

CHRIST AND HIS CO-WORKERS

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A SERMON
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DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON
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*“And they went forth, and preached every where, the Lord working with them,
and confirming the word with signs following. Amen.”*

Mark 16:20

THE previous verse tells us that “after the Lord had spoken to them, he was received up into heaven, and sat on the right hand of God.” It was expedient for His disciples that He should go away, and He had gone to the best place for helping them in their work. He could survey the field better from an eminence, so the Captain ascends on high. He could best send to them succor from the throne, so the Lord ascends to His glory. He could better lead them by the Holy Ghost than by His own personal bodily presence, so He was in the best place when “he was received up into heaven.”

The disciples were in their best place on earth. We do not always think so, we are sometimes eager to go home. We have often thought concerning a convert that if, the first day it is said of him, “Behold he prayeth,” we could also say, “Behold he sings in heaven,” it would save us a world of care and trouble and disappointment. Yet, all things considered, for the glory of God and for the working out of the divine purpose, the saints would not be best if they were immediately received up into heaven. No, it is better to read concerning them, “They went forth, and preached everywhere.” Christ is best up there, but it is expedient for us and for God’s glory that we should remain a while here.

I like the thought of Christ being taken up to heaven because His work was done, and His people being left on earth because there was still work for them to do. If we could steal away to heaven, what a pity it would be that we should do so while there is a single soul to be saved! I think that, if I had not brought to Christ the full number of jewels that He intended me to bring to adorn His crown, I would ask to come back even from heaven. He knows best where we can best serve Him, so He ordains that, while He sits at the right hand of God, we are to abide here, and to go forth to preach everywhere, the Lord working with us, and confirming the Word with signs following, even as He did with His first disciples.

I am going to say just a few practical words upon the fact, first, that *they worked*, “They went forth, and preached everywhere.” Secondly, *the Lord worked with them*, “the Lord working with them.” Thirdly, *the two workings were in delightful harmony*, for when the Lord worked He confirmed the Word with signs following, and as the writer of this verse has put “Amen” at the end of it, we will say, “Amen,” and feel “Amen.” Lord, make Your people work! “Amen.” Lord, work Yourself! “Amen.” Lord, make the two workings to be but one sweet monotone after all! “Amen.”

I. First, then, **THEY WORKED**, “They went forth, and preached.”

The disciples did not say, “Well, the Master has gone to heaven, so the eternal purposes of God will be quite sure to be carried out, it is not possible that the designs of infinite love should fail, the more especially as He is at the Father’s side, therefore let us enjoy ourselves spiritually. Let us sit down in the happy possession of covenant blessings, and let us sing to our hearts’ content because of all that God has done for us and given to us. He will effect His own purposes, and we have only to stand still and see the salvation of God.” No, brethren, it was not for them to judge what they ought to do. When they were told to tarry at Jerusalem, they did tarry at Jerusalem. There are times of tarrying, but inasmuch as the Master had commanded them to go into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature, they also,

when the hour had struck, went into all the world, and began to preach everywhere the Gospel they had learned at Jesu's feet. It is not for us to judge what would seem most reasonable, much less what would be most comfortable, it is for us to do as we are bidden, when we are bidden, and because we are bidden, for are we not servants and not masters? It is not wise to map out the proceedings even of a single day, but to take our cue from Him who is our Guide and Leader, and to follow Him in all things.

I would like you to notice concerning the working of these disciples that *all of them* worked. "They went forth, and preached everywhere." They might not all formally preach, some of them might not feel that they could stand before a large assembly, but they all actually preached in the sense of proclaiming, announcing, delivering truth before witnesses.

The women were as good witnesses as the men, for some of them had seen more than the men had, they beheld the risen Lord even before the very first of the apostles beheld Him, and inasmuch as they could all bear witness to the fact that He was risen from the dead, their duty was to go and tell the news that He who had been crucified in weakness had been raised in power, and was now to be proclaimed as the Savior of men, that "whosoever believeth in Him might not perish, but have everlasting life." "They went forth," not merely some of them, but *all* of them.

Next, notice that this work of the disciples was *aggressive*, "they went forth." Some of them were bound to stay for a while at Jerusalem, though that old nest was eventually pulled down, not a stick of it was left, and the very tree on which it was built was cut down. Persecution drove forth the bulk of them further and further, we do not know where they all went. There are traditions, which are not very valuable, to show where each of the apostles went, but it is quite certain that they all went somewhere or other, starting from the one common center, they went in various directions preaching Christ.

