

April 7, 2013 by Steve Brandon



Ending Mark

Mark 16:9-20

1. The Text
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Today in the gospel of Mark, we come to the final chapter -- chapter 16 -- and to the final verses in that chapter -- verses 9-20. Just over a year ago, we began this wonderful testimony to the life of Jesus Christ. Today, we finish. This is my 42nd and final message in this wonderful book.

To let you know, after Mark, I plan to preach through the Psalms of Ascent. These are Psalms 120-134. There are fifteen Psalms. It should take fifteen weeks. These Psalms were songs that Israel sang as they went up to Jerusalem to worship. My hope is that they will help us to think about our worship to the Lord. So, I encourage you to spend some time in these Psalms in anticipation of these things. They are short Psalms. All but one of them are less than 10 verses.

We come this morning to another one of those passages that are so famous that it has a name. There are several passages like this. Exodus 20 is called, "The Ten Commandments." Deuteronomy 6:4-9 is called, "The Shema." Matthew 5-7 is called, "The Sermon on the Mount." Matthew 6:9-13 is called, "The Lord's Prayer." Matthew 24-25 is called, "The Olivet Discourse." John 17 is called, "The High Priestly Prayer." Our text this morning is known as "The Longer Ending of Mark."

The reason why certain Bible texts get their names is usually because of the important role that they play in Biblical revelation. "The Ten Commandments" are important because they are the initial laws that God gave Israel. They are also a good summary of the entire law. "The Shema" is important because it speaks of genuine religion in the home. "The Sermon on the Mount" is important because it is the most famous and instructive sermon that Jesus gave. "The Lord's Prayer" is important because it contains the way that Jesus taught us to pray. "The Olivet Discourse" is important because it speaks of end times events. "The High Priestly Prayer" is important because it reveals the heart of Jesus in relationship with His Father and in relationship to His disciples.

But, "The Longer Ending of Mark" doesn't get its name because of its importance in Biblical revelation. Indeed, the vast majority of the contents in these verses are repeated elsewhere in one of the other gospels. There is very little here that is unique to Mark.

"The Longer Ending of Mark" gets its name because of its problem. And it's a large enough issue that I can't simply ignore this problem. So, let's look at my first point, ...

1. The Text

Let's read Mark 16, beginning at verse 9.

Mark 16:9-20

[Now after He had risen early on the first day of the week, He first appeared to Mary Magdalene, from whom He had cast out seven demons. She went and reported to those who had been with Him, while they were mourning and weeping. When they heard that He was alive and had been seen by her, they refused to believe it.

After that, He appeared in a different form to two of them while they were walking along on their way to the country. They went away and reported it to the others, but they did not believe them either.

Afterward He appeared to the eleven themselves as they were reclining at the table; and He reproached them for their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they had not believed those who had seen Him after He had risen. And He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved; but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned. These signs will accompany those who have believed: in My name they will cast out demons, they will speak with new tongues; they will pick up serpents, and if they drink any deadly poison, it will not hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover."

So then, when the Lord Jesus had spoken to them, He was received up into heaven and sat down at the right hand of God. And they went out and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them, and confirmed the word by the signs that followed.]

Most all of you have some sort of note in your Bible at verse 9 concerning these verses. Most of your versions will have these verses in brackets. The NASB and ESV have very short notes that explain the situation. The NASB says, "Later mss add vv 9-20" (i.e. "Later manuscripts add verses 9-20)." The ESV says, "Some of the earliest manuscripts do not include 16:9-20."

Let me explain. The Bible that we hold in our hands is a translation from the original Greek and Hebrew. The Old Testament was written in Hebrew (with a little bit of Aramaic). The New Testament was written in Greek. The manuscripts that we have of the New Testament are many. In fact, the number of manuscripts that we have of the New Testament are far more numerous than any other ancient Greek text. Consider the following chart:

[\[1\]](#)

This gives you a general idea of the sort of manuscript evidence that we have for the Greek New Testament. We have far more copies of the Greek New Testament than any other ancient Greek document. The distance between author and copy is far less with the New Testament than other ancient Greek documents. All this to say, if you doubt the authenticity of the New Testament, you must really doubt the authenticity of every other ancient Greek piece of literature.

