



Mark 16

Mark 16
Tape #8044
By Chuck Smith

Let's turn in our Bibles now to Mark's gospel chapter sixteen, we've come now to the end of the gospel of Mark. Next week we start the book of Luke.

As we get into the sixteenth chapter of Mark, it should be acknowledged that some have put a question mark or a doubt on the last portion of this chapter, beginning with verse nine to the end. The reason for the doubt or the questioning as to the accuracy or the authenticity of this portion of the chapter is because in two of the oldest manuscripts, this portion is deleted, that is, the manuscript known as the Sinaiticus and the other manuscript known as the Vaticanus.

Back in the middle of the 1800's a man by the name of Tishan Dors was down at the Saint Catherine's monastery in the area of the Sinai and he discovered there in the monastery this ancient vellum that was actually being used more or less for kindling, and in examining it, realized that it was an old copy of the scriptures, perhaps one of the oldest copies existing as far as the amount of the text that was there.

Upon the announcement of this discovery in the Vatican shortly afterwards, they pulled out this ancient manuscript from the Vatican which is known as the Vaticanus manuscript, the Codex Sinaiticus is called the Aleph, and they found that these manuscripts were quite similar. Not completely similar, there are differences in the two manuscripts themselves.

When they were going to revise the Bible, the two men who had a great deal to do with the revision were Wescott and Hort. They were Greek scholars and they put together a Greek text, which relied heavily upon the Codex Sinaiticus and the Codex Vaticanus, these two ancient texts. It should be noted that these texts do date back in the year 420-430, somewhere in there as best they can determine.

Because in these two texts, the last portion of Mark's gospel is deleted, they felt that it was necessary in the revised text to delete it or at least to make notations that it was not found in some of the oldest manuscripts, and you will find many notes like this in many of your modern translations. Many times it's called the oldest manuscript and sometimes they even have the audacity to call them the best manuscripts. I say audacity because there's a real challenge as to how good these manuscripts really are.

Let me read what some of the scholars at that time, mainly Shrivner and Dean Burgeon, had to say concerning the Codex Sinaiticus, which they put great credence upon. It said, Since the documents were first inscribed, they were made subject to no less than ten different attempts of revision and correction. That is, places that were crossed out and revisers who went through ten different revisers, went through and made changes many of them as late as the sixth to the eighth century. Dr. Shrivner published in 1864 a full collation of the Codex Sinaiticus with the explanatory introduction in which he states among the other facts of interest that the Codex is covered with such alterations, alterations that were obviously of a correctional character, brought in by at least ten different revisers, some of them systematically spread over every page, others occasional or limited to separate portions of the manuscript. Many of these being contemporaneous with the first writer, but the greater part belonging to the sixth to the seventh century.

We are sure that every intelligent reader will perceive and with little effort, the immense significance of this feature of the Sinaiticus Codex. Here is a documentation which the revisers have esteemed--and solely they've esteemed the Codex Sinaiticus but solely because of its antiquity--to be so pure that it should be taken as the standard whereby all other copies of the scriptures are to be tested and corrected. Such is the estimate of certain scholars of the nineteenth century, but it bears upon its face the proof that those in whose possession it have been from the very first and for some hundreds of years thereafter, esteemed it to be so impure as to require corrections in every part.

The Bible has been subject to what is called higher criticism, those who come to the Bible with a presupposition that it is like any other ancient text, and to be studied like any other ancient text, is not really the inspired word of God, and they seek to find fault and they seek to find contradictions and proofs that the

Bible is not really inspired by God and inerrant. These men have been hammering at the Bible for years. From the school of higher critics comes such men as Wescott and Hort who, using the Codex Sinaiticus and the Codex Vaticanus, made their own Greek text upon which the revised version and practically every other modern version has been taken.