I think a strong church is a very valuable institution, but I have always deprecated the idea that all of you should sit here Sunday after Sunday, and listen to me, and I have spoken to some of you to such purpose that I do not often see you now. Nor do I want to see you, because I know you are serving the Master elsewhere. There are some of our brethren who only come here to the communion, why? Because they are always at work for Christ in some way or other. They are the best members we have, and we shall not cross their names off the roll because they are not in attendance here. They are at work in some mission station, or trying to open a new room for preaching, or doing something or other for the Master, the Lord bless them!

I do not want you all to go out at one time, but I do want you all to feel that it is not the end, though it may be the beginning, of Christian life to come and hear sermons. Scatter as widely as ever you can the blessing which you get for yourself, the moment you find the light, and realize that the world is in the dark, run away with your match, and lend somebody else a light.

Be glad of the light yourself, but depend upon it, if God gives you a candle, and all you do is lock yourself up in a room, and sit down and say, "Sweet light! Sweet light! I have got the light while all the world is in the dark, sweet, sweet light!" your candle will soon burn out, and you also will be in the dark. But if you go to others, and say, "I shall have none the less light because I give some to you," by this means God the Holy Spirit will pour upon you fresh beams of light, and you shall shine brighter and brighter even to the perfect day.

"They went forth." Oh, that some people I know of could have their chapels burnt down! They have been stuck in a hole down a back street for the last hundred years. They are good souls, and so they ought to be, they ought to be matured by now after so much storage, but if they would only come out in the street, they might do much more good than at present. "Oh, but there is an old deacon who does not like street-preaching!" I know him very well, he will be gone to heaven soon. Then, as soon as you have had his funeral sermon, turn out into the street, and begin somehow or other to make Christ known. Oh, to break down every barrier, and get rid of every restraint that hides the blessed Gospel! Perhaps we must respect these dear old believers' feelings just a little, but not so much as to let souls die, we must seek to bring sinners to Jesus whether we offend men or whether we please them.

Then notice, dear friends, that these disciples went forth *promptly*, for though there is not a word here about the time, yet it is implied that as soon as the hour had struck, and the Holy Ghost had descended from Christ, and rested upon them, “they went forth, and preached the word everywhere.” Alas, too often we are “going” to do something! If about a tenth part of what we are going to do were only done, how much more might be accomplished! “They went forth.” They did not talk about going forth, but “they went forth.” They did not wait until they received directions from the apostles where they were to go, but providence guided each man, and each man went his own way, preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

You believe the Gospel, you believe that men are perishing for lack of it, therefore, I pray you, do not stop to consider, do not wait to deliberate any longer. The best way to spread the Gospel is to spread the Gospel. I believe the best way of defending the Gospel is to spread the Gospel. I was addressing a number of students, the other day, upon the apologies for the Gospel which are so numerous just now. A great many learned men are defending the Gospel, no doubt it is a very proper and right thing to do, yet I always notice that when there are most books of that kind, it is because the Gospel itself is not being preached.

Suppose a number of persons were to take it into their heads that they had to defend a lion, a full-grown king of beasts! There he is in a cage, and here come all the soldiers of the army to fight for him. Well, I would suggest to them, if they would not object, and feel that it was humbling to them, that they should kindly stand back, and open the door, and let the lion out! I believe that would be the best way of defending him, for he would take care of himself, and the best “apology” for the Gospel is to let the Gospel out. Never mind about defending Deuteronomy or the whole of the Pentateuch, preach Jesus Christ and Him crucified. Let the Lion out, and see who will dare to approach Him. The Lion of the tribe of Judah will soon drive away all His adversaries. This was how Christ’s first disciples worked, they preached Jesus Christ wherever they went, they did not stop to apologize, but boldly bore their witness concerning Him.

Note, once more, that they served their Master *obediently*, “They went forth, and preached.” Suppose they had gone forth, and had “a service of song”? Suppose they had gone forth, and held a meeting that was partly comic, with just a little bit of a moral tacked on to the end of it? We should have been in the darkness of heathendom to the present day. There is nothing that is really of any service for the spreading of the Gospel but preaching. I mean, by preaching, as I have already said, not merely the standing up in a pulpit, and delivering a set discourse, but talking about Christ—talking about Him as risen from the dead, as the Judge of the quick and dead, as the great atoning sacrifice, the one Mediator between God and men.