Now, having said that, we need to acknowledge that there is some distance between the original writers of the New Testament and the copies that we have. And, since these copies were made by hand (and not by photocopier), not all of the manuscripts agree everywhere. There are some differences among them, as the scribes made mistakes in their copies. Now, the good news is this: the manuscripts show remarkable agreement with each other. And whenever they disagree, it usually makes little or no difference in meaning. Never do any of the differences in readings change a Biblical doctrine. You should have all the confidence in the world that the English translation in your lap is a very reliable translation of the original documents that were penned by the apostles.

Usually, textual variants consist of a word or two. Now, this morning we come to the largest textual variant in all of the Bible -- twelve verses!

Now, the study of documents, in search of the original text is called, "Textual Criticism." To do it well, you need to know the original languages. Often, you need to know other languages, like Latin or Syriac. You need to know the history of the pertinent texts. You need to understand the message of each Biblical writer in order to understand what they would have written. You need to have a good understanding of church history in order to know who the church fathers were. In Seminary, studying these matters was left until the end of our studies, after you come to grasp many of these other things. Where I went to seminary, this class had the reputation of being the most difficult of all classes of any in the curriculum.

This morning, I want to simplify the issue for you; to at least give you some idea of what's going on with this passage. And to help you understand other textual issues that you may encounter in the future.

Fundamentally, at stake here is the weight we should give to the older manuscripts in comparison with the weight we should give to the number of manuscripts. In other words, which is more important? The older manuscripts that are closer (in time) to the original authors. Or the number of manuscripts that give testimony to a variant reading.

The note in the New King James Bible is instructive at this point. "Vv. 9-20 are bracketed in NU [Nestle-Aland Greek New Testament (N) and United Bible Societies' fourth edition (U)] as not in the original text. They are lacking in Codex Sinaiticus and Codex Vaticanus, although nearly all other mss. of Mark contain them."

This note mentions two Greek texts that are still in existence. Codex Sinaiticus and Codex Vaticanus. These are the oldest, most complete manuscripts that we have of the Bible. They are both identified as "Codex" because they are contained in bound books.

Codex Sinaiticus was discovered in the mid 1800's at a monastery of St. Catharine on Mount Sinai (and hence its name). It is written in all capital letters in four columns, measuring some 15 inches by 13 inches and several inches thick. It resides in the British Library, associated with the British Museum. Fifteen years ago, Yvonne and I had the privilege of seeing it. I remember standing in front of it in awe. I was standing by the oldest, most complete copy of the Bible in the world! I almost wanted to bow and worship the thing. It taught me a bit of why God has prohibited us from having the original writings. Surely, they would be objects of our worship if we had them.

Anyway, the Codex Sinaiticus dates back to the fourth-century. I would love to tell you the story of how Constantin von Tischendorf found it, but it's too long a story to tell, and it deviates from our text this morning.

The other text, Codex Vaticanus, dates to the mid fourth-century. It resides in the Vatican Library in Rome. It contains both the Old and New Testament as well as a good portion of the Apocrypha. It's not complete, as it's missing some books of the Bible. But, overall, it's much more than we have with most of our manuscripts.

These two manuscripts are the oldest, most complete documents that we have on the Bible. And when it comes to the ending of Mark, both of them finish at chapter 16, and verse 8.

On the other hand, most of the other Greek manuscripts that we have include the ending. As the note in the NKJV says, "nearly all other mss. of Mark contain them." I'm guessing more than a hundred texts include it. Yet, many of these texts date to the fifth, sixth, seventh, eight centuries. And many of these documents are merely copies of other copies that contain the longer ending.

If you had two manuscripts, one which included the longer ending and the other had the shorter ending, and you are a scribe, do you include the longer ending? Or do you leave it out? The choice is obvious. You include it. So, the long ending may be a propagated error, something that was included later, but soon overtook all of the documents.

