



# CANYON HILLS

COMMUNITY CHURCH

Series: The Book of Mark

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## **How Should We Then Respond?**

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It's always a great pleasure to gather as a church and worship by praising God and exalting him in our time of singing and prayer, and also in our time of giving, as an expression of our gratitude and thanks. So, I want to do a couple of things simultaneously. I'll ask the ushers to come forward and begin receiving the offering, and then let you know that the kids can be released. Not as part of your offering, but to the Sunday School. You'll get them back; don't worry.

I trust that your heart has been not only stirred, but also prepared to now look at God's Word. God's Word is truth that brings life, help, and hope, and that's why we're here today, so let's now turn our attention back to the gospel according to Mark. We've been in Mark for several months, studying this gospel, and we're going to conclude this gospel today to consider how we should respond.

However, before we conclude the message of all of Mark's gospel, there's a bit of an elephant in the room, if you will. There's a textual issue to briefly address. In fact, it's the largest textual variant in the New Testament. You might have noticed the passage for today is Mark, chapter 16, verses 9-20. However, we will not be studying those passages directly this morning. Instead, we are going to consider our response to all of Mark's gospel, and in fact, all of God's revelation to us.

Why are we doing this? Well, first, because there are actually four different closings to Mark's gospel in chapter 16, and so it makes it very difficult for us to literally stay on the same page. Secondly, because we do not believe these verses are part of what Mark originally penned when he wrote his gospel. Nearly every one of your Bibles highlights this.

They'll put a line after verse 8, showing you that that's the end of the chapter, or they'll put brackets around verses 9-20, and then there'll be a comment in your Bible that says something like, "These verses are missing from some of the earliest and most reliable manuscripts," and that is an understatement.

In fact, one person came up to me after an earlier service and he said, "My Bible doesn't have them at all!" You're right; many don't. This is just a textual variant, but most scholars throughout history, most faithful students of God's Word, have concluded that both external and internal evidence show us that the original text of the second gospel ends after verse 8.

Therefore, verses 9-20 are included for historical value, but not to be considered part of God's inspired revelation. For those who are prayerfully and studiously disagreeing with this position, I'd just encourage you not to build any foundational doctrines on what you find in these verses alone, but take all of God's Word and bring that to bear.

With that (and it really pains me to say this), we're not going to spend the whole morning addressing verses 9-12. Some of you are like, "Whew!" and others of you are really frustrated right now because you'd like to spend the whole time talking about that. So would I, actually! Talking about textual criticism, the variants, the process of inscripturation, how we have the Scriptures, and all that is important, but that's more for the classroom than the Sunday morning.

We do offer classes here, actually, through the School of Discipleship. Next year, we're going to start with the historicity, translation, and reception of God's Word, our Scriptures. We're going to focus on the Bible, and not only that, but how to interpret it accurately. If you would like to go down that road further as much as I would, let's please keep talking. You can sign up for those classes very soon.

Regardless of your position on verses 9-20 of Mark 16, today we're going to look at the implication, the call, and the response we should have to all of Mark's gospel, specifically our obedience to the gospel call and our ongoing living out of the gospel message. Therefore, for our Scripture reading today, I've selected several verses throughout Mark's gospel that we're going to walk through and read.

I will read, you will listen, and you're not going to be turning in your Bibles, because it'll be going too fast. If you have an electronic Bible, then I'm really going to frustrate you because you can't poke that quickly, I'm sure. If you would please now stand for the reading of God's Word, I'm going to read several verses that will survey for us the gospel according to Mark.

**"The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God... Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God, and saying, 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel...'**

**And the scribes of the Pharisees, when they saw that he was eating with sinners and tax collectors, said to his disciples, 'Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?' And when Jesus heard it, he said to them, 'Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners...' The Pharisees went out and immediately held counsel with the Herodians against him, how to destroy him...**

**And he went up on the mountain and called to him those whom he desired, and they came to him. And he appointed twelve (whom he also named apostles) so that they might be with**

him and he might send them out to preach... And he asked them, 'But who do you say that I am?' Peter answered him, 'You are the Christ...' And calling the crowd to him with his disciples, he said to them, 'If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me...'