There are two basic families of text and that is the Alexandrian school from which the Vaticanus and the Sinaiticus have come with that family of text, and then there is of course, the received text that encompasses the majority of the text. It should be noted that the majority of the text has this latter portion of Mark in it. It is only the two manuscripts that we had mentioned earlier that do not have the last portion of Mark's gospel. It is interesting, however, that this last portion of Mark's gospel is quoted by many of the early church fathers who died long before Codex Sinaiticus was ever copied.

In the early years of church history, Irenaeus who lived from 140 to 202, he quotes from this last portion of Mark's gospel. Now if you are using the Codex Sinaiticus primarily because it's the oldest document and you say because it's the oldest it's probably the most correct, then you have to explain what document was Irenaeus quoting from two hundred years before this was ever written.

Hipolatus who also lived from 170 to 235 quotes from this last portion of Mark's gospel. Certainly they were quoting from earlier manuscripts. So this idea that because of its antiquity that it has to be correct, it's sort of blown out of the window because you have Bible teachers quoting from this last portion of Mark's gospel.

So let me read you what Dean Burgeon said concerning the Codex Sinaiticus. He is not very high on it, to say the least. He speaks of the impurity of the Codex Sinaiticus:

In every part, it was fully recognized by those who were best acquainted with it. There are other characteristics of this old manuscript which have to be taken into consideration if a correct estimate of its evidential value is to be reached. Thus, there is internal evidence that lead to the conclusion that this was the work of a scribe who was singularly careless or incompetent or both. In this manuscript, the arrangement of the lines is peculiar, there being four columns on each page and each line containing about twelve letters, all of them capitals that are run together, [in other words, there's no attempt to separate the words, just all of the letters run together in all capitals] and there is no attempt to end a word at the end of a line, for even words having only two letters such as en and ec are split in the middle; the last letter being carried over to the beginning of the new line [it's really a very peculiar text, to say the least] though there was ample room for it on the preceding line. And this and other peculiarities give us the idea of the character and the competence of the scribe. [Probably done by some kindergartner.]

But more than that, Dr. Shrivner says,

This manuscript must have been derived from one in which the lines were similarly divided since the writer occasionally omits just the number of letters which would suffice to fill a line [in other words, he omitted whole lines and there were enough letters to fill that line but they were just omitted.] and that to the utter ruin of the sense. [And that is, the way they wrote it, it just doesn't make sense at all with the omission of that line. As if his eye had just sort of wandered to the line that was immediately below. Dr. Shrivner states that] Instances where complete lines are omitted and others where the copyist pass in the middle of a line to the corresponding portion of the line below [so lift off the end and the first portion of the next line]. From this, it is evident that the work of copying was done by a scribe who was both heedless and incompetent. A careful copyist would not have made the above or other mistakes so frequently and only the most incompetent would have failed to notice upon reading over the page to correct the omissions which utterly destroyed the sense.

In other words, had he bothered to even read over what he had written, he would have realized that he messed that line and he would have inserted it to fill in so it would make sense.

Speaking of the character of the tool of these manuscripts, Dean Burgeon says,

The impurity of the text exhibited by these Codices is not a question of opinion but a fact. In the gospels alone, Codex V [that is, the Vaticanus] leaves out words or whole clauses no less than 1,491 times. It bears traces of careless transcription on every page. Codex Sinaiticus abounds with errors of the eye and the pen to an extent not indeed unparalleled but haply rather unusual in documents of first rate importance. On many occasions, ten, twenty, thirty, forty words are dropped through very carelessness. Letters and words even whole sentences are frequently written twice over or began and immediately cancelled while that gross blunder whereby a clause is omitted because it happens to end with the same words as the clause preceding occurs no less than a hundred and fifteen times in the New Testament.

The Codex Vaticanus differs from the received text in the following particulars. It omits at least 2,877 words. It adds 536 words. It substitutes 935 words and it transposes 2,098 words and it modifies 1,132; making a total of 7,578 verbal divergences. But the Sinaitic is even worse. Its total divergences are over 9,000.

