

A Sermon on Mark 16:14–20 At the General Assembly, Louisville, Ky, May 15, 1879

By Thomas E. Peck

The Nineteenth General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States having, agreeably to the requirement of the last Assembly, met at 11 o'clock A.M., in the Second Presbyterian church (Rev. S. Robinson, D.D., pastor) of Louisville, Ky., the sessions were opened with the following sermon by the Rev. Dr. T.E. Peck, D.D., the Moderator of the previous Assembly.

MARK 16:14–20.

¹⁴Afterward he appeared unto the eleven as they sat at meat, and upbraided them with their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they believed not them which had seen him after he was risen.

¹⁵And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.

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

¹⁷And these signs shall follow them that believe; In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues;

¹⁸They 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.

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

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

The scene here described, my brethren, is one of the most extraordinary ever witnessed upon earth. If it has any parallel at all, that parallel can be found only in the history of the same divine Redeemer. The lowly man of Nazareth had just emerged from the darkness of the grave to which the malice of His enemies had consigned Him, and as they fondly hoped, had consigned Him and His cause forever; but He now appears with

all the majesty of a king, “having offered Himself once for all,” a sacrifice to satisfy divine justice for His people, and having thereby acquired the right to all dominion in heaven, earth and hell. Just before He rises to take His seat at the right hand of God the Father Almighty, he assembles these His servants in order to give them that commission in the accomplishment of which the whole world is to be subdued unto Himself.

We find nothing here, my brethren, like that which we find in other conquerors—in the conquerors and heroes whom this world has agreed to worship. We find, in giving this commission to those who are to be His instruments in accomplishing the conquest of the world, that He gives them no other weapon than the weapon simply of the words, “Go, preach My Gospel to every creature,” and then, with all the absolute sovereignty that belongs to Him, he says that the eternal destinies of men shall depend upon the manner in

THE AUTHOR: Thomas Ephraim Peck (1822–1893) studied under James Henley Thornwell and became pastor of the Second Presbyterian Church, Baltimore, Maryland in 1846 and subsequently was professor of theology at Union Theological Seminary (1860–1893). Peck previously appeared on the cover of the volume 12 issue of this journal, which was a rare full issue on the single topic of The Lord's Day or Christian Sabbath (or this would have been quite the appropriate item to include in that issue). This sermon does not appear in Peck's 3 volumes of works but was published in a rare publication, *The Debates and Proceedings of the General Assembly of the Southern Presbyterian Church at Louisville, Ky., May 15th to 24th, 1879, as transcribed that year by G.L. Wolfe* (Louisville, Ky: Courier-Journal Job Rooms Print, 1879), [5]–12. The PCA Historical Center obtained an original copy of this book and the text has been transcribed by Wayne Sparkman with only minor editing. Due to its rarity we present it in this issue of *The Confessional Presbyterian*. George Lewis Wolfe (1837–1896) was an ordained PCUS pastor and a skilled stenographer as well, apparently. However, the cost to prepare the publication somewhat shocked the PCUS General Assembly and the like was not undertaken again. Peck delivered this Opening Sermon as the retiring moderator on a portion of the text of Mark 16:14–20. The sermon was extemporaneous.

which they receive this word. "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; he that believeth not shall be damned." What a strange commission this to give such a world as ours—a world which had so often quaked under the tread of armies, which had resounded for weary centuries with the noise of battle—a commission to conquer this world by simply peaching, simply by a declaration of the Truth! It was no issuing of any royal edict or command—no command given to men to bow the knee merely because the sovereignty which gave the command was a sovereignty which could not be resisted; but it was "glad tidings." They were to proclaim "good news" to those who were sinners and sufferers. And in the discharge of this commission we find that they were to be supported by "the demonstration of the Spirit, and of power." And this again, my brethren, accounts for the fact that our Saviour gives this commission notwithstanding all the ignorance, all the unbelief, all the confusion of mind and sluggishness of heart which He knew existed in His disciples themselves; for just before, as we are told, He upbraided them with their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they did not believe those who had seen Him after He had risen from the dead. Stranger still to give a commission to those who seemed but a little while before to have had no faith in their great sovereign Himself' who, for a very little while before at least, doubted whether He had risen from the dead, and, therefore, doubted whether in attempting to conquer the world for Christ they were not attempting a conquest for the glory of a dead Saviour. And I think no man can ponder these words without seeing at once that either Jesus of Nazareth was God overall and blessed forever, or that He was a mere crack-brained enthusiast.

