

Mark 16:14-20
December 5, 2010
Lynchburg, Virginia

EXHORDIUM

We finally come to the end of Mark. The disciples are resistant to believing in the person and power of Jesus, right up to the very end of His earthly ministry. Even as He ascends up into the sky, they are looking up wondering what God is up to.

All along they had put their trust in Jesus to come to Jerusalem and overthrow both the secular foreign powers and the corrupt internal powers. Jesus was their hope. But then He died and all their hopes were dashed. Guess we were wrong. But then He rose again and their hopes renewed. Perhaps He will restore the Kingdom to Israel. But then Jesus does another thing that they do not anticipate. He floats off up into the sky. What is God doing? How can He rule the world if He is not here?

But just at this juncture in the story, we are giving the answer. How can Jesus rule the world? The answer is both a good one and a frightening one. It is good because it makes perfect sense. It is frightening because it looks as if it is unlikely to be successful.

How can Jesus rule the world? He does so through His people on Earth. He does so through the ordained means of fathers and mothers, pastors and elders, worship and service, water and bread and wine. But this answer frightens us because we know that fathers and mothers, pastors and elders fail. How can Jesus entrust the hope of the world to such inadequate and incapable creatures?

This is the lesson that Jesus has been teaching them all along. How can they do it? They can do it by His Spirit and by His power. They can do it by learning a new paradigm about what it means to rule well. Ruling well has to do with service and that service is what changes the world, quite literally what saves the world. And He has given that task to us, His servants.

But how can we who are imperfect do that which is perfect and requires perfection? We do so by His Spirit. We really do it and we really do it by His strength. For those schooled in Christ, this is no contradiction.

We must live up to our responsibilities in Christ and when we do so and when He blesses us with the fruit of our labors, we do not become puffed up and prideful about it. We know that we can only do this through Him, through His grace and mercy and power.

So, at the end of all of Christ's teaching, revealing Himself as King, He leaves the disciples and ascends to heaven. The ascension is not a contradiction in the Kingship of Christ. Quite the contrary, the ascension is the time when Jesus enters the throne room of the Father and receives the Kingdoms of the World, promised to Him in Psalm 2. Those kingdoms have now become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ.

EXEGESIS

14 Afterward he appeared unto the eleven as they sat at meat, and upbraided them with their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they believed not them which had seen him after he was risen.

The tomb was empty and the women testified to what the angel had said but the disciples did not believe them. Jesus appeared to Mary Magdalene and she testified to the disciples but they did not believe her. The disciples on the road to Emmaus saw Jesus and testified to the disciples but they did not believe their report.

Jesus finally appears to them and they believe. But Jesus does not simply let them believe without any accountability. He upbraids them for not believing the reports that they should have believed. He calls this hard-heartedness. Sometimes we give people a pass, believing that if God does not supernaturally reveal Himself, then it is not their fault that they cannot yet see Him. But that is not the case. Jesus had not yet appeared to the disciples but He expected them to believe the report of credible witnesses. They refused to do so and He calls them hard-hearted.

There is an obvious application here. We are to believe the reports of credible witnesses. When God ministers to us through other people, He expects us to believe Him through them.

THE GREAT COMMISSION

This section corresponds to Matthew 28:18-20, that we familiarly call the Great Commission. In the section we have accompanying signs. We see this prophecy and commission come into being in the Book of Acts.

As we think about the Great Commission, we need to think about the Ascension of our Lord. That is mentioned here in v. 19, He was receive up into heaven and sat on the right hand of God. Many Christians today would have a difficult time explaining what Jesus is doing seated at the right hand of the Father. It would appear that from their perspective, He is sitting there, incapable of doing anything about all the trouble in the world. Perhaps they envision Him constrained by the prince of the power of the air? In the minds of many, Satan is the ruler of this world and so Jesus just has to sit up in heaven, watching what is going on and unable to break in to the devil's domain.

People, this is emphatically NOT the case! This world does not belong to the devil. It never has belonged to him and it never will. In the Old Days, the pre-Christian days, there was a great insurrection on the part of the devil and his minions. They set up shop all around the globe, dominating humans through tyranny of government, principalities and powers, demonic black powers, the worship of idols. But that was a rebellion. They had no RIGHT to the Earth. It had not been given to them. Even after the Fall of Adam and Eve, the Lord gave dominion to Man. He established covenant with Noah, Abraham, Moses, David and Jesus. The Earth has always belonged to the Lord and to His people.

1 Peter 3:22 Who is gone into heaven, and is on the right hand of God; angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto him.

But there was a dangerous insurrection, a rebellion and it had to be quelled and the rebellious ones had to be restored or defeated. That is the work of the cross. In it, the Lord Christ defeated the rebels and established His throne OVER the Earth forever.

He has defeated Satan and the rebellious principalities and powers and any outliers that do not know it yet are being hunted down and defeated one by one. And Jesus will not stop until all of His enemies are beneath His feet.

Think about the world. What has God done in the world in 2000 years?

