Away from Me.” Jesus' word *many* suggests that there are individuals sitting in church buildings right now on Sunday morning, saying they believe in Jesus, believing they believe in Jesus, but their claim is faulty, their belief is groundless, and worst of all, their destination is a place of eternal torment.

The question is significant. How can we tell if we really believe in Jesus? Here's the answer. *When we really believe something, it shows.*

There are many texts in the Bible that substantiate this premise, including the one in front of us. We began this journey through the Gospel of Mark in 2022, beholding *The Servant in Action*. And today we come to Mark's concluding words. Or are they?

*A Word about the Text: Did Mark write Mark 16:9-20?*

If you have an ESV, you'll note a statement above verse 9 that says, "Some of the earliest manuscripts do not include 16:9-20." There are similar words in the NIV, "The earliest manuscripts and other ancient witnesses do not have Mark 16:9-20." If you're reading the NKJV you'll see a footnote that states, "Vv. 9–20 are bracketed in NU as not in the original text. They are lacking in Codex Sinaiticus and Codex Vaticanus, although nearly all other mss. of Mark contain them." If you're looking at the KJV *New Schofield Reference Edition Bible* you'll read a similar footnote, "Verses 9-20 are not found in the two most ancient mss., the Sinaiticus and Vaticanus; others have them with partial omissions and variations. But the passage is quoted by Irenaeus and Hippolytus in the second or third century."

What are they saying? Something quite important. Of course, what we have today are translations of the Bible. When God gave us this special Book, He did so by giving special revelation to prophets (who recorded the Old Testament) and apostles and their associates (who recorded the New Testament). He used the Hebrew language for the Old Testament (with a couple of places in Aramaic) and the Greek language for the New Testament. As time passed, His people made copies of this special Book, and eventually translated it into other languages.

In 1611 King James authorized a translation of the Bible into English, which is still in use today. But since we no longer use seventeenth century English, the Bible has been translated into modern day English, with the NIV in 1978, the NKJV which was completed in 1982, and the ESV in 2001. Due to archaeological finds, these recent Bible translations had access to more and older Hebrew and Greek manuscripts than did the KJV in 1611.

This is the reason for the note. In the oldest manuscripts, Mark 16:9-20 is not there. There is external evidence to suggest this. For instance, the fourth century church fathers Eusebius and Jerome noted that almost all Greek manuscripts available to them lacked verses 9-20. In fact, there's even a shorter ending that some manuscripts have.

There is also *internal* evidence. Verse 9 introduces Mary Magdalene as if she was a new person in the book, even though Mark already mentioned her three times (15:40, 47; 16:1).<sup>2</sup>

John MacArthur offers this helpful caution, "In spite of these considerations of the likely unreliability of this section, it is possible to be wrong on the issue. Therefore, it is good to consider the meaning of this passage and leave it in the text, just as is done with the other text with a similar history, John 7:53-8:11."<sup>3</sup>

If you'd like to know more about this, I've included another message at the of this transcript, which I preached on a Sunday evening at WBC in April 2007. That message addresses the fundamental question, "*How We Got Our Bible*."

Having said all this, I believe we ought to study Mark 16:9-20 because much of what is stated here appears in other Gospel accounts. And furthermore, as J. D. Jones states:

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<sup>2</sup> Observations made by John MacArthur, *MacArthur's Quick Reference Guide to the Bible*, p. 187.

<sup>3</sup> *MacArthur's Quick Reference Guide to the Bible*, p. 188.

“By whomsoever they were written, these verses were attached to the Gospel from its very earliest days. In the second century they were already recognized as part of the Gospel; and even if they are not Mark’s own workmanship they do not on that account lose their authority and force.”<sup>4</sup>

So now, let’s look at this unusual ending. In it, we’re going to see three post-resurrection scenes, and from it we’ll learn that if we really believe the message of the cross, we cannot keep it to ourselves.

### I. The appearances of Jesus (9-14)

The resurrected Jesus made three appearances in verses 9-14.

**A. Jesus appeared to Mary Magdalene (9-11).** Verse 9 begins, “Now when he rose early on the first day of the week.” That’s what we celebrated last week, the resurrection account of Jesus. Early on Sunday morning Jesus Christ, the One killed by crucifixion the Friday before, conquered death and left the tomb.

Then what did He do? Verse 9 says [as does Luke 8:2], “...he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, from whom he had cast out seven demons.” Mark’s account clearly states that Mary had watched Jesus die on the cross (15:40), then saw where He was buried (15:47), then witnessed the empty tomb (16:1), and then met the risen Jesus outside the tomb. If you want to see the fuller account, check out John 20:11-18 where we see Mary crying, then meeting Jesus but thinking He was the gardener until He called her by name. What did Mary do in response to seeing Jesus? Verse 10 tells us...