So when you read some of the most ancient manuscripts as they have in many of the Bibles and those that skip the last part of Mark or those that put it in so often put, This portion is omitted in some of the most ancient manuscripts. Those manuscripts are two, the Sinaiticus and the Vaticanus of which we've just read to you how sloppily they were done.

So that to omit it, it doesn't really finish the story of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Listen to the last verse of, that is, eight, before they get to this, which was omitted in these two manuscripts. "And they went out quickly and fled from the sepulcher for they were troubled and were amazed, neither said they anything to any man for they were afraid." Isn't that a great place to leave a story? Running away afraid, afraid to talk about it, end of story. And we don't even have the proofs of the resurrection yet. We don't have Jesus appearing to Mary Magdalene and all, it cuts it off right there. Obviously no place to cut off the story.

So don't be deceived into thinking that when someone says some of the finest manuscripts that we have, Codex Sinaiticus, one of the lousiest manuscripts we have. And to put a lot of credence on it is just sheer ignorance or deliberate deception. It is a poor, poor manuscript. And thus, to put so much credence in it as was done was Wescott and Hort, you have to look for other motives. I do not buy into the New Age theory that it was a part of the New Age plot. I think that the value of that book, New Age versions, is not in trying to discover conspiracy of New Agers to change the Bible; but I think the value of that book is the comparison of text side by side so that you can see the changes that have been made in the modern translations versus the King James.

It should be noted that the King James version was a translation of the received text or the Textus Receptus as was of course, Martin Luther's translation, Wycliffe's and all of these translations come from the received text; that is, what is also known as the Majority of Text. You see, where this is deleted in two manuscripts, it is included in over a thousand manuscripts. So you have a vote of a thousand to two. But for some reason they put greater credence on the two than the other thousand that have come over to us from a variety of sources, all agreeing together in coming out at the end in agreement against these two of which, as we pointed out, in one over 7,000 changes and the other over 9,000 changes. So with that, let's take a look at what Mark has to say.

And when the sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene (16:1),

One more thing, this fellow Dean Burgeon, tremendous scholar, has written a book called The Last Twelve Verses of Mark, extremely scholarly book in which his final conclusion is that it is genuine, it does belong there, is a part of the original text by an overwhelming amount of evidence. And he's written this book on the subject, more thorough and complete than any other book that's ever been written on the subject

of the last twelve verses of Mark.

So “when the sabbath was past,” this was the Saturday sabbath. There seems to be an indication in the scriptures that we had two sabbaths running concurrently. There was, of course, the feast of the unleavened bread, the first day of the feast of unleavened bread was a sabbath day, according to the law. And thus, it would seem that there were two concurrent sabbaths, one on Friday, one on Saturday. This is the Saturday sabbath when it was over. “Mary Magdalene,

Mary the mother of James, and Salome, had brought sweet spices, that they might come and anoint him (16:1).

In the previous chapter, we find that these are the women who were standing afar off watching the crucifixion of Jesus, verse forty, and they are the women who also followed Joseph when he took the body of Jesus and watched him as he put it in the tomb and the stone was rolled over the door of the sepulcher. So now they are coming early in the morning, the sabbath day, bringing sweet spices that they might come and anoint Jesus.

Very early in the morning the first day of the week, they came unto the sepulchre at the rising of the sun (16:2).

Mary Magdalene, evidently they left to come but she no doubt hurried ahead of the other women. She arrived at the tomb while it was still dark. She saw that the stone was rolled away, did not go in to find out anything, seeing the stone that was rolled away, made the assumption that they had moved the body of Jesus. And so she ran to tell Peter and John that Jesus’ body had been moved by somebody. And of course, Peter and John then came running to the sepulcher. In the meantime, these other women arrived and Mark will tell us what happened to them when they arrived, how that they saw the angel sitting there at the place where they had laid Jesus. But they then rushed back to tell the disciples what the angel had told them. Peter and John then arrived, John outrunning Peter, but Peter rushing into the tomb, John waiting outside and their discovery of the wrappings that were around Jesus, lying there, the fold’s still there but the body gone. And John immediately recognized the significance of it, that Jesus was risen indeed.

