

“All that Jesus Began to do and Teach”: Theological Themes in Luke-Acts

Let us begin with a word of prayer.

Father, as we approach You today, I am well aware that we are coming to the end of the semester. This is a time when people feel overloaded and helpless at times. We get so overwhelmed with what we have to do at times that we so easily forget that in Jesus is our rest. For He said, “Come to me all who are weary, and I will give you rest for your souls.” We forget that Jesus is our peace. You have no cause for enmity against us, for Christ has broken down those walls of enmity. There should be peace even among us in the church for the same reason—for Christ has reconciled us into one body. All these things should give us peace and joy, even in the midst of difficult times. Lord, I pray for these students, that You would give them wisdom in these last few weeks of school. Give them discipline as well, to accomplish the tasks before them. But especially, give them an overwhelming sense of peace and joy in Christ in the midst of all we have to do. Lord, thank You that Jesus is indeed our Savior and our Lord. We desire to honor Him as such in this class hour and throughout our lives. In His wonderful name we pray. Amen.

Last time we talked about Mark. I did some sample readings, going through the beginning of Mark. I pointed out the very brief prologue, the one sentence that brings us in, “The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.” This sentence is important because it immediately sets out what Mark wants us to think about this Jesus. (Many manuscripts do not include this verse, but the earliest manuscripts do). “The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.” This is the saying about who Jesus is. Then as we go through the Gospel, we recognize that these are characteristics of Jesus.

The recurring theme of Mark is “they were amazed.” They are amazed at His authority in teaching, they are amazed at His miracles, they are amazed at His ability to cast out demons, to heal paralytics, and to forgive sins. All those things cause great consternation among the people. By the way, as you read through the Gospels, if you are trying to find out how you should respond to this Gospel, chances are you are supposed to read it in light of some of the characters in the Gospel itself. Thus when the people are amazed, that should be our response as well. The problem is that we become dulled to this because many of us have heard and read these stories all our lives. We approach the story of the paralytic, for example, and say, “Oh yeah, he was paralyzed, they dropped him through the roof...I know this story.” We need to recapture that sense of amazement. Have you seen anyone heal a paralytic? Do you know anyone whom you have met in the last few days who has the authority to forgive sins? These are the kinds of things that really should provoke amazement in us as well. That is effectively the feel you want to get at the beginning of Mark.

The Gospel of Mark is known for being faster paced. Well, obviously it is shorter—by almost 10 chapters in comparison to Luke and a littler over that in comparison to Matthew. It is shorter. But the fast pace helps to focus us more on Jesus, in a sense. There are fewer characters that stand out in Mark. You do not have Joseph and Mary at the beginning. You just leap right in and see Jesus in front of you, and you are trying to figure out who this Man is. That is the feel you should get as you go through the Gospel of Mark.

Let me point out one other theme in Mark, talk about the ending of Mark, and then we will move into Luke. Because of time constraints, that is what we will have to do.

The other theme that comes out in Mark very early on is the theme of conflict. It is such a shocking thing, in a way. Here is this Man who is able to do all these amazing feats, and slowly and increasingly

there becomes a very adamant opposition to Him. There is conflict that goes on in Mark, as in the rest of the Gospels. This comes out when Jesus heals on the Sabbath, for example. It seems to come out especially in response to Jesus' statement in chapter 2. Let us look at 2:5b-9: "And Jesus, seeing their faith, said to the paralytic, 'Son, your sins are forgiven.' But some of the scribes were sitting there and reasoning in their hearts, 'Why does this man speak that way? He is blaspheming; who can forgive sins but God alone?' Immediately Jesus, aware in His spirit that they were reasoning that way within themselves, said to them, 'Why are you reasoning about these things in your hearts? Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, "Your sins are forgiven"; or to say, "Get up, and pick up your pallet and walk"?' The scribes were of course right in this—no one can forgive sins but God alone. Then Jesus heals the man to demonstrate His authority. This is a foretaste of the conflict that is going to go on. It starts out muted, but it increases as things go on. By the time we come to 3:6, while He is healing on the Sabbath, "The Pharisees went out and immediately began conspiring with the Herodians against him, as to how they might destroy him."

