

Lake Cities Community Church  
January 17, 2009  
Series: On Your Mark  
Pastor Craig Schill

**“On Your Mark”**  
Mark 16:9-20

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I do not believe that I will ever run a marathon, or even a half marathon. I do not believe I will ever compete in an iron man competition. I do not believe that if I accompany Trevor’s running club this summer to a 50-mile adventure race, that I will participate - like the other Dad will. I do not have the faith, the confidence or the trust that any of these things will ever happen for me. Now you might come to me and say, “Craig I believe in you. I believe you can do these things. You are not too old. You are not too out of shape. It is not too late for you. You can do it!” Another person might say, “I can help you achieve these goals. I have a fitness and nutritional plan for you – and if you are disciplined, in a six or twelve months you can be a different person!” No. No. No. I am firmly rooted in my unbelief. It is just where I am. I do not believe.

The title of my sermon this morning, and this sermon series, is “On Your Mark.” The cry of the announcer before the race begins. And while I may not run that 26.2 mile race, you and I have been on a 39-week journey together through the Gospel of Mark. And today we end that journey with this final message. It has been a journey from Galilee to Jerusalem. From Jesus’ teaching to his passion and suffering. And most of all it has been a journey of faith. From unbelief, to belief to obedience. The journey of discipleship: unbelief, belief, obedience. So say it another way: from faithlessness, to faith to being found faithful.

And I trust this has been your journey as well, as you consider your own journey from unbelief, or a lack of faith, to having faith in God and His Son Jesus Christ, and then putting that faith into application through obedience. As we look at those three stages. Unbelief, belief and obedience – consider where you are at in your own journey of faith and where God desires to take you. So if you are not already there, turn with me Mark 16:9-20.

### **Unbelief (Mark 16:9-14)**

But we start first with unbelief. Listen for that theme in verses 9-14. [Mark 16:9](#) Now after He had risen early on the first day of the week, He first appeared to Mary Magdalene, from whom He had cast out seven demons. [Mark 16:10](#) She went and reported to those who had been with Him, while they were mourning and weeping. [Mark 16:11](#) When they heard that He was alive and had been seen by her, they refused to believe it. [Mark 16:12](#) After that, He appeared in a different form to two of them while they were walking along on their way to the country. [Mark 16:13](#) They went away and reported it to the others, but they did not believe them either. [Mark 16:14](#) Afterward He appeared to the eleven themselves as they were reclining *at the table*; and He reproached them for their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they had not believed those who had seen Him after He had risen.

The author's message is clear – unbelief is not good. Unbelief is a place of despair. Unbelief does not please God. Jesus reproves the disciples for their unbelief. It is not good to be an un-believer. It reminds us in the gospel when the disciples (Mark 4) were so afraid on the Sea of Galilee with the storm threatening to turn over their boat, and Jesus says, "Why are you afraid? Do you still have no faith?" And also (Mark 6) when Jesus went to his

hometown and “wondered at the unbelief” in his family and friend. He could do very little healing there. In God’s world, in His economy – he works through faith. He honors and encourages faith.

I have been talking with a couple people who are not Christians, and have had the opportunity to share the gospel. And I asked one, is there anything that would keep you from trusting in Jesus right now? And he said yes... and he gave me his reasons. He was not ready to put his faith in Christ. That is why we call non-Christians, un-believers – they do not believe. I left him in unbelief. It broke my heart, and it breaks God heart when we live in unbelief.

And it is not just faith in becoming a Christian, but also in living the Christian life. Those of us who have been Christians for many years can also struggle with unbelief. Often we trust God for eternity, but trust ourselves for today. There are many reasons for this – we like to be in control, we love our sin. Like St. Augustine said, “O Lord help me to be pure, but not yet.” Do not tarry in unbelief. Trust in God for salvation and for living.

### **Belief (15-18)**

God want us to move from unbelief to belief. That is the first step of discipleship and that is our second point. Look at the next section – listen now for the theme of belief, verses 15-18: [Mark 16:15](#) And He said to them, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. [Mark 16:16](#) “He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved; but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned. [Mark 16:17](#) “These signs will accompany those who have believed in My name they will cast out demons, they will speak with new

tongues; [Mark 16:18](#) they will pick up serpents, and if they drink any deadly *poison*, it will not hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover.”

