

Get Going!

Mark 16:15

By Bryn MacPhail

There are at least ten appearances of the risen Jesus recorded in the New Testament. In five of these appearances Jesus commands His followers to go into the world and preach the gospel (Boice, *Matthew*, 645). The fact that this mandate is so often repeated signals us to its special significance. I'm also struck by the timing of this commission to "Go into all the world" to "preach the gospel".

In Matthew and Mark's gospel, the commission to "go" and "preach" the gospel is the last instruction Jesus gives to His followers before ascending into heaven. This is significant. Consider how much we value the final words of friends and family members before they pass away. Final wishes expressed by loved ones compel us in a unique and powerful way.

1. So you can imagine the impact the final words Jesus uttered while on earth would have on His followers.

My inclination, as I look at Mark's resurrection account, is to begin to immediately speak this morning about our present mandate to "go" and "preach the good news". And yet, I find myself hesitating. I hesitate noting that *the first words* of our risen Lord were not, "Go and preach"—these were *His last words*. I note that before Jesus gives this final commission, He says and does certain things in order to get His followers on a particular track.

Before Jesus gives His final commission, He helps His followers to overcome some things, which were challenging them. I wonder if our context might be similar in this regard. I imagine that, just as there were things keeping the first disciples from engaging the mission, there are things that are keeping you and me from sharing the gospel with others.

2. As the risen Christ engages His followers, I note that He helps them to overcome, what I think are, 3 common obstacles to sharing the gospel message with others.

Jesus helps His followers to move beyond *discouragement*, *doubt*, and *disobedience*. We begin with *discouragement*—something that each of Jesus' friends would have shared in common.

To have an appreciation for the discouragement felt by His followers we need to imagine what it was like for them in the time in between Jesus' crucifixion and the morning of His resurrection. Their leader had been executed, and now their own lives were in danger. There was discouragement surrounding the prospect of continuing the mission, and there was, of course, great discouragement in losing a beloved Friend. John's gospel describes how Mary Magdalene stood outside the empty tomb weeping.

3. Not only was Mary grieving the death of a dear Friend, she imagined that the empty tomb meant that Jesus' body had been taken away.

Mary was not thinking about any Resurrection; she had come to the tomb to anoint Jesus' body with spices (Mk 16:1). It was bad enough that her Friend had been executed, but now, even her efforts to anoint Jesus' body have been frustrated. Mary's discouragement has escalated to despair, and she weeps... But everything changes for Mary when the Resurrected Jesus shows up and greets her (Jn. 20:16). Discouragement gives way to jubilation. I'm guessing that every person here today has some understanding of the debilitating power of discouragement. For the follower of Jesus, discouragement presents as a massive obstacle to carrying on the mission of sharing the gospel with others.

4. Not only does discouragement affect *our motivation* to share the gospel, it also impairs *our personal witness*.

If our unbelieving friends see us in a constant state of frustration, if they regularly see in us discouragement and discontent, how will they ever believe us when we tell them that the Christian Gospel is '*good news*'? Before we can go and share the gospel, discouragement must be overcome. And the way Mary Magdalene and the first disciples overcame discouragement was by meeting with the risen Christ. We too must meet with Christ in prayer and live in close proximity to the Spirit of Christ if we are to be motivated to engage in His mission.

The second obstacle to sharing one's faith in Christ is *doubt*. Just as it is difficult to sell a product that you do not believe in, it is difficult to convince others of their need to follow the Risen

5. Christ if you yourself are not convinced of the need to follow Him.

John's gospel records for us the words of a man we have come to know as 'Doubting Thomas'. Speaking to the other disciples, Thomas declared, "Unless I shall see in His hands the imprint of the nails, and put my finger into the place of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe" (Jn. 20:25). Thankfully, Jesus appears to Thomas, and invites him to touch His hands and side. Thomas responds to this encounter with the Risen Christ, saying to Him, "My Lord and my God!" (Jn. 20:28). Thomas is able to overcome his doubt because of a face-to-face encounter with Jesus. But what about us? Short of Jesus appearing to us in physical form, how are we going to overcome our doubts? We can overcome our doubts, in large measure, by *studying the Bible*.

