

God's Plan - Part Two

Great Commission

By Dr. Jeff Meyers

Bible Text: Mark 16:15-16

Preached on: Sunday, April 14, 2013

I do want to encourage you this morning to open your Bibles to the gospel of Mark chapter 16. Now Mark is actually the second book of the New Testament and the 16th chapter is the last chapter of the gospel of Mark. And if you were here with us last week this is really the same song, second verse. But if you are a first time guest with us, you may be kind of at a loss right now. So allow me to catch you up to speed.

This calendar year we have had the privilege of walking through the book of Matthew looking at the person of Jesus, the life of Jesus, the ministry of Jesus, the passion of Jesus from one particular perspective. As we will see in just a moment, all the gospel writers brought a unique perspective. But Matthew showed us who Jesus was; the humble King of kings, the King of creation, the King of glory descending upon earth, being wrapped in swaddling clothes, allowing his closest confidants just to be a simple average person that we might call a next-door neighbor or ourselves. Yet there were the miracles and there were the teachings. There was ultimately the death and, yes, the resurrection, that climactic event, that exclamation point on the life and the ministry of Jesus. But as we studied last week, the empty tomb, the resurrection, what we know as Easter was not the end of the sentence. It was not the end of the thought. It was actually merely a dash. It was the continuation to something else. And what we see in the ministry of Jesus “post” resurrection, in those 40 plus days where he walks and he talks with his disciples and other people before his eventual ascension to the right hand of the Father, he gives very explicit and specific instructions on how they can be world changing agents.

And that is really the motto. That is really the idea around hopefully everything we do here at First Baptist. There is this motto that has been adopted: Change the world, start here. And yet we live in a world where everybody wants to see it changed. Everybody wants their particular stamp of something placed upon it. And so what we are doing is looking through what we know as the Great Commission passages, those passages at the end of all of the gospels where Jesus says, “Now that you have experienced, now that you have believed, how do you or what do you take from this moment on into the world?”

Last week in Matthew 28:18-20, probably the most famous Great Commission passage where he says, “Go into all nations and teach them everything I have taught you. Baptize them in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.” And today we come to Mark chapter 16, two very simple verses, verses 15 and 16, the Great Commission, from the perspective of the gospel writer Mark.

Today once again this is a plan. This is the how to. This is how we can see our homes changed. This is how we can see our communities changed. This is literally how we can

see the world changed, but we must do it his way rather than “being creative” to make it our way.

I would invite you to look at Mark 16:15-16. Very simply it says:

And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.¹

Boy, that kind of just sums it up, doesn't it? And in this passage of Scripture, two very simple verses, there are really two main ideas that I want you to leave with, but we are going to have our preliminary one in a moment. The two ideas are this. I want you to understand what is the process that God has given us to see the world change and what is the product that is to be implemented to see that process come to fruition.

But before we deal with the process and the product, there are a few preliminary thoughts that we have to deal with. And this is where the message today is going to feel like a Bible study more than a sermon, but we are going to lay some groundwork, because when we establish what we are about to establish, I think the process and the product will come to light. The first preliminary thought we must deal with is this supposed “problem.” I put the word problem in quotations. If you have a study Bible, if you have a Bible that either in the margins or below the lines gives man's commentary, humanities' commentary, ideas, suggestions or extras, please understand that everything between the lines or everything under the lines does not come from God, but comes from man. That being said, in many of your Bibles when you get to the gospel of Mark 16 beginning at about verse nine sometimes there is a foot note, there is an asterisk and some verbiage, something such as this: that some of the earlier or many of the most ancient of manuscripts do not include verses nine through 20. Do you see that in your Bible? It is one of those, what we call textual variances. And today we are not going to get into all the academic minutia that is involved in there, but there are some people out there that really struggle with the passage of Scripture that is contained at the end of the gospel of Mark. And I believe they struggle for two main reasons. The first one is because of the verses that I did not read.

Look at verse 17. It says:

And these signs shall follow them that believe; In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; They shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover.

