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Sermon Notes

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Personal Encounters with the Resurrected Lord

Mark 16:9-20

The foundation to our faith in Christ is the scripture... the inerrant, perfect Word of God.

We know literally nothing about Jesus Christ apart from scripture. Our salvation depends on faith in Jesus, and faith in Jesus depends on knowledge about Jesus, and knowledge about Jesus depends wholly and completely on the written Word of God.

We can learn about God the Creator from creation...

Romans 1:20 For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities-- his eternal power and divine nature-- have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.

BUT creation does not tell us that the Creator had a Son who became a human being, lived a sinless life, did great signs and wonders, taught amazing truths, died an atoning death on the cross, and rose physically from the dead. Creation does not tell us that we have sinned... and that our sins can be forgiven by faith in Jesus Christ. All of that comes from the BIBLE... the written Word of God.

Key to our salvation is this one assertion:

“Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”
(Romans 10:13)

Paul means clearly, the Lord Jesus. To “call on the name of the Lord” means to believe that Jesus is LORD, that is GOD. Name also refers to his reputation, and that involves his history. His person, his words, his deeds.

So, before we can call on the name of the Lord, we have to believe in him. And before we can believe in him, we have to hear about him... the facts of his person and his life. And before we can hear about him, we have to have an accurate information source about him. That is the WORD OF GOD, or the Word of Christ that we are proclaiming. So Paul says

Romans 10:17 So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.

Everything, then, comes down to the Bible as the perfect Word of God. In order to be saved, we have to believe that the Bible is actually the Word of God. That when we read the scriptures, we are actually hearing Almighty God, the Creator and Ruler of the Universe, speaking to us directly:

1 Thessalonians 2:13 when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is at work in you who believe.

Isaiah 66:2 "This is the one I esteem: he who is humble and contrite in spirit, and trembles at my word.

Hebrews 3:7-8 So, as the Holy Spirit says: "Today, if you hear his voice, ⁸ do not harden your hearts

My conviction of that fact is MARROW DEEP. For over 25 years, I have stood here week after week proclaiming the Word of God to you from text after text. I never sought to prove to you that the Bible is God's Word; I just assumed it and let it speak for itself.

This morning, we have an unusual task before us. The last twelve verses of the Gospel of Mark in everyone's Bible for over a thousand years, has in the last two centuries or so come into serious dispute. Most of you holding Bibles in your hand can

read some note on the page reading something like this: “The earliest manuscripts and some other ancient witnesses do not have Mark 16:9-20.” And the editors of that edition of the Bible then put a line between verse 8 and verses 9-20, or they put the whole thing in brackets.

So, the burning question before us this morning is, are these verses actually the Word of God or not?

Every good teacher of the Bible takes the passage he’s about to teach on in three steps...

- 1) What did God say?
- 2) What did God mean?
- 3) What does God want me to do about it?

Before we can get to those three steps, however, we have to be sure what we’re reading is in fact the Word of God. So this morning, we have to PROBE BEYOND the surface... behind the English Bible you are reading this morning. Two sciences present to us the Bible’s text: text criticism and translation.

In both of these sciences, we are depending on OTHER SCHOLARS to do their work well. This is a beautiful picture of the BODY OF CHRIST. Different Christians working together have served us all well. Some spent their lifetimes studying the ancient manuscripts and delivering to us their best work... the text of the Bible. Others then take that work and use their skills as translators to bring it over from the Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek into good, readable English.

Scholars expert in text criticism tell us what the original Greek text was; then translators excellent at both Greek and English deliver it to us.

This morning, we have to learn a little about text criticism in order to proceed.

I. First: A Word About Text Criticism

A. Text Criticism

1. Definition

Arises from two issues: 1) we don't have the original manuscripts of the New Testament; 2) the copies do not perfectly agree with each other

The science of text criticism is to produce a text as close to the original as possible based on the many manuscripts

2. Why don't we have the originals?

- a. Remember when Moses threw down the original Ten Commandments and shattered the stone tablets when the Jews were worshiping the Golden Calf? That's an example!
- b. Remember when wicked king Jehioakim was hearing the scroll of Jeremiah read to him? He so hated the message of the prophet that he cut it line by line and burned it in a firepot until the entire scroll was burned
- c. So it has been... every original copy of the sixty-six books of the Bible has been lost forever
- d. Why did God do that? Because our hearts are so idolatrous that we would tend to WORSHIP the original letter of Romans or the original writing of the Book of Revelation
- e. Remember when the bronze serpent God told Moses to make centuries later became an idol that some Jewish people worshiped?