And they were exceedingly astonished, and said to him, 'Then who can be saved?' Jesus looked at them and said, 'With man it is impossible, but not with God. For all things are possible with God... For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many...' And they all left him and fled... And Pilate again said to them, 'Then what shall I do with the man you call the King of the Jews?' And they cried out again, 'Crucify him...' And they crucified him...

And Jesus uttered a loud cry and breathed his last. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. And when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that in this way he breathed his last, he said, 'Truly this man was the Son of God...' And entering the tomb, they saw a young man sitting on the right side, dressed in a white robe, and they were alarmed. And he said to them, 'Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has risen...'"

Father, we do thank you for your Word, your truth, the light that gives us hope and help today. We come to you again, asking that you might open the eyes of our understanding and inform our faith in accordance with the truth and power of your Word and by your Spirit.

Father, we thank you for the gospel, the saving message of salvation in Jesus, your Son, and the truth that brought us life and even now teaches us to walk in newness of life and bring glory to your name. Gracious Father, we love you and we thank you for loving us first. We pray in Jesus' name, amen.

Mark wrote his gospel with a specific and explicit purpose. He opens his gospel and tells us right away what that purpose is. "**The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ [who is] the Son of God...**" The rest of Mark's gospel simply details the evidence for this claim that Mark is making at the beginning. This evidence calls us to a response. This evidence, not only of Mark's gospel, but all of Scripture, calls us to respond today and respond for the rest of our lives.

You see, we have an obligation not only to obey the gospel, but to live it out. The gospel isn't just for intellectual affirmation or a one-time transaction, though it's true that the gospel does get preached, save sinners, and bring them to life. Yet the gospel's power within you and over you doesn't stop there. We need the gospel of grace just as much today as on the first day we heard it. We must not treat the gospel like a pill we simply take to wash away guilt and sin, or like fire insurance that we purchase as a policy and then quickly forget about.

So, here's our task for this morning. We need to consider how we are to respond to the gospel. Every message here at Canyon Hills closes with a call, an offer, a time of response, so, as we close the gospel of Mark, we're having a time of response to the call God has given us in the gospel.

Well, Mark's gospel and all of Scripture calls us to respond with an informed, willful, wholehearted, repentant belief in these facts. By those words (*informed, willful, wholehearted, repentant belief*), I'm really speaking of *obedience to the gospel*.

1. *We must obey the gospel*. Let us not forget that the gospel is not a headline we simply notice and then keep walking. It's not a good suggestion from an insightful spiritual advisor, you know, take it or leave it. The gospel is not inspirational advice on how you can get back on your feet and get your life back on track. In fact, quite the contrary: the call of the gospel is to get off your feet and lose your life so you might find eternal life in Jesus Christ at the foot of his cross.

This is what we call *propositional truth*. You can't hear a propositional truth and not respond. Every time God reveals himself, he demands a response. Psalm 19 says, "**The heavens declare the glory of God...**" God's glory, message, character, and nature are continually being proclaimed through creation, but most especially declared with specificity and with salvation through the Scriptures. We can't read the Scriptures and not respond to them. To not believe is to reject. To reject is to not obey. To not obey is to choose eternal destruction.

I want you to see this for yourself in a few Scriptures. In John, chapter 3, John the Baptist has his followers come to him. They say, "Hey, Jesus is getting all kinds of followers." John rejoices and says, "That's great!" He says those famous words, in verse 30, "**He must increase, but I must decrease.**"

Yet in verses 35-36, John the Baptist goes on in his explanation, and he says, "**The Father loves the Son and has given all things into his hand. Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.**" Notice that the words *believe* and *obey* are used as synonymous terms for two contrasting responses to the gospel.

The one who believes has eternal life; the one who does not obey receives wrath. To say it another way, both faith and belief are coupled with obedience. They are married in the gospel by God's grace. God, by his Spirit, opens our understanding to believe. He then works within us to obey what we now believe, and he never does the former without the latter. Genuine faith will always be a belief that produces obedience.

Let's look at another passage, 2 Thessalonians, chapter 1. In 2 Thessalonians, chapter 1, Paul is writing to this young church and encouraging them in the midst of their persecutions. He's trying to encourage them and let them know that even though you are suffering persecution, God is still just and still at work. He will bring about his perfect result. This is actually part of his plan. So, he says, in verses 6-8,

**"...since indeed God considers it just to repay with affliction those who afflict you, and to grant relief to you who are afflicted as well as to us, when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire..."** In other words, the coming judgment in the

last day. **"...inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus."**

So, the gospel call is a call to which we must respond, and we do respond to it, but God calls us to respond by obeying. Now, having said all that, let's look back at Mark's gospel. Mark's gospel brings us through a series of statements he makes to these Gentiles in Rome to respond to the message of his gospel.

