

Jesus' New World Order

Message 14

The Triumph of the King Mark 16:1-8 (Read 16:1-20)

Jesus is God

Tonight we conclude our studies in the Gospel According to Mark. Those of you who have been with us every week this semester have experienced the whole story of Jesus' earthly ministry and all the major issues He introduced. You have followed Jesus from his baptism by John, through His healing and preaching in Galilee, the growing conflict with the Jewish leaders, His foray into Gentile territory, and the final bloody showdown in Jerusalem. You saw Jesus demonstrate incredible authority over everything in sight – men, demons, doctrine, disease, nature – and even the authority to raise the dead and to forgive sin. You saw Jesus demonstrate His awesome compassion on everyone He met – a leper, demon possessed men, a ruler's child, an unclean woman. Everything in this Gospel leads to the conclusion that Jesus could only be God Himself. No other conclusion makes any sense. And now, if any doubt remained, all doubts are erased by Jesus' coming back from the dead.

The Text

Before we discuss the meaning of the passage before us, we need to take a few minutes to consider some questions about the text itself. You may have noticed that some Bibles have 20 verses in Mark chapter 16, but others have only 8 and some have alternate endings. Ordinarily I would not spend our time on textual issues, but this passage has significant variations, and unbelieving scholars can use it to lead you astray. As your pastor, I need to take a few minutes to help you guard against attacks on your faith and encourage you that the Bible is inherently trustworthy.

All scholars agree that the text of Mark through verse 8 of chapter 16 is essentially reliable. Different ancient Greek manuscripts may have trivial variations here and there, such as a missing article or a stray adjective, but there are no significant differences. But when we come to chapter 16, some manuscripts end at verse 8, some have one additional verse (the "short" ending), some have 12 additional verses (the "long" ending), and some have both short and long endings! How can we know what Mark actually wrote? You might decide the authenticity of the manuscripts on the basis of how many of each type exist. In that case the long ending is the overwhelming choice, and this is what you find in the King James and New King James versions. But there are problems with that position. Many scholars think that the manuscripts in largest supply are not the best manuscripts. This includes solid, believing scholars, too. It is possible that some of the less common manuscripts are closer to Mark's original than the majority manuscripts. Furthermore, scholars note that the tone and style of both endings is not at all like the rest of the book, casting further doubt upon these endings.

Now you must be very suspicious when scholars try to tell you that part of the Bible is not authentic because of stylistic differences. Some scholars have used such arguments to persuade people that Paul did not write some of his letters due to differences in vocabulary and themes, in spite of the fact that these letters have Paul's name in them! Beware of such arguments! Unbelieving scholars have deceived many and have caused the ruin of much of the church. Most of our largest and best denominations have been devastated by this sort of corrupt teaching. Such positions fail to allow that authors may write differently to different audiences because of varying situations. But it is one thing to deny that Paul wrote Colossians because it is different from Ephesians, and another to question the authenticity of a few verses at the end of Mark.

Although stylistic arguments are inherently suspicious, I must admit that Mark's endings sound

entirely different than the rest of the book. To my ear, they really do sound as if they were written by a different author. But why would someone come along and compose an addition to the Gospel? Well, what do you think of ending the Gospel at verse 8? “And they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.” Is that any way to end the glorious story of salvation? No! We need to include the appearance to the disciples and the Great Commission. So since it isn’t there, someone wrote it up and added it to the text. But now you should be wondering, “Why *wasn’t* Christ’s appearance to the disciples included? That really *is* important.” Good question. What is even more interesting is the way verse 8 ends. The last word is $\gamma\alpha\rho$, the Greek preposition “for”. In Greek, just as in English, you cannot end a sentence with a preposition.

From every angle the ending of Mark is perplexing. Honestly, no one knows for sure how it is supposed to end. My best guess is that the true ending has been lost. Perhaps the bottom of the page was torn off, and when some scribe was given the job of copying the manuscript, he saw that and composed something to replace what was missing. But the thing to remember, the essential point is this: no matter which ending is correct, the story and doctrines of Jesus are unaffected. Nothing is added by the endings, and nothing is lost by their omission which we cannot find elsewhere in scripture. The story of Jesus and the doctrines of our faith are secure in either case. So do not let your faith be shaken if you read or hear scholars say Mark’s ending is proof of the unreliability of the scripture. They are entirely wrong. Do not listen to them.

Implications of Jesus’ Death

Jesus’ death and resurrection is the single most significant issue for every generation. All people in every century must come to terms with the implications of Jesus’ dying and rising from the grave. If this really happened, it has to affect everything about how we live. But Jesus’ death and resurrection had a special significance for His first century followers. Everyone knew why Jesus was crucified. He was arrested by the Jewish rulers, tried, and found guilty of blasphemy. The Romans did not care about blasphemy. They crucified Jesus because He caused an insurrection. But whether Jesus died as a blasphemer or a rebel against the state, His followers would be guilty of the same crimes. Jesus’ disciples knew this. That is why they ran when Jesus was arrested and hid in the days following. They knew that if they persisted in believing in Jesus, they would surely be crucified too.

