

Gospel of Mark - Christmas: Jesus Sends!

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[0 : 00] So we're reading from Mark chapter 16, verse 9 to 20. It's on page 1024 in the Red Bible.

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. She went and told those who had been with him and who were mourning and weeping.

When they heard that Jesus was alive and that she had seen him, they did not believe it.

Afterwards, Jesus appeared in a different form to two of them while they were walking in the country. These returned and reported it to the rest, but they did not believe them either.

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. He said to them, Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation.

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

And these signs will accompany those who believe. In my name they will drive out demons, they will speak in new tongues, they will pick up snakes with their hands, and when they drink deadly poison, it will not hurt them at all.

[1 : 18] They will place their hands on sick people and they will get well. After the Lord Jesus had spoken to them, he was taken up into heaven and he sat at the right hand of God. Then the disciples went out and preached everywhere, and the Lord worked with them and confirmed his word by the signs that accompanied us.

Thank you.

Just to make a note here, you'll see, and I'm sure it's in most of your Bibles, between verse 8 and verse 9, you've got this small little sentence in print, small print, and it says in my Bible anyway, and something similar in yours as well, the earliest manuscripts and some other ancient witnesses do not have Mark 16, verses 9 to 20.

I'm not going to get into a big commentary on the pros and cons and what it's all about. If you want to know more about that, please speak to me afterwards, other than to say this, that any of the accounts that we have of the Gospels, we don't have any of the original ones.

We do have some very early ancient witnesses and accounts, at least 10,000 different accounts of Mark's Gospel, some of which do have these last few words, from verses 9 to 20, some do not.

[3 : 38] The reason why I'm going to follow it is because it doesn't contradict anything that Mark has said so far, and it doesn't contradict anything of the other Gospels.

In fact, I think it concludes Mark's Gospel well. If you want to know for other reasons and more in-depth reasons, then as I say, please do ask me afterwards.

I'll be very happy to go through that all with you, but I don't want that to be a distraction, but we treat what we have here as God's Word to us today. Well, with that introduction, let's now pray and ask for God's help.

He said to them, Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation.

Father, we are reminded that you came and through the angels announced the good news that Christ had come, and we pray that we, as your people in that same tradition, would be people who announce the good news of Jesus Christ.

[5 : 06] Father, may this news be wonderful to us again today. May it excite us. May it thrill us.

May it continue to change us. and may it motivate us to pass on this wonderful message to those that we will meet this coming week and that it would cause us to change our lives so that we enable this good news to go out into all the world.

Father, may your word to us now help us in regards to that. We pray for your help amongst us in Jesus' name.

Amen. Well, we all love a good story, don't we? The best ones are the ones that we desperately want to be true.

Stories that tell us perhaps about a hero who comes and takes on the powers of darkness, fighting evil, destroying evil, good winning the day.

[6 : 27] We love the stories where a hero comes and who goes into the heart of the battle and sacrifices his life, wounded and dying on the battlefield so that others can be free and live happily ever after.

Well, last evening, I went with my family to watch The Hobbit, good movie, by the way. And as I came out of the cinema, there was a part of me that was so excited, I longed that it was true.

I wanted to be Bilbo Baggins, the Hobbit, who left the peace and the happiness of the Shire and entered into another world to take on the evil forces of Smaug, the breathing dragon, the fire-breathing dragon.

I dreamed of a world where everything could be made good again and everything would be beautiful, no more evil, no more darkness. The problem is, as my family would have to remind me, is I'm not a Hobbit.

And it's not true. It's just a made-up story. It's all fantasy. But look what we have here.

[7 : 46] Look what we're thinking about this week. Think of the true story of Christmas. It's all about a hero, isn't it?

The ultimate hero, the Lord Jesus Christ, the God-man who left the security of heaven and who came down into this world to rescue us, the one who came with absolute power and supreme authority to restore broken lives and to renew this disordered world.

The angels announced the hero's coming. You see it there on your screen. We read it, first of all, this morning. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.

Today in the town of David, a saviour, the rescuer, has been born to you. He is Christ the Lord.

Jesus, our hero, came into this broken world, a world that has been ruined by sin.

He came to a world that was overcome with the powers of darkness and evil. And in sacrificial love, he entered into the heart of the battle for you and for me.

[9 : 08] And in one of those greatest scenes of the story, we see our hero hanging on a cross. And it seems like that evil has won.

Our hero has died. Our hope seems to have been destroyed. But, the story continues on.

You see, just when we think the hero is dead, look at verse 9. Jesus rose early on the first day of the week.

The saviour, the rescuer, the one who was born into this world, the one who lived and who died, still lives. The story continues on.

Three times Jesus told us he would die and rise again. Look back at Mark chapter 8, verse 31.

[10 : 14] Verse 31. Mark chapter 8, verse 31, the last part of it.

Talking about himself, he said, he must be killed and after three days rise again. Look at chapter 9, verse 31.

He said to them, the son of man, that's speaking of himself, is going to be betrayed into the hands of men. They will kill him and after three days he will rise.

