

Truth for Today

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God's Servant in Mark's Gospel: He is Risen: Go and Preach - Mark 16

Good morning. We have come to the last chapter of the Gospel of Mark. We started the series on Mark on the 14 October 2007. Since then we have completed four chapters each year. During the four years we have emphasised a number of times that Mark presents the Lord Jesus Christ as God's perfect Servant. We read in Isaiah 42:1, "Behold! My Servant whom I uphold, My Elect One in whom My soul delights! I have put My Spirit upon Him; He will bring forth justice to the Gentiles." This verse can only be fulfilled in Christ. When we combine this with the opening verse of Mark's Gospel, "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God" we see a rather unique person, sometimes referred to as the "Servant Son". Although we might stress the Servant character of our Lord Jesus in this Gospel, we must never forget that He is the Son of God. In all the activity of the Gospel, the power of a divine person shines through time and again. This in itself is so remarkable, that God is found working in the world in this amazing way. Therefore, let us briefly remind ourselves of what has gone before.

In the last four years we traced the remarkable power of this Servant. In chapter 1 alone the Lord Jesus heals many people suffering from demons and diseases which afflicted them in that land of Palestine. However, it was not only power but the very words He spoke that added increased interest in the man from Nazareth. The people "were astonished at His teaching, for He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes", verse 22.

However, we must not overlook God the Father's declaration about the Lord Jesus as He stood on the banks of the river Jordan, "You are My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased", verse 11. The hidden years of obscurity in Nazareth had brought pleasure and delight to the Father as would the following three and a half years of public service culminating at the cross on Calvary's hill. As we move through to chapter four, we find the Lord Jesus calling His disciples to be with Him, teaching and dealing with the effects of a sin damaged world as manifested in the people of Palestine. We end chapter four with a demonstration of power over creation causing the following exclamation from the disciples, "They feared exceedingly, and said to one another, 'Who can this be, that even the wind and the sea obey Him!'" It is an absolute necessity for everyone in the world to find out who this person is!

We commenced the next four chapters in 2008 with the man possessed of many demons but they were no match for the "Servant God". The triumphant outcome is seen in 5:15, "Then they came to Jesus, and saw the one who had been demon-possessed and had the legion, sitting and clothed and in his right mind." And so from chapter 5 to 8 we see the power of the Saviour as demons are defeated, disease corrected and death overcome. He commissions His disciples to go out with similar power and comforts the disciples of John the Baptist after Herod had beheaded him. In chapter 8, we see Him feeding thousands, confronting the Pharisees and seeing the faith of a Gentile woman, finally ending with the serious life challenging questions at the end of the chapter, "What will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?"

In 2009 we considered chapters 9-12. This commenced with the transfiguration scene on a high mountain and the appearance of Elijah and Moses. Let us read from 9:2-4, "Now after six days Jesus took Peter, James, and John, and led them up on a high mountain apart by themselves; and He was transfigured before them. His clothes became shining, exceedingly white, like snow, such as no launderer on earth can whiten them. And Elijah appeared to them with Moses, and they were talking with Jesus." For a brief moment in time we are afforded a glimpse of Christ's millennial glory and the unmistakable proof of life after death as observed in these two "men of God", who had lived hundreds of years previously. It is also at the end of this chapter that the seriousness of hell is brought to our attention. In chapter ten we are told of God's view of marriage, the way to eternal life and the seriousness of a committed life to Christ. In chapter eleven we arrive at the last days before the crucifixion with Christ riding into Jerusalem as foretold by the prophet Zechariah (Zechariah 9). In chapter eleven, we have the picture of the fig tree depicting the fruitlessness of the nation of Israel, its demise being replaced with something entirely new – the church of God established at Pentecost. Chapter twelve brings the hatred of the Jews to a climax; they would kill the Lord Jesus. Teaching on "marriage rights" brings out again the fact of resurrection, which the Sadducees were trying to ridicule. The Lord has to say to them "Are you not therefore mistaken, because you do not know the Scriptures nor the power of God? For when they rise from the dead, they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven. But concerning the dead, that they rise, have you not read in the book of Moses, in the burning bush passage, how God spoke to him, saying, 'I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'? He is

not the God of the dead, but the God of the living. You are therefore greatly mistaken." Please read chapter 12 as it is so instructive.