3. Instead, what we have is handwritten copies; keep in mind that the printing press wasn't invented until the 15th century.

4. And the same Holy Spirit that inspired the 27 books of the New Testament originally has providentially protected the copies since then to ensure that we can get at the original words with a stunning level of certainty

5. The science of text criticism involves going to libraries all over the world and collating the tiny scraps and whole books of handwritten copies of the New Testament and making wise judgments about what is the most likely reading
6. Amazingly, God has given us over 25,000 handwritten manuscripts to work with... that's an astonishing treasure trove. By way of comparison, second place in all ancient literature in terms of existing copies is Homer's Iliad...643 copies; the NT has almost 40 times as many as what's in 2nd place. There are only 250 existing manuscripts of Plato's writings; the NT has 100 times as many!
7. Not only that, but the NT manuscripts start amazingly close in time to the eyewitnesses.
 - a. The Greek manuscripts are the most important, since the NT was written in Greek; there are 5600 of those
 - b. The oldest is a tiny portion from the Gospel of John, *p52* it's called, dating from the year 100-150. Since the Apostle John died around the end of the first century, that's within ONE GENERATION of an eyewitness of Jesus!! The Bodmer papyri, which contains portions of John and Luke, date from 175-225. The Chester Beatty papyri contains portions of all four Gospels and the Book of Acts, dates from the early 200's. And during this era of church history, the church was being savagely persecuted... so its amazing anything survived at all
 - c. But the small time gap between the original writing and the older manuscript is awesome for our level of certainty... the time gap on Homer's Iliad to the oldest of his manuscripts is seventeen hundred years!
 - d. After the Emperor Constantine made Christianity a legal religion around Council of Nicea (325), the persecution ended and there were many many more copies made, since people were no longer destroying them, and important people were paying for the copies to be made.
 - e. The oldest and most significant of all the ancient manuscripts is called the Codex Sinaiticus, because it was discovered in 1844

at a monastery on Mt. Sinai. It has been called one of the most significant books in the world... it is a bound book containing the entire Greek New Testament and dates from the middle of the 4th century...

- f. The other significant ancient book is the Codex Vaticanus, also dating from the 4th century and it contains the entire Bible; it may actually be a little older than Codex Sinaiticus, and is generally considered the oldest Bible in the world. The most widely sold Greek texts of the Bible are based essentially on this one book, edited by two scholars Westcott and Hort in 1881
8. Not only do we have 25,000 handwritten copies of the NT, we also have a stunning level of quotations by the church fathers, scholars who lived in the first few centuries of the Christian church and have quoted the NT extensively in their writings... there are almost 20,000 quotations of just the gospels in their works; meaning, you could put together the NT just from their quotations alone
9. All in all, we Christians have an embarrassment of riches when it comes to manuscripts... Scholar A.T. Robertson says we can ascertain the original Greek manuscript of the 27 books of the NT to a 99.9% accuracy level. And there is not a single Christian doctrine hanging in the balance based on a textual issue
10. So how does the science of Text Criticism work?
 - a. Whenever there are discrepancies on a passage, they try to study how the error might have cropped up
 - b. Often it's a scribe trying to solve a problem in the text... or it's a problem of repetition or spelling
 - c. Basic laws: the older text is given priority, and the harder reading is given priority... scribes tend to resolve difficulties, not introduce them

B. Applied to Mark 16

1. Those two very old Codices, Codex Sinaiticus and Codex Vaticanus BOTH stop at 16:8

2. However, the overwhelming number of handwritten copies of Mark 16 DO have verses 9-20... 1,653 Greek manuscripts DO have it, 99.8%, whereas only three ancient Greek manuscripts stop at verse 8. Three. Eight other ones have an alternate ending of Mark called “the Shorter Ending”. So, all in all, it is for this reason, the KJV had the longer ending, and over 1500 years of Christians thought the verses we’re looking at were inspired scripture
3. It is because of the importance of the two Codices that the 20th and 21st century Bibles include verses 9-20 but only with cautionary notes or brackets
4. Also when it comes to the Longer Ending of Mark, there are internal problems as well... the transition from verse 8 to verse 9 is difficult, Mary Magdalene is introduced it seems for the first time, there are some vocabulary and diction styles that are unfamiliar to the way Mark writes; there are other internal concerns as well... but none of them are insurmountable. They are the kinds of problems evangelical NT scholars have to address in many places anyway
5. FINALLY and interestingly, those who believe verses 9-20 are NOT inspired scripture LOVE the abrupt way Mark 16:8 ends:

Mark 16:8 Trembling and bewildered, the women went out and fled from the tomb. They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid.