In Mark, chapter 1, verse 1, he opens this gospel by making that claim we looked at: **"The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God."** Now, we have every reason to take that verse, that statement, at face value and say, "This is God's inspired revelation. It carries full authority. We can affirm it."

Yet Mark goes on to say, as do many of the New Testament writers, **"As it is written in Isaiah the prophet..."** In other words, immediately after Mark tells us what he is going to prove, he points to the basis for his claim: **"As it is written..."** He wants to present these facts. He wants us to recognize and receive them, not only as what he is saying, but a continuation of what all of God's prophets have said from the beginning, the consistency of God's revelation.

Paul does the same thing in the book of Romans. He starts by saying, **"Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy Scriptures..."** He bases the entire book of Romans on the fact that this is further revelation from what God has already said. You see, our faith is built on and informed by the very Word of God that is true, living, and active, and even now brings light and life to sinners who have rebelled against God.

Yet then, Mark goes further in his gospel beyond this. He gives several strategically-placed questions and statements that he wants the reader to notice and respond to. Chapter 2, verses 5-7: **"And when Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, 'Son, your sins are forgiven.' Now some of the scribes were sitting there, questioning in their hearts, 'Why does this man speak like that? He is blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?'"** Question: *Who can forgive sins but God alone?*

Chapter 3, verse 11: **"And whenever the unclean spirits saw [Jesus], they fell down before him and cried out, 'You are the Son of God.'"** Mark gives us that statement. Jesus is declared the Son of God. Of course, Jesus doesn't want to be declared by the demons, so he tells them to hush and be quiet, but the statement is true.

Chapter 4, verse 41... After Jesus calms the storm and the winds, **"...they were filled with great fear and said to one another, 'Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?'"** Mark is presenting questions and comments that cause us, the reader, to then answer the question, "Who is this?"

Chapter 8, verses 27-29:

**"And Jesus went on with his disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi. And on the way he asked his disciples, 'Who do people say that I am?' And they told him, 'John the Baptist; and others say, Elijah; and others, one of the prophets.' And he asked them, 'But who do you say that I am?' Peter answered him, 'You are the Christ.'"**

Toward the end of the gospel, in chapter 14, Jesus is being put through six phases of a trial. At this point, the high priest asks Jesus, **"Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?" And Jesus said, 'I am...'"**

At this point, we have to ask ourselves, "Who is the one who can forgive sins? Who is the one who can calm the seas, the storms, and the winds, the one who has been declared the Son of God, the Christ?" From his own lips, he said, "I am the Son of the Blessed One!" As Mark is writing to believers in Rome, Gentiles, he wants them to also affirm these same truths.

So, we get to the end of Mark's gospel, chapter 15, and we see this in verses 37-39: **"And Jesus uttered a loud cry and breathed his last. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. And when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that in this way he breathed his last, he said, 'Truly this man was the Son of God!'"** Mark is leading us along the way to come to the same conclusion to which the Roman centurion came, the very conclusion with which Mark began in the very first verse of his gospel.

So, again, how should we then respond to the gospel? Mark's gospel leads us to the only appropriate answer. We must obey the gospel because Jesus is the Son of God. Those affirmations go together. It was at this point in writing this message that I thought, "Okay. We have sung several songs together, read Scripture together, looked at several different verses, and talked about the gospel..." but in an effort to not commit a sin against you by never sharing and proclaiming the gospel, I want to take about three minutes and stir you up by way of reminder.

I would just encourage you, whether you've been in the faith for 5 minutes or 50 years, don't gloss over. Don't let this pass by. The sweetness of your salvation and the glory of God needs to always ring our ears into attentiveness. So, I pray you would be stirred by a reminder that our God is infinite, all-powerful, and always faithful. He is always holy and righteous. He is absolutely sovereign and will always do that which he has promised to do, because he has the power, authority, and the desire to do so.