1. *She told others about Jesus.* “She went and told those who had been with him [the apostles], as they mourned and wept.” Go and tell. That’s what the angel told Mary in the tomb. And that’s what she did. What effect did her testimony have?

2. *She encountered unbelief.* Verse 11 says, “But when they heard that he was alive and had been seen by her, they would not believe it.” Luke 24:11 elaborates, “But they did not believe the women, because their words seemed to them like nonsense.”

You say, “But hadn’t Jesus told these men He was going to rise from the dead?” Indeed, He had. Mark records at least three such predictions (see 9:31; 10:33-34; 14:28).

Notice again the word ‘first’ in verse 9. “Jesus appeared *first* to Mary Magdalene.” Why did the resurrected Jesus appear *first* to Mary Magdalene? Why not first to the apostles? Or first to His mother? Or to ask it a different way, why did God orchestrate it so that the apostles (and others) first learned about Jesus’ resurrection through *verbal testimony* rather than from *personal observation*?

Plummer’s observation is helpful, “The Apostles may have been allowed to hear of the Resurrection before seeing the risen Christ in order that they might know from personal experience what it was to have to depend upon the testimony of others, as would be the case with their converts.”<sup>5</sup>

In other words, the Lord allowed the apostles to experience the same frustration that everyone with whom they later shared Christ experienced. They learned that Jesus conquered the grave *from the testimony of another*. And what they heard sounded too good to be true, so they didn’t believe it.

Did *you* believe in Jesus the first time someone told you?

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<sup>4</sup> J. D. Jones, p. 680.

<sup>5</sup> Plummer’s quote, taken from Wessel, p. 789.

**B. Jesus appeared to two others (12-13).** In verse 12, “After these things he appeared in another form to two of them, as they were walking into the country.”

This seems to be a condensed version of the story in Luke 24 where Jesus met Cleopas and another unnamed disciple on the road to Emmaus and walked with them. They were “kept from recognizing him,” Luke 24:16 states. Mark’s account explains why. The text specifies that Jesus appeared ‘in a *different form*’ (Greek *hetera morphe*, ‘a form of a different kind’). One commentary suggests, “This could mean that He took on a form different from that in which He appeared to Mary Magdalene or, more likely, that He appeared to them in a form different from that in which they had previously recognized Him as **Jesus**.”<sup>6</sup>

“Hold on,” you object. “Are you saying that Jesus looks different now than He did prior to His resurrection?” Apparently so. Granted, His glorified body possesses some similarities, for His nail prints are still there (John 20:27). But there are differences too, and they are staggering. Do you remember what happened to the apostle John when he saw the resurrected Jesus in Revelation 1? He was so petrified that he fell at His feet as though a dead man.

It’s worth noting that hardly anyone who saw the Resurrected Christ recognized Him at first. Mary didn’t, supposing him to be the gardener. These two travelers on the road to Emmaus didn’t, believing Jesus was a pilgrim traveler. The Eleven in the upper room on Easter evening didn’t, not until He showed them His hands and side. The five disciples fishing on the Sea of Galilee didn’t, not at first, supposing Him to be a passing traveler. When He appeared to more than 500 brothers all at once on the mountain in Galilee, He was so different that even though they saw Him, “some doubted” (Matt. 28:17).

J. D. Jones said it well, “It needs a certain preparation of soul and spirit to be able to see Jesus.”<sup>7</sup>

What effect did seeing Jesus have on these two disciples? Verse 13 tells us, “And they went back and told the rest [including the Apostles], but they did not believe them.” See the pattern? It’s the same thing Mary Magdalene experienced.

1. *They told others about Jesus.* But unfortunately...
2. *They encountered unbelief.*

Bryan was my best friend when I was in Junior High. I was a young Christian at the time and so excited about my relationship with Jesus Christ! I remember telling Bryan about Jesus one night and about the eternal life he could experience if only he would repent of his sin and believe in Jesus. It was like I was talking about believing in the man on the moon. My friend just looked at me and wanted the conversation to end.

“Why doesn’t he believe in Jesus?” I wondered. “I told him that Jesus died for his sins and came back to life. I told him that Jesus had come into my life and would do the same for him. Why doesn’t he believe me?”

Have you ever had that experience? It’s frustrating, isn’t it? But the fact is, one of reasons it’s so frustrating for us is because we have poor memories. Why did *we* believe? It wasn’t because we were smart enough to figure it out. If we have believed in Christ, there’s only one reason. It’s the work of God! God opened our blind eyes so we could see! God touched our deaf ears so we could hear! God softened our sin-calloused hearts

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<sup>6</sup> *Bible Knowledge Commentary*

<sup>7</sup> J. D. Jones, p. 687.

and gave us the gift of faith so we could believe in His Son! The Bible says that salvation is by grace so that no one can boast (Eph. 2:8).