What is so striking in Mark is that as you go through the first four chapters there is an escalation in the miracles Jesus does. Thus His authority and the amazement at His status increase, and at the same time, the conflict against Him increases. Eventually His authority will be maintained but the conflict will continue to rise. The conflict will overwhelm the situation, and eventually He will be put to death. Of course, the thing you see throughout Mark is Jesus' own self-awareness of His coming death. Do you remember the passion predictions? Matthew, Mark, and Luke all record these predictions where Jesus says, "The Son of Man will be given over to the Gentiles and will be scourged and beaten and put to death." You have that awareness of the trajectory of His life coming from the very Son of Man Himself until He is in fact crucified.

Now let us move to the very end of Mark. At least in my version (the New American Standard (NAS) Bible), when you get to 16:9 in Mark, suddenly there is a bracket and a footnote. Other versions will actually set the text off and have a little saying at the top that says something like, "Many of the earliest manuscripts do not contain this passage." This brings us into some of the issues of what is called textual criticism. It is actually more complicated than the footnote tends to allow. In particular, the text of Mark through 16:8 is very secure. All the manuscripts that are not fragmentary have this text. With Mark 1:1-16:8, everyone is confident that was in the original. But it is the case that the earliest manuscripts do not have 16:9-20, which is called the longer ending. But there is also the short ending. The NAS puts this short ending at the very end of chapter 16, in italics and brackets. Some editions put it in with a footnote; others do not even include it. Let me read you the short ending. This is added in late manuscripts after verse 8 (which everyone agrees is original), so let me start by reading verse 8: "They went out and fled from the tomb, for trembling and astonishment had gripped them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid." Then the short ending reads as follows: "And they promptly reported all these instructions to Peter and his companions. And after that, Jesus Himself sent out through them from east to west the sacred and imperishable proclamation of eternal salvation." That is the short ending.

The complexity of all this is as follows: some manuscripts have no ending after verse 8. Many manuscripts have the long ending after verse 8, verses 9-20. But these tend to be later manuscripts. Some manuscripts only have the short ending that I just read to you. And some manuscripts have the long and short endings. That is the complexity of the issue before us. Now, what do you do with that? Well, there are, I think, three possible solutions to this. The question is which is the most probable? The short ending is represented, for the most part, in much later manuscripts. Thus the short ending does not seem to be original. Therefore, your possibilities are that the long ending is original, represented in verses 9-20, or Mark ends with 16:18. The long ending is found in the medieval manuscripts that were

preserved in the monasteries of Europe. Therefore, before the earliest manuscripts were found (just in the past 100 years or so), the earlier versions of the Bible (like the King James Version and Luther's German translation) included 16:9-20 because this was the textual tradition found in Europe. It is possible that this was the original ending that was somehow lost in all the earlier manuscripts.

Another possibility is that the earlier manuscripts are simply correct. There was no other ending; Mark really ends with 16:8: "...trembling and astonishment had gripped them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid." This is not impossible. What is the beginning of Mark? People are constantly amazed by what Jesus does. They are astonished, if you would. And sometimes fear grips them, especially after Jesus walks on water. What is the disciples' reaction to this? Fear and astonishment, because they are thinking, "Oh wow! Who is this?" Jesus' actions completely explode all their categories. Thus it is possible that is how we are supposed to end in this Gospel. Reading from the perspective of the characters, then, we too should be so amazed with this figure whom we are called to ask, "What do we do with this Man?" Thus it is possible that is how it ends.

Now, there is a little bit of awkwardness in the Greek, because verse 8 literally ends with a two-word sentence: "for they were afraid." The Greek word "for" (*gar*) is always the second word in a sentence. It is rather like the English word "therefore." You can say, "Therefore I say to you..." or "I, therefore, say to you..." The word *gar* in Greek always shows up as the second word. It would be like "I, therefore, say to you..." Literally, then, the Greek reads: "They were afraid, for." That is how it is. It is a little odd to end with that particle word, *gar*. It is not impossible, there have been some parallels found in Greek writings of that time period, but it is still odd.