In the next place, my brethren, I call your attention to the end of this conquest which the disciples were to make. They were to go forth and preach:

¹⁷*And these signs shall follow them that believe; In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues;*

¹⁸*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.*

So that clearly the great end contemplated by the Son of God, the Saviour, in giving this commission to His disciples is nothing short of the entire and perpetual deliverance of all who trust in Him from all evil, both moral and physical, that when His glorious work shall have been accomplished, it shall be seen that not only solitary vestige of evil shall remain in the whole church of His

redeemed—there shall not be the slightest shadow of that awful calamity, or series of calamities, which have passed over them in this world. They shall not only be all perfectly pure in spirit but they shall all be perfectly sound in body—both soul and body redeemed by the same blood, and sanctified by the power of the same Spirit, to be "presented before the presence of the Father without spot or wrinkle, or any such thing."

This is what I propose to call your attention to now particularly: The nature of this work—the grand end and aim of this commission which has been given by Christ to the church so far as that end terminates upon the church itself.

In the first place, my brethren, I remark that I think that we shall be greatly mistaken if we suppose that the signs the Saviour here mentions are merely designed to be credentials of His divine commission, or, with respect to the apostles themselves, were designed to attest the reality of their commission from the hands of God and His Christ. It is undoubtedly true that these miracles were designed for this purpose. Our Saviour said, "If I had not done among them the works that none other man did they had not sin, but now they have no other cloak for their sin." And the principle so clearly contained in the answer of Nicodemus to our Saviour in his interview by night is undoubtedly a principle sanctioned by the teaching of God's word everywhere—that no man can do the miracles that Jesus Christ did "except God be with Him." And I enter my protest against that doctrine which teaches that the miracles in themselves are not valid arguments for a divine commission on the part of those who work them. But I think that it is very important to notice that the miracles are not only this, and perhaps it would not be going too far to say that they are not chiefly this. In other words, that the miracles were designed not merely to attest the presence of God and the approval of God, but they were designed to reveal God. They were designed to reveal the nature of that mission which these miracles were used to authenticate—not only showing that God had sent a message, but indicating the purport of that message itself. It is perfectly plain that, if nothing more had been gained by investing these disciples with miraculous powers than merely the demonstration that they were messengers from God, that end could just as well have been subserved by enabling them to do miracles contrary in character to those actually performed. We do not find that our Saviour Himself, in a single instance, wrought a miracle which was not a miracle mercy; and we do not find that even in the case of the apostle, many miracles of a contrary sort were performed. He opened

the eyes of the blind. He unstopped the ears of the deaf, He cleansed the leper, he raised the dead. If His only purpose had been to show His power, His presence as a God, it might have been just as well served by smiting men with instantaneous blindness, as some of the old prophets of the law did; or by sending overwhelming calamities upon whole communities as was done by the hands of Moses, when he brought the Israelites out of Egypt; or by smiting a man who was in sound health with a loathsome leprosy for his sin, as was done in the case of the servant of Elisha; or by summoning men suddenly by the stroke of death to the bar of God, as was done in numerous cases in the Old Testament. Now, you do not find that any miracles of that sort were performed. Our Saviour went everywhere doing good, relieving the distresses of men, making them to feel that He was a great healer, the great restorer; that His soul was full of compassion, and that He came not to destroy men's lives but to save them. This view of the miracle, as revealing the nature of the commission as well as the fact that it was a commission from God, but be borne in mind in order that we may understand this passage.

