

**Mark 16: 15-20; “Received up Into Heaven”, Sermon # 117 in the series –  
“Astonished at His Teaching”, delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall  
on October 1<sup>st</sup>, 2016, in the Morning Worship Service.**

We now have come to the end of this glorious gospel of Mark. What a powerful message of Christ's life and ministry, of His death and resurrection, has been written down for us here. Although the gospel of Mark is the shortest of all the gospels, it surely is not lacking in spiritual depth, if we think about it in relation to the other gospels. And truly there are many things written in it which show us aspects of our Lord's life and His words which we never would have known, if he had not written it. But the Lord wanted it written so that we would know Christ better. Here in this last section we find our Lord's parting words to His apostles before His glorious ascension into heaven, and His words showed to them, and they show to us here today, that He is victorious over all His enemies and ours. In applying this truth to you today I want you to see, 1<sup>st</sup> of all – That Christ's victory will be shown forth in the preaching of the gospel to every creature. 2<sup>nd</sup> – Christ's victory was shown forth in the apostolic time period by sign gifts. And 3<sup>rd</sup> – Christ's victory has, is, and will be shown forth in His people's labors of evangelism as they remember His Ascension and His being seated at the right hand of God. In understanding the importance of these things, we can better understand our own part in serving Christ and laboring in His kingdom at this point in Church History.

**1<sup>st</sup> of all – Christ's victory will be shown forth in the preaching of the gospel to every creature.** (verses 15 and 16)

“And He said to them, ‘Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.’ “He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned.” What is the norm for all Christians throughout the Church age? The norm for each and every Christian is to be mindful of the Great Commission. The Great Commission in a nutshell form is given to us here: “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.” The Great Commission in its fuller, more extensive, and more explanatory form, is given to us in Matthew chapter 28, verses 18-20. “Then Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, ‘All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.’ “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” “Amen.” These two Commissions are meant to complement each other, not fight with each other. The Commission here in Mark emphasizes evangelism – Preaching the gospel to every creature. The Commission in Matthew emphasizes discipleship and the responsibility of every local church to teach those who have been converted through the preaching of the gospel, their responsibilities now that they are saved. Having been taught the gospel and having begun to learn the way of truth, the young disciple of Christ is to receive all the truth of the Bible so that they can observe all that Christ has commanded them. And His promise is that He will be with all who are Christians who are trying to fulfill this Great Commission until the end of the age.

Let me ask you whether you have seriously considered the fact that if you are a Christian you have the Lord Jesus Christ with you. Christ was received up into heaven in order that He and the Father might send the Holy Spirit to the Church. Because He was victorious over sin and death, He now sits at the right hand of the Father, but because He is presently, in an on-going sense victorious, He is also Christ with you, the hope of glory. These are facts which I declare to every believer in Christ this morning, and I pray that each of us will come to know the reality of what they mean. Christianity is much more than the opinions of men. It is resting in Christ's victory and working from Christ's victory. It is much more than words; it is power to do what is right. When we preach, we preach that Christ has triumphed over all of the spiritual enemies that any sinner has, and thereby, if you will believe in Him, He will very practically teach you and lead you by His word and by His Spirit. He may do this using the preacher or pastor. Or he may do this using

common and ordinary Christians around you. But He is most certainly with you by the presence and power of the Holy Spirit, just as really as if He was standing next to you, and actually even more personally, because He dwells in your heart. He reigns triumphant there in your heart.

And what He teaches you, He would have you to teach and preach to others. And yet sometimes we do not remember this, nor do we seem to know much about this kind of relationship with Christ in our conscious experience. And so we are reluctant to preach or to speak to just any “creature” about Christ. We do not want to throw our pearls before swine. But, let us understand that there is still very much that we can communicate in a simple straightforward manner to people around us; people who have personalities and temperaments of all shapes and stripes. You are called to preach the gospel to every creature but there are some things that should come before this, in your experience, which you need to learn. You must practically learn that Christ is victorious over sin and death and He has been received up into heaven where He is presently at the right hand of God.