It is by preaching Jesus Christ that sinners are saved. “It pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.” Whatever may be said outside the Bible about preaching, you have only to turn to the Word of God itself to find what a divine ordinance it is, and to see how the Lord makes that mainly to be the means of the salvation of men. Keep on with it, my brethren. This is the gun that will win the battle yet, though many have tried to silence it. They have had all sorts of new inventions and contrivances, but when all their inventions shall have had their day, and proved futile, depend upon it the telling out of Jesus Christ’s name, and Gospel, and work amongst mankind will be found to be effectual when all things else have failed.

“They went forth and preached.” It is not said that they went forth and argued, or that they went forth, and wrote apologies for the Christian faith. No, they went forth, and proclaimed—told out the truth as a revelation from God, in the name of Christ they demanded that men should believe in Him, and left them, if they would not believe, with this distinct understanding, that they would perish in their unbelief. They wept over them, and pleaded with them to believe in Jesus, and they felt sure that whosoever did believe in Him would find eternal life through His name. This is what the whole church of Christ should do, and do at once, and keep on doing with all its might, even until the end of the age.

There is only one more word left, and that is this very wide word, “*everywhere.*” One of our great writers, in a very amusing letter which he has written to a person who had asked for a contribution towards the removal of a chapel debt, wants to know whether we cannot preach Christ behind hedges and in ditches. Of course we can, and we must do so, provided it does not rain too hard. Can we not preach Jesus Christ at a street corner? Of course we can, and many of our friends will be preaching at the corners of the streets after this service is over. Yet in such a climate as ours we often need buildings in which we can worship God, but we must never get into the idea of confining our preaching to the building. “They went forth and preached everywhere.”

Mr. John Wesley, as you know, was complained of for not keeping to his parish, but he insisted that he did, for all the world was his parish, and all the world is every man’s parish. Do good everywhere, wherever you may be. Some of you are going to the seaside for a holiday, do not go without a good stock of tracts, and do not go without seeking an opportunity, when you are sitting on the sands, to talk to people about the Lord Jesus Christ.

There used to sit, in this left-hand gallery, a man who brought many persons in the course of the year whose conversion, under God, was due to him and to me. He had nothing particular to do except to go and sit down on a seat in Hyde Park, and there talk with ladies and gentlemen who came and sat there, he would tell them that he had a pew at the Tabernacle, and he would lend them his ticket, so that they might have a comfortable place, and then he took care after the sermon, to talk to them about Christ, and this church has in it now some excellent members whom that good brother brought to the Savior in that way. He said, “I cannot myself preach, but I can bring people to hear my minister, and I can pray God to bless them when they come.”

Only this week, I saw another brother, who leaves his home at eight o’clock on Sunday morning. There are, or there were, members of this church who walked twelve miles every Sunday morning to hear the Gospel here, and walked back to their homes at night. This brother lives a long way from here, and he starts at eight o’clock in the morning, and puts one of my sermons into each of the letter-boxes in a certain district as he comes along. So he utilizes a long walk, and in the course of the year circulates many thousands of sermons. What a capital way he has found of spending the Sabbath morning! When he gets here, after having done that service for his Lord, he enjoys the Gospel all the better because of what he has himself done in making it known to others.

Oh, beloved, it is sweet to think that Christ is preached in the workhouse, or in the infirmary, and to remember that the poor and the sick are not left without the Gospel! Let Christ be preached in the darkest slum, in the worst house that there may be in this neighborhood, and God knows that there are no worse houses than we have all round about us in this region. Oh, that Christ were talked of everywhere, to ones, and twos, and half-dozens, till the whole district should be saturated with blessed testimony for the Lord Jesus Christ! No place is so bad that we may not preach Christ there, and no place is so good that it does not need to hear of Jesus there.

II. I have taken too much time on that first division—they worked, so now we must turn to the second point, which is that **THE LORD WORKED WITH THEM.** That was the very root of the matter, “the Lord working with them.”

Is not this *wonderful condescension*? You remember the passage in which we are said to be laborers together with God. Is it not gracious and kind on the Lord’s part to let us come and work with Him? Yet it seems to my mind more condescending for God to come and work with us, because ours is such poor, feeble, imperfect service, yet so He does, “the Lord working with them.”