Now again I go further and contend that the miracles of our Lord, and to a very great extent the miracles of the apostles, which were wrought in His name, were not only intended to reveal the fact of a Saviour manifest in the flesh, but they were themselves instances or specimens of redemption. They were not merely pledges or earnest of redemption, but they were instances of redemption itself. Wherever there was a case of a blind man who had his eyes opened, or a deaf man who had his ears opened, or a leper who was cleansed, or a dead man raised from the dead, we have an instance, I say, of the actual exercise of the power of a Redeemer. You remember that famous instance—which was recorded apparently for the express purpose of bringing out this great truth—of the palsied man who was let down through the tiles into the presence of the Saviour in order to be restored from his paralysis. Now, what does our Saviour say to him in the first instance? "Son, thy sins be forgiven thee." And it was only when the Pharisees and by-standers generally murmured and expressed their surprise that any man should undertake to forgive sins that the Saviour said, "Whether is it easier to say, Thy sins be forgiven them, or to say, Arise, take up thy bed and walk?" No doubt both sets of words were equally easily uttered. It was as easy to say the one as to say the other. But that form of expression was adopted by our Saviour for this reason—that in the one case, the case of the forgiveness of sins, no man could tell whether the effect of the forgiveness

of sins followed or not; because it was a sentence that passed in the court of Heaven, or it was a sentence that seemed to pass by the instrumentality of a mere man as he walked upon the earth. Whereas, in the other case, if the power was real, if the effect was actually accomplished, then it would be palpable to the eyes of all; and hence He turns to the man and says, "Arise, take up thy bed and walk." When the Saviour said, "Thy sins be forgiven thee," He used a form of words which carried along with them a very large degree of antecedent improbability in regard to the effect. When He used the form of words, "Arise, take up thy bed and walk," there was a very high degree of improbability that that could be done. Now then in the one case the thing is done beyond the possibility of doubt. No reasonable man therefore could question that that which they could not see had been also really accomplished. I think this is a principle of immense consequence, my brethren, in the interpretation of God's word; and it is a principle which gives immense advantage in contending with those who doubt, or who profess to doubt the divine legation of Jesus Christ. Our religion is a religion of fact, not a religion of doctrine merely—not an abstract intellectual system which is capable of being logically expounded and logically defended, and which from the nature of the very case could be suited only to a trained and disciplined intellect. It is essentially a popular religion—not in the sense of a religion which men naturally like, but in the sense of a religion which is adapted to the people—a religion which they can comprehend, at least as to its evidence, if not as to its substance. It is a religion of fact; and anyone who is capable of appreciating the real value of historical proof in any department, is also capable of appreciating the historical evidence by which the great history of Christianity is established. When the Apostle Paul, you recollect, was reminding the Corinthian church of what his Gospel had been, when he was summing up what he had preached to the Corinthians, he sums it up after this fashion:

"For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures; and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures."

So, according to Paul's own account of the Gospel, which he preached, it consisted substantially in these two great things—the death of Christ and the resurrection of Christ. And when our Lord instituted two of the ordinances of the church, the only two which were to commemorate events in His history, we find that the two events which He chooses to commemorate are His death and His resurrection. Every time we celebrate the

Lord's supper we commemorate the death of Christ; and every time the light of a Sabbath morning shines upon our eyes, it reminds us of the resurrection of Christ.