So then after the Lord had spoken unto them, he was received up into heaven, and sat on the right hand of God. And they went forth, and

¹ Mark 16:15-16.

preached every where, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following. Amen.²

There is this struggle that says to those that believe that signs will follow them. And it talks about these miraculous events that if you were to be honest in your life you have probably never seen in your life. And so we look at these things and say, whoa, now, if it didn't happen in my life then obviously it shouldn't happen in anybody's life and I just struggle with this. But let me allow some clarification. Not only do you see particularly in the book of Acts; you see the apostles in the early days of what we know as the Church; there is this shadow of Peter and some one is healed. There is the handkerchief of Paul and someone is healed. You see these apostles. You see these original initiators of the early church. The Lord doing some incredible, amazing, "signs" in their life. But I think another passage of Scripture that may help us out here is 1 Corinthians 1:20-22 that says the Jews require a sign, but the Gentiles wisdom. It was the Jewish community who came to Jesus over and over and over again and said, "Jesus, show us a sign."

You know, it was the Gentile community, it was the Romans of Jesus' day who didn't struggle so much with the supernatural. They just wanted to hear what was this new message and what are you promising that others do not. And so when it says here that signs shall follow, please understand we are going not allude to this in a moment. In Acts 2 when Peter gets up in that famous Pentecost sermon it says that there were Jews there from every nation. In Acts 10 when the Gentiles, when the Romans known as Cornelius got saved, it said the Jews were amazed that the same sign that came upon them in Acts 2 came upon the Gentiles in Acts 10. And so there is this struggle with the signs.

The other struggle, though, is kind of with the language. And this may not be something you ever noticed or ever even cared about, but it is very relevant to what I am going to share in a moment. In these last few verses of the book of Mark there are words that are used, there are phrases that are used that are found nowhere else in the gospel of Mark. And so people have struggled with saying, "Why would the tone change? Why would the attitude change? Why would everything change at the end?"

Well, I don't know about you, but when I realized that Jesus was Savior and the tomb was empty, everything changed in my life. And so that being said, the problem I think can be solved when we look at the person. This is what is going to kind of give us the frame work of the two main points today. The person known as John Mark is the individual whom the Holy Spirit utilized to give us these 16 chapters of Scripture.

Now I do believe from Genesis 1 to Revelation 22 that every word that you have in your Bible is inspired by God. Every word is breathed by God. Every word is from God, by God, for God. We have got all that covered, right? That being said, what you do see is that even though the Lord gave us every word he wanted us to have, that he utilized the individuals and the personalities and the backdrop of those whom he used.

For example, you see in the prophet Jeremiah a different flare than the prophet Isaiah.

² Mark 16:17-20.

And in particular in this context we see a really much different flare with the gospel writers. You may not know too much about whom we know as John Mark. He is probably most well known in the book of Acts. He gets in a disagreement with the apostle Paul. They split ways and at the end of Paul's ministry he says, "Bring John Mark back to me for he is profitable for ministry."

But if you take the four gospel writers, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, the one that we know as Mark or John Mark I find to be the most intriguing and the most fascinating, because when Jesus' ministry was occurring, when he lived, when he did the miracles, when he died, when he rose from the dead, unlike Matthew and Luke and particular John, John Mark most likely was a young man/teenager. Have you ever noticed that teenagers just see the world a lot differently than non-teenagers do? And that being said, I think that helps us see a lot of the difference here.

For example, let's take the Great Commission. The passage that we studied last week in Matthew we will study again next week in Luke. Matthew was a tax collector. Matthew was a CPA. Matthew specialized in Microsoft. Excel spreadsheets were his best friends in the day. So how does Matthew convey the Great Commission? He says, "Go into all nations, teach them, baptize them in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Don't get that messed up. Get all three." Just like an accountant would. He has all the details, everything in line.

Next week we are going to hear from whom we know as the great physician Luke, the one who Paul said in Colossians 4:14 was this fabulous physician. And in the Great Commission he mentions the resurrection of the dead. Why? He is a medical doctor. He is still blown away by the fact that someone who was medically dead is now alive. And so you the aspects of who they are coming out.

You say, "Jeff, what does that have to do with the problem? What does that have to do with verses 15 and 16?"

This is the Great Commission as if a 16 year old wrote it. Notice what it says. He who believes is good. He who doesn't is not. End of story. What are the details? Don't have them. What are the parameters. Don't know. Here it is. And it basically is just so simple. Go in, preach to all creatures. If you believe and baptized you are saved. If you don't you are in bad shape. It is over.

Two simple words. And yet this is the mantra of the gospel of Mark. As I mentioned earlier, it doesn't mention the virgin birth. It doesn't mention the upbringing of Jesus. I mean, it starts with the gospel. This is the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ. In chapter one we have the temptation of Jesus. You remember the temptations, right? Three very specific temptations. Matthew gives 14 verses. Luke gives 14 verses. Mark gives two. He says the Spirit led him into the wilderness, he came out, and everything was good. Is that not the perspective of a young person?