So, which do you choose? Which is original? Did Mark write verses 9-20? Or, did Mark stop at verse 8? The best thing to do at this point is to read the first eight verses, and then stop after verse 8. Listen carefully, ...

Mark 16:1-8

When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome, bought spices, so that they might come and anoint Him. Very early on the first day of the week, they came to the tomb when the sun had risen. They were saying to one another, "Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance of the tomb?" Looking up, they saw that the stone had been rolled away, although it was extremely large. Entering the tomb, they saw a young man sitting at the right, wearing a white robe; and they were amazed. And he said to them, "Do not be amazed; you are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who has been crucified. He has risen; He is not here; behold, here is the place where they laid Him. But go, tell His disciples and Peter, 'He is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see Him, just as He told you.'" They went out and fled from the tomb, for trembling and astonishment had gripped them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.

And so, you ask yourself, is this how Mark ended his gospel? "They said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid"? You end on a note of fear? You end without mention of any of the appearances of Jesus?

When I was preaching through this text last week, I tried to stop here. I tried not to mention anything from verses 9-20, knowing that these verses are disputable. But I found it impossible. I had to mention the appearances of the risen Jesus

Remember, Mark was writing good news! "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God" (1:1). You may well translate it this way. "The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God." The book of Mark is good news!

It's all about the wonders of Jesus. It's all about how lived and died and rose from the dead. His life was a life of love. "The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve" (Mark 10:45). His death was death for our sins. "The Son of Man came to give His life a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45). His resurrection proves it all! It all is true -- every word that Jesus spoke! Can it possibly be that Mark ended this account of good news by talking about fearful women?

Many think so. Take John MacArthur, "The last word that Mark wrote was the word 'afraid, fear.' That's kind of a key. They were afraid. Not in the sense that they were afraid for their lives or they were afraid of being harmed or that they were in danger. This is the word phobos from which we get phobia, which means an irrational experience. They're literally experiencing bewilderment, amazement, astonishment, wonder. There are no human explanations. This thing ends in wonder." [\[2\]](#) Many people say the same thing as MacArthur does here.

This may be the case. But, it seems awfully abrupt to me. And it explains why the longer ending exists in the first place. Someone felt the need to finish the story, whether it was Mark (or someone else). Somebody knew that the story didn't end well in verse 8. And so, they finished the story.

In fact, more than one felt the need. Look at the end of verse 20. If you have a New American Standard translation, there is a portion of the verse all in italics, which reads, "And they promptly reported all these instructions to Peter and his companions. And after that, Jesus Himself sent out through them from east to west the sacred and imperishable proclamation of eternal salvation." And the note says, "A few late mss and versions contain this paragraph, usually after v 8; a few have it at the end of ch."

This is known as "The Shorter Ending of Mark." Somehow, the story didn't seem to end quite right at verse 8. So, either Mark (or others) wrote more to end the gospel of Mark. Either the shorter ending or the longer ending.

Now, there is reason to believe that Mark didn't write verses 9-20. The transition is difficult between verses 8 and 9. Verse 8 is speaking about the women in the plural. In verse 9, the subject is a masculine pronoun, referring to Jesus, a reference that needs to go back to verse 6 or 7. Furthermore, when Mary Magdalene is mentioned in verse 9, the writer feels the need to qualify who Mary is. She is the one "from whom He had cast out seven demons." But, Mary had already been introduced into the narrative in 15:47 and 16:1. Why mention here that she had seven demons cast out of her?

Some have mentioned a stylistic difference in the Greek from how Mark writes and how the ending reads, pointing especially to the differing vocabulary used in the ending. But, that may simply be because of the change in subject matter. In other words, the details of the longer ending are different than much of what Mark wrote. It only makes sense that he would use different vocabulary.

Donald Guthrie, a great New Testament scholar, said it well, ...