Now do you not see, my brethren, what great advantage this gives us in our contest with the infidel? We point him to facts—to facts whose reality cannot be denied without involving in logical consistency the denial of all the facts of human history whatever; for we have no greater evidence, we have nothing like the same amount of evidence for the death of Julius Caesar that we have for the death of Jesus of Nazareth under Pontius Pilate. And so with regard to the resurrection. All the circumstances of the case seem to have been ordered for the special purpose of leaving no possibility, at least no rational possibility of doubt, in reference to the reality of that great fact. Now, if these facts have occurred they have occurred once for all. If the death of Jesus Christ is a fact, it is a fact forever. And let the advancement of so-called science, or of real science, be what it may, it never can be changed. No conclusion at which science may hereafter arrive can ever in the smallest degree affect the reality of the facts of the death and the resurrection of the Son of God. You recollect how Peter argues against the Universalists of his time, and all times, in precisely the same way. When they say that there is no possibility or probability of the coming of the Lord, the apostle refers to the fact that there has been in times past a coming of the Lord; that there have been judgments in which He has discriminated between the righteous and the wicked, that there have been times when He poured His vengeance upon the wicked and has delivered the righteous; and all such dispensations—the dispensation of the flood, the destruction of the cities of the plain, and it might have been added after Peter's time, of the destruction of Jerusalem itself. All these instances in which there was a judicial discrimination between the righteous and the wicked, prove that there must be a final and perfect discrimination under the government of a God who is perfect and changes not; a final discrimination between the righteous and the wicked—one which will leave no righteous man without the blessing of God resting upon him, and no wicked man not blasted and branded by the thunderbolts of God.

Now, this being the view we ought to take of these miracles, then, my brethren, what a glorious view is open to us of the nature of the work which Christ came to perform, and which He honors His church by allowing her to co-operate with Him in performing! These miracles, says the Saviour, are signs, not mere prodigies, not mere powers; but they are signs, and signs not

merely of the presence of God, but the signs of a God present and ready to save, and one who will save. And it appears to me, therefore, that our Saviour here fortifies the faith of His apostles in a way precisely similar to that by which John the Baptist's faith, or the faith of his disciples, (whichever view we take of that passage), was fortified when the question came, the startling question, a question prompted by the obscuration of somebody's faith: "Art thou He who should come, or do we look for another?" "Go tell John what ye have seen and heard—the lepers are cleansed, the blind see, the deaf have their ears unstopped, the dead are raised, and the poor have the Gospel preached to them." Go, tell John this and then he cannot fail to believe, if his faith has been shaken; and you, his disciples, if it is yours and not John's faith which has been obscured, cannot fail to be confirmed. Why should you look for another? Why should you doubt that it is He who should come? Was it not the sign of a Redeemer according to the prophecies of the Old Testament? And do you not see works of redemption actually performed? And should we look for another? Is it possible that there could be another who could give better evidence, stronger or more overwhelming evidence, that He had come, that He is truly the Messiah and the Sent of God?

Beloved friends, we are not to look upon these words of our Saviour as limited in their application to the time of the apostles themselves. In that day it was not all believers who performed these works; these signs did not follow all them that believed. They were intended to be partial from the very first—either partial in the extent of space over which they were spread, or partial in the extent of time to which they were to be prolonged, or both. It was not necessary that all believers should do these things. Nay, it is not necessary that any of the believers should be able to do these things now in the way of miracles—in the way of works palpable to the senses, and which no man in his proper mind can deny. Beloved, it is only necessary for us to know that these things have been done in this fallen world. It is only necessary for us to know in this world of disease, that there has been a Healer against whose power no malady could stand when He spoke the word. It is only necessary for us in such a world as this of death, of graves, of weeds of mourning, to know that there has been One who walked amongst men, who only spake the word and the grave yielded up its prey. Oh! is it not something to know that there is One mightier than death? Is it not something to know that there is One who has actually conquered death? One who has actually gone down to the sides of the pit, and wrestled with the king

of terrors an triumphed over him? Is it not something to know that there has been One upon earth who was clothed with our nature, who was a man like ourselves, and whom death could not possibly hold? This was a sign—these were the signs that our Saviour gave His disciples of the nature of the work to be done.

And now let me illustrate this subject a little in some of the particulars here, not confining ourselves merely to the general view which has been indicated.