The chapter also gives clear instructions as to the two main commands for believers, "Jesus answered him, 'The first of all the commandments is: "Hear, O Israel, the LORD our God, the LORD is one. And you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength." This is the first commandment. And the second, like it, is this: "You shall love your neighbour as yourself." There is no other commandment greater than these.'" Chapter twelve ends with a challenge as to how devoted and committed we are to God. The widow, casting her two mites into the Temple treasury, is used by the Lord to show the widow's one hundred percent commitment. This is contrasted with everyone else whose gifts were only a part of their income. How do I view my wealth and resources? Are they mine or has God given them to me to be a steward of what is His?

This year, the final series, we have considered the remaining four chapters of Mark, chapters 13-16. In chapter 13 we touched upon the subjects of deceivers, the coming tribulation for Israel and the unknown time frame of the return of the Lord Jesus. In chapter 14 we were brought to the Lord's last night of freedom, with the Passover feast celebration and the introduction of a remembrance of Himself. This has been maintained by Christians to this present time, often on the first day of every week. The chapter closes with a demonstration of hatred towards the only person who had consistently shown divine love in so many ways. Chapter 15 opened with Pilate presiding over a miscarriage of justice. The scene moves to the hill of Calvary, the sacrifice of Jesus on the centre cross which has provided a means of salvation for everyone. Do you have the Lord Jesus Christ as your Saviour? Finally the chapter closed with Jesus being placed in a tomb.

I make no apologies for this summary of the previous chapters as it reminds us of the full and busy life of the Lord Jesus as covered in the Gospel of Mark. We now come to the last and shortest chapter in the Gospel. Our heading focuses upon the two main points of the chapter, "He is risen – Go and preach". Let us now consider chapter 16.

The journey to the tomb, verses 1-4

At the end of chapter 15 we have these words, "Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James observed where He was laid." On that first "Good Friday" as night was approaching, the body of the Lord Jesus Christ was placed in a tomb and a large stone was eventually placed across the entrance. This event was observed by two Mary's as mentioned by Mark. These faithful women disciples observed to the last the resting place of the person they had deeply cared about during His public activities for three and a half years.

Let us read the first four verses of our chapter, "Now when the Sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, that they might come and anoint Him. Very early in the morning, on the first day of the week, they came to the tomb when the sun had risen. And they said among themselves, "Who will roll away the stone from the door of the tomb for us?" But when they looked up, they saw that the stone had been rolled away - for it was very large." From John's Gospel we know it was Joseph and Nicodemus who had placed the Lord's body in the tomb, maybe in some hurry as the actual sacred day of the Passover Sabbath was imminent. Therefore, the women had prepared spices and were with some urgency hurrying to the tomb at the first possible opportunity.

Mark names three women hurrying to the tomb, but as they approach they remember the large stone and this becomes a concern to them – "Who will roll away the stone?" However, they need not have worried because upon arriving they see that the stone had been rolled away. Although not mentioned by Mark, the soldiers who had been guarding the tomb were not there; they had fled as Matthew's Gospel records. It would be with some trepidation and possibly mixed with curiosity that they continued moving towards the opened tomb.

The empty tomb, verses 5-8

Let us read the next four verses of our chapter. "And entering the tomb, they saw a young man clothed in a long white robe sitting on the right side; and they were alarmed. But he said to them, 'Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He is risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid Him. But go, tell His disciples - and Peter - that He is going before you into Galilee; there you will see Him, as He said to you.' So they went out quickly and fled from the tomb, for they trembled and were amazed. And they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid."

Well, the tomb was not as expected. Instead of the body of the Lord Jesus here is a person described as a young man. From the description we can only conclude that he was an angel. But this caused the women to be somewhat afraid. The popular description of angels, all shiny, smiling and with two wings is not a biblical description. Most references to angels in the Bible do not mention wings at all. Sometimes they may be seen in white garments as this young man is. And, unlike the scene at the tomb, angels often had missions that were serious and sometimes devastating - consider the destruction of Sodom in Genesis! However, this angel has great news for the women.

First, do not be alarmed or amazed at the situation. Then the news, which for the women, would be incredible, "He is risen", and then the further dramatic statement, "He is not here". All that can be seen are the empty grave clothes. The angel, possibly realising that they were having difficulty in taking everything in, gives them a message, "Go, tell His disciples - and Peter - that He is going before you into Galilee; there you will see Him, as He said to you." It would appear that their immediate reaction was to leave the "empty tomb" scene very quickly and not tell anyone what they had experienced. However, we do know from other Gospel accounts that the message was eventually communicated to the disciples.

The Lord's appearance to His disciples, verses 9-14

Mark brings before us three incidents when the risen Lord Jesus appeared to disciples. Not all occasions are mentioned and to gain a full picture we would need to consider a number of other Scriptures.