The Lord is working with that dear sister who, when she takes her class, feels that she is quite unfit for it, and with that brother who, when he preaches, thinks that it is not preaching at all, and is half inclined never to try again. Oh, yes, “the Lord working with them,” such as they were—fishermen, humble women, and the like! This was wonderful condescension!

In those days the Lord worked with them by *miracles*. These miracles called attention to the Gospel, and they also proved that God was with the preachers. Men want sometimes proofs of the existence of

God, and of His presence with His servants. So these first disciples were entrusted with miraculous powers.

Besides all this, God was working at that time very wonderfully by *providence*. The whole world was evidently just ready for the advent of Christianity. From Caesar's throne down to the slave who worked at the mill, everybody seemed to be in a condition of preparation for the Gospel, the general state of society was such that all were expecting great changes, thus God was working with the disciples when they went forth, and preached everywhere.

And above all, *the Holy Ghost was with them*, and that is the point I am now going to dwell upon, because that is what we want most of all. The Holy Ghost made what they said to be divinely powerful. However feebly they uttered it, according to the judgment of men, there was an inward secret power that went with their utterances, and compelled the hearts of men to accept the blessed summons of God, and dear friends, I believe that when we are seeking to serve Christ, we little know often how very wonderfully God is working with us.

I had an instance of that only this week. I will not mention the place, but there was a certain district of which I heard that there was great need of the Gospel there, and that there were many people in that district who were as ignorant of the way of salvation as Khoikhoi's, and the various places of worship seemed to affect a very small proportion of the people. A brother visited the neighborhood for me, and I prayed very earnestly that his visits might be blessed.

It is a very curious thing that while I was thinking about that district, there were certain Christian people close to it who were thinking about me, and longing for the Gospel to be carried to their neighbors, and after I had moved ever so little in the matter, I received a letter from them saying how much they wanted somebody to come and labor for the Lord among them. I said to myself, "This is strange, I have known this district for years, yet I have never noticed that anybody wanted me or my message, but the moment I begin to move towards the people, they begin to move towards me."

You do not know, my brother, that you may not have a similar story to tell. There is that street you feel moved to go and work in—God has been there before you. Do you not remember how, when His children had to go and destroy the Canaanites, the Lord sent the hornet before them? Now, when you have to go and preach to sinners, God sends some preparatory work before you, He is sure to do so!

When people come into the place of worship to hear the Gospel, if a man be in earnest in preaching it, God works upon them to make them ready before they come, and something they thought of on the road, or some sickness they have had, or a death bed scene they have witnessed, or some movement of conscience, awakened perhaps before they get into the building, renders them ready to receive the Gospel of the grace of God. The Lord works with us, my brethren, we always have a picked congregation, whoever comes, some come who never thought of coming, but the right people come, and often they come in the right state of mind because they have been prepared by God's Spirit for the message they are to hear.

Some do not come in that way, but God works with the minister while he is preaching. If he does not take his sermon, and read it, he is guided by God in what to say. He says the right thing, though perhaps it never occurred to him till the moment he utters it, and it tallies so exactly with what is going on in the mind that he is addressing, it fits so wonderfully that often, after a sermon, a person has said, "Somebody told the preacher all about me." It has frequently been my lot in the vestry after service to have persons demand of me who had told me about them—persons whom I had never seen or heard of till that moment. The preacher's word is blessed to them because God is working while the sermon is being delivered, and they are made to receive the truth.

In other cases God works afterwards, sometimes, immediately afterwards, at other times, years afterwards. There are different sorts of seeds in the world. The seeds of some plants and trees, unless they undergo a peculiar process, will not grow for years. There is something about them which preserves them intact for a long time, but in due season the life-germ shoots forth, and there are certain kinds of

men who do not catch the truth at the time it is uttered, and it lies hidden away in their souls till, one day, under peculiar circumstances, they remember what they heard, and it begins to affect their hearts.

Dear friends, if we work, and God works with us, what is there that we may not expect? Therefore, I put it to you that the great need of any working church is for God to work with them, and that therefore this ought to be our daily confession, that we need God to work with us. We must always realize that we are nothing apart from His working, we must not pretend to compliment the Holy Ghost by now and then talking about Him, as though it were the proper thing to say that of course the Holy Spirit must work.