John MacArthur says that word “afraid” is a very common end reaction to Jesus and his life, miracles, and ministry and goes throughout the Gospel of Mark to show that. He thinks this is the perfect ending to Mark: stunned amazement at Jesus’ resurrection.

But I would say you’re missing two things: personal encounters with the resurrected Christ which are VITAL (we’ll discuss that in a moment) and a Great Commission.

And the women DO NOT say ANYTHING about the resurrection of Christ. Odd way to end.

6. As I was memorizing this Gospel, I forged ahead at verse 9 and finished all of it. I believe these verses contain nothing that will harm us and things that can actually help us
7. It will do us no harm. And frankly omitting it will do us no harm either.
8. In the end, we have two sciences pitted against each other, neither is absolutely certain. Text criticism vs. Church history. The oldest manuscripts say NO, 1500 years of church history says YES. Neither can say for certain.
9. So... let's forge ahead!

II. Encounters with the Resurrected Lord

A. Personal Encounters with the Resurrected Lord

1. Absolutely vital... 1 Corinthians 15 bases its entire proof of Christ's resurrection on scripture's prophecy + eyewitness testimony
2. If Mark ended his gospel at verse 8, there are no eyewitness testimonies of encounters with the resurrected Christ
 - a. Like Jesus saying to Thomas,

John 20:27 "Put your fingers here; see my hands; reach out your hand and put it in my side. Stop doubting and believe!"

- b. Like Jesus saying to the Eleven in the upper room,

Luke 24:39-40 Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have."
⁴⁰ ***When he had said this, he showed them his hands and feet.***

- c. Eyewitness testimony to the bodily resurrection was foundational to the faith of the church

1 John 1:1 That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched-- this we proclaim concerning the Word of life.

If Mark intended to end his gospel account at verse 8, there are two things missing: these eyewitness accounts of his resurrection, and the Great Commission.

So, we must have these eyewitness accounts. Mark would be the only gospel account without them.

3. Beginning with Mary Magdalene... but continuing with two other disciples and with the Eleven Apostles.

Mark 16:9 *When Jesus rose early on the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom he had driven seven demons.*

B. Overwhelming Grief... and Unbelief

Mark 16:10-11 *She went and told those who had been with him and who were mourning and weeping. ¹¹ When they heard that Jesus was alive and that she had seen him, they did not believe it.*

1. The overwhelming sorrow of the disciples was the very thing Jesus said would happen

John 16:20 *I tell you the truth, you will weep and mourn while the world rejoices. You will grieve, but your grief will turn to joy.*

He likened their temporary grief to that of a woman in labor

2. Worse, by far, is their persistent unbelief... they clearly did not expect a resurrection... we'll get to their unbelief more in a moment
3. This lines up with Luke's account of the women's testimony being doubted

Luke 24:9-11 *When they came back from the tomb, they told all these things to the Eleven and to all the others. ¹⁰ It was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the others with them who told this to the apostles. ¹¹ But they did not believe the women, because their words seemed to them like nonsense.*

C. Additional Appearance to Two Disciples (Luke 24)

Mark 16:12-13 *Afterward Jesus appeared in a different form to two of them while they were walking in the country. ¹³ These returned and reported it to the rest; but they did not believe them either.*

1. This exactly lines up with the account of Jesus and the two disciples on the road to Emmaus in Luke 24
2. They “were kept from recognizing him”... he looked different than usual
3. Jesus had to reveal himself to his disciples in his resurrected form or they would not recognize him
4. With the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, Jesus looked like an ordinary traveler to Jerusalem
5. But when he broke bread with them, at last their eyes were opened and they realized it was the Lord
6. Here in Mark 16:12-13, it was greatly simplified; the net result was unbelief again on the part of the Eleven... their report was no more believed than that of Mary Magdalene

