

Believe, Go, Proclaim!

- Mark 16:9-20
- Let me give you a mini-lesson this morning on the authenticity of Scripture and how we know it is the Word of God that we can trust and build our lives upon. Do you see the script after verse 8 that says, “Some of the earliest manuscripts do not include 16:9-20”? You see the same at the end of John 7, because the story of the woman caught in the act of adultery is not in the oldest manuscripts of John’s gospel. What does that mean, “earliest or oldest” manuscripts? The Gospel writers just wrote one manuscript each, right? That’s right, but we do not have any of the original manuscripts. We only have copies. There are more than 25,000 copies of the New Testament, complete or fragmented, some within 20 years of the originals, more than any other ancient writing. Homer's Iliad is a distant second with a mere 643 manuscript copies, and with the oldest copy dated at 500 years after the original.
- Some copies differ in a word here, or a sentence there, or even a whole section, as we see in this text. Why is that? If you lived in Israel in A.D. 60 and you wanted a copy of Mark’s Gospel, how would you get it? You couldn’t run down to Straight Street in Damascus and pop into the Office Depot with Mark’s original manuscript. You had to sit down with it and painstakingly write it out, one word at a time. And what if you made a copy error, as many did? Well, you had a copy, but it was not a perfect copy, and if others made copies from your copy, they would not be perfect either, and they may make other errors in transcribing your copy! How do we know that we have the genuine text, or at least one that we can trust to be accurate in all things that matter? An article by Craig Blomberg in the Gospel Coalition states that there were an average of 16 variations per manuscript, and “the vast majority of these involved variations in the spelling of words; the use or non-use of an article, conjunction or particle; or slight variations in syntax. The only two that involve more than one or two verses are Mark 16:9-20 and John 7:53-8. Most importantly, no doctrine or ethical teaching of Christianity depends solely on one or more disputed texts.”
- So, some believe copyists added to the Gospel of Mark as they believed he had written it. Others, like James Edwards, believe that Mark did not end his account with verse 8. He writes, “It is hard to imagine a Gospel that begins with a bold, resounding announcement of divine Sonship (1:1) ending on a note of fear and panic.” Verse 8, Edwards says, even breaks off in mid-sentence, which is out of character for the rest of the text. Another argument that Mark did not end it with verse 8 is that Matthew follows Mark’s Gospel very closely. Remember, Mark was the first Gospel writer. Mark 16:6-8, the account of the angel speaking to the women and them leaving the tomb is paralleled almost verbatim in Matthew 28:5-8. So, it is believed by many scholars that Mark’s Gospel ended the same way Matthew’s does, with the women telling the disciples they had seen Jesus and he was alive and that he would meet them in Galilee. He did meet them there, and Matthew ends with the Great Commission. Here’s a final piece of evidence. Mark has many signature motifs, one of which is exousia, the authority of Jesus as the Son of God. Every time Mark writes about the authority of Jesus, Matthew reproduces that in his own Gospel. Except here. Matthew includes Jesus’ last commandment, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.” It is

plausible to believe then, that Mark's Gospel had that important moment accounted for, first.

- Ok, let's look at this text today under three brief points: Belief and unbelief, Great Commission, and Ascended Savior.
- **Belief and Unbelief (verses 9-14)**
- This section is a mosaic of three resurrection appearances of Jesus, built around the theme of calling the disciples from unbelief to belief. The first reflects John's account of Mary Magdalene weeping outside the tomb, telling the angels, "They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him." She then turned around and saw Jesus, but thought he was the gardener. Until he called her by name: "Mary." She went and told the disciples, "I have seen the Lord." Mark's gospel says they heard her, but "they would not believe it."
- The second story reflects Luke's gospel account, where two followers of Jesus, not two of the eleven apostles, meet Jesus on a country road. Luke tells us they were on the road to Emmaus. I love that story. They didn't recognize the risen Savior, and they couldn't believe that this guy walking with them didn't know what had happened. One of them, Cleopas, said to Jesus, "Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem who does not know these things that have happened...?" Ha! Jesus is the *only* one who truly knows what happened. He reveals himself to them in the breaking of bread and then vanishes. They raced back to Jerusalem and told the eleven, "The Lord has risen indeed." Mark says, "but they did not believe them."
- In the third story, Jesus appears to his eleven disciples and rebukes them for their "unbelief and hardness of heart, because they had not believed those who saw him after he had risen." Three stories, three witnesses to the risen Savior, in ascending order of reliability, according to Jewish culture: a woman, two men, and Jesus Himself. The message is clear. Jesus Christ is risen from the dead. Believe it. But not only that. Go tell it on the mountain. And, everywhere else. That leads us to:
- **Great Commission (verses 15-18)**
- Verse 15 is a shortened version of Matthew 28:16-20, and we call it the Great Commission. Living the Great Commandment ("love the Lord with all your heart, soul, mind and strength") will lead us to living the Great Commission. What are we commanded to do? 1- Go into all the world. We cannot each individually do that, but the multitude of disciples can, and are doing it, and will continue. Why? Because the Gospel is of universal importance. It is ordained for all creation. Wherever believers go, we go with the message of the Gospel. It is to be on our lips, and it is to be evident in our lives. We live it, yes. But we also speak it. Why are we commanded to do this? 2- The Gospel has eternal consequences. Verse 16: Those who believe will be saved. Those who do not believe will be condemned. How are we to do this? 3- The proclamation of the Gospel will always be accompanied by the power of God. In fact, it *is* the power of God. Paul wrote, "For I am not ashamed of the Gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes..." (Romans 1:16). Sometimes the proclamation of the Gospel is accompanied by miraculous signs. We can see all of these signs mentioned here, except for the drinking of poison and not being hurt, in the book of Acts. Demons are cast out

by the apostles. Some people speak in new tongues when they believe. Some people were miraculously healed. And Paul was bitten by a deadly serpent that was hiding in a bundle of sticks on the island called Malta, and had no ill effects. By the way, there's no evidence in Scripture of anyone handling snakes, or picking up a snake on purpose. None. There is also no mention of anyone in the New Testament drinking poison, either on purpose or by accident. Josephus, the Jewish historian, wrote about a cult in the first century that was connected with deadly drugs and had some measure of influence in Christian circles. But many believe that this reference is metaphorical. The leaven of the Pharisees was their hypocritical teaching, Jesus said, and the deadly poison here could refer to heresy.

- Don't miss the forest for the trees. The important point is not the signs that may accompany the Gospel, but that the Gospel is the power of God for salvation, and we have the privilege to proclaim it!
- **Ascended Christ (verses 19-20)**
- Luke records the ascension in his final verses and writes about it again in Acts 1. Matthew and John do not. But whether this was part of Mark's original gospel does not matter and it does not change the truth. Jesus Christ is risen. He is alive. And he ascended into heaven and, just as David wrote in Psalm 110, the King of kings is seated at the right hand of the Father. Hebrews 7 says Christ is a priest forever and "he always lives to make intercession for (us)," for those who have drawn near to God through him.
- One year and eight months, and 70 sermons have brought us to the conclusion of this study. I am going to miss the Gospel of Mark. But I have grown to love the Savior more and, I hope, trust him more as we have walked with him from his baptism to his ministry to his suffering to his resurrection to his ascension into glory.
- Prayer
- Greet One Another