First off, you should not be daunted by the truth that not all Christians are called and gifted to preach. Just because you do not have a call to preach publically to every creature, does not mean that you cannot do evangelism by speaking for your Lord. I have tried to show you this before. I have told you that there are two Greek words for the word “preach” which are found in the Book of Acts, Chapter 8. And they are found in verses 4 and 5. It says there, “Therefore those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the word.” “Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria and preached Christ to them.” “Those who were scattered” are those who were referred to, back in verse 1 of Chapter 8. It says there – “At that time a great persecution arose against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles.” That is a lot of Christians. But these Christians who had all kinds of differing gifts, went about it says: “εὐαγγελιζόμενοι” (evangelidzomenoi); they went about evangelizing, preaching the word. They went about gossiping the gospel. That is what all Christians are called and commissioned to do according to our text. But Philip’s going down to the city of Samaria to preach to them; the Greek word is ἐκηρυσσεν. “He proclaimed to them (he formally preached to them) the Christ”. This was the preaching of a herald, one who was called and commissioned formally by the Lord and the church, to preach. But the point is, that the Lord would have every Christian do what they can to evangelize.

In order to preach the word effectively, in a God-glorified way takes more than a commission even. It takes the love of Christ. And what I believe this text is saying, is that you should pray to know Christ so as to be filled with the love of Christ. Listen to how the apostle Paul prayed for the brethren in Ephesus in Ephesians 3: 14-21. “For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height – to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.” “Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end.”

Here we see that these brethren, who Paul prayed for, had the Spirit. And you too, have the Spirit if you have believed in Christ. And I am saying that because you have Him with you, that He will be giving you opportunities to speak concerning Him; to say a word to every creature that you come into contact with. And I am asking you, will you not pray to be given a love for the lost? The person who does not believe will be condemned. He who believes will be saved. But how will they hear without a preacher? But you say to me – The Commission states that those who are to preach are to go into all the world, and I am really quite a home body. I have no desire to go to the ends of the earth. Ah, that may be the case, but do you not think that unsaved creatures live all around you

here, and you come into contact with them, at least some times? The apostles and the early church were instructed to begin right where they were, in Jerusalem, and then spread their gospel preaching outward to the areas around Jerusalem, and then their Commission, and ours, reaches to the ends of the earth.

This does not mean that each of the apostles went to the ends of the earth. But it does mean that each and every day they thought about those unsaved creatures around them. When Jesus used the word “creatures” here, He was intending to tell us something more about what He is looking for, when we preach the gospel. He meant to say that each and every unsaved person is a creature of God. We do not preach the gospel to dogs and cats and alligators or other wild animals. But in terms of the way that sinful people act sometimes, you would think that they are pretty wild creatures. For Christians to preach the gospel to every creature shows us that this commission was not simply given to the apostles and that first generation of Christians to observe. For how could they even begin to fulfill this Commission on their own? They only lived for a few years, and even though they did a mighty work, there was always more evangelism and preaching to do. There has always been more for the Church of Jesus Christ to do all down through this Church age. But because Christ died, rose from the dead, and ascended to heaven, we are victorious and we will be victorious with Him. But we should always pray for a greater witness.

**2<sup>nd</sup> – Christ’s victory was shown forth in the apostolic time period by sign gifts.**

(verses 17 and 18)

You and I, as Christians have been given this Commission just as surely as those Christians who lived in the days of the early Church; the Apostolic time period which was so extraordinary in their having the sign gifts; the gifts that were given to the apostles and others. “And these signs will follow those who believe: In My name they will cast out demons; they will speak with new tongues; they will take up serpents; and if they drink anything deadly, it will by no means hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover.” Now, it is no doubt true that all of these signs were fulfilled in the apostles, and some others as well, in the days of the apostolic age and generation, but it is just as true that there is no need for these sign gifts today for the word of God has been canonized. And, there is a warning in the book of Revelation at the end of it, which shows that nothing should be added to the Canon of the Scriptures.