D. Finally, the Eleven Apostles

Mark 16:14 *Later Jesus appeared to the Eleven as they were eating; he rebuked them for their lack of faith and their stubborn refusal to believe those who had seen him after he had risen.*

1. This is vital for understanding the massive transformation worked on them by the resurrected Christ and the indwelling Spirit after Pentecost
2. The Eleven Apostles had as a central job description, being eyewitnesses to his life, death and resurrection
3. BUT despite Jesus repeated warnings of what would happen, and despite the Old Testament scriptures that predicted it, they were immersed in doubt

Matthew 28:16-17 *Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. ¹⁷ When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted.*

Luke 24:38 He said to them, "Why are you troubled, and why do doubts rise in your minds?"

John 20:24-25 Now Thomas (called Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. ²⁵ So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord!" But he said to them, "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe it."

4. But they would NOT continue to doubt
5. First, Jesus here directly rebukes their unbelief

Mark 16:14 Later Jesus appeared to the Eleven as they were eating; he rebuked them for their lack of faith and their stubborn refusal to believe those who had seen him after he had risen.

The text is quite bold about this... "stubborn refusal to believe"

Other texts translate it as "hardness of heart"... like their hearts were twisted, unyielding...

BUT it would not continue that way! The rebuke from Jesus was the start of their healing.

Then he really got to work on them over the next forty days

Acts 1:3 After his suffering, he showed himself to these men and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God.

6. The combination of the physical encounters with Christ in his resurrection body, plus the careful instruction he gave them from Old Testament prophecies, plus the power of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost moved this band of doubting men to the world-changers they would become
7. They would be unshakeable in their faith that Christ was risen and that death was defeated... they would become resolute and courageous, bold and direct... unquenchable in their fiery zeal
8. TRUTH + HOLY SPIRIT = **a changed world**

III. The Great Commission

Mark 16:15-16 He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation. ¹⁶ Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.

A. This is the Great Work Christ Has Entrusted to the Church

B. Five Versions...

1. One in each of the four gospels

2. One in Acts

C. Mark's Version

1. Focus on the verbal proclamation of the gospel message in the entire world... the "good news"

a. Almighty God is reconciling the world to himself through Christ

b. Sins have been fully atoned for

c. Death has been defeated

d. God himself is ready to be our treasure and our Father and the lover of our souls... God IS the gospel! God IS the treasure hidden in the field! God IS the pearl of great price! The glory of God is our inheritance for all eternity

e. That's the message... next is EXTENT... geographical and personal

2. Go into ALL THE WORLD... this is not just to stay in Jerusalem and Judea... but to the ends of the earth

3. Preach to ALL CREATION... fascinating expression

a. Certainly it means to all nations, and to all individuals within those nations

b. No one is exempt categorically... male and female, rich and poor, old and young, Jews and Gentiles, barbarians, Scythians, slave, free

c. Should we also preach to the trees?? To the birds of the air??

Romans 8:19-21 The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. ²⁰ For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope ²¹ that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God.

And what about the trees of the field?!

Isaiah 55, the great proclamation chapter:

Isaiah 55:1-2 Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost. ² Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labor on what does not satisfy? Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good, and your soul will delight in the richest of fare.

Isaiah 55:6-7 Seek the LORD while he may be found; call on him while he is near. ⁷ Let the wicked forsake his way and the evil man his thoughts. Let him turn to the LORD, and he will have mercy on him, and to our God, for he will freely pardon.

Isaiah 55:10-11 As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, ¹¹ so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.

Listen to how it ENDS:

Isaiah 55:12-13 You will go out in joy and be led forth in peace; the mountains and hills will burst into song before you, and all the trees of the field will clap their hands. ¹³ Instead of the thornbush will grow the pine tree, and instead of briars the myrtle will grow. This will be for the LORD's renown, for an everlasting sign, which will not be destroyed.

The trees are EXCITED! So go and proclaim the good news TO ALL CREATION!

D. The Call and the Danger

Mark 16:16 Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.

1. It is by faith in the gospel of Jesus Christ that salvation comes
2. The command to be baptized is part of the Great Commission... it is a sign of submission and willingness to obey King Jesus
3. Baptism is outward and visible sign of the inward transformation Christ has worked in a soul
4. Water baptism should not be hereby misconstrued as essential to our salvation... the thief on the cross was not water baptized
5. But baptism is essential to an obedient life... it is a commitment, a pledge to bring all areas of the physical life in the body under the cleansing work of Christ and his Word
6. On the other hand...rejection of this gospel is eternally devastating: **“Whoever does not believe will be condemned.”**
7. Earlier Jesus had made plain the torments of hell... eternal conscious torment

Mark 9:48 where "their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched."