In the first place our Saviour says “they shall cast out devils.” There is a special significance in that, because the very purpose for which He was manifested was to destroy the works of the devil, and the very first gleam of hope that darted upon fallen man was contained in that sentence which was denounced against the serpent, that the woman’s seed should bruise his head. And then we say that those who contend for the personal existence of Satan, those who support the clear teaching of Scripture on this point, are those who are defending human nature; and those who deny the existence of a personal devil are the greatest libelers of their kind. What! to say this monster sin which has filled the world with lamentation, mourning and woe, and converted earth into a field of skulls—that this monster sin was engendered in the heart of man without any temptation, without any inducement from without, without any subtle plausible solicitation from some superior spirit! Why, how could we libel human nature more than by saying that? So that we are really getting rid of the doctrine of a personal devil, such as the Scriptures describe, by making all sin to originate with man, and so making man the devil!

Now, the devil being the author in one sense of all the sin in the world, being the prime mover of sin, our Saviour who came to destroy the devil’s work, tells His disciples that one thing they shall do—and it is mentioned as the foremost thing in the enumeration—is that they shall cast out the devil. A mightier spirit than man has taken possession of man and kept man’s personality in abeyance or in subjection in innumerable instances; but ye shall cast out the devils by a word, by My word, by My power; and so it shall be known everywhere that the devil is the slave of Christ. Is not this some comfort to us, to know that, in all our conflicts with Satan and the powers of darkness, there is a Redeemer who is not only able to overcome them, but has overcome them? That these enemies, in reference to whom we are so often tempted to say, we shall one day fall by their hand, are all conquered? That the blessed Redeemer has made a show of them openly upon His cross and by casting them out in innumerable instances?

But I pass on to notice the next particular in the

enumeration, which gives us, I think, the more positive side of the work to be done, and that is the speaking with new tongues.

This wonderful miracle which we call “the gift of tongues,” we are not to take as bestowed upon the church in order to enable the preachers of the Gospel more effectually to preach among all nations. I question very much whether it was designed for that purpose at all. Certainly, so far as the field of operations of the original apostles was concerned, it did not seem to be needful that they should have such a gift; because wherever in the bounds of the Empire these apostles went, they found the Greek language familiarly spoken; and Paul, not only on Mars Hills, but in Antioch of Pisidia, and everywhere else, could address any audience intelligibly in the Greek tongue. And besides, the apostle Paul himself tells us though he spoke with more tongues than they all, that when a man speaks “with a tongue he speaks to God and not to men”—not merely in the sense that God alone knows what he means, but in the sense that he uses his tongue in addressing God and not in addressing men. The gift of tongues was bestowed upon men originally upon the day of Pentecost, and always afterwards, as I conceive, in order to enable them to set forth “the wonderful works of God” in praise, instead of setting them forth in preaching. So that when you look at it in this light, this gift of tongues was intended to signify what should be the ultimate result of this Gospel of Jesus Christ when it should have achieved its highest triumphs. It should be that all men who should experience its power should praise God. The prevailing characteristic of sinful natural man, as the apostle James tells us, is that his “tongue is set on fire of hell;” and that as the tongue, the articulate power of speech is the appropriate expression of the reasonable nature of man, the reason by which he is distinguished from the brute, so when men are in their original sinful condition the tongue is the expression of a ruined reason, of a perverted reason, of a reason which is always collecting material for the praise of self, for the praise of men; and that the time shall come when the heart being thoroughly sanctified, being thoroughly purified by the Spirit of God, men shall praise God and not themselves. Then shall be realized all those prophecies in the Psalms, that all nations shall praise Him. All those exhortations to praise Him shall be promptly responded to—exhortations which grow and multiply, as you have often observed, towards the end of the Book. All nations shall praise Him, from the rising of the sun unto the going down thereof, God’s name shall be praised. This is the consummation which the church is to seek. It is