Let us understand that these sign gifts were given for the very specific reason that the verbal inspired word of God, which the apostles and believers in the early Church preached, needed confirmation by these very obvious miracles. And they were a glorious confirmation that God was with those who spoke the word of the Lord. This confirmation was very needful, to show forth Christ’s victory over the power of devils and evil spirits. They were cast out in Jesus’ name. Speaking in tongues was a sign, not to believers but to unbelievers, it says in 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 14: 22. And this was true on the Day of Pentecost when “the multitude came together”, there in Jerusalem, and they were confused, because everyone heard the apostles and disciples speak in his own language. They were saying to one another – “Look, are not all these who speak Galileans?” “And how is it that we hear each in our own language in which we were born?” “We hear them speaking in our own tongues the wonderful works of God.” “And so they were all amazed and perplexed,” it says. “And they said to one another, ‘Whatever could this mean?’”

This was a sign to them of God’s working. And so Peter answered their perplexities by preaching to them a sermon which they could understand. And by the victorious resurrection power of Jesus Christ being exerted in the Holy Spirit’s working, 3000 people were converted to Christ and added to the Church that day. A few days later, Peter and John went up together to the temple at the hour of prayer, and a certain man lame from his mother’s womb was carried, whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple which is called Beautiful. He was asking for alms from those who were coming in to the temple. And when he saw Peter and John, about to go into the temple. They fixed their eyes on him, and Peter said – “Look at us”. And Peter said – “Silver and gold I do not have, but what I do have I give to you: ‘In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise

up and walk.” And he took him by the right hand and lifted him up, and immediately his feet and his ankle bones received strength, and he leaped up, stood and walked, and entered the temple with them – walking, leaping, and praising God.” This man was lame and he was fully recovered by the use of this sign gift. And Peter, once again, preached the gospel, and many of those who heard the word believed; and the number of the men came to be about 5,000.

Similarly, in Acts 28, verse 8 it says that it happened that the father of a man named Publius lay sick of a fever and dysentery, and the apostle Paul went in to him and prayed, and he laid his hands on him and healed him. This was a sign gift was being used by Peter according to the will of God so that people who had never heard of Jesus might be receptive to hearing and receiving the gospel of Christ. And in Chapter 28, verse 1 of Acts, it says that when Paul came to the island of Malta, the natives showed him unusual kindness and they kindled a fire and made all who with him welcome. And because it was raining and cold, Paul gathered a bundle of sticks and laid them on the fire, and a viper came out because of the heat, and it fastened on his hand. The natives saw the creature hanging from his hand, and they said to one another, ‘No doubt this man is a murderer, whom though he has escaped the sea, yet justice does not allow him to live. But Paul shook off the creature into the fire, and he suffered no harm. This was a sign gift in use for their benefit. They were expecting that he would swell up or suddenly fall down dead. But after they had looked for a long time and saw no harm come to him, they changed their minds and said that he was a god. All of these things like this, God providentially ordered so that these verses in Mark 16 could be fulfilled, and so the gospel could be preached to every creature.

This only leaves the statement – “and if they drink anything deadly, it will by no means hurt them.” There is a tradition that this very thing happened to the Apostle John. He actually was given a cup of drink with poison in it and it did not hurt him. But it is not recorded in the Bible. But I like what Philips Brooks has said about this. He says – “Let us consider the safety which Christ offers.” “It is a safety not by the avoidance of deadly things, but by the neutralizing of them through a higher and stronger power.” “There is no such idle promise as that if a man believes in Christ a wall shall be built around his soul, so that the things out of which souls make sin cannot come to Him.” “The Master knew the world too well for that.” “His own experience on the hill of His temptation was still fresh in His memory.” “He knew that life meant exposure, that sin must surely beat at every one of these hearts.”