And so sometimes we struggle with the fact that here in the last part of the gospel of Mark it may sound a little different or be a little wild and there are these signs that come up. Let me give you the favorite phrase of a young teenage boy. Are you ready? “Dude, did you see that?” In other words, when they are amazed by something they want to say that was unbelievable. You ask that young man how did it happen. I don’t know, but, dude, it happened. What was the chronological order? Don’t know, but, dude, it happened. That is what it is like when you see through the lens of a young person. And that is why in the book of Mark, 16 chapters, 63 times the phrase “and immediately.”

Now I do not have a teenager in the home yet. But I have got a couple who think they are. Do you realize that if you include primary school, high school and college, I have got 25 years of education and I can’t keep up with this. They are telling me this story about what happened and it is here and it is there and it is all over the map. And in the end I say, “Now, son, so what is the point?” Oh, we made the basket. Ok, I didn’t get all that detail, but that is the way that young people communicate. And so that being groundwork here, when we talk about what is the process, what is the means by which the gospel of Jesus Christ can have the world change starting right here. We see that laid out for us and we have a perspective that some of us don’t get, some of us haven’t gotten and some of us have a hard time struggling with. But you are going to see that it can be incredibly beneficial to our understanding of the gospel.

So what is the process? The process according to Mark 16:15 is to preach the gospel to every creature. You think of seven billion people. How does that work out? Well, thankfully there is a little extra commentary in the book of Acts 1:8. Jesus made this statement before his ascension. He said, “Wait here in Jerusalem. When the Holy Spirit is come upon you you shall go forth as my witnesses throughout Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and the uttermost parts of the earth.”

And so what is the process? What is the method? What is the means by which the gospel of Jesus Christ is given? And the Bible makes it very clear that there is a strategy. And here in Mark 16:15 it may not look very strategic: just go to every creature. But Jesus laid it out. He said, “You start in Jerusalem. And then you go to Judea, Samaria and the uttermost.” In other words, start where you know best and then work out from there.

Now I have got a picture today to help you with this strategy. In fact, you will find it in your worship guide if you open it up. But we are also going to put it on the screen. I want to introduce you to a process of sharing the gospel, a process of telling people about Jesus that you may or may not be familiar with, but when you hear about it you are going to say, “Oh, I get that.” We call it the concentric circles of concern. Really that is just a very simple basic way to put the plan of sharing the gospel in motion in your life. Now you will notice in these circles there is a bunch of circles within a circle. But when it starts out, it is centered upon you. That is critical here, because you cannot share with somebody something you do not have. You cannot tell somebody about salvation if you do not possess it. In fact, my favorite definition of evangelism is one beggar telling another beggar where to find food. So you have got to start with yourself.

Now every person who has ever been involved in multi-marketing or insert sales or a salesman in general knows the next circle is always family, right? You start with your family because you have got to start with those people that you have a relationship with. You can call them up. They will sit down with you. They will have a conversation and so naturally the easiest, most effective process for changing the world starting right here is taking the gospel of Jesus Christ and working first with those whom you already have a relationship with. And that is our family.

Then you take it a step up and it becomes our friends. These are the ones we play ball with. These are the ones we hang out with. These are the ones we work out with. These are the ones we sew with or whatever your hobby may be or your passive life. These are those individuals. And, by the way, some of these may or may not be considered Facebook friends, ok? Because, you know, we all know some of those really aren't friends. They are just kind of crossing the electronic path there. But these are the people whom you have a relationship with and hang out with.

Then it goes up to coworkers or maybe classmates if you are in school. These are the people that you see maybe for a great length of time, but it is very confined and it is in a very specific scenario. You don't hang out with them much outside of the office. You don't see them except for from this hour to that hour on this day and that day. And if it were not for work or if it were not for school you probably wouldn't have a relationship with them whatsoever.

And then it ends with what we know as the mission field. Now this is the reason why this is so strategic in this gospel. When he says go to every creature, what is your first thought? Go unto the other side of the world. Go to somebody who doesn't speak my language, go to someone whose culture I don't get. If we are going to go to every creature, I have got to reach seven billion plus people and what ends up happening is we end up getting into a frenzy, getting into a mess and getting frustrated. Yet when Jesus says, "Hey, guys, when you go out, start where you are, then expand out a little bit, then expand out a little bit further."