They leave and Mary who had told them comes back now and it is while she is there weeping, sobbing, that the angel said, Why are you weeping? And she said, Because they have taken away my Lord, I don’t know where they put Him. And she turned away and Jesus was standing there. She thought He was the gardener, and He said, Woman, why weepest thou? And she said the same thing, they’ve taken away my Lord. So that’s sort of the way the events took place, the gospels put them together when you collate the whole thing, this is the way the story comes out. And then Mary saw Jesus, grabbed hold of Him, and He said, Don’t cling to Me, Mary, go and tell the disciples that I have risen indeed. So she came to tell the disciples. So these women come, while it is very early in the morning, first day of the week, that would be the Sunday, and they came to the sepulcher at the rising of the sun.

And they said among themselves, Who shall roll us away the stone from the door of the sepulchre (16:3)?

If you have seen some of these sepulchers over there and the stones that are in front of them, you’ll understand their question. I have actually tried to push some of these stones by setting my back against the wall, my feet against it and tried to roll it and couldn’t do it. They really weigh a lot and they are really set there firmly. And so I can understand the women’s question, Who’s going to roll away the stone? Because we are told it is great and those are great stones that they would roll in front of the opening of the cave in which they would bury the bodies. And so it was their concern, who would roll away the stone? Worried about that.

Like so many of our worries, however, they are unnecessary, they are needless because when they got there, they found the stone was already rolled away. So here they are worrying who’s going to roll it, and it’s already done. Have you ever worried about something, when you arrive there it’s already taken care of. All that worry, what would I worry so much for? Wasted all the energy worrying. And here the Lord’s gone before me and taking care of things before I ever got there. But I was sure worried about it and spent a lot of mental energy in worry that was totally needless. And so is their case.

But when they looked, they saw that the stone was rolled away: for it was very great (16:4).

In the last chapter, we find the chapter ending with Joseph taking the body of Jesus and wrapping it in

fine linen and putting it in the sepulcher and rolling the stone to the door of the sepulcher. Behind that stone there in the sepulcher laid the body of Jesus. There lay there a dead concept of God. You see, Jesus had come to reveal God unto man. “God, who at sundry times and in divers ways spoke to our fathers by the prophets,2 Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his own dear Son, God’s revelation” (Hebrews 1:1). He said, “He that hath seen me hath seen the Father” (John 14:9).

What did He reveal to us about the Father? That the Father has tremendous concern for you because He loves you. He wants to provide for you, take care of you, He watches over you, He’s concerned with every, even minor detail about your life, far more than what you even dream or realize because of His intense love for you. And so He brought to man this concept of a God of love, not of wrath, not of judgment, but a God who loves His creation. Not a God who is far removed from His creation but a God who is infinitely involved in His creation. But man rejected that concept of God. And when you look at the cross and the events of the cross, you find everything but love.

You find the viciousness of man, the hatred of man, venom being poured out upon the Savior as they nailed Him to the cross, as they mocked Him as He died. And as Joseph took and wrapped Him in linen and put Him in the tomb and rolled the stone over the door, behind the stone there lay a dead concept of God, rejected by man. Behind the stone there actually lay a dead religion. True it is unlike any other religion, but it is and does have the aspects of a religion for it does speak of God and man’s approach to God and it speaks of the faith by which man is to come to God. But so unlike most religions, religions that have man reaching out to God, this is a religion that tells us that God was reaching out to man, that finite man could never reach God, starting with an earth base. But an infinite God reached down to finite man and “God so loved the world He gave His only begotten Son” (John 3:16).