This is what our friends need, what we needed, the sovereign, gracious work of God.

“If salvation is God’s work, then is there anything we can do to help?” Yes! God works through means. He commands us to be witnesses, to tell lost people what we know about Jesus. But since lost people need more than information, namely they need *regeneration*, we must do more than witness. God commands us to *pray*, to ask God the Holy Spirit to do what He alone can do, to open their eyes, regenerate their dead hearts, and give them the ability to believe in His Son and be saved (John 16:8-11).

If the very men who spent three years with Jesus struggled to believe, why are we shocked by the obstinate responses we encounter? It’s so easy for us to forget, beloved. We too were hopelessly lost, until someone shared Christ with us and prayed for us. And God, through faith which He bestowed, graciously gave us the gift of eternal life!

So let’s keep sharing, and keep praying!

Thus far, we’ve seen Jesus send Mary and then the two unnamed disciples to the Apostles, but they didn’t believe. So, what did Jesus do next?

**C. Jesus appeared to the Eleven (14).** “Afterward he appeared to the eleven themselves as they were reclining at table, and he rebuked them for their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they had not believed those who saw him after he had risen.”

If you want to see the full account of this encounter, check out John 20:19ff. Notice what happened to the eleven apostles (Judas is gone).

1. *They were rebuked for their unbelief.* Jesus isn’t pleased with their refusal to believe the testimony of the three witnesses He’d just sent them. They should have responded differently. They learned something important in that room, didn’t they?

2. *They learned how difficult it is to believe in someone you have not seen.* Peter did. Thirty years later Peter wrote these words to second generation Christians in 1 Peter 1:8, “Though you *have not seen him*, you love him; and even though *you do not see him* now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy.” Could Peter say that of you? You’ve never seen the risen Jesus either, but do you *love Him* and *believe in Him*?

So ends scene one, the appearances of Jesus.

## II. The assignment from Jesus (15-18)

In this scene we hear the words Jesus spoke to the Eleven, the charge we often call the great commission. Apparently, the Lord gave the great commission more than once and with different emphases each time (see also Matt. 28:19-20; Luke 24:47-48; John 20:21; Acts 1:8). In Mark’s account Jesus clarified three realities for the Eleven.

**A. He said to go and preach the gospel (15).** “And he said to them, ‘Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation.’” In the NIV, “Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation.” Ponder the gravity of each word.

**Go**—don’t wait for lost people to come to you; you go to them.

**Into all the world**—not just to Israel where you live; start there but then leave your comfort zone and go to *all* the world. My salvation begins with the Jews but it’s not restricted to the Jews. I have the whole world in mind.

**And proclaim**—*kerusso* is the Greek word, meaning announce, make known as a herald, preach. Please note that preaching is the means the Lord chose to reach sinners.

In our day we hear people say things like, “If you want to reach lost people, by all means *don’t preach to them*. Preaching doesn’t work any longer. People’s attention spans are too short to listen to a monologue. So use drama. Use music. Use artistic expression. That’s what works today.”

But the issue isn’t whether we think something works or not. It’s what Jesus said. Frankly, from a communication standpoint, preaching (which is a one way monologue) may not be the best means of communication to get a human response. But we’re not after a human-initiated response. We’re after a God-produced response. And preaching is the God-ordained means by which His Spirit produces that response.

Romans 10:17 says, “Faith comes from *hearing* the message, and the message is *heard* through the word of Christ.” Apparently, God has chosen to work through preaching because it’s the means through which He receives the most glory.

And what is preaching? J. I. Packer defined preaching as “the event of God bringing to an audience a Bible-based, Christ-related, life-impacting message of instruction and direction from Himself through the words of a spokesperson.”<sup>8</sup>

Can we use drama or music or art in gospel ministry? Yes, as long as we view them as servants of preaching, not to replace preaching, but to create a platform for preaching. *Go into all the world, Jesus said, and proclaim/preach*. Preach what?

**The gospel**—the *euangelion*. The gospel is the good news that God saves sinners! It’s the message that Jesus Christ, the Son of God became a man, lived a perfect life, died as a substitute for sinners, conquered death, appeared to witness, then returned to heaven. God now offers forgiveness and eternal life to all who will repent and believe in His Son. This is the message we are to preach. To whom?

**To the whole creation**—to all creation, says the NIV. In other words, the good news is for everyone. Don’t leave anyone out, says Jesus!

Which raises a question. Has everyone heard? No, they have not. And this means we have an unfinished assignment.