Have you ever lost something dear to you? Some of you have experienced the death of a parent. Some have suffered the loss of your home. One Lehigh student lost two of his closest friends last summer in a gruesome car wreck. How would you respond if you lost *all* your family, friends, and possessions as well as your life? This is what the followers of Jesus were facing. They were confronted with the ultimate personal crisis. They faced losing everything – and all for nothing. You might be willing to die for a good cause. Our servicemen are facing death in Iraq and Afghanistan to make the world a safer place for the rest of us. But no one wants to die for a failure. That is why the Vietnam was a disaster. When the sun rose Sunday morning Jesus’ followers were grappling with having wasted their lives for a failed messiah. Can you imagine anything more pathetically depressing?

The Godly Women

But while Jesus’ chosen disciples were cowering in fear, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome boldly marched out to the tomb early in the morning. It was a reckless, foolhardy move. What could they accomplish? The tomb was sealed with a massive stone and protected by armed guards. And what could come of being identified with Jesus? Might they not expose themselves to arrest for following Him? I can picture the disciples worrying about this dangerous errand.

“Mary Magdalene is impossible,” said Peter. “You can’t talk sense to her. She’s always running off to some foolhardy thing, but this is the most ridiculous of all! Besides, putting spices on the corpse won’t bring Jesus back to life.”

“You’re right,” James added. “And Mother is just as bad. Once she gets an idea in her mind there’s no use wasting your breath. And it’s not like her to join Mary Magdalene in her silly exploits.”

“I’m worried about all of them,” John said. “Salome is so easily frightened. I am so worried that they will get into serious trouble. If only there were something we could do!”

Why did they do it? It really was foolish. There was no way they could succeed. But the story of these three women is so important, three gospel writers included it in their accounts.

This story is significant because it reveals the three core Christian virtues: faith, hope, and love. Theirs was an impossible task. Ordinary human logic would have dictated that it was useless to go to Jesus’ grave that morning. But where human logic fails, faith begins. The one thing these women learned during their years with Jesus was to trust Him. I don’t think they expected Him to rise from the dead, because none of Jesus’ followers understood His predictions that He would rise. Furthermore, there they were with spices for the corpse! So their faith was not in Jesus’ resurrection, but in Him. They learned to trust Jesus with their lives, and that wasn’t going to change just because He had died. Perhaps they would die too. Then they would go to be with Him. They didn’t care. They knew Jesus had all authority and infinite compassion. They knew He would take care of them in life or in death, and they would rather be dead with Jesus than alive without Him. Their faith, greater than death, propelled these women to the tomb of Jesus.

But they didn’t go simply to mourn or remember. They went to *do* something. They took spices along. They had hope that God would do something. I would not have had such a hope. I would have insisted on a plan. They had no plan, but they were convinced that God would make it possible for them to anoint the body of Jesus. They didn’t bother to check out the situation in advance. They were so convinced that God would act, they marched right over there with the spices in hand.

Underneath it all was their intense love for Jesus. They loved Him to the point of death. These were the women who had wept at His cross after His disciples had run away to hide. They loved Him such that they would love even His dead body. They loved Him enough to buy expensive spices. Their love overwhelmed everything else in life. Their love for Jesus totally defined their identity and their actions. They loved Him with all their hearts.

Women, these are your models. You ought to read the gospels to see how Jesus lived and imitate Him, as we all should do. You should learn from Peter, Paul, and others how to follow Jesus. But Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome are your special models. They were not concerned about themselves. They were not frustrated that they were not called to be apostles. They were not jostling for prominence or recognition. They simply served. They served in spite of intense danger, and they are the heroines of our faith. In God’s plan they would never preach to the crowds or convert the Gentiles, but they didn’t care. By simply following Jesus, they joined the greatest in His Kingdom. And every time the resurrection of Jesus is read, the faith, hope, and love of these three women is retold as well.

We live in a time when men and women are taught to strive for greatness. The reason you came to Lehigh – men and women alike – is to get a high place in society. You don’t want to do manual or menial labor, so you are getting a college degree, and you came to Lehigh because a Lehigh degree will advance you more than a lesser institution. The attitude of “be all you can be” has infected the church as well, and Christians refuse to be held down. They jostle for position and recognition, for the best roles and most prestigious places. If they cannot advance in one church, they simply leave and go to a church where they can move up – often under the guise of “using their gifts”. Their heroes are Billy Graham and Bill Bright – and surely these men have been wonderfully used of God. But when did you hear anyone say her model was Mary Magdalene, the formerly demon possessed woman? She is too ordinary, too common, too embarrass-

ing. We want the limelight and positions which entail praise and rewards.