6. John tells us that it was for this reason that the gospels were written; John writes, "these have been written that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name" (Jn. 20:31).

Perhaps you are here this morning because you regard Easter to be a very important day. And yet, what might be keeping you from more regularly attending a Christian gathering are the doubts that you harbour about certain elements of the Christian faith. What remains for you then, is a choice. You may choose to simply *live with your doubts*... Or, you can attempt to *resolve your doubts* through careful investigation. My encouragement to you is to pursue the latter. My encouragement is for each of us to become students of the Scriptures. For some, *discouragement* is a barrier for Christian witness; for others it is *doubt* that hinders, and still, for others, it is...

7. *disobedience* that keeps us from heeding the commission of Christ.

As I think about those close to Jesus to whom this barrier of disobedience applies, I immediately think of Peter. Peter is sometimes described as 'the apostle with the foot-shaped mouth'. Peter seemed to always be saying, and doing, the wrong thing. Without doubt, Peter's lowest moment followed shortly after his promise to Jesus to never deny Him (Mk. 14:31). Peter did deny Jesus—three times—just as Jesus had predicted. We need to bear in mind Peter's propensity for doing the opposite of what Jesus required as we reflect on this Resurrection account in Mark 16. Because, unless we bear in mind Peter's recent betrayal we will miss the full impact of what the angel says to the women who had come to anoint Jesus' body.

8. What we assume to be an angel (Mk. 16:5) says to the women, "Do not be amazed; you are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who has been crucified.

He has risen; He is not here; behold, here is the place where they had laid Him. But go, tell His disciples *and Peter*" (Mk. 16:6, 7). Why the special mention of Peter? Why not just say, 'Go tell the disciples'? Surely, this is just like our Lord to single out the person most in need of His grace and mercy. Peter wept following his denial of Jesus (Mk. 14:72).

Peter felt terrible.
He was mortified.

The guilt from his disobedience was weighing heavy on him. Jesus knew this, and so Peter is singled out as a special beneficiary of the Resurrection, "go, tell His disciples *and Peter*." As I look out into the congregation this morning, I do not know what might be keeping you from following the risen Christ.

9. I do not know what hinders you from sharing the gospel with others.

Could it be, that before we can get to *the last things Jesus said*, we need to come to grips with some of *the first things that the risen Christ said and did*? If any of you are *discouraged*, there is a more pressing imperative for you to heed. Jesus says, "Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you, and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart; and you shall find rest for your souls" (Mt. 11:28, 29). If any of you are here this morning as skeptics; if you are here this morning harbouring doubts regarding the Risen Christ, my plea is for you to earnestly study the Scriptures and to seek the Lord in them. For a parent of a young child, few things are more frustrating than when a child turns down food that they have never tasted.

10. "Just try it. If you don't like it, you don't have to finish it. Just give it a try", is what we say to them.

Similarly, the Psalmist urges each of us, "taste and see that the Lord is good; how blessed is the man who takes refuge in Him" (Ps. 34:8). And, if any of you are here feeling reluctant to engage the risen Christ because of some past or present season of disobedience, let me encourage you with the words of John the Baptist, "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" (Jn. 1:29). There remains a mandate for every follower of Jesus; we have been commissioned to "go into all the world and preach the gospel" (Mk. 16:15). If the obstacles of discouragement, doubt, and disobedience are allowed to remain, fulfilling this mandate will be very difficult for us. It is only as forgiven, believing, and encouraged, followers of Jesus will be sufficiently motivated to go and share the gospel with others.

11. One of the great things about this commission to “go and preach the gospel” is that it becomes our natural response as we overcome the obstacles we’ve talked about.

You won’t need much convincing. As you gain assurance of your forgiveness... As your belief in Christ strengthens... And as your encouragement grows... Sharing the gospel will become the natural overflow of your relationship with Jesus. To put it simply, *your constant pursuit of Christ will lead to a constant pursuit of others*. We may gather in one place Sunday by Sunday, but the mission is not in here. The mission is out there. The church is not to be a fixed gathering, but a mobile one. We’re supposed to be on the move.

12. Friends, Easter reminds us:

Christ has risen. Death is conquered. Forgiveness is offered. There is a good news for us to share—let’s get going!

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