And so when we talk about the process by which we are to share the gospel of Jesus Christ, please understand. The most effective means of doing so is starting with those relationships that you have already established, working through those and then beginning to go outward. Now that is the strategy that Jesus laid out. That is the strategy that is "most effective." But there is another word I want to give you today. It is the word saturation. You know what saturation is. To be saturated is to be completely immersed, completely consumed by. So how is it that you and I as individuals who have a relationship, as individuals who are part of the same church, how do we change the world? Notice that that motto does not say change the county. It doesn't say change the state or even change the country. It says change the world, starting here. Jesus did not pull the original apostles aside and say, "Ok, guys, you have got enough fire power just for this side." No, what did he say? He said, "Go into all the world." He did not limit them by their number. He did not limit them by their education. But he said, "Hey, if you

will start here in Jerusalem, then go to Judea, then go to Samaria, then go to the uttermost parts of the earth, this will get taken care of.” And, by the way, it did not take long for the whole world to begin to hear the message of Jesus Christ.

Now here is what I want to do. And this may look a little complicated, but hopefully I can break it down for you simply. I want to take that same set of circles and turn it upside down and layer it over the first one. I want you to imagine, as you are seated here today, that you and I are in a private conversation right now. I know there are people all around this room. But this is just you and I. I am going to be person A. You are going to be person B. I have people in my life. I have family members. I have friends. I have coworkers and associates. And I have those who I have no relationship whatsoever that you would call the mission field.

You have the exact same dynamics. So let’s just imagine that it is you and I. We are the only two people in the room. You do realize that some of the people whom you may work with may be my friends. Some of the people who are your relatives, I may have a hobby that correlates with them. There may be individuals in your life that you consider the mission field that may be my relatives or friends. In other words, we are not lone rangers. When he sent them out, as he sends us out, what happens is our lives intersect so that the process is that the gospel will saturate the world.

Now let me give you a good example of this. Several years ago I was speaking to an individual that was concerned about a coworker of his, concerned about their spiritual state and where they were and struggles that they were having. And this individual began to talk to me about this individual. And it just sounded familiar. You know, you have that conversation where that story sounds... and I stopped him. Do you know what I realized? That their coworker was actually a relative of mine. You see how that overlaps?

How many times have you said that? You are talking to someone and have said, “Well, I didn’t know you knew them. They are my so and so. They are my friend. They are my neighbor. They are my coworker. They are my relative.”

Now I want you to imagine this illustration. We started with just you and me overlapping. Now imagine taking all thousand of us in the room and overlapping our service. You know what would happen is that there would be so many different angles by which this person would hear the gospel they would be saturated with it. They would be saturated from family members, saturated from friends, saturated with coworkers, saturated with the mission field. You say, “So why does it not happen?” Because you cannot finish a race you don’t start. In other words, if we don’t start with our family, we will never go to our friends. If we don’t continue to our friends, we will never go to our coworkers, et cetera. And so what this diagram or what this illustration shows us is that every one of us will do the same thing Jesus told us to do, start with those you know best and work your way out. You will be amazed at what you see happening. That is the simple process.

You know, when you hear that phrase, “Change the world, start here,” it is very daunting, isn’t it? You think, there is no way. I can give you the process. Start with yourself then

Speak with your family, speak with your friends, speak with your coworkers, speak with those whom you have casual relationships with. If every one of us will do the same thing you would be amazed at how many people would hear the message of Jesus Christ. In fact, you know, there is a joke. In fact, it is really, I guess, verifiable that between every human being there are six degrees of separation. Every human being on the planet, there are only six degrees of separation. That being said, the only thing keeping the process from happening is from us actually doing it. And yet Mark makes it real simple. Just like a teenager. Hey, go to every creature. Make it happen. But yet it is so in a process laid out.

So the last issue is... we talked about this process. What is the product? What is it that we share? What is it that changes the world? What is the antidote to the disease of this world? What is it that will actually get results? Because everybody is trying and most people aren't getting much out of it. I want you to notice what verse 16 says. It says:

“He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.”³

Now there are two things or two products or two items that are addressed. The first one here is salvation. Salvation is simply this. It is that we are sinful people in need of a Savior. And please hear me. That is the message the world is not getting. That is the message that we need to share. That is the product, if there is anything the church needs to sell, is that humanity is sinful. Humanity is separated from God. Humanity is dirty and we need a Savior.