Do you see the move from unbelief to belief. Unbelief is discouraged but belief is greatly encouraged! Why? Because belief leads to salvation, and unbelief to condemnation. Faith leads to heaven, and unbelief to hell. And if you put your belief into practice, Jesus tell us, God power will confirm your faith. God works through faith. We have seen that in Mark haven't we? IN Mark 2 with the paralytic, the text tells us, “Seeing their faith, Jesus said, your sins are forgiven.” And in Mark 5, with the woman who was bleeding who touches Jesus cloak. Jesus said, “Your faith has made you well – go in peace. Be healed.” Faith leads to salvation and it leads to God's power. Did you hear that list of signs accompanying early Christians? Casting out demons, speaking in new languages, picking up snakes and drinking poison. God confirms their belief with His power.

A few months Tammy made a wonderful 9 x 13 pan of brownies. They were set on the stovetop and left to cool. But the problem was that we had an ant problem in our house. When Tammy later returned to the brownies they were covered with thousands of ants. It was like a horror movie. My brave wife Tammy grabbed the can of Raid bug spray and fervently sprayed those brownies until all the ants were dead. She probably used half the can up ensuring the death of those ants. Being a witness to this, I began to scrape the brownies into the garbage. But the phone rang and I set the now half empty pan of brownies back on the counter and forgot about them... until the kids came home from school. “Great brownies, Mom” said Trevor and Hayden as they finished off the rest of the poisoned brownies with their ant icing. But, “Yea, they were not harmed by the tainted brownies, and the Lord protected them according to His word.”

Seriously, some Christians seek to put this passage to the test. You can look on YouTube and find Christians who gather copper head snakes and rattlers and pass them around. And they drink poison in the worship service. There are some believers who look at a passage like this and seek to put it to the test. But that is missing the point isn't it? This passage is descriptive and not prescriptive. It is showing us what happened to those people, it is not a command for us today. The point being made is that when you obey, God will bless you. God's power will be released through faith. And that is as true today as it was then.

### **Obedience is Rewarded (19-20)**

That leads to our final point - obedience. Unbelief. Belief. Now obedience. [Mark 16:19](#) So then, when the Lord Jesus had spoken to them, He was received up into heaven and sat down at the right hand of God. Jesus is gone. Will the disciples obey? They have done nothing yet – they have only listened to the command (great commission) and heard the promises. They are at a point of decision. Will they preach the gospel to the entire world? [Mark 16:20](#) And they went out and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them, and confirmed the word by the signs that followed. Yes they did! They obeyed! You see – at some point you have to put your faith into action. Unbelief is rebuked. Belief is encouraged. Obedience is blessed. If you want to live a life of blessing you must live a life of obedience. You must actually do, say, go and live according to God's Word.

And this is where most of us are. We need to obey. It is not enough to move from unbelief to belief. It is not enough to do the Texas two-step; we need the third step of obedience. Many of you have been Christians for years and you have studied the Bible for a

long time. You and I know what to do. We know what not to do. We need now only to obey. Like the song we will sing for the closing hymn, "*Trust and obey, for there is not other way to be blessed – to be happy in Jesus.*"

Now, in closing, I am happy to tell you that today I have moved from unbelief to belief. I do not believe I will run a marathon, but I do believe that next Thanksgiving I will run the Dallas 5k Turkey Trot. That is a start. I believe I can do it. That's metric isn't it? 5K is like what? A mile? 10 months from now I believe that I can do that – and not only me, but our whole family. Unbelief to belief is a great journey - but now what? That's right - obedience. I have to (at some point) start training. I need to actually prepare for that race. My belief must be put into action. There will be obstacles to this goal; but in the action and application – in the obedience there will be great blessing and sense of accomplishment.

The Christian life is not rocket science. It is not hard to understand the journey we are all on. We all start in unbelief – that is fine, but we dare not stay there too long. Life is short. Move to belief and faith and trust in Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior. And then turn to obedience. Trust *and* obey. As you learn how God wants you to live – walk in it. Unbelief, belief, obedience. On your Mark – get set – go! Let's pray.