Unlike religions which give you the regulations and the rules whereby you might please God by your efforts and by your works, this is a religion that says that by your best effort you can never please God. You have to be born again. You have to have the infusion of a new life, a spiritual life. But man rejected that religion, he will continue by his own works, as rotten or feeble as they might be to try to appease a God of wrath and try to reach if possible this infinite God and there He lays. Behind that stone there is a dead hope.

The disciples during the ministry of Christ were extremely excited. They knew the prophecies concerning the Messiah and the kingdom of God that was going to be set up upon the earth. They knew that there was going to be a time when the earth would experience true peace, that they would “beat their swords into plowshares, their spears into pruning hooks, they would study war no more” (Isaiah 2:4). They had hope that that kingdom was going to be set up now, that they would be able to raise their children in peace and that the glory of the Lord would cover the earth. But He was crucified and they placed Him in the tomb and they rolled the stone over the door of the tomb and behind that stone, a dead hope. The disciples on the road to Emmaus said we had hoped that in Him was the salvation of Israel. But they put it in the past tense. But they crucified Him and this is the third day. Hope is dashed.

What does it mean, The stone is rolled away from the door of the sepulcher? It means just this: the concept of God is not dead, it is true. He is a loving God. He is concerned with you, deeply concerned with you and with every facet of your life. It means that the religion is not dead, it’s alive. That though man cannot reach God by his own efforts, God has reached down to man and provided a way whereby man can have the forgiveness of sins and whereby man can come into fellowship with the eternal God through the sacrifice of His Son. It means that you can know God and fellowship with God, just as He declared by faith and trusting in Him. It means that the hope is alive.

Peter said, Thank God that we have a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. “Of an inheritance that’s incorruptible, undefiled, that fades not away, that’s reserved in heaven for you, who are being kept by the power of God through faith” (1 Peter 1:4,5). I’ll tell you what, what a new view this gives of the cross. As we look now at the cross through the open tomb, it gives us a whole new perspective. Before the stone was rolled back, the cross was a horrible miscarriage of man’s inhumanity against man, a classic example of how heartless and cruel man can be. A terrible tragedy that the Son of God should be hanged. But now, we look at the cross with a whole different view. We see it not as defeat, but we see it as glorious victory.

God wasn't defeated, Satan was defeated there at the cross. His power over your life was defeated in the cross of Jesus Christ for He spoiled the principalities and the powers that are against us, making an open display of His victory as He triumphed over them through the cross. And so it gives us a whole different view of the cross. Rather than being a great tragedy, it's God's love demonstrated in a very visible way to man. I like that verse, "that the stone was rolled away." What a difference it makes.

And so they entering into the sepulchre, saw a young man sitting on the right side, [obviously an angel] and he was clothed in a long white garment; and they were frightened. And he said unto them, Don't be afraid: You're seeking Jesus of Nazareth, which was crucified: but he is risen; he is not here: behold the place where they laid him. [And then he said,] But go your way, tell his disciples and Peter that he goeth before you into Galilee: there you will see him, even as he said unto you (16:5-7).

Go and tell the disciples and Peter. Peter probably figured that the Lord never wanted to have anything to do with him again. You know how you feel when you've really blown it big time? How you feel when you've really failed the Lord? Like He's through with me, He never wants anything to do with me again. I don't blame Him, I failed Him. In that time of crisis, I let Him down and all of that guilt that Peter was feeling. So the Lord puts a little, go tell, and Peter. Let him know. The door isn't closed. There's forgiveness, there's understanding, there's compassion, there's love. "Go tell the disciples and Peter."

And they went out quickly, and fled from the sepulchre; and they were trembling and they were amazed: neither said they any thing to any man; because they were so afraid. Now when Jesus was risen early the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene (16:8,9),

This is confirmed in the other gospels, especially the gospel of John which tells us of this appearance to Mary Magdalene.

out of whom he had cast seven devils (16:9).