J. D. Jones penned these words in 1914. “Every nook and corner of the world has a right to hear it. We have not to pick and choose. Some lands are difficult. Mohammedanism in Africa, Hinduism in India seem to oppose almost impenetrable barriers. But the Christian Church must not neglect India and North Africa because of their difficulty. Some lands are dangerous. But danger must not daunt us. It never has daunted the Church. The Gospel has entered into possession of nearly every land by a living way. Palestine by the blood of James and Stephen; Europe by the blood of Paul and Peter; the South Seas by the blood of John Williams; Africa by the blood of Bishop Hannington; New Guinea by the blood of James Chalmers. And still we must go in spite of danger. To the barbarians of Central Africa, and the untamed savages of New Guinea we must ‘go and preach.’”<sup>9</sup>

Indeed, we must go, and help others go where we cannot go. And preach, to all creation. Until the task is done.

But there’s more. Jesus addressed a second reality about our assignment in verse 16.

**B. He said people should believe and be baptized (16).** “Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.”

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<sup>8</sup> Taken from *Handbook of Contemporary Preaching*, p. 19.

<sup>9</sup> J. D. Jones, p. 704.

Some read this and conclude a person must be baptized to be saved. But notice carefully the contrast here. Jesus says that a person who believes and is baptized will be saved, indicating that a person who believes in Him will want to be baptized to give public testimony of his faith. On the other hand, according to the second part of the verse, who will be condemned? Not the person who isn't baptized but the person who *does not believe*. In other words, if a person doesn't *believe* he isn't saved, even if he has been baptized.<sup>10</sup> That's because two things are true of baptism.

1. *Baptism doesn't save a person.* A person is saved by believing in Christ.

2. *Baptism is evidence that a person really believes.* If a person truly believes in Christ, he will want to make it known. If he doesn't, it's an indication that his faith is deficient.

Walter Wessel explains, "Belief and baptism are so closely associated that they are conceived of as virtually a single act. The inward reception (belief) is immediately followed by the external act or witness to that faith (baptism). The result is salvation."<sup>11</sup>

Again, if we really believe in Jesus, it shows! And according to Jesus, there's a specific way it will show, a third reality.

**C. He said signs of power would accompany those who believe (17-18).** Notice verse 17, "And these signs will accompany those who believe." To be precise, Jesus identifies five signs. It's worth noting that every one of these 'signs' appears in the book of Acts except for one (see if you can spot it).

Notice verses 17-18, "In my name they will cast out demons; they will speak in new tongues; they will pick up serpents with their hands; and if they drink any deadly poison, it will not hurt them; they will lay their hands on the sick, and they will recover."

They will *cast out demons*. That's what verse 9 just said Jesus did with Mary Magdalene. Paul did the same with a servant girl in Philippi (Acts 16:18).

They'll *speak in new tongues*, like the apostles did in Acts 2 when the Spirit enabled them to speak in foreign languages.

They will also *pick up serpents*, perhaps like Paul did on the island of Malta, not by choice but when a viper sunk its fangs into his hand (Acts 28:5-6; see also Luke 10:19).<sup>12</sup>

And *when they drink deadly poison it will not hurt them*. There's no mention of this in Acts. The prediction seems to be that although persecutors will try to kill believers by forcing them to drink poison, the Lord will protect them, and apparently that happened in the first century.

And the fifth sign, *they will place their hands on sick people and make them well*. This is what Peter did with the lame beggar in Acts 3:7.

What are we to make of these spectacular signs? Let's not miss the obvious. This is what Jesus said *would* happen, that these signs would accompany those who believed. And that is what *did* happen. Where? In the early church. These signs did accompany those who believed. Specifically, these were signs of an apostle (see Heb. 2:3-4). The Holy Spirit used these dramatic demonstrations of power in the early church to authenticate the preaching of the gospel. And then, as the history of the church progressed and the gospel advanced, the appearances of these spectacular gifts decreased.

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<sup>10</sup> Observation by W. Wiersbe, p. 167.

<sup>11</sup> Wessel, p. 790.

<sup>12</sup> I chuckled when I read one commentator's observation, "Superstitious use of this verse has given rise to the snake-handling and poison-drinking sects of Appalachia." Wessel, p. 790.



Should we expect to see these miraculous signs today? Granted, God can do whatever He desires, and at times He does spectacular things to gain a platform for the gospel message. But think of what a sign is. A sign points our attention to something else. There's a sign outside that says, "Wheelersburg Baptist Church." The sign points to a greater reality.

And that's what the first century sign gifts did. The Lord demonstrated His power through the apostles and others so that people would listen to their message, which they eventually wrote down in what we call the New Testament. The sign gifts thus *fulfilled* their purpose.

