

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

Mark 16: 17-20

Brothers and sisters, peace be with you, this is Hwa-Chi. Thank the Lord, it's time to read the Bible again. Let's continue reading Chapter 16, verses 17-20 today.

The great commission in Mark 16:15-18 differs from the one in Matthew's Gospel that we are familiar with. Matthew emphasizes preaching the gospel to all nations, making disciples of them, teaching them to obey the Lord's commands. Mark, however, emphasizes preaching the gospel to all creation, which includes bringing salvation and helping people grow in life, becoming holy and reflecting the glory of God, so that all creation can be freed from the bondage of vanity and corruption and enjoy the freedom of being children of God.

Therefore, the great commission in Mark includes three levels: first, helping people believe. Once they believe, they receive the grace of salvation through Jesus Christ, no longer condemned, saved from the judgment of the lake of fire, saved from eternal perdition; they can also share in the eternal blessings of the new heaven and earth; second, helping people to be baptized, so that they can be saved from the present life, saved from the world, saved from the power of Satan, saved from their own flesh and sinful desires; third, helping them to walk the path of sanctification, living a holy life, bearing the fruit of the Holy Spirit, manifesting the glory of God's Son. Such a mission is truly great and difficult, who can bear it?

We know that Mark emphasizes Jesus coming to serve. In Mark 10:45, "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many." Since Jesus served as a servant, those sent by Jesus should also serve as servants. A servant only needs to do as the master commands, and the master will be responsible for the servant's ability and effectiveness in serving. Therefore, though the great commission in Mark is difficult, God is responsible, and servants only need to do as the master commands. But how will God fulfill His responsibility?

Verses 17-18: "And these signs will follow those who believe: In My name they will cast out demons; they will speak with new tongues; they will take up serpents; and if they drink anything deadly, it will by no means hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover."

From these two verses, we see that God promises that signs will accompany those who believe. The first sign is casting out demons in the name of the Lord; the second is speaking in new tongues; the third is being able to handle serpents; the fourth is not being harmed by drinking poison; the fifth is being able to heal the sick by laying hands on them. The great commission in Mark is relatively difficult because most saints have not experienced these signs and wonders. As a result, people don't know how to balance their understanding of these scriptures. Some charismatic groups tend to overly emphasize these signs and wonders, while other conservative groups may completely ignore them, even denying that this passage is canonical. Let's pray that the Lord gives us the spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that we can truly understand God's word, balance it, and interpret it correctly.

Firstly, these signs are promises from God to those who are willing to go and preach the gospel to all nations. They are unique equipment given by God to help them serve others appropriately, just as Jesus Christ served people diligently on earth two thousand years ago. Therefore, we cannot consider these experiences as necessary conditions for salvation. It's clearly stated in verse 16 that as long as you believe, you will not be condemned; and if you believe and are baptized, you will be saved, without any additional requirements. Some groups wrongly emphasize speaking in tongues as evidence of salvation, which is inappropriate.

Secondly, most saints lack these experiences because we all lack the mindset of being servants, willing to accept the Lord's commission to go and preach to all nations. The apostles and disciples of the early churches had the mindset of being servants, and they were sent by the Lord to preach to all nations, and indeed these signs and wonders followed them.

Now let's look at them one by one:

The first one is casting out demons: In Acts 16:16-24, Paul and Silas went to Philippi to preach. They cast out a spirit of divination from a servant girl, which angered her owners, leading to Paul and Silas being thrown into prison. However, this gave Paul the opportunity to witness to the jailer, leading to the establishment of the church in Philippi. The Church in Philippi maintained a close relationship with Paul and supported him in his gospel preaching efforts everywhere. Thus, Paul established the Philippian church through casting out demons.

The second is speaking in new tongues: In Acts 2:1-13, on the day of Pentecost, the disciples gathered in Jerusalem, and the Holy Spirit was poured out upon them. They spoke in tongues as the Spirit enabled them, and there were many Jews from various nations present in Jerusalem for the feast. The disciples used their own languages to preach the gospel and testify to these Jews. Peter seized the opportunity to preach his first sermon, which deeply convicted the listeners, and three thousand people were saved that day, leading to the establishment of the church in Jerusalem. Here we see that the disciples speaking in new tongues led to the establishing of the church in Jerusalem.

The third is handling serpents: In Acts 28:1-10, when Paul was on his way to Rome and encountered a shipwreck, he was stranded on the island of Malta and received by the natives. While gathering firewood, Paul was bitten by a venomous snake, but he did not die as expected, which led many natives to be saved.

The fourth is drinking poison without harm: There isn't a direct example of this in the book of Acts, where apostles drank poison while preaching and were unharmed. However, as the apostles traveled to many remote areas and consumed local food and water, experiencing stomach issues would have been common. In 1 Timothy 5:23, Paul specifically advised his young coworker Timothy not to drink only water but to use a little wine for his stomach's sake.

Here we see the apostles of the early church going out to preach the gospel and establish churches using their limited resources, yet still managing to spread the gospel to the ends of the earth at that time, to Italy and Spain, showing God's provision in their daily lives. Of course, they didn't deliberately consume poisonous substances to prove they wouldn't be harmed, as that would be testing God; rather,

they prayed over their food and drink for cleanliness, and God provided protection and blessing, enabling them to continue fulfilling the tasks entrusted to them by God.