We live in a world where everybody wants to try to convince everybody else that they don't have any problems. Folks, look in the mirror. You are messed up. We have issues. It says that we need to be saved. You don't need to be saved unless you are lost. You don't need to be found unless you are lost. Use any analogy that you want. And yet we need to come to an understanding that for people's lives to be changed—hear me very clearly—no amount of money given to them will solve it. No amount of justice given to them will solve it. This is the very simple product that every human being needs, no matter how much they are worth, how well-endowed, how much they have been given or not given, according to the Bible, all have sinned. And when we go to family and friends and coworkers and share with them the truth that we are sinners in need of a Savior, it says whoever believes.

Now I want you to notice it says whoever believes and is baptized shall be saved. Whoever believes not shall be damned. Now I want you to notice two things very clearly in the second half of that verse. Number one, it does not say that a lack of baptism will cause damnation. It does not say that. In fact, I can think from that perspective of the teenager. He just said it matter of fact. Whoever is saved and baptized. In other words, one goes with the other, peanut butter and jelly. You are going to do one; you are going to do the other. But whoever does not believe is damned.

³ Mark 16:16.

Now here is the thing I want to address, of all the four gospel writers, as far as just their personal lives, you realize that John Mark, the teenager, would have been the most progressive. He would have been the most contemporary. He would have been the most edgy. Why? He is a teenager. They get into things and understand things that adults don't. And yet he made it very clear that without Jesus damnation happens. He did not soft sell it. He did not seeker sensitize it or whatever words you want to use. He said without Jesus damnation occurs. That means hell.

Folks, we live in a world today, and to quote a friend of mine, we have taken the blood out of Jesus and we have taken the hell out of eternity. And we have got to have them both. And John Mark as a teenager, you know sometimes it takes a young person to knock us adults in the side of the head. Because as we get older, as we "mature" we think, "Well, somehow we have got to make this more palatable. Somehow we have got to make this more understandable."

A teenager walks in the room and says, "Here is the deal. Jesus, heaven; no Jesus, hell. No questions."

Folks, that is what we need to get back to. That is the message that changed the world. It is salvation. That is what we need. You realize that once Jesus said, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and all these things will be added." If people start getting saved all the other stuff will come into play eventually. But there is a second product and I mention it, as a "symbol." Whoever believes and is baptized. You know, I know that you are in a Baptist church. I realize the fact that over the last 400 years as an entity we have specialized in what we call, you know, post-belief baptism or adult baptism meaning that being, "dunked in the water" occurs after you have made a conscious understanding that you are a sinner in need of a Savior.

You say, "Jeff, why would you put so much emphasis? You said it is not necessary for salvation."

Absolutely. The thief on the cross never touched a drop of water. That guy is just as much a resident of heaven as I ever will be. But I want you to understand something. The perspective of Mark chapter 16 is of a young progressive, hey, let's get this thing done. Do you know of all the things he could have mentioned that were important to us walking as a believer he mentioned baptism. Now, remember, we are dealing with a young person, right? That is the perspective. In other words, we are only going to give you the meat. We are only going to tell you what is critical. He says, "If you believe you are baptized."

I want to make something clear and don't go waving and screaming. He did not say whoever believes and tithes. Now that is something we ought to be a part of and it is something that is a discipline that is important to our lives. He says, "But whoever believes and is baptized..." In other words it was so critical to our understanding of who we are in Christ, that even the shortest, most brief Great Commission statement puts it in

there. And yet we live in a day when we say, “Well, it is just not that big of a deal. I mean, after all, we are in the 21st century. I mean putting people under water, isn’t that a little archaic? Isn’t that a little outdated? Doesn’t that just seem a little foolish? And yet it is the young progressive one who mentions it so very clearly.

That being said, what it simply says is that we ought to live a life beginning with our families, extending to our friends, that communicates that all are sinners in need of a Savior and when that has been realized in our lives here is the key to the symbol. We will identify ourselves with Jesus Christ no matter what that looks like or what it feels like or what others say about it. There is an identification with who he is.

Now let’s just be honest as we come to our time of invitation. We live in a world today that if you believe in the media hype is on the brink of a nuclear conflict. We live in a world where poverty and despair are at an all time high. And you may be thinking to yourself, “Jeff, you mean to tell me that the antidote is that simple?”

Yes. Jesus could have told them anything. But he told them, as you go, communicate they are sinners in need of a Savior. Identify with me and I will change the world. As we addressed this last week and I think this is our Achilles heel. We think we have got to get creative. We think we have got to get new and progressive. What we really need to do is what Jesus told us to do. And it all works out from there.