First, we have Mary Magdalene. This clearly indicates that after initially leaving the tomb Mary returned. Mary was consumed with grief and for a fuller appreciation, please read John chapter 20. Mark is brief in his recording of this first appearance but he does clearly indicate the great liberty that Mary had been given, having been released from seven demons. From this we can surely appreciate the distressed state Mary must have been in. Not only had her Lord and Saviour apparently died on a Roman cross, but his body had been stolen! The joy Mary experiences however is not shared by the other disciples who were still in Jerusalem. Verse 11 states that they did not believe Mary.

The next appearance is to the two disciples returning to Emmaus, who, after meeting the Lord, immediately left Emmaus and took the long journey back to Jerusalem during the night. Again Mark records that the disciples in Jerusalem did not believe this account either. It is not until they receive their own personal visitation by the risen Lord that they are convinced. The Lord, however, "rebuked their unbelief and hardness of heart". I wonder what the Lord Jesus would think today when His resurrection is not believed even by some who claim to be Christians!

The importance of the resurrection

What we know from the Scriptures about the importance of the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ is found in 1 Corinthians 15. Paul records that more than 500 saw the Lord at the same time. Also, Paul states that the Lord's resurrection is very important; it goes to the heart of Christianity. Without the resurrection, our faith is bereft of a major foundation stone calling in question our salvation. Let us now consider the Gospel commission.

The great commission verses 15-18

One thing is clear from Mark and the other Gospels, that is, the importance of preaching. The Gospels are not alone in pointing out the necessity of preaching. In Romans 10:14, "How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?" The importance of preaching is not confined to the New Testament as we find Paul quoting from Isaiah in the following verse 15, "And how shall they preach unless they are sent? As it is written: 'How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, who bring glad tidings of good things!'"

The greatest news that has ever been known is the message of the Gospel - that a full and complete salvation is available to everyone by true faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and His amazing and comprehensive sacrifice at Calvary. Genuine repentance along with faith is required in order that eternal life can be secured.

The commission given to the disciples and every Christian since, is to be involved in going out with the Gospel message. The whole world is the harvest field. The Lord Himself said in John 4:35, "Do you not say, 'There are still four months and then comes the harvest'? Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes and look at the fields, for they are already white for harvest!"

Now verse 16 has caused some difficulty in the past. "He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned." Belief and baptism are two separate and distinct things. Belief brings salvation. Those who do not believe are under condemnation. Baptism is the outward testimony from or about a person who believes. If we are baptised but there is no belief, then we are still under condemnation. Verse 16 still holds true. Verses 17-18 concern those early days of the apostles and believers who were able to do many signs and wonders that were especially relevant to the nation of Israel. In 2 Corinthians 12:12 we read, "Truly the signs of an apostle were wrought among you in all patience, in signs, and wonders, and mighty deeds." We see Paul indicating that signs and wonders were connected with the apostles. In 1 Corinthians Paul indicates in chapters 12 and 14 the need to seek after what is spiritual and not the showy gifts which may have a tendency to draw attention to the servant and not the master. In 1 Corinthians 13 Paul also highlights the permanence of love and the transitory nature of gifts.

Are we involved in this commission?

The main point of challenge in these verses is not whether I have a sign gift but am I involved in pointing lost souls to Christ?

Conclusion verses 19-20

Consistent with Mark's Gospel, we have brief statements summarising what is important. Verse 19 states, "So then, after the Lord had spoken to them, He was received up into heaven, and sat down at the right hand of God." We quickly move from the Lord's final words communicated to His disciples, to the ascension where the Lord Jesus is received up into heaven. We might say that the Lord Jesus is welcomed back into His rightful home. Not only has He returned home, but He has taken the place of authority at the right hand of God.

Finally verse 20 clearly indicates that the disciples responded to the Lord's command, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature." So I repeat again, are we obedient to the Lord?

Let me finish with part of LA Bennett's hymn,

*Oh, teach me what it meaneth,
That cross uplifted high,
With One, the Man of Sorrows,
Condemned to bleed and die.
Oh, teach me what it cost Thee
To make a sinner whole;
And teach me, Saviour, teach me
The value of a soul.*

*Oh, teach me what it meaneth,
That sacred crimson tide,
The blood and water flowing
From Thine own wounded side.
Teach me that if none other
Had sinned, but I alone,
Yet still, Thy blood, O Jesus,
Thine only, must atone.*

*Oh, teach me what it meaneth,
Thy love beyond compare,
The love that reacheth deeper
Than depths of self-despair!
Yea, teach me, till there gloweth
In this cold heart of mine
Some feeble, pale reflection
Of that pure love of Thine.*

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