

Go with the Gospel!

Text: Mark 16:15-20

Introduction:

1. We come now to the conclusion to the Gospel of Mark. In this concluding section, we have the risen Lord Jesus' final instructions to His fledging church. This has often been referred to as the Great Commission.
2. Each Gospel writer (particularly the 3 synoptic Gospels) contain the Great Commission. The Great Commission IS the task for the church and great efforts must be taken to keep it centre stage in the local church.
3. For today's study, we will divide the text into three parts:

I. THE COMMISSION TO THE DISCIPLES (VS. 15-16)

Christ speaks of:

A. The Responsibility to the Gospel (Vs. 15)

Observe 2 key features of this command. We need to have:

1. Gospel Feet – 'go'
 - a. Romans 10:15 "...as it is written, **How beautiful are the feet** of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!"
 - b. Song 7:1 "**How beautiful are thy feet with shoes**, O prince's daughter!"
 - c. The word 'go' is a small word, just two letters and yet it is one of the most disobeyed commands in God's Word.
 - d. Even with all the technological advancements we have, when it's all said and done, someone has to go to where the unsaved are and share Christ with them.
 - i. Politicians know the power of door-to-door work and personal contact!
 - ii. Cults know the power of door-to-door work and follow up!
 - iii. Christian lobby groups know the power of grass roots campaigning such as door knocking, leaflet distribution and one on one contact!
 - iv. Why on earth then do most Christians today sneer at door knocking for the Gospel or tract distribution as "outdated".
 - v. Illustration: Someone with no method says "I don't like your method".
 - e. Someone put it like this, "With all our education, our fine buildings, our image of the church, we are doing less to win people to Christ than our unschooled forefathers did. We're no

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longer fishers of men, but keepers of the aquarium, and we spend most of our time swiping fish from each other's bowl."

- f. Illustration: William Booth was invited to visit King Edward VII at Buckingham Palace in 1904. When asked by the king to write in his autograph album, the old man – now seventy-five – bent forward, took the pen, and summed up his life's work:

Your Majesty,

Some men's ambition is art,
Some men's ambition is fame,
Some men's ambition is gold,

My ambition is the souls of men.

- g. We are to bring sinners into God's House – Luke 14:23 "And the lord said unto the servant, Go out into the highways and hedges, and **compel them to come in**, that my house may be filled." But we are also to go to sinners **outside** of God's House!
- 2. Gospel Speech – 'preach'
 - a. The word 'preach' means "to herald". While this includes the formal proclamation of the Gospel (e.g., by a God-called man of God), it is not limited to this. At its heart, the command requires a verbal presentation of the Gospel and this can also be done on one on one.
 - 1. The example of Christ. He preached to the masses publicly but He was also the Master Personal Evangelist/Soul-winner (e.g., Nicodemus; Samaritan woman).
 - 2. The example of the early church: Acts 5:42 "And daily **in the temple, and in every house**, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ."
 - 3. The excuse of lifestyle evangelism: "I just witness by my life". Don't use one truth as an excuse to disobey another equally important truth! Of course, we are to be a testimony for Christ by the way we live and conduct ourselves (Matt. 5:13-14; Phil. 2:15). But that does not excuse us from opening our mouths for the Gospel! The two go hand in hand – the life and the lips.

B. The Reach of the Gospel (Vs. 15)

- 1. It is for every place – "into all the world"
 - a. God loves the world. "For God so loved the world..." (John 3:16).
 - b. Christ died for the world. "And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world." (1 John 2:2).
 - c. Note: This includes the so called "closed countries". God owns this world and He has authorized the preaching of the Gospel for the whole globe.

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2. It is for every person – “to every creature”
 - a. 2 Peter 3:9 “The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, **not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.**”
 - b. 1 Tim. 2:4 “Who will have **all men to be saved**, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth.”
 - c. Rev. 22:17 “And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And **whosoever will**, let him take the water of life freely.”