Chapter 10, verse 34. They will mock him, spit on him, flog him and kill him.

Three days later, he will rise. And now in keeping with this great promise, he now appears to his followers to prove he is alive.

[11 : 24] So look at chapter 16, verse 9. We read there that he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom he had driven seven demons. In verse 12, afterwards, Jesus appeared in a different form to two of them while they were walking in the country.

in verse 14, later Jesus appeared to the eleven as they were eating. You see, none of them believed that Jesus would rise again.

None of them had expected a resurrection. They had all gone home and given up. For them, the story had finished. It was over. The book was closed.

But now the risen Jesus appears physically proving to them that he is alive and that they can believe. The story of Jesus who was born and died has risen again.

So the story, the Christmas story continues on. Do you believe that the story continues? Or did it just stop with some baby who was born and that was it?

[12:40] Are you like those in verse 11? When they heard that Jesus was alive and that she had seen him, they did not believe it.

Perhaps you're thinking right now, well, if Jesus turned up here right now, then I would believe it. If he appeared right now, if he appeared and walked through those doors and sat down beside me, then I would accept this story about Jesus.

Well, look what Jesus said to his disciples in verse 14. When 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 been risen.

You see, Jesus is saying, the fact that people saw me is evidence enough. Jesus did not appear to everyone, he appeared to some people so that they might testify to everybody else the fact of his resurrection.

And that's the same message that comes to us today. Believe, not because Jesus walks through the door at our demand, believe because people did see him and their eyewitness account is recorded for us in Mark's gospel.

[14:14] In fact, read through one of the earliest accounts in 1 Corinthians chapter 15 and it tells us there that he appeared to over 500 people, all who were living at the time, so people could go and check out to see if it was true.

This isn't fantasy. fantasy. This isn't the stuff of legends. This is the true story of Jesus Christ, our hero who was born, who died, and who rose again, and who lives forever.

The story of Christmas is not finished. It continues on. Which leads to the second point, that this story must be told.

Verse 15, he said to them, go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation.

The good news that we are to tell is the true story of Jesus. We are to tell the Christmas story to people. Look back to the very first verse of Mark's gospel with me.

[15:33] Chapter 1, verse 1. This is what he says. This is how he introduces his gospel.

The beginning of the gospel. Gospel simply means good news. the beginning of the good news about Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

Now there's something that I want us to notice here, a connection that I want us to make. Mark's introduction here is very similar to the very first book of the Bible, the very first verse we find in the Bible.

You know how the first verse goes in Genesis chapter 1, verse 1? In the beginning God. And Genesis records for us how the earth was formless and empty.

There was disorder and chaos and then God intervened. He brought order and design. He created the world into something that was very good and beautiful.

[16:43] And now look where Mark introduces his gospel. He starts it like this, the beginning of the gospel. He's saying to us, can you see that connection?

There's a disorder and a chaos in our lives and in our world and it all needs to be put right. And God has intervened through Jesus, our hero, not to create the world, but to renew the world, to bring about a new creation in the lives of people.

So, Mark chapter 1 verse 14, we read this, after John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee proclaiming the good news of God.

The time has come, he said, the kingdom of God is near, repent and believe the good news. Jesus proclaimed to the people as he walked on this earth, he was telling people that he was God's chosen king, he was the Messiah, the promised one, he was the one with absolute power and supreme authority, he was born to be the saviour and the rescuer of mankind, he was the one who came to die for us, the one who came to take our sin for us, so that through repentance and faith we might enter into God's kingdom, a world ruled by peace and justice, the world that we all dream of and long for.

This is the story that he told and this story is too good to be kept for you and me just to talk about amongst ourselves.

[18:32] So at the end of Mark's gospel, having introduced the story, the good news, he concludes it by telling us in chapter 16, verse 15, go into all the world and preach this good news to all creation.

This story is so great, this story is so amazing that he doesn't just say, oh by the way, when you have time or if you feel like it, go.

It's a command. Do it. Tell the good news to all places on this planet and to all people on this planet. Nobody, not one race, not one people group is to be excluded from hearing this amazing story. The world is still looking for a hero.

We all long for someone who can change this world, who can transform lives, who can forgive and make things right again. While all of that longing and all of those dreams, they become a reality in the true story of Jesus Christ.

[19 : 57] Now let's be clear. This story is serious and it requires a response from people.

Look at verse 16. Whoever believes and is baptized, baptism being that outward expression of your faith in Christ.

Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned. You see, if we're to believe this story, and if people are to believe this story, they are to make it their own story.

We've got to live it. We've got to personalize it. We've got to make it about us, because this is a story about people like you and me. People who have entered into this world, rebelling against our creator, God, people who have lived and loved themselves more than their creator, and we are in desperate need of forgiveness and rescue.

And this story is telling us that if I have faith in Jesus, then I can be forgiven, that I can be saved, that I can be rescued, that I can be delivered from condemnation, will escape God's judgment.

[21 : 27] That is the wonder of the story. And of course, to ignore the story, it has consequences. Look at the end of verse 16.