Can you imagine what her life was before she met Jesus? A life of torment, a life of bondage, her life was a living hell, possessed by seven evil spirits which Jesus cast out and set her free. Don't you know, as Jesus said, "He who is forgiven much loves much" (Luke 7:47). Don't you know that she had a love for Jesus that is incomparable? This man delivered me out of hell. This man set me free. This man gave me life and from that time, she followed Him, she stayed close by Him. She was standing there when He was crucified. She followed when they took Him to the tomb. And she's probably the first one to arrive at the tomb. Seeing the stone rolled away, ran to tell Peter. But then when she came back, then she met Jesus, the first one to see the risen Lord. There's something tender and special about that. John again tells us how that she grasped Him. I think a death grip, like someone who was drowning and suddenly the Savior is there who she thought she had lost. And I think it was a grip that says, You may have gotten away from me once but I'll never let You go again. And so Jesus said, Mary, don't cling to Me. But go and tell the disciples I've risen indeed. And thus, this woman, Mary Magdalene became the first commissioned witness of the resurrection of Jesus from the dead.

And she went and told them that had been with him [that is, the disciples], as they were mourning and weeping (16:10).

Here we are, the third day, and Jesus said to them over and over again, They're going to crucify Me but the third day I will rise again. Not that I feel I'm better than the disciples, far from that. I wish I was somewhere even close but I don't even feel that. But somehow, I think that had Jesus said over and over again, They're going to crucify Me but the third day I'll rise again, I think that on the third day I'd be looking for something. I think I would be waiting there, let's see, this is third day. Let's go check things up. Let's see what's happened. But rather than being in expectancy and anticipation of the resurrection, they were weeping, they were mourning. As far as they were concerned, it's all over. Here Mary shows up, can you imagine how excited she must be. I'll bet you she had a hard time getting the words out. The excitement, the thrill, I've seen Him, I've seen Him, He's alive, He's alive. Calm down, what are you trying to tell us, Mary? And it was probably that she was so excited and all that they thought she's flipped.

You remember when Peter was thrown in jail after James was beheaded by Herod and he saw it pleased the Jews so he threw Peter in jail intending to bring him forth the next day and execute him. And that night, the angel of the Lord delivered Peter. But the church, you remember had gone to prayer, praying for Peter.

And the angel delivered Peter out of the prison and he went to the house where the church was praying. He knocked on the door and the young maid, Rhoda, came to the door and said, Who is it? Peter, let me in. She ran back to the prayer meeting, she said, Peter's at the door! They said, You're crazy, you've seen a ghost. And he kept knocking until they finally said somebody better answer it and Peter was there. And so our faith, you see they were praying for Peter's release but surely not with faith because they didn't believe it when it happened.

How many times have we been surprised that God answered our prayers? Just by His sovereign grace and love, not anything to the credit of my great faith but just God's sovereign grace. And so here are the disciples. Again, the witness of a woman, they wouldn't accept. In those days women didn't have many rights and they could not testify in court. They wouldn't accept the word of a woman. So Jesus commissioned Mary to go tell them but they didn't listen. They were still mourning and weeping. They should be rejoicing. But that's what unbelief will do. It'll keep you in tears. It'll keep you in agony. It'll keep you in despair and misery when you should be rejoicing. God is going to take care of it. Many times God has already taken care while you're still mourning and you're still weeping and your unbelief keeps you from entering into the joy of God's victory and of God's work.

And so, God has done it. He has raised Him from the dead. But they can't enter into the joy because of unbelief.

After that he appeared in another form unto two of them, as they walked, and went into the country (16:12).

Luke expounds on this. He tells us that Cleopas and one of the other disciples were on the road to Emmaus when Jesus joined them and we'll get that in the gospel of Luke. And they mentioned to Jesus, now in another form, they didn't recognize Him even as Mary didn't recognize Him at first. Just what implications are here are something that you'll have to draw for yourself. I'm not qualified to make implications but He appeared in another form. They were obviously very sad because He questioned them, How come you're so sad? And they told Him the story that He knew so well. How that Jesus was crucified and this was the third day and they even mentioned, Some of the women said that they saw Him. Because after He appeared to Mary, He appeared to those other women.