God chose to create for himself a people made in his image to reflect his glory. He then dwelt among them in perfect unity and with perfect joy and declared this work to be very good, but his people chose to rebel, doing that which God commanded them not to do. In so doing, they destroyed the joy and unity they had with their Creator and invited the punishment he promised, the punishment of death. That death has been handed down to every generation. That includes you and me.

We are all deserving of hell apart from God's divine intervention because of our inherited guilt as well as our own willful participation in sinful rebellion. Yet God, being rich in mercy, made a promise that he would send a Savior who would satisfy the righteousness of which we fell short

and pay the just penalty we deserve. He takes upon himself those punishments so we might have opportunity for salvation.

You know God kept his promise. He sent a Savior. He sent Jesus, his only Son. Jesus, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of a virgin, tempted in every way, and yet remained sinless. Yet, at the end, his own creation shouts out, "Crucify him!" and we did. We crucified the Lord of Glory, but again, God, in his great love, purposed that this would happen from the beginning so that though every one of us is guilty, yet by his death, salvation becomes available.

Even more, he who was crucified and buried rose on the third day. Having now satisfied perfect righteousness and perfect justice, Jesus then conquers death, ascends to heaven, and sits even now at the right hand of God, advocating on your behalf, for your benefit, for your salvation, for your perseverance.

There's one more thing. Before Jesus ascended to heaven, he left us another promise, a promise that he would return. It has been almost 2,000 years and there is nothing left on the prophetic calendar to occur before he returns for his own and begins pouring out justice and judgment on sinners. If you are not fully assured in your heart that you are ready for Jesus to come right now, I would ask you... I would *beg* you to obey the call of the gospel. Turn from your sins and trust in Jesus alone for salvation.

Do you believe that gospel? You may have grown up around it. You may have heard it 1,000 times. Do you truly believe it? Has it impacted and changed your life? Have you received and obeyed God's call in the gospel with an informed, willful, wholehearted, repentant belief, what we would call obedience?

2. *We must live the gospel.* Mark's original gospel doesn't include Jesus' explicit command to go out into all the world and preach the gospel. Maybe that's why somebody added it later on. Yet we do have, by clear implication and according to Mark's style, the call to respond to what is presented with appropriate application.

Specifically, the application of living out the gospel through our way of thinking, a new way of thinking that drives and propels a new way of behaving. A new way of thinking that imparts a new way of behaving that then propels us to a new message of proclaiming his glory and his gospel to others. It's always encouraging to see new believers or those who have walked with Christ come to Christ and receive this call to holiness. As each receives and responds, they have a unique passion and conviction to reach their sphere for Jesus Christ.

We can't forget that Acts, chapter 17, tells us God has placed each of us during a certain generation, during a certain season, in a certain location for his glory so we might know the gospel and share the gospel with others. It's always encouraging to see others grab hold of that call. This is how we live the gospel: new thinking, new behaving, and new proclaiming.

Michael Green, in his excellent book, *Evangelism in the Early Church*, gives us a picture of what the first Christians did as they sought to live the gospel. He says of early Christians,

"They were passionately convinced of the truth of the gospel. They were persuaded that men and women were lost without it. It was the key to eternal life, without which they would perish. They shared in God's own love, poured out on a needy world. They paid heed to Christ's Great Commission. They sought to interpenetrate society with the gospel which had had so profound an effect upon them. Christianity for them was no hour's slot on a Sunday. It affected everything they did and everyone they met."

Wow! So, is that what Christianity is? Is that what Christians do, believe, obey, and proclaim the gospel? Why? Well, Paul tells us exactly why in 2 Corinthians, chapter 5. Genuine believers are propelled because of the love of Christ that controls us. He goes on to say, "**...because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised.**" There's our purpose. We have new life in Christ. We ought not to be living our old life and deceive ourselves.

John Owen, a seventeenth-century Puritan, in regard to proclaiming the gospel, simply said, "Truth revealed to any, carries with it an immovable persuasion of conscience that it ought to be published and spoken to others!" You know that to be true. Genuine Christians have that passion, that desire.

We still have earthly fear. We still have fleshly anxiety, selfishness, or whatever the case might be, but you have a desire to proclaim Christ to others, to get others to hear the saving work that brought you the gospel. To love the gospel is to take up your cross every single day and follow Jesus.

