

“Nothing is Impossible With Our God” Mark 16:9-20

Do you believe?

This is the title of books and movies, but, more importantly, it is the question God asks us in the closing verses of Mark’s Gospel. We have moved rapidly through this great God-inspired account of the life of Jesus, challenging us to see Jesus for who he really is: The Christ (or Messiah), the Son of God. In chapter 8 we read how Peter is given this wonderful insight about Jesus: You are the Messiah!

And from there we moved to the cross, for the Messiah came to seek and save those who were lost. Jesus would die, but he would forewarn his disciples so that they would know that this was not a tragic end, but God’s design for salvation. Just as Jesus foretold, he was betrayed and arrested, tried and beaten, crucified and buried. Yet on the third day – just as he said he would – Jesus rose from the dead.

When we get to Mark 16:8 we think we have come to the end of the story. Jesus is alive and the women are told to share the good news.

Today we look at verses 9-20. Most of your Bibles will indicate that this may not have been the original ending of the Gospel, that it was added later. Its style and vocabulary are very different from the rest of the Gospel. Your note may say that it was not found in the earliest manuscripts we have of Mark’s Gospel.

What I will tell you is that by year 100 one of the early church fathers quoted from this passage. Mark’s Gospel was likely written around AD 65 as a record of Peter’s sermons, or teachings on the life of Jesus. If that is true, then the ending we read today was added very early. From earliest days it was accepted as the appropriate ending of the Gospel. I tend to believe God has His ways of getting His story to us. I accept these verses as the proper conclusion to the Gospel, so we shall take a closer look at them today.

As noted at the start of this message, the theme of these verses is, “Do you believe?” But the subtitle may be, “If you believe, what will you do about it?”

Turn with me in your Bibles to Mark 16:9-20. This is the Word of the Lord.

Verses 9-11 recount Mary Magdalene’s encounter with the Risen Jesus. She is the first eyewitness to the resurrection. She goes to the disciples who are mourning and weeping and tells them the good news: Jesus is alive! I have seen him!

But look at verse 11. What does it say? “They did not believe it.”

Verses 12-13 tell of the disciples encounter with Jesus on the road to Emmaus. Two disciples walked with Jesus and were taught by Jesus, and when they ran back to Jerusalem to tell the

other disciples that Jesus was alive, what was their response? “But they did not believe them either.”

So in verse 14 Jesus appears to the eleven as they were eating. This is likely the event recorded in Luke 24, where Jesus appears to the disciples who are hiding in a locked room. What does Jesus say to the disciples?

“He rebuked them for their lack of faith and their stubborn refusal to believe those who had seen him after he had risen.”

All the evidence was in place. The disciples had heard what Jesus said, about the fact he would die and rise again on the third day. They had seen that Jesus was no ordinary man, but truly one come from God. They had seen the power of God work in him, healing the sick, casting out demons, even raising the dead. Then Jesus appears to Mary, and the disciples, reliable witnesses, but the disciples still would not believe.

Jesus rebukes the disciples for their unbelief – confronts their sin. The only chance they have is to find forgiveness and grace from Jesus. And that is exactly what he offers them.

Do you believe?

Finally the disciples can say, “We believe.”

Sure, they have more to learn, and they certainly will need the Holy Spirit’s help to live out that belief, but finally they believe.

How about you? Do you believe Jesus is the Son of God who came to give his life so that you could be saved from sin and have life everlasting? Or maybe you do not believe you are a sinner, that you are a good person, that Jesus did not have to die for you. Maybe he had to die for those people in prison, or those criminals in the city, or that terrible neighbour down the street, but you are basically a good person.

The issue is not about whether you are a good or bad person. The issue is, what have you done with Jesus? He comes to you offering you a free gift, the gift of eternal life, and asks, “Will you accept me and my gift?” Until we say “Yes” to the gift we are saying “No” to Jesus, and that is the greatest sin of all. Yes, we all tend to say and do and even think the wrong things, and these too are sins. But the most important question is “What will you do with Jesus and his gift of forgiveness and eternal life?”

If you are ready to say “Yes” to Jesus then you need to confess you are a sinner, ask Jesus to forgive you and to come into your life. Commit yourself to being true to Jesus and pray that he will give you the Holy Spirit to help you live the life that pleases him. If you really mean this, your life will be changed for eternity right now!

The rest of our passage addresses the question, “Now that I believe, what must I do?”