As J. Vernon McGee observes, "If someone maintains that they are injunctions for today, then one must accept them all, even the drinking of a deadly poison. Even before the end of the first century, the sign gifts were no longer the credentials of the apostles. The test was correct doctrine (see 2 John 10)."<sup>13</sup>

This brings us to the final scene in Mark 16.

### III. The ascension of Jesus (19-20)

The chapter ends by highlighting two very encouraging truths about Jesus.

**A. Jesus returned to heaven (19).** Verse 19 says, "So then the Lord Jesus, after he had spoken to them, was taken up into heaven and sat down at the right hand of God." So the One who suffered on earth is no longer suffering. Now He's in heaven.

And He's *seated* there, indicating His work is done, His redemptive work. He's now at His Father's right hand, enjoying a place of honor and authority. Back home in heaven!

But that's not all. In reality He's not just *there*, but *here* too.

**B. Jesus continues to work with His people (20).** "And they went out and preached everywhere [in other words they did what Jesus told them to do], while *the Lord worked with them* and confirmed the message by accompanying signs [in other words, He did what He said He would do!]." Notice the divine-human cooperation here.

1. *Our part is to preach.*

2. *His part is to provide the power.* If we don't preach, people don't hear. If He doesn't provide the power, the preaching falls on deaf ears.

As Charles Spurgeon put it, "You might as well expect to raise the dead by whispering in their ears, as hope to save souls by preaching to them, if it were not for the agency of the Holy Spirit."<sup>14</sup>

But here's the wonderful reality. We may not see Him, but He is with us. "Lo, I am with you always," He said in Matthew's final verse. By the ministry of His Spirit whom He has sent to live in us, Jesus now provides us with the power necessary to fulfill the mission He's given to us. We preach. He provides the power. And the Father draws, and the Spirit regenerates, all who have been given to the Son (John 6:37, 44; Eph 1:14).

So no, I'm not a farmer. Spending time on a farm didn't make me a farmer, nor did learning the FFA creed. The evidence simply was not there.

### Make It Personal: If we really believe, there will be evidence.

I see three evidences in this passage. I'll put them in the form questions.

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<sup>13</sup> J. Vernon McGee, p. 202.

<sup>14</sup> Taken from *Handbook of Contemporary Preaching*, p. 18.

1. *Are you living in dependence upon Jesus?* Perhaps you have called yourself a Christian for many years. But this is the crux of the matter. Has God opened your eyes to the truth about yourself, that you are hell-bound sinner, and about His Son, that He came to save you, a hell-bound sinner, by taking your place? And have you experienced the gracious work of the Holy Spirit, such that you now are placing your faith in Jesus alone for your salvation? If not, I invite you to do so now. To use the words of Jesus, *ask and you shall receive.*

And if you have asked, are you living in dependence upon Him day by day? If we really believe in Jesus, it shows. And one of the first ways it shows is by being baptized, to let the world know that we believe in Him and belong to Him. If you have never been baptized, why not come to our new members class and find out more.

2. *Are you living in obedience to Jesus?* It starts with baptism, but that's just the beginning of a life walking with Him. Are you reading the Book He has given us, so you can learn what He said? And by His Spirit's power, are you seeking to obey Him? And when you don't obey Him, does it grieve you? And do you quickly seek His forgiveness, and others' if necessary?

And here's one command in particular, the one we've seen today. Jesus said to *go and preach the good news to all creation.*

3. *Are you telling others about Jesus?* Are you doing that? Who have you told about Jesus recently? Go, Jesus said. Preach. To all creation.

**Testimony of salvation:** Denise Hurley

**Closing Song:** #297 *"I Love to Tell the Story"* (all three verses)

**Closing charge:** Let the redeemed of the Lord...SAY SO.

Community Group Discussion:

1. This morning we took a close look at the final verses in Mark's gospel. In many versions, we find a statement like this in front of verse 9, "The earliest manuscripts and some other ancient witnesses do not have Mark 16:9-20." What manuscripts are they talking about? If this passage wasn't in the earliest manuscripts, how did it end up in our English Bibles?

2. Take a few moments and read Mark 16:9-20. If it is true that Mark did not write this passage, how should we treat the content of Mark 16:9-20?

3. In verses 9-14, we read about several of Jesus' post-resurrection appearances. To whom did Jesus appear? Describe their responses. What do they have in common, and why is that significant?

4. What assignment did Jesus give His followers in verses 15-16? How does this version of the great commission compare to the others (use your chain reference to see how it's worded elsewhere)? How should we understand the words in verse 16, "*and is baptized*"? Is baptism necessary for salvation? If not, what is this verse saying?

