

The Forgotten Mission

Mark 16.20

Scripture reading: Acts 2.22-39

A couple weeks ago I was able to spend some precious time in Adelaide with my grandson. Caleb is five months old – and he is completely relaxed in my arms. When I lift him up over my head, he laughs – he doesn't fret because of the height. When I carry him across a busy street, he takes no notice of the traffic. When I bounce him on my knee, he doesn't even try to hold on with his hands.

He doesn't struggle, because he has such strong trust in his granddad. Whatever I do with him, wherever I take him, he doesn't stress. He simply relaxes and enjoys it.

That is how we should be with God. And if we truly understand the ascension – that Jesus ascended for us, for our benefit – then we will.

N T Wright said, "To embrace the Ascension is to heave a sigh of relief, to give up the struggle to be God (and with it the inevitable despair at our constant failure), and to enjoy our status as *creatures*: image-bearing creatures, but creatures nonetheless."¹

The ascension should inspire in us great certainty and trust – just like Caleb with his granddad. Here's a couple reasons why (by way of revision):

Jesus reigns on high. He has taken upon Himself the responsibility to meet our needs and purge our imperfections. It is by the administration of His sovereign grace that people are saved. And it is by the working of His sovereign plan that a place is prepared for us.

So relax . . .

- If you are saved, don't worry about losing your salvation. It all depends on dependable Jesus, who atoned for all your sin once for all on the cross.
- If you are witnessing (and I hope you are), don't worry about whether a person accepts or rejects the gospel. That is Jesus' responsibility, not yours.
- If you are hurting, don't worry that this will never end. Jesus is preparing a kingdom that is so glorious Paul says ¹⁸ . . . the sufferings of this present time are not worthy *to be compared* with the glory which shall be revealed in us (Romans 8:18).

All of this is true because Jesus reigns on high. And that is only the beginning of the benefits that flow on from His ascension. To name a second, **Jesus also defends us from on high.** Here are more reasons to relax . . .

- If you sin even though you are a believer, don't worry about facing the wrath of God. Jesus is your advocate.

¹ N. T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope (Harper One, 2008)*, p. 114

- If you are being tempted, don't worry that you are unable to resist. Jesus is your intercessor.

We come now to the third reason why we should be glad **Jesus ascended for us**:

3. Jesus delegates from on high (v 20)

You will notice from verse 20 that Jesus delegates to two parties the responsibility for spreading the gospel. There is "the Lord" and there is "them". This is the process of expandability.

Mark 16:20 (NKJV)

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

The 'Lord' is the Holy Spirit. 'Them' is a reference to the apostles – and by extension, all believers who have followed them.

Consider first how Jesus delegates to believers.

a. Believers

Mark 16:20 (NKJV)

²⁰ And they **went** out and **preached** everywhere . . .

Going out and preaching was not something the apostles did on their own initiative. Their first impulse immediately following the resurrection of Jesus was to go back to Galilee, get in a boat and go out fishing (see John 21) – they did not go out preaching.

So what was it that got them out of the boat and into the streets of Jerusalem, Antioch, Ephesus, Alexandria and Rome? It was a commandment from Jesus.

Mark 16:15 (NKJV)

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

Here is a radical change in God's method of operation. In the Old Testament, the method of evangelism could be described as 'come and see'. Israel was a sample of the glorious and righteous and prosperous kingdom of God on earth for all nations to come and see – a sample, that is, to the extent that she obeyed God's benevolent covenant given to Moses.

Think about it this way. One of the hottest political issues today is illegal immigrants – boat people risking their very lives to come to Australia. Why are they so determined to come here? Because this country represents a better life.

Now switch back to the Old Testament during the reigns of David and Solomon. What did foreigners see in Israel? Glory. Righteousness. Peace. Prosperity. Australia is good, but not that good. In that day, people wanted to immigrate to Israel.

And what was the immigration policy God dictated? Let them come! Let all the nations come and see the greatness of Israel's God. And if they wish to believe – like Rahab, like Ruth – let them be circumcised and become part of Israel.

When you read the Old Testament law, you see that Israel was to have an open immigration policy. Come. See. Convert.

After the resurrection, however, this method of operation changes. God's great commission is no longer come and see. Now it is go and tell.

i. Go

We might ask, "Where are we to go?" There are actually two correct answers to this question – one is a destination, the other a determination.