The most satisfactory explanation of all the textual evidence is that the original ended at 16:8 and that the ... endings were different editorial attempts to deal with verse 8. ... If 16:8 is not likely to have been Mark's intentional ending, could it possibly have been accidental? It is possible to conjecture that the scroll was damaged, but if so it must have happened to the original, or else to a very early copy. There is no means of ascertaining the correctness or otherwise of this conjecture. It has further been suggested that something happened to Mark at this point, so that he never completed the task, a suggestion which is not impossible, but which in the nature of the case cannot be confirmed. ... If we do not accept that Mark intended to end with 16:8, it would seem that the only course open to us is to admit that we do not know what ending he had in mind. ... No doubt the debate will go on, with little hope of a conclusive result. [\[3\]](#)

I share these things to put this passage in perspective. The vast majority of what you hold in your hand contains no such controversy. Of course, there are liberals who will seek to cast doubt on everything the Scripture holds. But, among believing scholars, there is no controversy. What you hold in your lap is an accurate translation of what Matthew and Luke and John and Paul actually wrote. In fact, for 16 chapters, we are sure that Mark wrote these words, with little or no controversy. There's a bit in chapter 9:44, 46.

The controversy comes down to the last 12 verses in our text. We don't know if Mark wrote it. We don't know if someone else wrote it. And yet, I do think that they are worthy of being preached.

Bruce Metzger, another great New Testament scholar, has an interesting take. He believes that Mark didn't write these verses. However, since they were surely attached to the gospel when the church recognized the gospels as canonical (in the Council of Carthage in 397), he points out that "the New Testament contains not four but five evangelic accounts of events subsequent to the Resurrection of Christ." [\[4\]](#) Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John all speak of the resurrection. And whoever wrote the extended ending of Mark gives further witness to the resurrection of Christ. If it's not Mark, it's a fifth witness to the resurrection.

Bottom line, John MacArthur says it well. "[The longer ending of Mark] should always be compared with the rest of Scripture, and no doctrines should be formulated based solely on them" [\[5\]](#)

The fact of the matter is that most of verses 9-20 are contained in the other resurrection accounts. There are only a few things in these verses that are unique to Mark. Let us hold on to them tenuously.

Having said that, with the remaining time this morning, let's dig into these verses. My second point, ...

2. The Appearances (verses 9-14)

When Jesus rose from the dead, it wasn't merely an empty tomb that convinced everyone. Jesus actually appeared to many people. He spoke with them. He ate with them. They touched Him. That was Paul's point in 1 Corinthians 15.

1 Corinthians 15:3-8

For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. After that He appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom remain until now, but some have fallen asleep; then He appeared to James, then to all the apostles; and last of all, as to one untimely born, He appeared to me also.

In other words, the appearances of Jesus verified His resurrection. It wasn't mere hearsay that led people to believe that Jesus had risen. It wasn't by simple implication of an empty tomb that led people to believe that Jesus had risen. No, it was His actual appearances before people that led them to believe that He had risen from the dead.

In verses 9-14, we see three of these appearances mentioned. The first comes in verse 9, ...

Mark 16:9

[Now after He had risen early on the first day of the week, He first appeared to Mary Magdalene, from whom He had cast out seven demons.

This is a tender scene of Jesus and Mary. The gospel of John elaborates on it.

John 20:11-18

But Mary was standing outside the tomb weeping; and so, as she wept, she stooped and looked into the tomb; and she saw two angels in white sitting, one at the head and one at the feet, where the body of Jesus had been lying. And they said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping?" She said to them, "Because they have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid Him." When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, and did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?" Supposing Him to be the gardener, she said to Him, "Sir, if you have carried Him away, tell me where you have laid Him, and I will take Him away." Jesus said to her, "Mary!" She turned and said to Him in Hebrew, "Rabboni!" (which means, Teacher). Jesus said to her, "Stop clinging to Me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to My brethren and say to them, 'I ascend to My Father and your Father, and My God and your God.'" Mary Magdalene came, announcing to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord," and that He had said these things to her.