It's interesting to me that as they came to Emmaus and Jesus was acting like He's just going to keep walking, they said, No, it's getting late, come and stay with us. And when He broke the bread, they recognized Him. How? Perhaps they saw the nail pierced hand as He broke the bread. And immediately He disappeared. But then they started talking, did not our hearts burn in us as He spoke with us in the way?

So they went [that is, the two came back] and told it to the residue: but neither believed they them (16:13).

You can't blame them for being prejudiced against women completely because when these two guys came back they didn't believe them either. Unbelief, what does it take to dispel the doubt and the unbelief of the human heart? What does it take? What does it take for God to dispel the unbelief in your heart?

Afterward he appeared unto the eleven as they were sitting at meat, and he upbraided them [or He rebuked or scolded them] with their unbelief and their hardness of heart (16:14),

He had done that to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus. "O slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared" (Luke 24:25)! And so "He upbraided them with their unbelief and hardness of heart,"

because they believed not them which had seen him after he was risen (16:14).

Really scolded them for that.

And he said unto them (16:15),

And now the commission that we have in Matthew to,

go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature (16:15).

The commission to the church to carry the good news of Jesus Christ to the world.

And He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned (16:16).

It's just that clear cut. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you'll be saved. Don't believe in Him and you'll be damned. The Bible says "he that hath the Son hath life; he that hath not the Son of God hath not

life” (1 John 5:12,13); “but the wrath of God abides on him” (John 3:36).

And these are the signs which will follow them that believe; In my name they will cast out devils; they will speak with new tongues; They shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover (16:17,18).

There are those who have taken this passage of scripture and abused it. In some radical groups, there are those that are known as snake handlers and when they get in a meeting and they are worked up into a real frenzy, they will begin to pass rattle snakes around the circle to demonstrate their faith and using this scripture, “They shall take up serpents” and that’s the basis for this snake handling practice. I am reminded of the temptation of Jesus by Satan when he took Him up to the pinnacle of the temple and said, Jump, for it is written, “He will give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways. To bear thee up, lest at any time you dash your foot against a stone” (Psalm 91:11,12). But Jesus answered and said unto him, “It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God” (Matthew 4:7). Any deliberate taking up of serpents to prove your faith is tempting God. Same is true of drinking any deadly thing. It shall not harm them. To deliberately drink cyanide or arsenic to prove your faith is tempting God. It is not intended that this should be done.

Note that these things were to be done in the context of carrying the Gospel into all the world. And in the records of the missionaries, in carrying the Gospel into all the world we find accounts so many times where missionaries were bitten by some deadly snake without any ill effect. At times when missionaries had to drink swamp water filled with all kinds of vermin and disease and did not have any ill effect.

We remember the case of Paul the apostle when he was shipwrecked and cast up on the shore and they were gathering wood to make a fire to warm themselves out from their experience in this surf. And how that as Paul was gathering some wood and throwing it in the fire, this poisonous viper fastened itself on Paul and the natives on the island said, He must be a horrible murderer because even though he escaped the storm and the surf, yet the gods will not allow him to live. And they were waiting, they knew that deadly viper, they knew that the person only had just a few minutes and they would go into convulsions and die. And so they were watching, waiting for him to start into the convulsions and to die. But he just shook the thing off in the fire. So after a while when he didn’t go into convulsions they said, he must be a god. It didn’t affect him. But you see, that was in the context of carrying the Gospel into all the world and I believe that as we carry the Gospel into all the world that if we by happenstance are bitten by a poisonous viper that you can take this as a promise of God.