5. To help His people fulfill the great commission, Jesus made a prediction in verses 17-20. What was it? What did He say that He would enable them to do? Why are these sometimes referred to as "sign gifts" and how we should we view them today?

6. The good news of Jesus is a message that we must *not* keep to ourselves. Spend some time praying for gospel opportunities this week.

**Appendix: Adapted from sermon preached at WBC 4/15/07 PM**  
“*How Did We Get Our Bible Anyway?*”

In our study of God’s Word this morning we came to Mark 16:9-20, a passage that contains the preface statement in the NIV, “The earliest manuscripts and some other ancient witnesses do not have Mark 16:9-20.” That statement raises some questions for us, such as: What manuscripts are they talking about? If the passage wasn’t in some early manuscripts, how did it end up in our English Bibles? And perhaps the more basic question: *How did we get our Bible anyway?* I’d like to address that question in this lesson.

The Bible is God’s revelation. 2 Timothy 3:16 indicates, “All Scripture is God-breathed.” It came from God. Furthermore, God worked through human instruments to produce the Scriptures, as explained in 2 Peter 1:20-21, “...men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.” The Bible was written over a 1,500 year period of time, beginning with Genesis penned by Moses in 1400 B.C. to the book of Revelation penned by the apostle John in 100 A.D.

[See timeline chart]

When the Spirit of God inspired the Scriptures He used the Hebrew language for the Old Testament (with a small portion in Aramaic) and Greek for the New Testament. Why? Because these were the languages spoken by the authors and the first recipients of the Scriptures.

As time passed, two things happened. One, the original manuscripts were copied in order to preserve the Scriptures and to make it possible for others to read them. Secondly, as time passed and as the gospel spread throughout the world, it became necessary for the Bible to be translated into other languages. We do not today have the original manuscripts. We hold in our laps this evening an *English translation* of the Bible. So how did we get our Bible anyway?

**The Preservation of Scripture:** What belongs in the Bible and what does not belong?<sup>15</sup>

1. The term *canon* literally means “measuring rod or rule”. In theology, it refers to the closed collection of books that make up the authoritative Scriptures. The Canon consists of the 66 books we know today as the Bible—39 OT books, and 27 NT books. The Canon is recognized by the Church as God’s Word, the authentic and authoritative rule of life for believers.
2. It’s important to point out that the Church does not have the authority to make something to be Scripture. Rather, the Church only recognizes what God has caused to be His written Word. What would be wrong with the Church having authority to make something to be Scripture? The Church would be an authority over Scripture—and this can’t be.  
Consider a dollar bill. I don’t have the authority, or the power to make a piece of paper into a dollar bill. In fact, if all of us put our heads together and agreed to make this piece of paper a dollar bill, we still would not be any further ahead. Actually, the deception would be all the greater. I only can recognize what is already a dollar bill. Similarly, only God can make words to be his very words and worthy of inclusion in Scripture.
3. In the formation of the Old Testament Canon, God spoke to prophets and instructed them to write down His Words (Exodus 24:3-4). The Israelites recognized the collected writings as authoritative (Joshua 1:8; 2 Kings 23:3). The collection of books recognized as God’s Word was gathered together from the very beginning of their writing. God instructed the Israelites how to recognize His true prophets (Deuteronomy 13:1-5, 18:20-22). If they failed these tests, they were to be ignored or killed! All 39 books of the Old Testament were collected and recognized as God-inspired by Ezra and the Jewish scribes in the fifth century BC. In the New Testament, there is no record of any dispute between Jesus and the Jews over the extent of the canon. In fact, Jesus puts His stamp of approval on the accepted Old Testament books (Luke 24:44-49). Notice also that Jesus identified the Scripture as one completed book from Abel, the first martyr (Genesis) to Zacharias, the last one killed in 2 Chronicles 24. It is interesting to note that Jesus did NOT include any apocryphal books. They were in existence during His time and included accounts of

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<sup>15</sup> I am indebted to Pastor Darrel Schrock for his efforts in developing much of the following explanation for use in a Bibliology class used to train church leaders in Eastern Europe.

other martyrs later than Zacharias. This shows that Jesus did not include them in Scripture (Matthew 23:35).

