

Day 81, Mark 16

by David Servant

Jesus commissions His disciples to preach the gospel and promises supernatural signs for believers, despite their initial unbelief and hardness of heart.

Scripture: Mark 8:31, Mark 16:9, Luke 24:12, John 14:12, John 20:19, Acts 28:1

Topics: "Resurrection Faith", "Holy Spirit"

Description

David Servant emphasizes the disciples' struggle to believe in Jesus' resurrection despite His repeated predictions, highlighting how even future church leaders like them had doubts. He points out Jesus' compassion in reproaching the disciples for their unbelief yet still commissioning them to preach the gospel, showing that there is hope for all, including those who struggle with faith. Servant discusses the supernatural signs that believers experienced in the book of Acts, such as speaking in tongues, casting out demons, and healing the sick, emphasizing God's power at work. He addresses the controversial verses in Mark 16:9-20, acknowledging differing views on their inspiration but emphasizing the greater works believers can do through faith in Jesus.

Transcript

Although Jesus repeatedly told His disciples that He would be killed and rise from the dead after three days (see Mark 8:31, 9:31, 10:34), they never got it. Even when Mary Magdalene reported to them on Sunday morning that Jesus was alive and that she had seen Him, they still didn't believe (16:11). And that evening, when two men, whom Jesus appeared to on the road to Emmaus, reported an encounter with Jesus, they still refused to believe (Luke 24:12-16). I always feel better about myself when I read about those future church leaders. With Jesus, there is hope even for me!

On Sunday evening, while they were still "mourning and weeping" (Mark 16:10) over Jesus' death and hiding "for fear of the Jews" (John 20:19), the eleven found that there was one Jew from whom they couldn't hide, namely Jesus. According to Luke's account, just as they were expressing their disbelief at the report of the two Emmaus road disciples, Jesus appeared in their midst. Excellent timing on His part, and I imagine they almost jumped out of their skins. The first thing He did was reproach them "for their unbelief and hardness of heart" (16:14). He didn't say, however, "That was the last straw, and I'm through with you!" Rather, after He rebuked them, He commissioned them to go into all the world and preach the gospel. Jesus gives jobs to bone-heads, which again makes me feel better.

Jesus also told them about some supernatural signs that would follow those who believe. In the book of Acts, we see that those signs were fairly common. On at least three occasions, we read in Acts of believers speaking in tongues, which was the most common of the five signs. We also read of demons being cast out and people being healed through the laying on of hands.

The only example of "picking up serpents" we have in the book of Acts is when Paul was bitten by a poisonous snake on the island of Malta (Acts 28:1-5). It should have killed him, but he shook it off and suffered no harm. A few folks have interpreted Jesus' words about picking up serpents to mean that God wants us to have snake-handling services in our churches. That, however, would fall into the category of tempting God. You won't find any snake-handling services in the book of Acts!

Similarly, there is no record of anyone drinking poison and not suffering any harm. Certainly we should not intentionally drink poison to prove our faith, thus tempting God. If someone intentionally poisons us, we then have the right to claim it won't hurt us.

Some have challenged the inspiration of Mark 16:9-20, claiming it was added later to Mark's original Gospel by an over-zealous scribe (a Pentecostal one, no doubt!). Although Mark 16:9-20 is not included in some early manuscripts, 16:9 was cited by Irenaeus, and 16:20 was referred to by Justin Martyr, both well-known second-century Christian apologists and church fathers.

You've probably heard the story of the mother who excitedly called her son, who was studying at a seminary, to tell him some good news. She had just visited a Pentecostal church, and the pastor's sermon had been on the various supernatural signs that would accompany believers found in Mark 16:17-18. At the end of the service, she had gone forward to receive prayer, and found herself speaking in a language she had never learned. She was ecstatic, and thought her son would be just as overjoyed.

He, however, explained to her that, according to some of his seminary professors, Mark 16:9-20 was not found in some ancient manuscripts, and was thus considered to be uninspired. She was, however, undaunted by his dousing, enthusiastically responding, "Wow! If God can do all that with uninspired verses, imagine what He can do with inspired ones!"

The fact is, even if we do away with Mark 16:9-20, we still have the entire book of Acts, not to mention Jesus' words, "He who believes in Me, the works that I do, he will do also; and greater works than these he will do" (John 14:12). So let them remove those "uninspired verses" if they want to!

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