

Lake Cities Community Church
Pastor Craig Schill
Pre-Sermon introduction, 1-17-10
Series: On Your Mark

Snakes & Stuff – Overview of the problems of Mark 16:9-20

Before we get to our sermon, I want to spend a few minutes addressing a few problems with our passage. Now, for a pastor to say that a passage in the Bible has problems, may in itself be problematic to you! But turn with me to Mark 16:9-20. When you get there you can see that the publisher of your Bible has indicated through brackets, italicized print and publisher notes that these verses are a source of debate. The debate is whether or not they should be included as sacred Scripture. Some argue, “Yes it should be,” and others argue, “No it should not.”

The fundamental problem is that we don’t have Mark’s *original* manuscript to know for sure. Now we do have of course thousands of other Greek manuscripts (some within a 100 years of Jesus’ death); and while they often agree and confirm one another, from time to time there are differences, and this is one of those cases. In fact, in no other place in Scripture is such a large passage of Scripture under such scrutiny. Here is a brief summary of the debate.

Those who argue against this passage as not being legitimate Scripture will likely make at least four arguments. (1) First, verses 9-20 are not found in two of the very oldest and more reliable Greek manuscripts. These manuscripts are so important that the lack of these verses in them is significant. They also argue (2) that the style of Greek and words in 9-20 are different, and new vocabulary is used making it seem likely it was written by

another person (i.e. added later). In addition, (3) when evaluating differences in ancient manuscripts the rule of thumb is to go with the harder reading, as one can imagine why down the road a person might add to or smooth out a hard reading. Ending Mark at verse eight is the harder reading. (4) Also, the reference to drinking poison and handling snakes are more consistent with apocryphal stories than the Bible. They just seem out of place.

But before you make up your mind, consider the arguments on the other side. (1) First, while 9-20 are not in those two important manuscripts they are found in nearly all other ancient manuscripts! They were widely accepted very early on. (2) Second, while there are some differences in style and vocabulary, the passage is still brief and blunt, just as Mark likes to be. Also, this is an argument which must be used with care. Liberal scholars use this thinking to argue that John did not write Revelation, and that Paul did not write some of his letters. (3) While normally you favor the harder reading, if a reading is too hard, that might not hold. Leaving the women in fear and trembling of verse eight seems a very unlikely ending to the book (whether or not you go with verses 9-20). (4) And while snakes and poison are unique, so is casting out demons and healing the sick. The supernatural is always unique. Why would we doubt one and not the other?

In conclusion, because we don't have the original autograph, we just don't know for sure whether this passage was or was not part of the original document. However, it is my position that either way it has been carefully preserved and made part of the canon of the Bible, and therefore I believe we should teach and preach from it. It does not contradict in any way what we have been learning in Mark, and actually provides a very nice summary. As we will see in the sermon - it has an important message for the church and for each of us. But before we turn to this morning's sermon, let's pause to pray.

