

## **In the Shadow – Mark 16:9-20**

As I mentioned in the last blogpost, Mark 16 has a controversial history. The King James version that a lot of us grew up with usually includes verses 9-20 without comment. Most of the newer versions either include the passage with caution or exclude it altogether. Interestingly, the Kinyarwanda Bible that I have includes it without any comment or caution.

The evidence from early manuscripts leads us to be pretty certain that Mark 16:9-20 was not a part of the original writing. My purpose today is not to engage in that argument. Since I am, essentially, a theological bumpkin, I will let the scholars a whole lot smarter than me work through that one. Rather, I want to talk about what we can learn from the passage regardless of its origin.

The “Longer Ending of Mark” can be considered important because:

- *It confirms the resurrection of Jesus Christ* – verses 9-13. It’s pretty well established in our minds how important the resurrection is. As church historian Phillip Schaff wrote, “The resurrection [of Christ] is either the greatest miracle or the greatest delusion which history records.” If this passage taught anything different we could easily toss it out.
- *It confronts the hard of heart* – verse 14. The disciples had difficulty believing Mary Magdalene (vs. 11), as well as Cleopas and his companion (vs. 12 and Luke 24). Jesus’ words to Thomas come to mind, “Blessed are those that have not seen and yet have believed.” (John 20:29) Jesus confronts us, not with a nasty rebuke, but a loving call to believe Him – to trust Him – to obey Him.
- *It commands the Great Commission* - verse 15. Of course we have Matthew 28:16-20 and Acts 1:8, but reading it in a third context only makes the command stronger. This is our response to the new life we have in Jesus Christ. One of my favorite passages (I have a lot of them) is Revelation 7:9-17. You and I have the responsibility of taking Christ’s salvation to “every nation and tribe and people and language,” (7:9 NLT). I get excited just thinking about that future time in glory!
- *It condemns the unbeliever* – verse 16. This might not be our favorite part of the passage, but significant regardless of our feelings. Jesus during His earthly ministry didn’t mince words on the subject. Paul writes in Romans 3:23 that “the wages of sin is death.” Everyone makes a choice, “Do I follow Jesus?” Our part as Jesus people is to share appropriately and let the Holy Spirit do the rest.
- *It consoles the oppressed* – verses 17-20. This is the portion of the passage that generates the most controversy. It’s the fun part, in my opinion. Not that I’m ready to go out and grab a copperhead or chug a jug of Roundup, but I take comfort in knowing that if God calls me to a task, he’ll give me the courage/strength/wisdom/protection to carry me through it. Maybe this doesn’t apply to me as much as others down through history, but for oppressed and persecuted peoples, these are encouraging words. Jesus is seated at the right hand of the Father. He empowers His followers. “And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” (Matthew 28:20 NLT).

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