It must be a downright matter of fact with us that the Holy Spirit must work, as much as it would be with a sailor that his sails could not go round without the wind, and then we must act as the miller does. He sets his sails, and tries to catch the wind from whatever quarter it blows, and we must try to work in such a way that the Holy Spirit is likely to bless us. I do not think the Holy Ghost will bless some service that is done even by well-meaning people, because if He did, it would seem as if He had set His seal to a great deal that was not according to the mind of the Lord.

Let us so act, dear brothers and Sisters, in our work, that there is never the smudge of a dirty thumb across the page, and nothing of pride, or self-seeking, or hot-headedness, but that all is done humbly, dependently, hopefully, and always in a holy and gracious spirit, so that we may respect the Holy Spirit to own and bless it. That will, of course, involve that everything must be done prayerfully, for our Heavenly Father gives the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him, and we must ask for this greatest of blessings, that God the Holy Spirit may work with our work.

Then we must believe in the Holy Spirit, and believe to the highest degree, so as never to be discouraged or think anything difficult. "Is anything too hard for the Lord?" Can anything be difficult to the Holy Spirit? It is a grand thing to often get into deep water so as to be obliged to swim, but we like to keep our feet touching the sand. What a mercy it is to feel that you cannot do anything, for then you must trust in God and God alone, and feel that He is quite equal to any emergency!

Thus trusting and thus doing His bidding, we shall not fail. Come, Holy Spirit, and work with all Your people now! Come and rouse us to work, and when we are bestirred to a holy energy, then work with us! Eternal arm that never wearies, to which nothing can be difficult, be stretched out to work with Your church at this time to Your own praise!

III. Finally, brethren, and very briefly, THE TWO WORKINGS ARE IN HARMONY.

They are really one, they blend, they unite, "God working with them, and confirming the Word with signs following."

I get a little afraid of some people who say very glibly, "The Lord told me this, the Lord told me that." You had better mind where that notion may lead you, because what God has to say He has already said in the Bible. You will find that anything which comes to you with power, and is really His truth, is here in the Book. We do not get new revelations nowadays, we shall get all kinds of fanaticisms and follies if we expect such revelations.

For instance, a man meets me at the bottom of the stairs, and he says that God has revealed to him that he is to preach here one Sunday. I say, "I do not believe the Lord has revealed anything of the kind, at any rate, He has not revealed to me that I am to let you preach, and I shall not let you till He does." I do not believe in lopsided revelations, but there are numbers of people led into all sorts of extravagances by the notion that the Lord has spoken this and that to them. What God does is not to give us a new Word, but to confirm the Word that He has already given. That which He has revealed, it is for us to speak out, and God, in His working will confirm the Word that He has given.

The harmony of the two workings is manifested thus—*the first working springs out of the second*. No man really goes and preaches Christ without being moved by the Spirit of God to do it. It is the Spirit of God who taught us about Christ, and all that we can preach, that is worth preaching, comes of the Holy Spirit in that very act.

Then, secondly, *the first implies the second*. No man who truly preaches Christ can do it except by the Holy Ghost, and in his ministry he must teach the necessity of the working of the Holy Spirit. “Ye must be born again, and born again of the Holy Spirit,” must be his constant cry.

So the first of the two workings implies the second, and then, next, *the second confirms the first*, that which we have taught out of God’s Word, God, the Holy Ghost, bears witness in the understanding and conscience of men that this is the very truth.

And, finally, *the second is promised to the first*. Where we work, God will work with us. It is not as some put it, “Paul may plant, and Apollos may water, but only God can give the increase.” There is no such text as that in the Bible, nor anything like it, Paul’s testimony is, “I have planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase,” and when we plant and we water, the increase will come. It is not God who is behindhand, it is we who are behindhand.

If we had but faith as a grain of mustard seed, we would not find that God would fail that faith, and when we get the faith which can move mountains, we shall not find that God’s omnipotence has evaporated, and that our faith has outrun His power. Believe you that, my brother, and labor on the strength of that belief. Believe you that, my sister, and tell of Christ, for, doing so you cannot, you shall not fail. Perhaps for the moment you may seem to do so, but in the long run—and God can afford to wait, remember, though you think you cannot—in the long run there was never a lost testimony, never a word of God that did return to Him void.