the highest and most exalted goal which human nature can ever reach. My brethren, I suppose you have never read that passage in the second chapter of Acts, about the outpouring of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost, and the tongues of fire, without thinking of that passage in the Old Testament, which seems to be set over against it as its counterpart, where the Babel builders came together for the purpose of making themselves a name, for the purpose of glorifying man. They came to build a city and a tower, in order to “make themselves a name,” says the simple record. It is the praise of man that they are after. It is the combination of the resources of this poor, feeble, mortal man that they are seeking. Conscious that the individual man is weak, that he is mortal, they will see to it that the constitution of large communities, and by keeping men together and organizing them thoroughly, the name of man shall be perpetuated—the name of the race and the power of the community whatever may become of the individual units which constitute it. That dream of the Babel builders has been the dream of mankind in all the ages. It was the dream that the Alexanders and the Tamerlanes of the world endeavored to realize, a dream which above all others the iron monarchy of Rome endeavored to realize, and did almost realize. Wherever that dream has occupied the mind of the great conquerors of men, wherever they have been able to realize the dream, you will find that it has always been a capital point to have but one language, and that, the language of the conqueror.

Now, in this matter of the Pentecost we have precisely the reverse of all this of the Babel builders. These disciples after the tongues from heaven have been given them, praise God and not man, and that glorious scene of the day of Pentecost is designed to be a prophecy. It was a prophecy, and is a prophecy this day, that the time shall come when men’s tongues shall be set on fire of heaven instead of hell, because their hearts have been purified by the spirit of God from heaven instead of inflamed by fiends from the pit of darkness. The time will come when men shall be all holy; and when they shall be all holy, then not one solitary wish, thought, or impulse shall ever enter into their souls but thoughts of the glory of God and the impulse to praise God. That is the meaning of it as I believe. Hence, when our Saviour says: “They shall speak with new tongues,” He does not mean merely that you shall witness this remarkable miracle of speaking with tongues. He means to say that this gift of tongues or speaking with tongues is the sign of what your work is ultimately to be—what the highest result is to be—the entire transformation of the human

soul, the entire and absolute purification of the human heart, when there shall be no impulse but the impulse to glorify God.

I have not time, my brethren, to notice these other particulars that our Saviour insisted on, though it would be exceedingly interesting. I will only mention the last as one which should form the subject of profitable meditation in itself:

¹⁸*They shall lay hands on the sick and they shall recover.”*

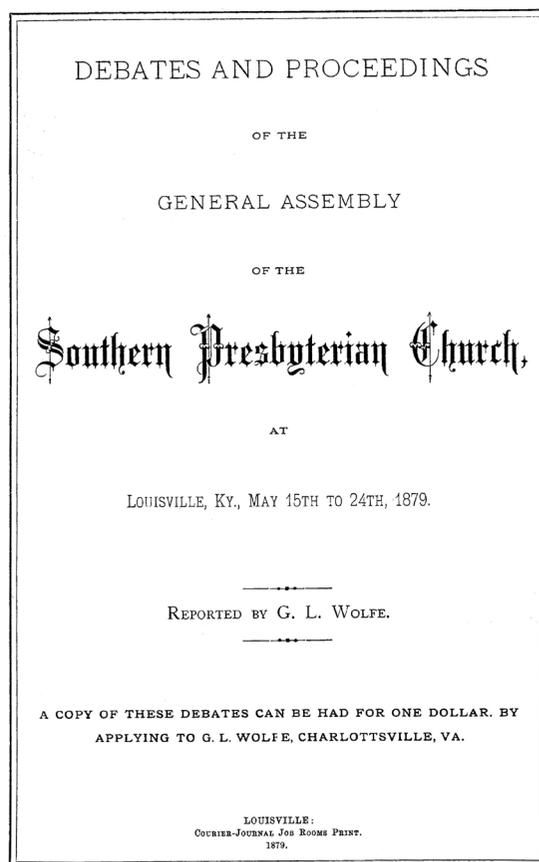
If there is any one feature of our condition in this world, a feature belonging to our physical condition, it is that of our liability to disease. There is not a solitary soul in this congregation who is not liable to moral maladies. The probability is that the vast majority will die by disease. It is a thing which no man can deny to be a calamity—a thing which no man can deny is, in the long run, to be irremediable by human skill. Now, says the Saviour (and this prophecy of His falls in with the old prophecies in regard to the same thing), the time is coming when you shall lay hands on the sick and they shall recover, and this healing of the sick by the laying on of your hands is a sign. It is a sign—this healing of the sick—that the time is coming when there shall be no sickness in all the redeemed church of God, no pain, no sorrow. There shall be no crying. God shall wipe away all tears from all faces. A strange world this will be where there is no use for a physician! And yet this is the promise and the prediction, as I understand it, of this passage.