You can feel the love that Mary had toward Jesus. She was grieved that He was gone. And when she saw Him alive, she embraced Him, never wanting to let go. Notice that Jesus wasn't a phantom or a ghost or a spirit. No, Jesus had risen in flesh and blood.

Jesus told Mary to go and report to the disciples, which is exactly what she did. The gospel of Mark records this, ...

Mark 16:10-11

She went and reported to those who had been with Him, while they were mourning and weeping. When they heard that He was alive and had been seen by her, they refused to believe it.

Last week I touched on this a bit. When the disciples first heard word of Jesus being risen from the dead, they didn't believe it. Doubts filled their hearts. It took a personal encounter to convince them. But even this wasn't always enough. Look at verse 12, ...

Mark 16:12

After that, He appeared in a different form to two of them while they were walking along on their way to the country.

This has reference to Jesus' appearance to the two on the road to Emmaus. The form of Jesus was "different" in the sense that the disciples didn't recognize Him as they walked along the way.

The story is told in Luke 24:13-35. It's one of my favorite stories in the Bible.

Luke 24:13-35

And behold, two of them were going that very day to a village named Emmaus, which was about seven miles from Jerusalem. And they were talking with each other about all these things which had taken place. While they were talking and discussing, Jesus Himself approached and began traveling with them. But their eyes were prevented from recognizing Him. And He said to them, "What are these words that you are exchanging with one another as you are walking?" And they stood still, looking sad. One of them, named Cleopas, answered and said to Him, "Are You the only one visiting Jerusalem and unaware of the things which have happened here in these days?" And He said to them, "What things?" And they said to Him, "The things about Jesus the Nazarene, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word in the sight of God and all the people, and how the chief priests and our rulers delivered Him to the sentence of death, and crucified Him. But we were hoping that it was He who was going to redeem Israel. Indeed, besides all this, it is the third day since these things happened. But also some women among us amazed us. When they were at the tomb early in the morning, and did not find His body, they came, saying that they had also seen a vision of angels who said that He was alive. Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just exactly as the women also had said; but Him they did not see." And He said to them, "O foolish men and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary for the Christ to suffer these things and to enter into His glory?" Then beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures.

Jesus may have said something like this, ...

Gentlemen, you are right to place your hope in Jesus of Nazareth, as the one who would redeem Israel (verse 21). But, have you ever thought of what this means? Do you realize how that redemption was to be accomplished? Think with me about what took place in the garden of Eden, when Adam and Eve fell into sin. To the serpent, he said, "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; He shall bruise you on the head, And you shall bruise him on the heel." (Gen. 3:15). In order for the serpent to receive his death-wound, the bruise on the head, the Messiah would be bruised

on his heal, but a flesh wound.

This signifies the suffering of the Messiah. Consider the Psalms, they speak much of the sufferings of the Messiah. To be sure, Psalm 2 speaks of the victory of the Messiah -- the Anointed One. But, before His reign, the rulers of the world spew their hostility toward the anointed one. "The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers take counsel together against the LORD and against His Anointed, saying, 'Let us tear their fetters apart and cast away their cords from us!'" (Ps. 2:1-2). This signaled a battle between the Messiah and the rulers of the earth. His sufferings would surely ensue.

Then, perhaps, the climax of all the prophetic Scriptures, comes in Isaiah 53. In that chapter, we see the servant of God coming. We see the Messiah coming. And yet, how does this chapter describe the Messiah? "He was despised and forsaken of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; and like one from whom men hide their face He was despised, and we did not esteem Him" (Is. 53:3). "He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; the chastening for our well-being fell upon Him, and by His scourging we are healed" (Is. 53:5). "He was oppressed and He was afflicted, yet He did not open His mouth; like a lamb that is led to slaughter, and like a sheep that is silent before its shearers, so He did not open His mouth" (Is. 53:7). "By oppression and judgment He was taken away; and as for His generation, who considered that He was cut off out of the land of the living for the transgression of my people, to whom the stroke was due?" (Is. 53:8). "His grave was assigned with wicked men, yet He was with a rich man in His death, because He had done no violence, nor was there any deceit in His mouth" (Is. 53:9).