The snowflakes fall into the sea, are they not gone? Not one of them, for they help to feed the mighty deep. The showers fall on the wilderness, are they not lost, if they drop on the sand of the Sahara? Not a drop of them, for they shall be evaporated, and used somewhere else. See, they come up in clouds, and at length they fall where God has ordained. If the Lord is working with you, you cannot fail, you shall not fail. Only keep on working, relying on God to help you, and looking up to the Lord to work with you.

O poor sinners, all this sermon is about you! Our wish is to see you saved, our prayer is that you may be brought to Christ. Oh, that you were as willing to come as we would be to lead you to the Savior, as willing to come as God is to receive you! Come and try Him now, and you shall praise Him forever. Amen.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON

MARK 16

Verse 1. *And when the sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome, had bought sweet spices, that they might come and anoint him.*

We know that “Him” whose name is not given here. There is scarcely need to mention that it was Jesus whom the women came to anoint. Oh, how gladly would we also anoint “Him” whose name is The Anointed One! But not as a dead Christ, for “He is risen.” Our sweet spices must henceforth be for that living One whom we anoint with our living joy and consecration, or rather, we must receive our anointing from Him, for He is the Christ, and we the Christ-ians who get our very name and life from Him.

As He was supposed to be dead, and still lying in the tomb, these holy women came to anoint Him.

2. *And very early in the morning the first day of the week, they came unto the sepulchre at the rising of the sun.*

We often lose a great blessing by not rising early for devotion. While yet the flowers are wet with dew, it were well if our souls had the dew of heaven resting upon them.

3-4. *And they said among themselves, Who shall roll us away the stone from the door of the sepulchre? And when they looked, they saw that the stone was rolled away: for it was very great.*

Which was, I suppose, the reason for their thinking about the stone, but still, I cannot help reading it as a reason why it was rolled away. At all events, this was the argument that David used when he prayed, “For thy name’s sake, O LORD, pardon mine iniquity; for it is great,” as if the greatness of the sin had in it some reason for pardon. So the greatness of the care may be some reason why we might expect a great God to come to our relief. It was a very great stone, therefore God, who knew that poor feeble women could not move it, Himself had it rolled away.

5-6. *And entering into the sepulchre, they saw a young man sitting on the right side, clothed in a long white garment; and they were affrighted. And he saith unto them, Be not affrighted:*

They were afraid of an angel. “Conscience doth make cowards of us all,” and even good men and good women are apt to be afraid of anything celestial and bright. The angel said to the women, “Be not affrighted:”—

6-7. *Ye seek Jesus of Nazareth, which was crucified: he is risen; he is not here: behold the place where they laid him. But go your way, tell his disciples and Peter that he goeth before you into Galilee: there shall ye see him, as he said unto you.*

Does not that last clause drop out very sweetly? Yet there is somewhat of a rebuke in it, “as he said unto you.” “Did he not tell you that he would rise from the dead? Did he not say that he would meet you in Galilee?” And the day shall come, beloved, when you also shall rejoice in your Deliverer and your deliverance, and you shall not wonder so much then as you do now, for you shall see that the deliverance was what you ought to have expected, “as he said unto you.”

Poor seeking sinner, if you have found the Savior, you are full of wonder, but the day will come when you will see it in another light, you will be equally grateful, but you will say, “I ought to have had faith to expect this, as He said to me.” It will always be so. Just as God says, so it is—in creation, in providence, in grace, and as He has said to you, so shall it be in your spiritual experience.

8. *And they went out quickly, and fled from the sepulchre; for they trembled and were amazed: neither said they any thing to any man; for they were afraid.*

There was no reason in Christ’s resurrection for anything but delight, yet these dear women were overwhelmed, silenced, struck dumb, by that which made the angels sing.

9. *Now when Jesus was risen early the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom he had cast seven devils.*

It has been a general tradition in the church of Christ that Mary Magdalene was a great sinner, I do not feel sure that she was, but still, she is the type of a great sinner. The seven devils that were within her do not represent actual guilt on her part, but they depict or symbolize the subjection of her nature to the power of Satan. It is very beautiful to notice that those people for whom Christ does most He seems to love best, yet this is also according to human nature, for if there be a child in the family that the mother loves most, it is the one that was the hardest to bring up, and who has cost her most of care and most of labor. The casting out of seven devils endears the Magdalene to Christ, and first of all He appears to her. Besides, she loved much, doubtless, and she was quick of sight, so she saw Him first.