15 And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. 16 He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.

Preach (a public crier) the gospel (good news) to every creature. Gospel is “Long live the King!” All creation. That is not just the humans on earth. It is everything that has been made. All must know that Jesus Christ is Lord of all.

He that believes that Jesus is Lord and is baptized will be saved. A denial of Jesus as Lord is personal damnation. Thus, one could not stay a Jew only and see salvation. This rules out salvation for Muslims or any other religion that denies that Jesus Christ is the Supreme Lord over all of creation. This makes Trinitarian belief a necessary part of salvation.

Believeth ONLY and be saved? Yes, think of the thief on the cross.

Baptized and NOT be saved? Yes, think of Judas and Simon the Magician.

But to those who believe the gospel and are baptized, assurance is yours.

Damnation comes from failure to believe. This damnation comes whenever one stops believing. Damnation does not come when one is weak, or has struggles or doubts. That is not what this verse is talking about. If one rejects Jesus as the Lord of Heaven and Earth and will not submit to Him, that kind of person will be damned.

We can generally recognize such a person. He is characterized by living by his own rules. He does not submit to Christ’s authority so he establishes his own or some other authority. This generally results in obvious sinful living. This may manifest itself in the baser sorts of sins, drunkenness, fornication (athletes and movie stars) but it also manifests itself in the cultured sorts of sins, materialism, academic pride, arrogance, insolence (academics, scientists, philosophers). And often both.

**17 And these signs shall follow them that believe;
In my name shall they cast out devils;**

Acts 5:15-16 15 Insomuch that they brought forth the sick into the streets, and laid them on beds and couches, that at the least the shadow of Peter passing by might overshadow some of them. 16 There came also

a multitude out of the cities round about unto Jerusalem, bringing sick folks, and them which were vexed with unclean spirits: and they were healed every one.

**they shall speak with new tongues;
Acts 2, proclamation of the gospel.**

18 .They shall take up serpents;

Acts 28:3-5 3 And when Paul had gathered a bundle of sticks, and laid them on the fire, there came a viper out of the heat, and fastened on his hand. 4 And when the barbarians saw the venomous beast hang on his hand, they said among themselves, No doubt this man is a murderer, whom, though he hath escaped the sea, yet vengeance suffereth not to live. 5 And he shook off the beast into the fire, and felt no harm.

and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; Not attested to in Acts but there are stories from the early church that indicate that this did happen in the apostolic era.

they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover. See Acts 5 above.

19 So then after the Lord had spoken unto them, he was received up into heaven, and sat on the right hand of God.

Why are you gazing up into heaven? He will come back but not today. Get about your business!

Eph 1:20-23 20 Which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places, 21 Far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come: 22 And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, 23 Which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all.

Eph 4:8-13 8 Wherefore he saith, When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men. 9 (Now that he

ascended, what is it but that he also descended first into the lower parts of the earth? 10 He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things.) 11 And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; 12 For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: 13 Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ:

1 Cor 15:24-26 24 Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power. 25 For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet. 26 The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death.

EXHORTATION-I do declare!

20 And they went forth, and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following. Amen.

The Gospel ends with an amen and rightly so. The disciples finally get it. In the very last verse of the book of Mark, the disciples finally understand what they are called to do and they go and do it. We know that this last verse takes place after Pentecost, so the Holy Spirit has come upon them and empowered them to do the work of the gospel.

This foolishness of preaching, with faith, does two things.

1. It works. When the Word is declared with faith, in the power of the Spirit, it accomplishes that which God has ordained. Such as are numbered among the elect hear the gospel message and respond in faith. The message is efficacious because the cross, resurrection, ascension and rule of Jesus are efficacious. They accomplish what they were meant to accomplish. We reformed, of all people, should be the most bold in preaching the good news of the Lordship of Christ, the cross of forgiveness, of the hope of resurrection. God is doing all of this through us and has prepared our good works beforehand. So, have faith, proclaiming this truth.

Remember that you are called to be a good ambassador of this message. A herald cries out the truth, “Long live the King.” Some will hate the new king, others will be pleased He is ruling. Others may take some time to come around. But none of their responses change the fact that Jesus is King or that He is, in fact, their Lord and Ruler and they owe absolute submission to Him. That part stays true no matter what people respond.

2. The message changes lives. The message is not only that Jesus is King. It is that He is supreme ruler and demands absolute loyalty. Furthermore, he demands that His servants be blameless and pure, without sin, perfect, like His Father in heaven is perfect.

We may recoil at this part of the message because we know that we are not perfect and are therefore afraid of what this new king might do to us. He will surely find out my sins, banish me from the kingdom, or have me executed. No, that is the even more wonderful thing about this King. He requires all of His subjects to have no debts. But instead of making them all pay for all of their debts, He suffered the consequences of the debts, paid them in full and invites all of His subjects to serve Him without any stains of debts or sins from the past. Without debt, people can start over, serving Jesus with complete loyalty, depending upon Him to keep them clean and to lead them in the way of righteousness.

This is certainly good news worthy of proclaiming everywhere. So, let us be bold and testify of the Kingship of Jesus and all His wonderful works to save His people from their sins.