C. The Response to the Gospel (Vs. 16)

When the Gospel is presented, the sinner has a choice to make; a choice that will determine their eternal destiny. There will be those who...

1. Receive the Gospel – ‘saved’ (Vs. 16a)
 - a. Belief – the essential requirement for salvation. You must “repent...and believe the Gospel” (Mk. 1:15)
 - b. Baptism – the outward symbol of inner faith. The fact baptism is not required for salvation is made plain in the second half of the verse. Unbelief is what damns a person, not whether they were baptised or not.
 1. 1 Cor. 1:17 “For Christ sent me **not to baptize**, but to preach the gospel: not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect.”
 2. Acts 8:36-37 “And as they went on *their* way, they came unto a certain water: and the eunuch said, See, *here is* water; what doth hinder me to be baptized? And Philip said, **If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest.** And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.”
 3. Illustration: The repentant thief (Eph. 2:8-9; Titus 3:5).
 4. William Macdonald: “Baptism is not a condition of salvation, but an outward proclamation that the person has been saved.”
2. Reject the Gospel – ‘damned’ (Vs. 16b)
 - a. Unbelief is a sinful choice that results in damnation for all eternity.
 - b. Rev. 21:8 “But the fearful, and **unbelieving**, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death.”

II. THE PREDICTION TO THE DISCIPLES (VS. 17-18)

A. The Preliminary Considerations RE the Signs

1. If you are going to use this passage to claim that tongues are a gift for believers today, then to be consistent in your interpretation, you need to also include the other three – snake handling, poison drinking and healing. You cannot pick and choose the ones you like. Why is it that tongues are so aggressively promoted as being for today on the basis of this passage but not taking up serpents or drinking something deadly?
2. The signs are said to “follow” saving faith. They do not save an individual. The passage makes it clear that it is faith in the Gospel message that saves the sinner. Many today are putting faith in a “sign” rather than in the substance which is the message of salvation.

B. The Particulars of the Signs (Vs. 17-18)

Christ spoke of five sign gifts that would accompany the witness of the early church.

1. Casting out devils.
2. Speaking with new tongues. Note that tongues in the Bible equals real languages, not unintelligible gibberish. They are languages not before known to the speakers. (Refer two-part sermon series on tongues for more details).
3. Taking up serpents.
4. Drinking anything deadly. Both this and the previous (serpents) have to do with God’s servants being protected from harm.
5. Healing the sick.
6. Note: They would be accomplished “in my name”. “This qualifying phrase stands emphatically at the head of this list of signs. The power will not be their own, nor is it to be exercised for their own aggrandizement.” (Hiebert)

C. The Purpose of the Signs (Vs. 20b)

1. To authenticate Apostolic Preaching.
 - a. ‘confirming’ = to make firm, establish, make sure.
 - b. Remember, in the early church period, the N.T. was still being completed. The sign gifts temporary by their very nature and purpose.
 - c. Eph. 2:20 “And are built upon **the foundation of the apostles and prophets**, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner *stone*.”
 - d. 2 Cor. 12:12 “Truly **the signs of an apostle** were wrought among you in all patience, in signs, and wonders, and mighty deeds.”
 - e. Heb. 2:3-4 “How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and

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was confirmed unto us by them that heard *him*; **God also bearing *them* witness, both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to his own will?**”

- f. Hiebert: “These signs were the authenticating credentials of the apostolic message, exhibiting the presence of the living Christ working with and through his messengers. They served to accredit not the faith of the individual but the validity of the faith he represented.”
2. We can see four out of the 5 signs mentioned fulfilled literally in the Apostolic era as recorded in the Book of acts.
 - a. Casting out devils – Acts 8:7; 16:18; 19:11-12.
 - b. Speaking in tongues – Acts 2:4-11; 10:46; 19:6.
 - c. Protection from serpents – Acts 28:5 (only recorded instance).
 - d. Healing the sick – Acts 3:7; 19:11; 28:8-9.
 - e. Drinking something deadly – not recorded in Scripture but attributed to John and Barnabas Eusebius, the early church historian.
3. J.C. Ryle: “Let us never forget, that Christ’s believing Church in the world is of itself a standing miracle. The conversion and perseverance in grace of every member of that Church, is a sign and wonder, as great as the raising of Lazarus from the dead. The renewal of every saint is as great a marvel as the casting out of a devil, or the healing of a sick man, or the speaking with a new tongue. Let us thank God for this and take courage. The age of spiritual miracles is not yet past. Happy are they who have learned this by experience, and can say, “I was dead, but am alive again: I was blind, but I see.”