Isn't this what happened to Jesus? Wasn't He "despised and forsaken" of men? (Is. 53:3). Wasn't He "oppressed and afflicted"? (Is. 53:7). Didn't He go to the slaughter "like a lamb" (Is. 53:7). Wasn't He "cut off out of the land of the living"? (Is. 53:8). Wasn't His grave assigned with a rich man -- Joseph of Arimathea? (Is. 53:9). All of these things were prophesied of the Messiah! Don't you see?

It was necessary for the Messiah to suffer. It was necessary for the Messiah to die! Isn't this what Jesus told you?

Do you remember the when He came into Jerusalem and confronted the Pharisees with the story of the man who prepared a vineyard and went away. When he sent his servants to collect the proceeds of the vineyard from the workers, they mistreated them and beat them. But, when the owner sent his beloved son, they beat him and killed him (Luke 20:9-18). Then, Jesus quoted from Psalm 118, predicting that the Messiah would be rejected, "The stone which the builders rejected became the chief cornerstone" (Psalm 118:22). Before the Messiah would become the chief cornerstone, it was necessary for him first to be rejected.

Or do you remember when Jesus was upon the cross? He took the words of Psalm 22 and applied them to Himself? "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" God would forsake the Messiah, allowing Him to die. Do you remember the other verses in that chapter?

Psalm 22:8 says, "All who see me sneer at me; They separate with the lip, they wag the head, saying, 'Commit yourself to the LORD; let Him deliver him; Let Him rescue him, because He delights in him.'" Isn't this what took place when Jesus was upon the cross? The chief priests and the scribes and the elders all mocked at him using these very words (Matt. 27:43). Do you remember verses 16-18?

Psalm 22:16-18 says, "For dogs have surrounded me; A band of evildoers has encompassed me; They pierced my hands and my feet. I can count all my bones. They look, they stare at me. They divide my garments among them, And for my clothing they cast lots." Didn't every one of these things take place?

With Jesus upon the cross, His hands and feet were pierced in His crucifixion. And yet, He died before they would come and break his legs to bring upon His death. Furthermore, they cast lots for his garments. It couldn't be more clear. It was necessary for the Messiah to suffer before entering His glory.

But, God wouldn't allow the suffering to be defeat. Do you remember Psalm 16:10: "You will not abandon my soul to Sheol; Nor will You allow Your Holy One to undergo decay"? That wasn't talking about David. His tomb is in Jerusalem. You have probably seen it (every school child takes a field trip there). His body underwent decay. It was talking about the Messiah. He wouldn't be in the tomb long enough for His body to undergo decay. He would be raised from the dead. That's why they can't find His body. Jesus Christ of Nazareth is alive!

He will enter into His glory! He will obtain the glory of the Messiah! "The government will rest upon His shoulders; His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace. There will be no end of His government or of peace." (Is. 9:6-7). He will be seated upon David's throne forever and ever (2 Sam. 7:13). Through Him all of the nations will certainly be blessed (Gen. 12:3).

But, it was necessary for Him, first to die.

Mark 24:28-35

And they approached the village where they were going, and He acted as though He were going farther. But they urged Him, saying, "Stay with us, for it is getting toward evening, and the day is now nearly over." So He went in to stay with them. When He had reclined at the table with them, He took the bread and blessed it, and breaking it, He began giving it to them. Then their eyes were opened and they recognized Him; and He vanished from their sight. They said to one another, "Were not our hearts burning within us while He was speaking to us on the road, while He was explaining the Scriptures to us?" And they got up that very hour and returned to Jerusalem, and found gathered together the eleven and those who were with them, saying, "The Lord has really risen and has appeared to Simon." They began to relate their experiences on the road and how He was recognized by them in the breaking of the bread.

Back in Mark, we read, ...

Mark 16:13

They went away and reported it to the others, but they did not believe them either.