But I cannot tarry any longer on these things. I only wish to say a word or two in reference to the nature of the work for which we have come together to-day, as explained by the principles upon which we have been meditating. We come here as the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States. We come here to deliberate, to confer with one another in reference to things which belong to Christ, and which belong to the interests of His church. A great many things that we have to do are matters of detail. There are arrangements; there is machinery, if you choose to call it so, necessary in order to accomplish our work; but my brethren, what is the grand aim and design we ought to have in all these things? We ought to keep our eyes steadfastly fixed upon the consummation—the absolute deliverance of the church of God and of all that part of the human race which has come into the church (and it will be overwhelmingly large in the end), the absolute deliverance of this church from all evil, all moral evil, all physical evil, from all the guilt of sin; from all

pollution of sin, from all weakness of the soul, all infirmity of the body, all disease and deformity of the body for evermore. Now, if this is the true view of the matter, was there ever anybody of men on the face of the earth that had a more beneficent mission than the church has to discharge? Was there ever anybody of men existing on the earth whose mission of benevolence was more comprehensive, more all-embracing than the mission of the church? To abolish all sickness, to abolish all dying beds, to abolish the grave as well as to abolish hell! Is not this a commission which might nerve every arm and stimulate every heart? My brethren, ought we not to cry shame upon ourselves whenever our hands hang down or our knees become feeble in such a glorious work as this? If it were nothing but the good of man, if it were nothing but the amelioration of man's condition, nothing but the priceless blessing bestowed upon the members of our own race, bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh, it were enough; but when we are glorifying Christ the Redeemer of the world, when we are seeking to show forth His power as the Saviour of the world, when it is our highest aim to demonstrate the irresistible efficacy of Christ's compassion, and of Christ's arm, how can we refuse to make sacrifices? How can we refuse to do anything, to suffer anything, to be anything which the providence of Christ may call upon us to do, or to suffer, or to be?

And it is a very simple thing, my brethren—the means by which we are to do it. Nothing but preaching the Gospel! Go, preach to every creature the glad tidings! That is the whole of our commission as a church. It is not we who are to cast out the devils; it is not we who are to give tongues to men, with which they shall celebrate the praises of God; it is not we who are to lay hands on the sick and they shall recover; it is not we who are to do these things. It is the power of God only, the power of the Father only, the power of Christ only, the power of the Spirit only. And when this work shall have been done, there shall not be one note of praise but to the glory of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost. But Christ has condescended to use us as His instruments, and He uses not only the breath of one's mouth, but He uses the breath of the mouth of such worms as we, of such weak people as we, of such sinners as we—sinners saved by grace, but sinners still! We are the instruments, we have but one thing to do—that is to preach the Gospel. This is the ultimate aim, this is the thing you are to do, this is the thing you are to do, this is your commission. Everything is intended merely to bring these glad tidings to human ears and human hearts. All our measures of government, all our measures of discipline,

have but this one end in view ultimately—it is to preach the glad tidings to every creature. How can we think of such a commission as this, my brethren, without feeling that it is our duty to embrace the whole world in the arms of our faith and love; without feeling that we are debtors to all men, whether they be Greeks or Barbarians, whether they be wise or unwise, whether they be Chinese or Hottentots, that, so long as there is a single soul on earth, be he in the distant isles of the sea, that has never heard of Jesus and His salvation, we shall do all and sacrifice all that he may hear of Christ. And I think that, if our hearts were only impressed as they ought to be with these great truths, we should soon have the praises of God sounded from the rising of the sun unto the going down of the same. ■



The Debates and Proceedings of the General Assembly of the Southern Presbyterian Church at Louisville, Ky., May 15th to 24th, 1879, as transcribed that year by G.L. Wolfe (Louisville, Ky: Courier-Journal Job Rooms Print, 1879). Title page of the copy owned by the PCA Historical Center. Used by permission.