1. Destination

The destination is specified by Jesus in Acts 1.8: Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and to the uttermost parts of the earth. In other words, we are not done going until everyone has heard.

After 2000 years of evangelisation, has everyone heard? In this age when people all over the world are better connected than ever thought possible – through smart phones, Facebook, and Twitter – can we say that the boundaries of the uttermost parts of the earth have been breached?

We would like to think so . . . but the reality is that we are woefully short. In fact, we have hardly scratched the surface.

I want you to see a two minute video clip of John Piper talking about this sober reality. Before you see it, you need to understand some missiological terminology.

You'll hear Piper talk about 'people groups' instead of 'nationalities'. 'People groups' is a more precise term than nationalities because many countries do not have a uniform culture or even race. For example, in Australia we have some true blue Aussies who are of Aboriginal descent and some that are of European descent. Two very different cultures. Two separate people groups . . . yet both are all equally part of one country.

There are 196 countries in the world, but there are 13,000 people groups.

Another term you'll hear is 'unreached people groups'. This is defined as any group of people where the percentage of evangelicals is 2% or less. Where you have that situation, it is important for missionaries to be there to support the small local Christian community.

Out of 13,000 people groups, how many do you think are unreached?

A final term is 'unengaged, unreached people groups'. These are people groups that have no Christians and no missionaries.

Out of 13,000 people groups, how many do you think are unengaged – no Christians?

http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=uSmf0kK8wzg

Jesus said go and tell. The destination is the uttermost parts of the earth. After 2000 years, we are nowhere near getting there. And, as Piper said, we have no excuse.

Will you do your part? Will you give? Will you go? Will you tell?

Just to make sure we have the right picture of where many of the most unreached and unengaged people groups are, I want to list some countries: China, India, Thailand, Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam, Malaysia, East Timor, and Indonesia. These are Australia's neighbours. And many people in them have not heard.

This is where the second correct answer comes in.

2. Determination

Destination is half of the answer. Determination is the other. When Jesus said "go", the apostles understood that this was a continuous action. You could put it this way, "in your going – that is, wherever you may be going today – tell."

I failed on this one recently – in fact, it was on that same trip when I saw my grandson. I share this illustration to my shame.

I bought ice creams for Sean and Nessa at Glenelg shortly before going to the airport for my return flight. As we were sitting on the jetty watching dolphins play in the surf as the sun set over the Southern Ocean, I began to calculate how much I had paid for the ice creams and I realised I had been undercharged by \$7.80. So I walked the several blocks back to the shop and insisted on paying. The gal was dumbfounded – she could not believe anyone would be so honest.

I had gone . . . but I'm sorry to say that I didn't tell. There I was in an empty restaurant looking a gal in the eye who openly wondered what planet I came from . . . and I said nothing about the man responsible, Jesus Christ. I didn't even have a tract to give her.

How determined are you to tell about Jesus wherever your day has you going? At the least, all of us should carry tracts so that we are ready. Better yet, we should be praying expectantly that God will drop opportunities in our lap to actually say something – to witness about the difference Jesus has made in our life; to share a word of Scripture.

Jesus said, ‘Go’. After 2000 years, we as Christians have clearly not gone far enough. There are so many more places to go – destinations like China, Thailand and Indonesia . . . and also Australia. That’s where determination comes in. Every day I will pray expectantly and go out prepared – determined – to be a witness for Jesus Christ.

Jesus said, ‘Go’. He also said, ‘Tell’. What do we tell?

ii. Tell

There are two ways that we tell the good news – by what we say, and by what we do.

1. What We Say

Mark records exactly what Jesus wants us to be saying in our going:

Mark 16:16 (NKJV)

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

I want to point out to you that this is more declarative, than persuasive. The gospel does not need people to endorse it with their belief to be valid – such as our politicians require with opinion polls. The gospel is true for everyone at all times, just as this verse says. For the one who believes, it means salvation. For the one who does not believe, the exact same gospel means condemnation. There’s no escaping it.

Therefore, in our going, we declare the gospel, we do not sell it. It is not an advertisement – such as you see on the television during breaks in the newscast. It is the breaking headline. It is the news, the good news.

And so our presentation of the gospel to a person is not “won’t you let Jesus be your personal Saviour” as if Jesus needs our permission. Our presentation is that Jesus is the Saviour once and forever more – disbelieve it at your own peril.