If you’re forced to drink out of necessity water that you know to be polluted, you can ask God to bless it. I don’t think any harmful effects will come. But that’s in the context of carrying the Gospel into all, it isn’t going out and testing faith. Like one minister took a thing of poison around his congregation, had them all drink it to show their faith. We don’t want any faithless people in our church and he lost a few. He was charged with manslaughter and rightfully so. But it isn’t something that we’re just to foolhardily step out on and say, He’ll give His angels charge over me, watch me sail off this twelve-story building. And when Satan suggested that, Jesus rejected it as tempting God, putting yourself in deliberate jeopardy just to try and prove your faith and a passage of scripture.

So the book of Mark ends in a very beautiful way.

So then after the Lord had spoken unto them, he was received up into heaven, and he sat on the right hand of God (16:19).

Where He is today. “Seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for us” (Hebrews 7:25). “He who is ascended is the same one who first of all descended in the lower parts of the earth. When He ascended, He led the captives from their captivity” (Ephesians 4:8-10). When Stephen was being stoned, he said, “I see the heavens open, and the Son of man standing at the right hand of the Father” (Acts 7:56). Here he says, He’s up there seated at the right hand. Paul in Ephesians tells us that He is seated in the heavenly places far above all principalities and powers. But the story is that whenever a martyr is coming home, He stands to receive him. And so Stephen saw Him standing there ready to receive him into glory. And Stephen said, “Lord, receive my spirit” (Acts 7:59).

Luke’s gospel and the book of Acts tells us a little more fully concerning the ascension of Christ into

heaven and we'll cover that when we get to Luke and to the book of Acts. Again, we told you that Mark is an abbreviated account.

And they went forth, and preached every where, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following. Amen (16:20).

So be it. End of story. So "they went everywhere preaching the word, the Lord working with them, confirming the word with signs following." I believe that's the correct order. I don't believe that God intends that signs be the primary draw for the church, that we try to draw people with signs to prove some kind of spectacular powers. I believe that there is power in the word of God to bring conversion. And the signs follow. Thus, the faith is not in the signs but the faith is established in the word of God. I think it's a very dangerous thing to establish one's faith in signs that they have seen because there are many times that there are charlatans who are showing signs and if you believe because I saw that man who had an oxygen tank and he took the thing off and he ran up and down the aisles. And you believe because you saw that apparent miracle when he was prayed for, they just pulled the oxygen mask off and the guy ran up and down the aisle. And you say, I saw it, thus, I believe because I saw that. Then when you find out later that the guy really didn't need the oxygen tank, it was all set up, what does that do to your faith?

But if your faith is established in God's word, then it's unshakable. Because you see, you may see a genuine sign that will bring faith in a sense, but the next time the person may not be healed. My faith is not in what I have seen God do, as far as healing the sick. My faith is in the word of God. And thus, it's not a variable. It's established, it's strong. You can't put faith in feelings which again are sort of a sign. Oh I felt warm all over. I felt tingly all over. I felt bubbly all over. But maybe tomorrow you're going to feel rotten all over. And so you don't put faith on feelings, you put faith in fact, the fact of God's word that is true. The word of God that changes not. And when your faith is established in the word of God, it is unwavering, it's unshakable. Signs follow, great, wonderful. But don't put your faith in the signs. Put your faith in the word.

Father, we thank You again for Your word, a lamp unto our feet, a light into our path, a cleansing of our soul and spirit. Lord, we pray that we might hide Thy word away in our hearts, that we would not sin against You. Establish Lord our lives in the word and in You. And Lord we thank You for the signs that do follow. We thank You for those confirming things that come. But Lord our faith is in You and in the word that You have declared. For though heaven and earth may pass away, we know that Your word is going to abide forever. And so Lord thank You for Your word and the opportunity of studying the word that we might grow thereby. Bless Lord our study, make us diligent students that we might indeed learn of Thee. In Jesus' name, Amen.