But whoever does not believe will be condemned. You see, if this good news is all about Jesus, who is born into this world, to renew broken lives, to restore the disordered world, to bring forgiveness, it makes sense that the kind of people who will be part of that eternal kingdom are those who see their sin, and those who see their failures, and turn to Jesus, and follow him. Not because they're perfect, but because they know they're not, and they look to Christ. But if people want to continue to rebel and to fight against him, if people long to be free of God's rule and just live however they want to live and do whatever they want, then there will be no place in God's kingdom.

They will be condemned. end. We must, and I underline, we must tell this story because it is a matter of heaven or hell.

that is the reality of Christmas. And third, we must be encouraged that this story has power to change people's lives.

[23 : 19] Verse 19, After the Lord Jesus had spoken to them, he was taken up into heaven and he sat at the right hand of God.

Now to sit at the right hand of God is not just kind of a location, a position, it's telling us something much bigger and much greater. To sit at the right hand of God is to be given the highest position possible.

This is the place of all power and all authority and this is the place where Jesus reigns and rules. Now get this, the power and the authority that Jesus has goes with his disciples as they tell the story.

It goes with them as they tell the story. Look at verse 20, Then the disciples went out and preached everywhere and the Lord worked with them.

The risen Lord Jesus with all his power and authority is not absent now from his disciples but he is now present with them through the Holy Spirit.

[24 : 34] He hasn't abandoned them. He is now working with them. You see the desire of Jesus is that all people everywhere hear the story and believe the story.

That's what he wants. He wants people to know the true story of Christmas. It's his desire that people know about him. And sometimes supernatural things happen to make that possible so that people everywhere hear the story and so that people believe the story.

Look at the end of verse 20. Well let's read verse 20 again. Then the disciples went out and preached everywhere and the Lord worked with them and confirmed his word by the signs that accompanied it.

Now in verse 17 to 18 we get a description of some of these supernatural signs. And if you were to read through on in the story if you read through Acts and through the letters you will see some of these things there.

Sometimes as people spoke they drove out demons that God was saying that he does have power and authority over Satan and over evil.

[26 : 09] people sometimes they did speak in tongues or in different languages so that people could hear the message and the good news in their own language so that people could believe.

We also read that sometimes they were protected as they brought the good news to dangerous and hostile places. So in verse 18 we read they will pick up snakes with their hands and they will drink deadly poison.

It will not hurt them at all. And through time God has kept his messengers to bring the good news to distant places and to hostile and difficult places and he has protected his messengers as they have brought the good news.

Sometimes they were able to heal the sick to convince the most cynical and the hardened of people so that they would be convinced that the story of Jesus was true.

We read that at the end of verse 18. They will place their hands on sick people and they will get well. And those who had no belief whatsoever were convinced it was confirming the word that this was real.

[27 : 30] Of course these signs are not an absolute guarantee that they continue to happen or happen all the time. We only need to read on in the story where we read of many who did bring the good news of Jesus and they were persecuted.

They did die for their faith. People who were sick weren't healed but yet they still believed. And we can read this throughout the rest of the New Testament.

But the point still stands and this is what I want us to take away. That Jesus still uses his power and his authority in the lives of his people to make sure that his story is heard in all the world and that people believe in Jesus Christ.

He still works with us through the power of his Holy Spirit to see lives changed so that people are convinced of who he is. It changes people's lives.

And this week we are going to celebrate Christmas. We will remember on Wednesday that Jesus Christ, our true hero, came into the world to be our saviour.

[28 : 55] and as we celebrate Christmas and as we sing our Christmas carols as we have done today, let's remember this. This week 2.91 billion people or 7,292 people groups on our planet will not celebrate Christmas because they have never heard the good news of Jesus.

Get your head around those numbers. 2.91 billion people will not celebrate because they have not heard the good news of Jesus.

Think of these countries that we hear about in the news, so ruined and broken. The Qashqai people of Iran, the Bedouin people of Iraq, the Tamanai people of Afghanistan.

Think of the brutal regime in North Korea, people like you and me, never heard and do not know. The world longs for a hero.

People are still looking for someone who will renew broken lives and restore this disordered world. People long to be finding a saviour, someone who will forgive.

[30 : 29] Well, you know what? We know that story. We've heard it. And he tells us in verse 15, go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation.

God's salvation. So this Christmas, may God give us every opportunity to tell the story to those who have not yet heard and to those of our friends and our family who have not yet believed.

That is the reality of Christmas. Christmas. We've got good news. We have a message to tell. Let's pray. Let's pray. In the quietness, each of us just think of someone who we know we're going to meet over this coming week, a friend, somebody within our family, perhaps they've heard the good news and they have not yet believed.

Pray for them now that God will use you to be the person who shares through conversation, or through giving a book.

Pray that God would by the power of his Holy Spirit convince people of its truth, opening up their blind eyes and blocking their deaf ears to the truth of Jesus Christ.

[32 : 48] Just pray for that right now. Just pray for that right now. Thank you.

Thank you.