O my soul, if you have been a great sinner, do not take any place but that of first in love and first in fellowship with Christ! Be you content to be nothing, but be you anxious to make Him your all in all.

10. *And she went and told them that had been with him, as they mourned and wept.*

It is a curious “interior” that Mark here sketches, or rather stipples, with just a few touches. There are most of Christ’s disciples, who had been with Him, sitting mourning and weeping over His death, and in comes Mary, and says that she has seen Him alive.

11. *And they, when they had heard that he was alive, and had been seen of her, believed not.*

This was both cruel to the Magdalene and forgetful of their Master’s word, but unbelief is a very cruel thing. It is not only grievous to ourselves, but it acts in a shameful manner to Christian brethren and sisters, and worst of all is its treatment of our Divine Master Himself. It says that He is dead when truly He is alive. Unbelief has no good in it, it is altogether evil, only evil, and that continually. The Lord deliver us from it!

12-13. *After that he appeared in another form unto two of them, as they walked, and went into the country. And they went and told it unto the residue: neither believed they them.*

It is very hard to kill unbelief, it has more lives than a cat is supposed to possess. There is no end to it, and if men sit down and indulge in it, and look upon it as an infirmity, or as a painful trial, instead of regarding it as an abominable sin against the Lord, they are likely to sink deeper and deeper into this horrible mire.

14. *Afterward he appeared unto the eleven as they sat at meat, and upbraided them with their unbelief and hardness of heart,—*

Christ is full of love to them, yet He must upbraid them, He loves them, but He loves not their unbelief, nay, He is more vexed with unbelief in them than in other people.

14-15. *Because they believed not them which had seen him after he was risen. And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.*

That commission of our Lord makes me smile, for it seems such a curious cure for unbelief, yet I have proved the usefulness of it many a time. There have I been sitting down, fretting and worrying, and my Master, instead of giving me some gracious promise, that I might sit there by myself, and enjoy its sweetness, has said, “Up with you, go into the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature.” Those who preach most, if they preach with all their hearts, will believe most, and they will grow strong enough to tread their doubts beneath their feet. So ought it to be.

In the lives of those who have brought many to Christ, I do not, as a rule, read long chapters about their doubts and fears. No, but God encourages them by the signs and seals which He gives them, they see His hand with them, they mark how the Lord works with them and by them, and they forget their unbelief. Does not this passage seem to run so? “He upbraided them with their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they believed not them which had seen him after he was risen. And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.”

16. *He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.*

This is a weighty message for us to carry, and we have need to carry it with due solemnity, with our hearts on fire with love.

17-18. *And these signs shall follow them that believe; In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall 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.*

The apostles and the early Christians had these miraculous signs, there is no need that they should be given over again. The seal was set upon the Gospel at the first. A man buys a house, and on the first day when he takes possession, he gets the signature of the seller, and the legal seal upon the conveyance. That matter is done, if he ever doubts his right to the property, he can always look back to that seal. He does not want a fresh lot of sealing wax every five minutes, neither do we need continual miracles.

The church of Christ at first was like a ship going to sea, the tug takes her out of the harbor, but when she is fairly out at sea, she does not need the tug any longer, she is dependent then upon the wind from heaven, and so she speeds on her way. Or the church is like a young tree newly planted in the orchard, it has a stake stuck in the ground by the side of it, to which it is tied, but when it grows into a strong tree, where is the stake? The tree does not require it, for it stands fast by other means, it is just so with us and the miracles which were needed at the first.

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

The disciples were not at once received up into heaven, though they might have been if God had so willed it, there was work for them to do here below, so Christ alone “was received up into heaven, and sat on the right hand of God,” and as for His followers—

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

These last verses of Mark's Gospel have, as some of you know, been questioned as to their inspiration and authenticity, but they are so like Mark that you cannot read them without feeling that they are part and parcel of what the Evangelist wrote. Set any critic you please to work, and if he knows the idiom and style of Mark's writing, he will be bound to say that this is part of the Gospel according to Mark, and God the Holy Spirit, blessing these words to our hearts, as I trust He will, will set His seal to what we believe and know to be His inspired Word.

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