The most important way to learn to follow Jesus is by imitating others who follow Him – people like these three women. God has also given us living models – the older women and men in the church. Some of you have learned to follow Jesus by watching your parents. Others of you do not have parents that are following Jesus. All of us need older Christians around us because they are our immediate examples. This is one reason you need to be in a church. Fellowship on campus with your peers plays a big role in your spiritual development, but it can never take the place of fellowship in the church. Women, you need to know women who have served a husband, reared children, and managed a household in a godly way. Men, you need to know men who have loved a woman, reared children, and ruled a household to please God. Without this your spiritual growth will be stunted. Do not commit yourself to be a spiritual pigmy. Get off campus and into a church on Sunday morning where you can rub shoulders with Christians of all ages.

The Resurrection

For the first followers of Jesus, His resurrection was a stunning event. Words cannot convey the joy, the relief, the hope, the wonder, the excitement that Jesus resurrection brought to those men and women who had risked everything on the hope that Jesus was the Messiah. They were speechless with happiness, ecstatic with delight. They anticipated a life spent in building God's Kingdom, and even if they died for Jesus, at least their death would have some real meaning.

Looking back 2,000 years, Jesus' resurrection packs powerful implications for us as well. Jesus' resurrection does at least four very profound things for us today. First it is a vindication of Christ. It proves Jesus is who He said He is. Jesus claimed to be God. Rising from the dead proves He is no mere mortal. It further proves Jesus teaches the truth. He predicted He would rise again, and it happened. His resurrection vindicates Jesus' identity and His word.

Second, Jesus' resurrection assures us of forgiveness of sin. As we saw last week, Jesus died for our sin. When He died, the penalty for our sin was paid, so we are guilty no more. Since He died for us, we will not die in sin. And by rising from the dead, Jesus proves that God accepted His sacrifice. His resurrection assures us that God has surely forgiven us all our sins.

Third, Jesus' resurrection gives us hope of resurrection. Paul explains this in 1 Corinthians 15:12-22.

Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain. We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified about God that he raised Christ, whom he did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If in this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied. But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive.

1 Corinthians 15:12-22

You see, Paul is arguing that Jesus is the beginning of a long series of resurrections. He is the first; but just as surely as Christ rose from the dead, so we also shall rise from the dead. His resurrection is proof that we shall rise one day, too.

Fourth, Jesus' resurrection proves that He is fully King and Lord of heaven and earth. Psalm two has come to pass!

Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain?
The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together,
against the LORD and against his anointed, saying,
“Let us burst their bonds apart and cast away their cords from us.”
He who sits in the heavens laughs; the Lord holds them in derision.
Then he will speak to them in his wrath, and terrify them in his fury, saying,
“As for me, I have set my King on Zion, my holy hill.”
I will tell of the decree: The LORD said to me,
“You are my Son; today I have begotten you.
Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage,
and the ends of the earth your possession.
You shall break them with a rod of iron
and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel.”
Now therefore, O kings, be wise; be warned, O rulers of the earth.
Serve the LORD with fear, and rejoice with trembling.
Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and you perish in the way, for his wrath is quickly kindled.
Blessed are all who take refuge in him.

Psalm 2:1-12

The disciples recognized that the resurrected Jesus is now King and Lord of everything in heaven and earth. After Peter and John had been threatened by the Jewish leaders they prayed in the words of psalm two and applied them to their immediate situation.

And when they heard it, they lifted their voices together to God and said, “Sovereign Lord, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and everything in them, who through the mouth of our father David, your servant, said by the Holy Spirit, ‘Why did the Gentiles rage, and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers were gathered together, against the Lord and against his Anointed’ – for truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place... (Acts 4:24-28)

Conclusion

And so as we conclude our fall semester, we see in Mark's gospel beyond all doubt that Jesus is King and Lord of a New World Order. He is the Son of God who came to earth to establish God's Kingdom – a totally new way of life. He is both God and man who is the King in God's Kingdom. He rules over men, over disease, over demons, over nature, and over sin. He fought Satan, the Jews, and the Romans – and in the end He won. Jesus' victory was His resurrection from the dead, and now He lives forever to reign over us.

This new world order consists of people who believe in Jesus and follow Him. They keep God's laws and show the compassion of Jesus on their neighbors. They know Jesus loves them, and they love His word. But the power of Jesus' Kingdom is not limited to those who believe in Him now. The new order He has established is spreading over the whole world. In every continent and nation the gospel of Christ is converting millions to faith in Him. Like the mustard seed that becomes a tree that fills the garden, Jesus' Kingdom is filling the earth. It is truly a new world order.

Are you part of the new world order? Are you in Jesus' Kingdom? The only reasonable response, the only sane response to the gospel is to worship and serve Jesus. Be wise, be instructed, "serve the LORD with fear and rejoice with trembling...Blessed are all those who put their trust in Him." Amen, Lord Jesus. May we always worship and serve you alone.

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