In Brief: In Defense of the Traditional Ending of Mark.

The concept of biblical canon includes not only the authoritative books which make up the Bible but also the authoritative text of those books. As Carl E. Armerding put it, “the development of an authoritative text is a natural corollary to an authoritative list of books.”¹ In the historical review this paper has shown that the Traditional Ending of Mark is the earliest attested ending for the second Gospel. It was known by Justin Martyr and Irenaeus of Lyon. It appears in some of the earliest Greek uncial manuscripts of Mark, including Alexandrinus, Ephraemi Rescriptus, and Beza. There was a period when the ending of Mark was clearly disputed. In the end, however, an organic consensus affirmed the Traditional Ending as the fitting and proper canonical conclusion to Mark. After his review of the external evidence² for the Traditional Ending of Mark, Nicholas P. Lunn wrote:

For the vast majority of its history the church as a body has pronounced in favor of this passage. The indications of doubt on the part of Eusebius and the copyists of a small number of manuscripts do not reflect the view of the church in general. Its inclusion was unambiguously accepted from the earliest times, with the second century fathers. The Byzantine, Vulgate, and Peshitta texts, which were to hold sway in the principle sections of the church for a thousand years or more, each embraced it. The humanist scholars and Reformers of the early sixteenth century all received it as authentic, it being published in the Greek NT editions of Erasmus, Stephanus, Elzivir, and Beza. The Bible translation tradition set in motion by Tyndale included it, the passage appearing in Coverdale’s version, the Great Bible, the Anglican Bishops’ Bible, the Puritan Geneva Bible, the Catholic Rheims-Douai version, as well as the King James Bible which came to dominate the English-speaking world for the next three centuries. In the Great Awakening of the mid-eighteenth century and other subsequent revivals the Gospels were preached and read in a form containing the final verses of Mark. The great missionary movement of the early nineteenth century brought about the translation of the NT into numerous languages of Africa, Asia, Australia, and the Americas. With the received Greek text and the King James Bible as

the only possible, and indeed the only known base-texts, the longer version of Mark’s Gospel passed into the hands of the indigenous churches. It was not until the latter half of the nineteenth century that the long-established acceptance of Mark 16:9–20 began to be seriously challenged in certain academic quarters of the Western world. This turn-around found its impetus in the re-discovery of Codices Vaticanus and Sinaiticus, two manuscripts which, it should be remarked, had long lain unused by the church. History shows therefore that also in the matter of ecclesiastical tradition, or what may be termed “canonicity,” the longer ending has received a clear stamp of approval.³

In our present day, this renewed challenge to the Traditional Ending of Mark has created a new canonical crisis. I believe it is reasonable and right to advocate for a new consensus to emerge which reaffirms the Traditional Ending of Mark as the authoritative, fitting, and canonical conclusion to Mark. Such a consensus would again provide consistent and authoritative translations to be read by God’s people both privately in personal devotion and publicly in corporate worship and would allow ministers to preach this text with confidence as the Word of God.

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1. Carl E. Armerding, *The Old Testament and Criticism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 101.

2. This study has focused on the external evidence in favor of the Traditional Ending. The ending may also be defended on the basis of internal evidence. For several recent scholarly defenses of Mark 16:9–20 as consistent with Markan style, see Farmer, *The Last Twelve Verses of Mark* [(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974)], 77–108; Maurice A. Robinson, “The Long Ending of Mark as Canonical Verity,” in David Alan Black, ed., *Perspectives on the Ending of Mark [4 Views]* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2008), 40–79; and Lunn, *The Original Ending of Mark*, 117–317.

3. Nicholas P. Lunn, *The Original Ending of Mark: A New Case for the Authenticity of Mark 16:9–20* (Eugene, Ore.: Pickwick Publications, 2014), 115.