

Daily Bread with Brother Hwa-Chi (Not reviewed by the speaker, for personal use only)

Mark 16: 15-16

Brothers and sisters, peace be with you, this is Hwa-Chi. Thank the Lord, it's time to read the Bible again. Today, we will continue to read Mark Chapter 16, verses 15 to 16.

Comparing the Gospel accounts of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, all conclude with the Great Commission, which is to spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ throughout the earth. However, due to the different portrayals of Jesus in these three Gospels, the way they record the Great Commission also differs.

In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus is depicted as a king, thus He issues the Great Commission in an authoritative tone. In Matthew 28:19-20, this passage is one of the most familiar Great Commission passages: "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." The Great Commission in Matthew includes two parts: first, to preach the Gospel to people, bring them before God, and baptize them to become disciples of Jesus Christ; second, to teach them, helping them understand and obey the word of God.

In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus is portrayed as a perfect and complete man. Therefore, the Great Commission recorded in Luke emphasizes Jesus instructing His disciples to bear witness to the Gospel, from Jerusalem to all nations. He also promises them the power from above, enabling them to faithfully testify for Jesus Christ.

In the Gospel of Mark, Jesus is depicted as a diligent servant. The Great Commission in Mark is recorded in 16:15-18. Mark emphasizes that preaching the Gospel is to serve others, and in the process of your service, there will be signs and wonders accompanying you, just as Jesus Christ fulfilled His **earthly ministry** by preaching,

casting out demons, and healing the sick. Today, let's focus on the first part of Mark's Great Commission, which is about preaching the Gospel and baptizing people, recorded in 16:15-16. Although it's only two verses, Mark's perspective includes a very fundamental truth that is often overlooked or misunderstood. May God have mercy on us and give us the spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that we can truly understand God's word.

Verse 15: "And He said to them, 'Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.'"

Firstly, "you must go." This command is not just for the disciples at that time but for every saint who has been graciously saved: you must go. The benefits of the Gospel cannot be confined to ourselves. After receiving the blessings of the Gospel, we must share them. The peace and joy brought by the Gospel multiply as we share them, becoming richer and surpassing. The Gospel should not remain stagnant but flowing. It is a stream of grace that ultimately needs to spread throughout the inhabited earth, going into all the world to preach the Gospel.

In Acts 1:8, when Jesus ascended into heaven, He established the route for preaching the Gospel: starting from Jerusalem, to all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. This route goes from near to far, from close relationships to distant ones, from the same culture to similar cultures, and ultimately to different cultures, spreading the Gospel to all inhabited earth. For every saint, it means starting from your family, to relatives, then to classmates, friends, colleagues, neighbors, and beyond. If capable, participating in short-term missions to different places, preaching the Gospel to unfamiliar people. If led by God, one can temporarily set aside work to expand the Gospel in places with different languages, cultures, and customs. God will surely open your eyes and expand your boundaries through these ministries, spreading the Gospel to all nations. According to Romans 11:25, we must continue until the full number of Gentiles has come in, then Jesus Christ will come again.

Indeed, verse 15 doesn't seem challenging at first glance, especially when using translations like the Chinese Union Version. However, delving into the original Greek text reveals an interesting nuance. The word used for "people" in this verse is "ktisis" in Greek, which indeed means "creation" or "creature." Therefore, translations like the New International Version (NIV) and the American Standard Version (ASV) render it as "Preach the gospel to all creation." The King James Version (KJV) translates it as "creatures," thus "Preach the gospel to all creatures," emphasizing the broad scope of the commission to share the Gospel with all of creation. Therefore, St. Francis said, "Preach the gospel at all times, and if necessary, use words." This means you should preach the gospel wherever you are, whenever it's necessary, using your words. It means our lives should be preaching the gospel, not just through our verbal actions but also through how we treat everything: how we use resources, and how we manage our interactions with various people, events, and objects according to God's will.