4. In the formation of the New Testament Canon, the 27 books of the New Testament were recognized as God's authoritative Word by several factors:
  - a. **Apostolic endorsement** (the author had to be an apostle or have an endorsement by an apostle [Peter endorsed Mark's Gospel, and Paul was used to authenticate Luke's books]). (John 14:26 and John 16:13-14 show how the Holy Spirit will reveal Truth to the Apostles and remind them of what Jesus had said to them, and the Apostles would in turn will write it down for all believers).
  - b. **Consistency with the rest of Scripture.** Martin Luther wrestled with the book of James because it seemed to contradict the doctrine of Justification that he was fighting the Roman Catholic church over.
  - c. **The perception of a writing as "God-breathed" on the part of an overwhelming majority of believers.** The intrinsic qualities of the book attest to its divine origin as Christians read them. Jesus said in John 10:27 "My sheep listen to my voice, and I know them, and they follow me". As with the case of Hebrews, the majestic glory of Christ is so evident to believers that there can be no question as to its place in the Canon. An over-whelming perception of a writing as God-breathed on the part of an overwhelmingly majority of believers--which seems to be the case with the book of Hebrews—whose authorship is not perfectly clear—though many credit Paul.

The first official recognition of the 27 books of the New Testament was 397 AD at the Council of Carthage. Of course individual books were already accepted as Scripture before this point (2 Peter 3:16; I Timothy 5:17).

What about the Apocrypha?

5. The Apocrypha (lit. "things that are hidden", or "deuterocanonical" as the Roman Catholics refer to them) is not part of the Canon. They were never part of the Hebrew Scriptures, though the Septuagint included them (Greek translation of the OT—for the Greek-speaking Jews). They were included in Jerome's Latin Vulgate (completed in AD 404), but he said they were not "books of the canon", only "books of the church". Only in 1546, at the Council of Trent, did the Roman Catholic Church officially declare the Apocrypha to be part of its canon. Among other things, this was done to help strengthen its defense against the Reformer, Martin Luther. There are at least 4 reasons why the Apocrypha was never recognized as part of the Canon:
  - a. They have no internal witnesses that speak of their own claim of divine inspiration. They don't claim to be God's Words.
  - b. The Apocrypha originated from Jewish people. And yet, these same Jewish people did not consider them as God's words. Even Josephus, the Jewish historian, said "no more words of God were added to Scripture after about 435 BC.
  - c. They were not considered as Scripture by Jesus or the New Testament authors. Jude 14 quotes a prophecy by Enoch which is also recorded in the Book of Enoch 1:9. Hebrews 11:35 *may* be referring to the record of events found in 2 Maccabees 6:18 to 7:42. None of these references refer to the Apocrypha books as Scripture. None are introduced or cited with a phrase like "God says", or "Scripture says", or "it is written", which are phrases that imply the divine authority of the words cited. These were cited more for the purposes of illustration than proof. Paul has quoted even pagan poets as saying truth but does not equate any of their works as inspired by God. It's also helpful to see that I Enoch, nor the pagan poets that Paul mentions are even part of the Apocrypha. No book of the Apocrypha is even mentioned in the NT.
  - d. They contain teachings that contradict the rest of the Bible (i.e. works salvation—2 Maccabees 12:45-46; Prayer for the dead—Tobit 12:9; they justify falsehood and deception, and support

a morality based upon expediency; they teach creation of the world out of pre-existent matter; giving of alms makes atonement for sin, and more).

Should we expect any more writings to be added to the Canon? Hebrews 1:1-2 seems to answer this question very clearly...read...The writer makes a contrast between the former speaking of old by the prophets, and the recent speaking in the last days by God's Son. This is a strong indication that the final revelation given by God has come through His Son. Throughout chapters 1 and 2 of Hebrews, God reveals to us that the revelation that came through Jesus is far superior to that of any previous prophet.

Where do we learn of this revelation that came through Jesus? The New Testament Scripture. The Holy Spirit came to the Apostles and reminded them of what Jesus had taught and also led them into all Truth so they could write it down as the Holy Spirit carried them (John 14:26 and John 16:13-14). One test of whether or not a book was included in the Canon was Apostolic endorsement—what are the biblical qualifications of an apostle? They were with Jesus during His earthly ministry the whole time, from John's baptism to the time when Jesus ascended into Heaven, and they had to be eye witnesses of His resurrection. None of those qualifications could ever be met past the first century. And so, its clear that the New Testament writings are the final, authoritative, and sufficient revelation of the redemptive works of Christ.

6. **The Canon is now closed.** Therefore, any attempt to add to what God has already given is a grave mistake. Read Revelation 22:18-19...the primary reference is to the book of Revelation. But it is no accident that that this statement comes at the end of the last chapter of Revelation, and Revelation is the last book of the New Testament. Even the message of Revelation makes it clear that it must be placed last in the Canon, for its focus is on the future hope and God's new Creation. Just like the book of Genesis has to be first in the Canon because it teaches us of creation. (Deuteronomy 4:2, 12:32; Proverbs 30:6—these passages give a warning not to add, but more is written after them. What do we make of this? Simply put, they warn that no unauthorized writer should ever claim to be writing God's Words).
7. God has preserved His Word for us today. We can be assured of this because God is faithful. And because we know that this is God's Word. He has more at state than any of us. Based upon His character, and based upon the fact that so much is riding upon us having His completed Word in our hands, we can rest assured that we have all that He wants us to have, and none more. Remember that God is sovereign and in complete control of the universe, the church, and our lives. He is able to protect and preserve His Word.