Returning to my comments at the beginning, we have an obligation to not only know and obey the gospel, but to live it out. The gospel is not just for intellectual affirmation or a one-time transaction. We need the gospel of grace. Again: We need the gospel of grace just as much today as on the first day we heard it. If we are unwilling... If *you* are unwilling to live the gospel, that is good evidence that you never have obeyed the gospel.

To a watching world that desperately needs to hear genuine Christian faith, you cannot go on professing what you and God clearly know you are not possessing. It's time to obey the gospel and live for the gospel for the sake of your own soul, as well as for the sake of everybody around you. Other believers who need to see this, unbelievers who need to know this...

Francis Schaeffer shared this burden years ago when he wrote, "If we do not make clear by word and practice our position for truth as truth and against false doctrine, we are building a wall between the next generation and the gospel. And twenty years from now, men will point their finger back at us..." You can see the urgency in that statement, and that was said over 50 years ago.



Today, we're reaping the fruit of gospel ignorance and a lack of biblical discernment because we have built a wall between the gospel we profess to have obeyed and its application to our new way of living and new message of proclaiming the saving work of Jesus Christ.

John Stott, before he graduated to glory a few years ago, penned these piercing words:

"...we need to consider that the Bible is a dangerous book to read, and that the church is a dangerous society to join. For in reading the Bible we hear the words of Christ, and in joining the church we say we believe in Christ. As a result, we belong to the company described by Jesus as both hearing his teaching and calling him Lord. Our membership therefore lays upon us the serious responsibility of ensuring that what we know and what we say is translated into what we do."

The world needs to see the message of the cross in a changed life so they can say, "What has changed? What's new? Why the joy? What's happening? I need that peace! I need that hope. I need that help."

So, we ask again...*How should we then respond?* How should we respond to God's clear revelation he has given to us in his Word? All of his Word, as well as Mark's gospel? Well, we should respond as we've seen throughout history, like Abraham, who heard the call and believed God and it was counted to him as righteousness, or like David, when he hears and recalls the saving work of salvation in God. He says, **"For this I will praise you, O LORD, among the nations, and sing praises to your name."**

Maybe we should respond like Isaiah, who, when he's confronted with the glory of God, covers his mouth and says, **"Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips..."** the conviction piercing his own soul. Yet only a few verses later, following this conviction, he says, **"Here I am! Send me."**

Maybe you respond like Mary, who said, **"My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant...for he who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name."** He who is mighty has done great things for you. He who is mighty is still doing great things for you. He who is mighty may return at any moment, but offers great things to you even now.

Mark's gospel calls us to respond like the Roman centurion does: **"Truly this man was the Son of God!"** Yet then it begs the question...*Now what?* We must obey the gospel call, we must live the gospel message, and whatever you do, don't respond like Pharaoh, who, in Exodus, chapter 5, says, "Who is the Lord, that I should obey his voice? I do not know the Lord and I will not obey."

How should you then respond to the gospel? Obey the gospel call. Live the gospel message. For each one of us, this could have a different application. Some of you need to put aside and repent from the sin you know you're in. Some of you need to walk in obedience and get baptized. Some of you just need to begin doing the daily reading, loving, and living of God's Word.

Whatever the case might be, God calls you to obey the gospel and live the gospel. That's why we gather here as a family, as a church, as the body of Christ, to love and help one another through this. Meeting Christ, walking with Christ, looking to Christ, and proclaiming Christ for our God and for his glory.

I'm going to pray, and when I'm finished, there'll be counselors up front who would love to talk with you and walk with you wherever you are, whether you need to put off sin or put on those practices you know you're not doing. We would love to walk with you. Please come up and talk with one of them. Let's pray.

Father, we do thank you again for this great salvation we enjoy on account of your goodness. What a great God you are to save from death the very ones who rebelled against you! We are forever unworthy of such grace but forever grateful for such love. Give us the courage today to obey your gospel, to live your gospel, and to proclaim your gospel for you glory. We pray in the mighty and matchless name of Jesus, your Son, the only Savior, our Lord, amen.

If the Lord has pricked, pierced, or given you a new heart, please come and talk. We would love to walk with you down this road.

Now, to him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all we could ask or think, according to the Spirit who works within us, to him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus forevermore. God bless you.