Actually, the concept presented by Mark here is completely consistent with Paul's concept in Romans 8:19-21. Romans 8:19-21 says: "For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope; because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God." In fact, Adam's sin had far-reaching consequences, affecting the entire natural order of the universe. Since sin entered the world, not only do sinful humans face death, but all of creation also falls under the futility mentioned, being subjected to corruption.

All created things were originally meant to remain new and unblemished, unaffected by aging. However, because of sin, all things have become corrupted. The only solution for creation to be liberated from this corruption and futility is for the sons of God to be revealed, meaning God's children, whose lives grow and mature, displaying the glory of God's image in them. Only then can all things return to the beautiful state of God's original creation. When Mark speaks of preaching the gospel to all creation, he implies that we are not only to lead people to believe in Jesus and receive forgiveness for sins but also to help them grow in holiness, to

become sanctified, and to attain glory as soon as possible, so that all created things may be freed from emptiness and corruption.

Dear brothers and sisters, with this understanding, the next time you hear the wind, know that it is urging you to grow quickly; the next time you see falling leaves, know that the trees are reminding you to grow quickly; when you hear the chirping of insects, know that they are pleading with you to grow quickly. Mark 15:16 tells us to preach the gospel to all creation. On one hand, through our growth, we enable creation to be liberated from emptiness and corruption sooner; on the other hand, all creation constantly reminds us to grow and mature, to display the glory of God's children.

Here arises a question: how can we preach the gospel to all creation? Animals may have ears, but they cannot understand our words; and plants don't even have ears. So how do we preach to them? The call to preach the gospel to all creation, as Mark presents it here, is to expand our perspective and align ourselves with God's original intent, His primal definition of the Gospel. This definition is far broader, higher, and deeper than what we typically understand. The Gospel is indeed intended for all creation.

Verse 16: "He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned."

This verse is also a fundamental truth but is often misunderstood, especially by seekers. Their most common question is, "If believing is enough, why do we need to be baptized?" Hopefully, this time, we can clarify the truth. Let's start by examining the second half of this sentence, which is, "he who does not believe will be condemned."

Jesus Christ, by shedding His blood and giving His life on the cross, completed redemption. Through His grace of redemption, received by believing, one can be saved freely, without any other conditions attached. In other words, once you believe, you accept the effectiveness of Jesus' redemption, and He bears all your

sins and transgressions for you. Therefore, you will not be condemned. Not being condemned means you will not perish eternally, you will not face judgment in the lake of fire, and you will certainly have a share in the new heaven and new earth. Just as John 3:16 says, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." Having eternal life, you will have a share in eternity in the new heaven and new earth, having been saved from the judgment of the lake of fire and from eternal perdition.

In reverse, if you do not believe, meaning you do not accept the redemption of Jesus Christ, your sins will still be upon you, and you will be condemned. Every person has sinned because they have all fallen short of the glory of God, none have lived a perfect life like God. Therefore, those who do not believe will certainly be condemned and will face judgment in the lake of fire, leading to eternal damnation.

Now, let's consider the first half of the sentence: "He who believes and is baptized will be saved." This clearly tells us that it must be belief, followed by baptism, for salvation to be attained. Here we need to consider two different scenarios: one where a person is "baptized without believing" and the other where a person "believes without being baptized." According to the logic of this statement, neither of these individuals can be fully saved.

Let's first consider "being baptized without believing." Because this person does not believe, they will be condemned, meaning their sins still remain upon them. Since they do not believe and do not accept the effectiveness of Jesus' redemption, their baptism is entirely meaningless. Some churches may prioritize numbers and may even pressure individuals into baptism; some may not truly believe but feel pressured or compelled by social expectations to be baptized; and some churches may teach prosperity theology, leading some individuals to be baptized for the benefits they seek in this life. These individuals do not address the issue of their own sin, nor do they believe that Christ shed His precious blood on the cross, bearing all their sins. Therefore, their sins still exist, and their baptism is meaningless. They will still face judgment in the lake of fire and fall into eternal damnation. Additionally, some individuals may have been baptized as infants

without having the capacity to believe. Later in life, they may never truly consider matters of faith or genuinely acknowledge their sins and seek God's forgiveness. In such cases, their baptism is also of no help to them. Hence, those churches that practice infant baptism often add a rite of confirmation in adulthood, emphasizing the need for personal belief and acceptance of the efficacy of Jesus Christ's redemption. Only then can one be considered as believing and baptized, thus ensuring their salvation.