“Nay, that the things out of which sin is made, temptation, *and* moral trial, must enter into every heart; and so He said not, “I will lead you through secluded ways where none but sweet and healthy waters flow,” but, “Where I lead you, there will be the streams of poison.” “Only if you have the vitality which comes by faith in Me, your life shall be stronger than the poison’s death.” “If you drink any deadly thing it shall not harm you”.... “Only those temptations which we encounter on the way of duty, in the path of consecration, only *in regard to* those has our Lord promised us that we shall conquer.” “He sends us out to live and work for Him.” “The chances of sin which we meet while that Divine design of life, the life and work for Him, is clear before us, shall not hurt us. When we forget that design, our arm withers, our immunity is gone. It is only when we are about some higher task, only when they meet us as accidents in the service of Christ, that we have a right, deliberately to encounter temptation and the chance to sin, and may claim the Lord’s promise of immunity.”

“Think in how many places that law applies.” “Have I a right to read this skeptical book – this hook in which some able, witty man has gathered all his skill against my Christian faith?” “It is a book of poison.” “Have I a right to drink it?” “Who can say absolutely yes or no?” “Who does not feel that it depends upon what sort of life the reader brings to meet the poison?” “If in your soul there is a passionate desire for truth, if you do really love and serve Christ, and want to know Him better, that you may love and serve him more, if this book comes as a help to that part of a study by which you shall get nearer to the heart of the truth and Him, then if you drink that deadly thing it shall not harm you.” “Nay, you may rise up from the reading with a faith more deep.” “Whatever

change your faith may undergo, it shall win a profounder life.” “But if there is no such earnestness, no such life as this, if it is mere curiosity, mere desire to be fine and liberal, mere defiance, a mere wantonness, then the poison has it all its own way; there is no vigorous life to meet it; and its death spreads through the nature till it finds the heart ...”

“And so it is everywhere with all exposure of the spiritual life.” “What took you there?” “What right had you to be there?” “These are the critical questions on which everything depends.” “If you are passing through temptation with your eye fixed on a pure, true life beyond it, temptation being only a necessary stage upon your way, so long as you keep that purpose, that resolution, that ideal, you shall be safe.” “If you are in temptation for temptation’s sake, with no purpose beyond it, you are lost.” (end of quote) Brethren, I trust you see, in Brook’s words, the power of the risen, ascended, reigning, and triumphant Savior. His power to keep your soul in the most dire of tempting circumstances, both mentally and physically will be enough to help you and sustain you. And yet it must be your fixed purpose to do everything in your power, by the power of Christ’s grace, to resist the Devil, flee immorality, and hold fast and hold forth the truth of the Bible in those times.

### **3<sup>rd</sup> – Christ’s victory has, is, and will be shown forth in His people’s labors of evangelism as they remember His Ascension and His being seated at the right hand of God.**

Verse 19 – “So then, after the Lord had spoken to them, He was received up into heaven, and sat down at the right hand of God.” “And they went out and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them and confirming the word through the accompanying signs.” This is what the early Church did, and what great success they had in their preaching! I want you to think with me now for a few moments about Christ’s ascension and its meaning for Christians during this whole Church age. There is not more than one Church age; we must assert it vigorously, for the Bible knows of only one. The kingdom of Christ is not two-fold; one age and kingdom for the times of the Gentiles and then in the Millennium, another age and kingdom for the Jews. The kingdom of Christ is not a two tier kingdom, one of suffering before the Millennium, and then no suffering during the Millennium.

Rather, we should understand that there is only one kingdom of grace leading to the kingdom of the ultimate glory in heaven and the eternal state. But we must also acknowledge, if we are to be faithful to the truth of the whole Bible, that within this one Church age there are different time periods of opposition and advance in regard to Christ’s kingdom. There are systematic oppositions of Satan which are eventually all overcome by the Church. There have been and there will be times of such great opposition to the preaching of the word, that it will seem that the Church would be destroyed, and truth might seem to be overcome by falsehood and error. I am saying that we should understand that there will always be a sense during this Church age where the truth – “All who would live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution”.