The disciples found it difficult to believe that Jesus was raised from the dead. Don't ever be deluded into thinking that the disciples were gullible people who lived long ago in the age of superstition and were easily persuaded to believe that people raised from the dead. They were just like us. They weren't easily convinced!

Even in verse 14, we see Jesus mentioning their unbelief. Verse 14 contains a third appearance of Jesus at the end of Mark. It's the appearance of Jesus to the eleven disciples.

Now, presumably, this took place in Galilee. It's where Jesus had told the disciples to go (Mark 14:28). It's where the young man (or angel) told them to go (Mark 16:7). Jesus confronted them on their lack of belief.

Mark 16:14

Afterward He appeared to the eleven themselves as they were reclining at the table; and He reproached them for their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they had not believed those who had seen Him after He had risen.

When you read Matthew's account of Jesus appearing to the eleven disciples, you get the same feel. Matthew writes, "When they saw Him, they worshiped Him; but some were doubtful" (Matthew 28:18). And according to our text this morning, Jesus "reproached them for their unbelief and hardness of heart."

A big question here comes to you. Do you believe? Do you believe that God raised Jesus from the dead?

You might be thinking, "Well, if the disciples had a difficult time believing, isn't it permissible for us to be unbelieving? Isn't it permissible for me to have my doubts? They had the opportunity to see Jesus. They had the opportunity to touch Jesus and talk with Him. We don't. Why does God expect of us beyond what the disciples experienced?"

Well, look at what verse 14 says about why Jesus reproached them. "He reproached them for their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they had not believed those who had seen Him after He had risen." In other words, these disciples had been given eye witness testimony that Jesus had risen from others, who they had come to know and love and trust. But, they still didn't believe. And Jesus reproached them for their unbelief.

But, what about us? We have Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, all of whom testify to the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the grave. Perhaps (depending upon whether or not Mark wrote this section), we have another testimony to the resurrection of Jesus. In 1 Corinthians 15, we have the testimony of Paul as well. Furthermore, we have the advantage of hindsight. You know what they say, hindsight is 20/20.

We have time to think of the reactions of the people. We have time to consider the Old Testament prophecies. We have time to see the big picture of the life of Jesus. We have the later testimony of Paul, who explained the life of Jesus in his letters.

If we don't believe in the resurrection, there is no excuse. God has made it plain to us. And were Jesus to appear before us today, He would reproach every single one of you for not believing (verse 14).

But, when Jesus met with the disciples, it wasn't merely to reproach them. He had a plan for them. This is my third point, ...
3. The Commission (verses 15-18)

Mark 16:15

And He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation.

Verse 15 is practically identical to the great commission given in Matthew's account, ...

Matthew 28:18-20

All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and

lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

This is what Jesus has called the disciples to do. This is what Jesus has called each of us to do. This is what Jesus has called our church to do. We need to be about proclaiming the good news of Jesus to "all creation." That is, everybody! They need to hear! They need to hear about Jesus.

Mark 16:15

And He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation.

In our small group this past Friday at our house, we were looking at chapter 7 of David Platt's book, "Radical." The chapter is entitled, "There is No Plan B: Why going is urgent, not optional." The premise of the chapter is this: apart from Jesus, there is no salvation. John 14:6 says, "Jesus said to him, 'I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me.'" Acts 4:12 also says, "And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved." In 1 Timothy 2:5, we read, "For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus," And John 3:36 says, "He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him."

You might equally add Mark 16:16.

Mark 16:16

He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved; but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned.

Therefore, David Platt gives the logical conclusion: we must go and tell people about Jesus. They need to believe! They need to respond in baptism! If they don't believe, they will be condemned!

Oh, church family, let's be about doing this. Let's be about the business of telling people about Jesus. Let us tell them of His life. Let us tell them of His death. Let us tell them of His resurrection, that they might call upon the Lord and be saved.

As we come to verses 17 and 18, we begin to get on shaky ground, as there are a few things here that aren't mentioned anywhere else in the Bible. And with the tenuous nature of the ending, let us hold these things loosely.

In verses 17 and 18, Jesus gives five signs of things that would take place.