Now let's consider another scenario, "believing but unwilling to be baptized." As long as a person genuinely believes, they will not be condemned and will be spared from judgment in the lake of fire. Through belief, they attain eternal life and have a share in the new heaven and new earth, securing eternal salvation. So why should one be baptized? Baptism is a public testimony, a public declaration that you have accepted the salvation of Jesus Christ, that you are moving from the kingdom of darkness under Satan's rule to the kingdom of the beloved Son of God, and that you belong to Christ. It is a triple declaration that will ensure your salvation from three aspects.

The first aspect is the world. You declare to the world: "Your old self is dead! It has been buried! The temptations, desires, corruption, and impurity that once entangled you have been crucified with Christ. Now, you are a new creation, able to separate yourself from the world and receive salvation from it. The second aspect is Satan. It is declaring to Satan and his followers that you belong to the kingdom of God, that you belong to Christ, and that you are holy. Now, you are under the protection of God and the angels. Satan and his followers can no longer bother you, and you can be saved from under Satan's power. The third aspect is the flesh. You declare to your own flesh: "Your body, along with its sinful desires, has been crucified with Christ. Now, it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me." You can receive salvation from the flesh.

This triple declaration brings about triple salvation, and we must understand that salvation is a process. The public declaration marks the beginning of this process. Once it begins, it becomes a journey of struggle: there are times of strength, times

of weakness, times of victory, and times of failure. But through the abundant supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, we will ultimately be saved.

After understanding the benefits that baptism brings to us, a person who believes but is unwilling to be baptized is somewhat like entering into a lifelong commitment with a lover without a public marriage ceremony to inform family and friends. Meanwhile, those who are interested in you will still make efforts to pursue you. In this scenario, can you be sure that you will stay faithful and not disappoint your lover? Of course, this analogy is not entirely accurate because the pursuers are not people but the world, Satan, and the flesh, and their attacks are much harder to defend against. Therefore, those who truly believe must be baptized. And the word of God says that those who believe and are baptized will certainly be saved. This salvation not only delivers us from sin for eternity and spares us from judgment in the lake of fire but also gradually saves us in this present life from the world, Satan, and the flesh through the public declaration and testimony that you belong to Christ.

"Those who believe and are baptized will certainly be saved." For those who believe and are willing to be baptized, the church has both the right and the obligation to baptize them. However, the church's baptisms must be conducted with caution. For those who are seeking and believing, it is advisable for them to attend baptism classes to help them understand some basic truths, especially to ensure that they truly believe and willingly accept the salvation of Jesus Christ out of their own free will. For those who genuinely believe, we can then baptize them.

The process of baptism should be spiritual. We must understand that this is not merely a ritual; it is a public testimony and declaration. On one hand, it is a declaration to the visible material world; on the other hand, it is also a declaration to the unseen spiritual world. Through baptism, the individual is united with the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, declaring that they belong to Christ and are part of the kingdom of God. I know many Christians who had their first spiritual experience and felt the moving of the Holy Spirit during their baptism. Such subjective spiritual experiences can be a lifelong source of help for them.

Let us pray together: Lord, we thank You for Your definition of the gospel, which surpasses our understanding and is broader, deeper, and higher. You call us to proclaim the gospel to all creation, meaning that it's not just about believing in the gospel for the forgiveness of sins, but also about spiritual growth and maturity, so that we may reflect the glory of Your Son. Help all creation to be freed from emptiness and decay. Help us to be willing to obey Your word, for You said, "Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved." Help us to obtain eternal life through faith and to publicly testify to our belonging to Christ through baptism. Help us to be saved from the world, from the power of Satan, and from the desires of our own flesh. Help us to walk on the path of sanctification and live a life that's pleasing to You. We pray in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.