And so we declare, we do not advertise, the good news that Jesus is the Saviour who made atonement for our sin. We declare the good news that Jesus is the Christ – the anointed worldwide king. And we declare the good news that Jesus is God the Son, worthy of all worship and adoration. We declare this news without apology.

Now please do not misunderstand me. I am not saying that there is no emotion, no passion in our proclamation of the gospel. Paul said,

2 Corinthians 5:11 (NKJV)

¹¹ Knowing, therefore, the terror of the Lord, we persuade men; but we are well known to God, and I also trust are well known in your consciences.

Yes . . . we want people to be saved – especially if they are family or friends. But their acceptance of the gospel does not depend on how well we declare it. We are responsible to go and tell – acceptance is not something we control or even influence. That is solely between them and God.

Go and tell.

Are you going? Are you telling?

If you are not, one possible reason is that you have not truly received Christ by faith yourself. Perhaps you have been resisting. Perhaps you have been waiting. Perhaps you have been riding the fence – wanting to appear to people at church to be a Christian when deep down you know you have not sold out to Jesus Christ as Lord.

Won't you trust Christ right now? Believe and be saved.

And then go and tell.

2. What We Do

Actions speak louder than words. I want to take you back to verse 16 and point out the first and most important action that every Christian should take. It is called baptism.

Mark 16:16 (NKJV)

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

Let me ask you straight up. If you have believed, have you been baptised?

This is a very serious matter. Far too many Christians today take a casual attitude towards baptism – as if it is a nice little optional gesture that you may or may not want to make some day.

But there's nothing casual . . . nor anything optional . . . about baptism from God's point of view. It is a command . . . and rightly so. By our baptism we publicly and unashamedly declare our identity with Jesus

Christ our Lord. In other words, by our verbal testimony backed up by our action in being immersed in water we tell the good news.

This is our first witness.

Perhaps we've made baptism too sanitised. We baptise people in specially made tanks housed in secure church buildings. The first century believers didn't have that luxury. They were baptised in public . . . and it was scandalous. Their baptism was an insult to religion, an insult to country, an insult to family. Often they paid a price . . . and considered it worth it. Jesus was worth it.

Nothing stopped them from being baptised. Is there something that is stopping you?

If God is speaking to you about your need to be baptised, don't ignore it. Tell me about it or tell Eric about it and we'll happily organise a baptism service.

I do need to clarify one thing, though. Baptism is not a condition for salvation. Some people read this into verse 16, but it isn't actually there.

Mark 16:16 (NKJV)

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

Is salvation conditioned on belief and baptism? In other words, is a person not saved until he or she is baptised? The answer is no. Throughout the New Testament, the consistent message is believe and be saved. If baptism were a condition, then it would be repeated at the end of verse 16 – 'he who does not believe or is not baptised will be condemned'. You don't read that in the verse because it is belief that is necessary for salvation. Baptism is an act of obedience after salvation.

Go and tell. We go with the gospel – determined to declare it even to the farthest destination. We tell with our words and with our deeds – deeds beginning with baptism and continuing with good works.

Are you going? Are you telling?

Have you believed? Have you been baptised?

This is what Jesus delegates to us.

Now I want to encourage you. If you find all this rather daunting, you are not alone. You are not alone in two senses – in the sense that I find it daunting, too. I still get nervous about witnessing.

But more than this, you are not alone in that Jesus delegates to the Holy Spirit that He dwells in us, goes with us, empowers us and enables us to tell the good news. We'll talk about this next week.

I want to close by thanking God for the people who went and told so that I would be introduced to Jesus Christ my Lord. I thank God for my mum and dad who faithfully took me to church and openly declared their faith in our home. I thank God for an elderly Sunday School teacher named Nick DeYoung who gave me my first Bible. I thank God for a Sunday School song leader named Lenore Cartwright who showed her love for Jesus in the way she sang. I thank God for a youth leader named John Weiss who patiently taught me from the Bible the truth about Jesus. I thank God for an 80 year old man named Ford Hough who took me out with him whenever he went and told.

And most of all . . . I'm thankful to Sovereign Jesus who loved me, died for me, rose for me, ascended for me and is coming back for me. And not for me only, but for all who love, trust and follow Him.

Is that you?