Mark 16:17-18

These signs will accompany those who have believed:

- (1) in My name they will cast out demons,
- (2) they will speak with new tongues;
- (3) they will pick up serpents, and
- (4) if they drink any deadly poison, it will not hurt them;
- (5) they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover."

We know that the disciples were casting out demons. Mark 3:14-15 tells us, "[Jesus] appointed twelve, so that they would be with Him and that He could send them out to preach, and to have authority to cast out the demons" And in Mark 6:7, "He summoned the twelve and began to send them out in pairs, and gave them authority over the unclean spirits." Mark 6:13 also says, "And they were casting out many demons."

We know that the early church was casting out demons. In Acts 8 we read of how Philip went to Samaria and "began proclaiming Christ to them" (Acts 8:5). Through his ministry, many unclean spirits were coming out of people (Acts 8:7). Many were being healed.

In Acts 16:18, we read of how Paul cast an evil spirit out of a slave girl who had a spirit of divination. And in Acts 19:12 we read of how Paul was the means that God used of evil spirits going out of people.

We know that the early church spoke with new tongues. On the day of Pentecost, the disciples were all together, ...

Acts 2:2-4

And suddenly there came from heaven a noise like a violent rushing wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. And there appeared to them tongues as of fire distributing themselves, and they rested on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit was giving them utterance.

These were languages, unknown to the speaker, but understood by others who spoke these languages.

Acts 2:7-11

They were amazed and astonished, saying, "Why, are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we each hear them in our own language to which we were born? Parthians and Medes and Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the districts of Libya around Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs—we hear them in our own tongues speaking of the mighty deeds of God."

This was a sign of the Holy Spirit coming upon the church and empowering believers.

The same thing happened when the gospel came to the Gentiles. When Peter came to the home of Cornelius, "the Holy Spirit fell upon" them and they were "speaking with tongues and exalting God" (Acts 10:44, 46). I believe that these Gentiles were speaking in languages foreign to them (Hebrew, perhaps), that was known to Peter and his friends.

The same thing happened when the gospel came to Ephesus and to those who had only heard of John's Baptism (Acts 19:6). Paul gave some instruction regarding how tongues should work in the life of the church (1 Corinthians 12-14).

These things really happened. We know that the early church was casting out demons (verse 17). We know that the early church spoke with new tongues (verse 17).

But, we are ignorant of the next two signs that would accompany believers. We don't know anything about them -- (3) picking up serpents, or (4) drinking poison and surviving (verse 18). The closest thing that we know is the account in Acts 28:3-6, when Paul was bitten by a snake and survived.

So, I just say, let's stay away from these things. Sadly, there are churches who do these things. They handle snakes in their church services. They are placing their doctrine and practice upon a tenuous text.

I have heard of preachers who have died from snake bites. Recently, I heard of a man dying from snake bites when he was handling them in church. His father had died the same way. And his son is a pastor, who will probably meet the same fate, as he handles snakes during church services as well. At some point, they might consider the fact that Mark 16:18 isn't working for them.

We continue, ...

Mark 16:18
(5) they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover."

We know that the early church laid hands on people and were healed. Acts 28:8 tells us, "And it happened that the father of Publius was lying in bed afflicted with recurrent fever and dysentery; and Paul went in to see him and after he had prayed, he laid his hands on him and healed him."

And my fourth and final point, ...

4. The Ascension (verses 19-20)

Mark 16:19-20
So then, when the Lord Jesus had spoken to them, He was received up into heaven and sat down at the right hand of God. And they went out and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them, and confirmed the word by the signs that followed.]

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on April 7, 2013 by Steve Brandon.
For more information see www.rvbc.cc.

[1] Taken from The Compact Guide to World Religions, edited by Dean C. Halverson

[2] <http://www.gty.org/resources/Sermons/41-85>

[3] Donald Guthrie, New Testament Introduction, pp. 90-93

[4] Bruce Metzger, The Text of the New Testament, p. 229

[5] From the MacArthur Study Bible