The fifth is laying hands on the sick: There are numerous examples of healing in the book of Acts. Here are a few examples: Acts 3:6, Peter commands a man lame from birth to rise and walk; 5:16, many sick people were brought to Peter, and he healed them all; 9:40, Peter raises Tabitha from the dead in Joppa; 20:10, Paul raises Eutychus, who fell from a third-story window, from the dead.

So, the five signs mentioned in the Gospel of Mark were experienced by the apostles of the early church. We firmly believe that even in today's society, with advanced information and medical technology, if you have the mindset of being a servant of God, willing to be sent to underdeveloped areas to preach the gospel, to bear witness for the Lord, these signs will still accompany you when necessary. We read many testimonies of missionaries who were sent to the tropical rainforests of South America or the jungles of Africa, and signs and wonders often accompanied them. We must understand that signs and wonders are not for our spiritual pride or self-indulgence; they are for witnessing the glory of God. When you are willing to be a servant of God, He will give you authority to witness His glory.

Verse 19: "So then, after the Lord had spoken to them, He was received up into heaven, and sat down at the right hand of God."

After Jesus Christ rose from the dead, He was with the disciples for forty days. These forty days were to help the disciples transition; they were accustomed to the physical presence of Jesus Christ, but now they had to transition to His spiritual presence. The basis of this transition was the indwelling Holy Spirit, as mentioned in John 20:22, where Jesus breathed on the disciples and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit." With the Holy Spirit dwelling within them, they could follow His guidance.

Forty days later, Jesus ascended openly before them. This is recorded in Acts 1:9-11: "Now when He had spoken these things, while they watched, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. And while they looked steadfastly

toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel, who also said, 'Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven.'" When Jesus ascended, the angels foretold to the disciples that one day He would return. After His ascension, Jesus sat down at the right hand of God the Father, having completed His earthly ministry and now beginning His heavenly ministry.

Jesus' heavenly ministry refers to His ongoing work in carrying out the plans ordained by God for the fulfillment of His eternal purposes. Let's delve into Ephesians 1:7-12 to understand these plans. First, let's read the passage:

Verses 7-8: "In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace which He made to abound toward us in all wisdom and prudence." This is the first plan, the redemption plan in Christ, which Jesus Christ has already accomplished.

Continuing with verses 9-10: "Having made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself, that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth—in Him." This is the second plan, the plan of headed up all things in Christ: that all of us should be brought together in Christ, a plan that Jesus Christ continues to execute in heaven.

Let's proceed with verses 11-12: "In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will, that we who first trusted in Christ should be to the praise of His glory." This is the third plan, the full inheritance plan in Christ: that Christ should become our inheritance. This plan has also not yet been fully accomplished and is part of Jesus' ongoing work in heaven.

Now, since Jesus has ascended and is seated at the right hand of God, how does He carry out His heavenly ministry?

Let's continue with Ephesians 1:13-14: "In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory." Here we see that after Jesus ascended, He sent the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, who dwells within every saved saint.

The Holy Spirit works within us to accomplish what? Firstly, to seal us, making us increasingly belong to God, so that the Holy Spirit can complete Jesus Christ's plan of heading up all things in Christ. Secondly, the Holy Spirit is the guarantee of our future inheritance, enabling us to increasingly enjoy the richness of Christ today, ultimately fulfilling Christ's inheritance plan in us. In other words, the Holy Spirit works within us in two ways: firstly, to make us belong to Christ, so that all of us can be united in Christ. Secondly, to make Christ belong to us, so that each one of us can be filled with the richness of Jesus Christ, and ultimately, Christ's inheritance plan will be fulfilled in us.

Verse 20: "And they went out and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them and confirming the word through the accompanying signs. Amen."

The apostles and saints of the early church, following the commands of Jesus Christ, went out into all the world to preach the gospel to all nations. As a result, the Lord worked with them, confirming their message with various signs and wonders. The saints of the early church have left behind a wonderful testimony. As this great mission has been passed down from generation to generation, churches have been established all over the world, and the gospel of Christ has been proclaimed far and wide.

Today, we can gather in the house of God, worshiping and praising Him together with His children, bearing the fruit of the great mission passed down by faithful witnesses throughout the ages. As we are now in the end times, the baton of the great mission is in our hands, and we must faithfully fulfill our entrusted task and finish our race. Seeing the changes in the current situation, we know that the day

of the Lord's return is drawing near. May we all be faithful and good servants when Christ returns, receiving His praise and rejoicing with Him.

Dear brothers and sisters, thank you for your coming alongside me over the past 16 weeks, as we journeyed through the Gospel of Mark. We have learned to be disciples of Christ in His school. I believe that during this time of reading the Scriptures, some of God's words have taken root in your hearts. May the Lord guard His words and bring true spiritual growth. Let us thank God together for bringing us through these past 16 weeks.

Dear Lord Jesus Christ, thank You for leading us through the Gospel of Mark, helping us understand Your ministry on earth: how You served as a faithful servant, preaching, casting out demons, and healing the sick; how You trained Your disciples, transforming them into messengers of the gospel, capable of carrying out the great mission. Lord, we truly thank You, for not only completing Your earthly ministry but also continuing Your work in heaven, helping us to fully belong to You after receiving Your grace of redemption, and enabling us to fulfill Your plan of heading up all things in You as one. On the other hand, we experience and enjoy Your various riches, so that each one of us may be filled with the richness of Jesus Christ, and ultimately, the plan of the full inheritance in Christ may be fulfilled in us. Lead us, bless us; in Jesus Christ's holy name, we pray. Amen.