III. THE ASCENSION BEFORE THE DISCIPLES (VS. 19-20)

A. The Position of the Ascended Christ (Vs. 19)

1. Exalted – “received up into heaven”.
 - a. The ascension is described in Luke’s Gospel: “And he led them out as far as to Bethany, and he lifted up his hands, and blessed them. And it came to pass, while he blessed them, he was parted from them, and carried up into heaven. And they worshipped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy: And were continually in the temple, praising and blessing God. Amen.” (Lk. 24:50-53)
 - b. The ascension is described in Acts: “And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight.” (Acts 1:9)
 - a. The ascension is a truth of great victory: “And what *is* the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, Which he wrought

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in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set *him* at his own right hand in the heavenly *places*, **Far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come:** And hath put all *things* under his feet, and gave him *to be* the head over all *things* to the church, Which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all.” (Eph. 1:19-23)

- b. John Phillips: “From the brow of Olivet, Jesus stepped straight into glory. He found His way through the cheering ranks of the angels to the Great White Throne of God. He took His place on the right hand of God, a Man in a human body, seated on the throne of the universe, with every right to be there because He is God over all, blessed forevermore! There He sits “from henceforth expecting till his enemies be made his footstool” (Heb. 10:13).
2. Seated – “sat on the right hand of God”. This truth is of great comfort to believers:
 - a. He is our Intercessor – Romans 8:34 “Who *is* he that condemneth? *It is* Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, **who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us.**” (Also Heb. 7:25)
 - b. He is our Advocate – 1 John 2:1 “My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an **advocate** with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous:”
3. We preach Christ crucified, risen, ascended and coming again!

B. The Presence of the Ascended Christ (Vs. 20)

1. His Presence with His Workers (Vs. 20a)
 - a. What a wonderful truth! The risen, ascended Christ is present with His people as they labour for Him. “Their activity was empowered by Him; He did through them that which they could not do themselves.” (Hiebert) The glorious truth is that the Ascended Christ is still at work in this world.
 - b. Christ promised, “...lo, **I am with you always**, even unto the end of the world. Amen.”
 - c. We are “labourers together with God” (1 Cor. 3:9).
2. His Presence with His Word (Vs. 20b)
 - a. The proclamation of the Word, the Gospel message, was the primary activity of these men. They “preached everywhere” not worked miracles everywhere! Preaching was primary, miracles secondary and subject to the sovereign will of God.

Conclusion:

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1. What are you doing to help advance the cause of the Gospel? Are you a soul-winning Christian?
2. Are you saved? We have had Christ so wonderfully revealed to us through Mark's Gospel. Will you receive Him today as Lord and Saviour?
3. J.C. Ryle's exhortation at the conclusion of his commentary of Mark's Gospel is fitting for the conclusion of our series:

“And now let us close the pages of St. Mark's Gospel with self-inquiry and self-examination. Let us not content us to have seen with our eyes, and heard with our ears, the things here written for our learning about Jesus Christ. Let us ask ourselves whether we know any thing of Christ “dwelling in our hearts by faith?” Does the Spirit “witness with our spirit” that Christ is ours and we are His? Can we really say that we are “living the life of faith in the son of God,” and that we have found by experience that Christ is “precious” to our own souls? These are solemn questions. They demand serious consideration. May we never rest till we can give them satisfactory answers! “He that hath the Son hath life, and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life.” (1 John 5:12)