#### *Archaeological Support*

It is also helpful to see that the more archeologists and textual scholars have studied, the more they verify that God has preserved His inerrant, infallible, inspired Word for us today. The Bible in our hands today is the most accurate representation of any original manuscript from the ancient or present world! Only the Almighty only wise God could and would do this for His creatures.

Archeological finds not only verify the events recorded in the OT as an accurate historical record, but they show the remarkable accuracy with which God preserved and transmitted these texts to us, demonstrating the reliability of God's Word today. This is the significance of the Dead Sea Scrolls. These old manuscripts of the OT (believed to be from 100 BC to 70 AD) were found to be dated almost 1,000 years older than any other Hebrew Old Testament manuscript previously in existence. Even after all those years between a copy made in 100 BC and a copy made in 900 AD, 95 % of the text was word for word identical! The other 5 % of the text was chiefly variations in spelling and obvious slips of the pen. The more texts we find the more they verify that today we have an accurately transmitted copy of the original inspired text given the prophets by God.

The NT has even greater numbers of Greek manuscripts (over 5,000) with some dating to within 70 years of their writing. After much study and research scholars have produced a few current Greek texts that seek to use all that information to produce a reliable text as close as possible to the original writing. It is from these texts that we have our contemporary language versions of the Bible translated. There are some differences between the manuscripts and Greek texts you would find available today.

Some claim there are 10,000 "errors" in the NT today. This is very misleading and deceptive. It is true that there are that many "variants" which critics of the Bible have falsely called "errors". A variant is counted any time anything in a manuscript differs from any other manuscript (or copy). This difference

is counted again in every copy where it appears. So if a single word is spelled differently (even names transliterated from Hebrew to Greek using a different vowel) in 3,000 copies, that is counted as 3,000 variants but only involves the question of a single word like “the” or maybe one letter.

Actually, there are less than 40 places in the Greek NT manuscripts where these variants occur and most those are a matter of spelling or word order. Even as archeology studies these manuscripts we are getting a better understanding of these variants. This is settling more of those questions of differences and verifying the accuracy of the NT we have in our hands today. We can be certain that we have 100% of the NT and today less than ½ a percent is in question as to which text has the original reading. And none of those variants change the biblical teaching of the passages in question either.

*Why do various English translations differ from each other at certain points?*

In part it’s because of the growing availability of older manuscripts. Perhaps the following chart will help explain... [show chart of translation process]

*So what about Mark 16:9-20?*

As mentioned earlier the NIV states, “The earliest manuscripts and some other ancient witnesses do not have Mark 16:9-20.” The statement is included to let the reader understand that the oldest Greek manuscripts omit this section. In other words, there’s a real possibility that Mark did not write this ending to his Gospel. Apparently, someone else did.

There is external evidence to suggest this. For instance, the fourth century church fathers Eusebius and Jerome noted that almost all Greek manuscripts available to them lacked verses 9-20. In fact, there’s even a shorter ending that some manuscripts have.

There is also *internal* evidence. Verse 9 introduces Mary Magdalene as if she was a new person in the book, even though Mark already mentioned her three times (15:40, 47; 16:1).<sup>16</sup>

*Other observations about the inclusion of Mark 16:9-20*

Harry Ironside: “I do not dwell on the critical question as to the authenticity or otherwise of the last part of this chapter, verses 9 to 20. It is not found in two of the most ancient manuscripts, but it bears the stamp of inspiration, and the book of Acts and the history of Missions attest its credibility, so that I see no reason to assume that it is other than a part of that God-breathed Scripture which is for our instruction and blessing.”<sup>17</sup>

William Barclay: “Mark’s gospel really stops at verse 8. We have only to read the passage to see how different it is from the rest of the gospel and it appears in none of the great manuscripts of the gospel. It is a later summary which replaces the ending which either Mark did not live to write or which at some time went astray.”<sup>18</sup>

J. Vernon McGee: “Now we come to the section that is not included in all the manuscripts but which we believe is the Word of God.”<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Observations made by John MacArthur, *MacArthur’s Quick Reference Guide to the Bible*, p. 187.

<sup>17</sup> H. A. Ironside, *Mark*, p. 251.

<sup>18</sup> W. Barclay, p. 370.

<sup>19</sup> J. Vernon McGee, p. 200.