8. The great joy of the gospel is this:

Romans 8:1 Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus

E. Signs that Accompany the Spread of the Gospel

Mark 16:17-18 And these signs will accompany those who believe: In my name they will drive out demons; they will speak in new tongues; ¹⁸ they will pick up snakes with their hands; and when they drink deadly poison, it will not hurt them at all; they will place their hands on sick people, and they will get well. "

1. The strangeness of these verses has tended to buttress those who feel that this passage is not inspired scripture

2. Mark doesn't use the word "signs" like this anywhere else

3. John uses this term regularly, as does the Book of Acts

Acts 2:43 Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles.

Acts 4:30 Stretch out your hand to heal and perform miraculous signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus.

Acts 8:6 When the crowds heard Philip and saw the miraculous signs he did, they all paid close attention to what he said.

Acts 14:3 So Paul and Barnabas spent considerable time there, speaking boldly for the Lord, who confirmed the message of his grace by enabling them to do miraculous signs and wonders.

Paul specifically said that miraculous signs marked an apostle:

2 Corinthians 12:12 The things that mark an apostle-- signs, wonders and miracles-- were done among you with great perseverance.

And the Book of Hebrews says:

Hebrews 2:4 God also testified to [the gospel of salvation] by signs, wonders and various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will.

So, these signs DID accompany those who proclaimed the gospel... they DID drive out demons, they DID speak in tongues, they DID shake off a deadly snake attack (Paul did anyway, on the island of Malta, as recorded in Acts 28), they DID lay their hands on sick people and see them healed. There is no record of anyone drinking poison and surviving, but it fits with the other signs here mentioned.

Of course, this passage in Mark 16 gave rise to Appalachian snake handling sects, but keep in mind these verses are not commanding that all Christians do these things, or that these signs will accompany every Christian every time

IV. The Lord's Heavenly Power Predicted and Fulfilled

A. The Lord's Sovereign Power Unleashed from Heaven

Mark 16:19-20 *After the Lord Jesus had spoken to them, he was taken up into heaven and he sat at the right hand of God. ²⁰ Then the disciples went out and preached everywhere, and the Lord worked with them and confirmed his word by the signs that accompanied it.*

1. The clear implication is Christ's being at the right hand of God enables the spread of the gospel
2. Also in the Great Commission in Matthew 28: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations..."
3. Christ is WORKING WITH US... laboring with us as we spread the gospel
4. He confirmed his message by the miracles!

Acts 8:6 *When the crowds heard Philip and saw the miraculous signs he did, they all paid close attention to what he said.*

5. So we are said to be God's co-laborers!

2 Corinthians 6:1-2 *As God's fellow workers we urge you not to receive God's grace in vain. ² For he says, "In the time of my favor I heard you, and in the day of salvation I helped you." I tell you, now is the time of God's favor, now is the day of salvation.*

As he had just said:

2 Corinthians 5:20 *We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God.*

6. More on this next time!!

V. Applications

- A. Stand in Awe of the Resurrection of Christ... and Believe in Him!
- B. Stand in awe of God's providence in protecting the text of the NT

1. 25,000 manuscripts!
2. Like a 25,000 voice choir of trained vocalists; if 1% of them sing off-key at a given moment, the pure note still sounds clearly
3. God has given us a clear NT text to work with
4. It is because of providence and God's control over history that I marvel that he would allow 1000 years of Christians, including Luther, Calvin, the Puritans, John Owen, Jonathan Edwards, Charles Spurgeon, etc. to all think Mark 16:9-20 was scripture is fascinating.... That doesn't make them right or wrong, but it's just interesting

C. Walk Through the Themes These Verses Cover

1. The personal eyewitness encounters with the resurrected Christ... our gospel is HISTORICAL
2. The unbelief on the part of the Eleven Apostles... and how completely that was healed by seeing Christ, learning scripture from him, and by the outpoured Holy Spirit... SO WE ALSO NEED STRENGTHENING
3. Embrace the Great Commission work the Lord has given us to do!
4. More next week!