In verse 15 we read a familiar command of Jesus, “Go into all the world and preach the Gospel.” This is how Mathew’s Gospel ends as well – with the Great Commission.

I think it is a shame we use the English word “preach” here because as soon as we do, far too many people think this is describing the work of the pastor, and it does not apply to them. The word simply means announce, or share the Gospel. This command was not just for the eleven disciples, or the missionaries like Paul who would follow, or the pastors, priests and evangelists who came after them. Sharing the Good News about Jesus is the task of every believer in Jesus.

Do you believe? Then tell others. This is what Jesus is saying.

Jesus wants all to come to believe in him. Notice the great promise of verse 16: “Whoever believes and is baptised will be saved.” Baptism cannot save you – it is an outward, visible sign to all that you now believe. But those who believe will be baptised. Read through the book of Acts and you will find every time people put their faith in Jesus for salvation they asked to be baptised. It was the sign that they were now members of God’s family, a part of His church.

And what if you do not believe? Does it matter? “Those who will not believe will be condemned.” This is a sober reminder that there are consequences for how we respond to God and his gift of salvation through faith in Jesus. If we reject it, we reject Jesus, we will be condemned. In chapter 9 Jesus speaks about the fires of hell that never go out, and that we should do everything possible to escape that end. This is where the condemned end up, those who will not put their faith in Jesus for salvation.

So the call is for us to believe and be baptised, and to call others to believe.

What if people do not believe, what will you do now?

That seems to be the theme of the next verses. Jesus says there will be signs, demonstrations of the power of God, that will accompany those who will go and share their faith. Listen to what God will do through those who believe and share Jesus with others:

- God will drive out demons in the name of Jesus.
- God will enable believers to speak new languages or tongues.
- God will protect from the bites of the poisonous snake
- God will protect from death those who drink a deadly poison
- God will bring healing through his followers as they lay hands on people and pray.

The power of God that was at work in Jesus will be at work in the lives of his followers. We see this lived out in the book of Acts.

For instance, in Acts 16 we read how Paul and Silas in the name of Jesus commanded a demon to leave a young girl. She is instantly set free.

In Acts 2 we read how the Holy Spirit gave new languages to the disciples so they could share the Gospel with people from many nations.

In Acts 28 Paul gathers wood for a fire and a poisonous snake bites him. When nothing happens to Paul, the people are ready to hear the Gospel.

In Acts 1 we are introduced to a man named Barsabbas. The disciples are choosing someone to take the place of Judas Iscariot who betrayed Jesus and killed himself. Two men are nominated, Barsabbas and Matthias. Matthias is chosen, but Barsabbas does not disappear. Church tradition tells of his ministry even after he is not chosen as one of the twelve. One story tells of how he was forced to drink deadly poison because he would renounce his faith. He survived...

In Acts 3 we read of Peter and John healing a lame man in the name of Jesus. In Acts 8 Philip the evangelist saw demons flee and the paralyzed and lame healed in the name of Jesus. According to Acts 19 the Apostle Paul just had to touch a handkerchief and healing power went out and cured the sick and cast out demons.

The point here is that our God can do anything. And as he sends us out with the message of Jesus he also sends us with the power to pray for others, and we will see miracles. Do not be afraid to pray for people who are sick, or hurting, or depressed, or angry. You will see miracles – maybe not every time, but God will make a difference in their lives.

Francisco lives in our city and every week heads to the downtown core or waterfront to share the Gospel and pray for people. Guess what? He sees miracles week after week – from people relieved of headaches and sore hands to release from demons.

I have watched a person come to the church drunk and incoherent become sober and attentive after we pray together. I have seen God deliver people from migraines, and watched Him rescue businesses that were on the ropes. I have seen God find lost earrings and wedding rings, and find the lost soul and bring them to faith. All we had to do was believe and ask God in prayer.

Friends, Mark is saying – Jesus has sent us with an important message and he has given us power to go. We can ask God for anything knowing that nothing is impossible to God.

Do you believe that? Will you pray with people so they will see the signs of God's presence?

Mark ends with Jesus ascending back to heaven, and there he sits at the right hand of God. "All authority has been given to me," Jesus says to his followers, "so go... make disciples of all nations..."

The disciples did as they were commanded, and we praise God for that. There would be no church today if they did not. Now, will we be obedient? Will we go? The God who can do anything has sent us.

Let me ask you one more time: Do you believe?