But dear brethren, hold fast the truth. The Bible clearly states that there will also be times and seasons of victory where gospel success has come, and it will come again, by the working of the Holy Spirit of God, as the fulfillment of the plans of the Father in relation to the victory of our Lord Jesus Christ, coming to fruition. The ascension of our Lord is meant to show us that our Lord Jesus Christ has been completely victorious over all of the forces of sin and death. His sufferings are complete and they are over. The Devil can no longer defeat Him. The Devil is now a defeated enemy, even though he is still quite active in his systematic oppositions worldwide. Let us always remember that Christ went through tribulation in His sufferings, but now He has been raised to glory and eternal honor. He was not only raised from the dead, but He has been exalted on high. His Resurrection was the first step in His exaltation by the Father. He was raised from the dead and given a name which is above every name. The Ascension, where He was received into heaven was the second step in His exaltation by the Father. The third step in His exaltation by the Father is what theologians called His Session; His triumphantly sitting at the right hand of God the

Father, reigning there, but waiting until His Father makes all of His enemies a footstool for His feet.

I want you to see that even though Christ is presently reigning at the right hand of the Father, and has been given all authority in heaven and earth, that there have been, are, and will be, for the Christian Church, times and seasons within this one Church age where there are workings of the Holy Spirit in some ways the same for all Christians, in regard to their individual salvation. And yet in regard to the Universal Church, Christ's Body, there also will be quite very different workings in regard to the success of the gospel in any given generation. But I want you to see that in this present evil age there will always over time, be progression to victory for the Church of Jesus Christ, both in terms of individual members and in terms of the Church Universal. Even as there was progression to victory for our Lord Jesus Christ, so there will be progression to victory for His Body, the Church. This is an integral part of what His ascension means; that He is not only the first fruits of them that slept (individually), but He is also the Reigning Coming King whose Church will also know the reality of His Holy Spirit's working in such a way that the Church will fulfill the Great Commission in a victorious sense, and not be defeated ultimately by the strategies of the Devil, who is still presently deceiving the nations.

It is Christ's victory over sin and death which is the basis of our salvation. In the outworking of our individual salvation, that is the same for every Christian in this whole Church Age. "For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body – whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free – and have all been made to drink into one Spirit." (1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 12: 13) But I am trying to show you that there is more victory to come than the individual victory of every Christian pressing on to the glory of heaven; their learning to overcome the world, the flesh, and the Devil personally and individually, and their persevering to the end of their life. That is a very glorious thing. But there is also the victory of Christ's Church which has been coming progressively and in stages throughout this Church age; the victory of Christ's Church as she faces and overcomes the major strategies of the Devil and the difficulties of living in a fallen, sinful world where sometimes very few people believe. Christ has been reigning during the whole Church age. He has been seated at the Father's right hand during all of the times. Both He and His Church have been successful to the degree that the Father would have it to be so. Even in those times where it seemed as though she was utterly defeated, it has not been so.

Let us see, in closing, that Christ's ascending to the Father and His being received up into heaven to be the King and Lord and Ruler of all, is the indication that God's full purpose of Christ's Church someday spiritually reigning upon the earth, and fulfilling the Great Commission in the greatest possible way, shall indeed come to pass. Oh, Victory in Jesus, my Savior forever! That should be the meaning to us personally, and as members of His Universal Church. And let us also see, with equal clarity, that there will always be, to the end of the age, the oppositions of the world and the Devil; that even after the gospel conquers by the preaching of the word, that toward the end of the age, that Satan shall be released for his little season, to deceive the nations once more, and that this will be the occasion of our Lord's glorious Second Coming. I hope that you are looking forward to that Day. No one knows the hour nor the day of His Coming. "The Lord said to my Lord, 'Sit at My right hand, till I make Your enemies Your footstool.'" While we wait for our Lord's return, let us remember our Lord's love for us and in love for Him evangelize the lost. John says – "And we have known and believed the love that God has for us." "God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him." "Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness in the day of judgment; because as He is, so are we in this world." "There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment." "But he who fears has not been made perfect in love." "We love because He first loved us."