To review, our first possibility is that 6:9-20 is original. The second possibility is that Mark actually ended his Gospel with verse 8, to kind of bring us into the amazement, fear, and astonishment. A third possibility is that there was a further ending to Mark, but the folio was lost. What I mean by that is ancient manuscripts were written on scrolls. You might think of a long scroll that can be unwound. Well, the scrolls were made of papyrus, and they were not produced in very long pieces. After all, how would you crush and glue together a sheet of papyrus that stretches 24 feet? So what they did instead was produce smaller pieces of papyrus and then weave them together. Thus you would have some stitching periodically along the scroll. Therefore one possibility is that the last folio fell off—the stitching came undone or tore, and it was lost. Thus effectively this theory says that the ending of Mark was lost very early on so that the earliest copiers in the third and fourth century did not have it. And then later, those copying Mark thought, "This is a strange ending." So they came up with a summary statement of the kinds of things that could be deduced based on the other Gospels and on Acts and came up with 16:9-20.

Those are the various possibilities: Mark 16:9-20 is original, Mark ends with verse 8, or the folio was lost. I have to say that, of all these possibilities, I would lean toward one of the last two. I do not think it likely or most probable that verses 9-20 are original because of the lack of awareness of these verses in the earliest manuscripts. I do not see why the early manuscripts would intentionally omit them. And I do not think it likely that they would accidentally omit them, especially because not all these manuscripts appear to copy each other and thus several people would have had to make the same mistake. It is possible that there is a variation on this, that verses 9-20 were original. Perhaps the folio they were on fell off one of the copies and thus the earliest copiers missed it and then the folio was recovered later on.

What I want to ask you in all of this is how then should you think through these matters? How do you deal with this? If words or verses do not appear in the earliest manuscripts, do you immediately dismiss them? No, you have to think it through much more carefully than that. The issue for me is not simply that verses 9-20 are not found in the early manuscripts. Rather, the issue for me is that you have a long ending in some manuscripts, a shorter ending in others, and then a mixed ending in others. Thus the

tradition is very complex and quite awkward. Textual criticism is the discipline that goes through and examines manuscripts in order to arrive at the likely original reading, the reading that came from Mark's hand. We have roughly 5000 Greek manuscripts of the New Testament and about 15,000 early translations of the Greek New Testament in Latin, Syriac, and more obscure dialects like Armenian and Gothic. Thus we have this huge textual base to draw from for understanding how the original of the New Testament likely read in all its parts. That is an incredible help. The originals of all the works from antiquity, unless they just happen to be discovered in some hole in a desert, have decayed and fallen away. Think of any major ancient author: Homer, Thucydides, Lucian, Seneca, etc. For any ancient author, we do not have the original manuscripts from their hand. We just do not. Thus with every work from antiquity we are left to copyists who copied the original, and then copyists who copied the copies, the copyists who copied the copies of the copy. That is the reality with any ancient work.

There are two ways to deal with things like this. One is to almost arbitrarily determine one copy you will say is original and then remove any variance from that. This is the process Muslims use with the Quran. They have a text they deem to be the original, and any variation from that is immediately burned. That is putting much weight on whether or not they have the right one. They just hope that after 1400 years of transmission they still have the original. We are actually in a better situation because the process has been more democratic, if you would. We have all these manuscripts that have some variations from one another, and so we can develop techniques for determining the original. These techniques are based on the antiquity of the manuscripts, the widespread geographic distribution—if the same readings show up in Egypt, Europe, and Palestine, that is more convincing than a reading that only shows up in Europe. Thus geographic distribution is important. And there are other ways of thinking through all of this.

The result, I think, is that we actually have a more secure text of the New Testament than of any other document from antiquity because we have more copies of it. If you were to pull Homer off the shelf, a really good critical edition of Homer (which is close to being the second best testified work), you will find there are several very good long manuscripts of Homer that date from about 800 to 1000 years after the time Homer wrote. Then we have some papyri manuscripts that have been discovered recently that move the time frame into within about 100 years of the time when the Iliad was originally written. And that is just a great help. The result is that now for Homer we have hundreds of manuscripts, which is great. That is much better than we have for Josephus. We have about 12 good manuscripts from Josephus. When we get to the New Testament, we have about 5000 good manuscripts. And that is leaving off all the early translations that also provide a textual basis. Thus we have a much better knowledge of the New Testament than of any other ancient document.

Bruce Metzger is not someone you could describe as an evangelical, *per se*. He has respect for the Scripture, but he would not necessarily worship in our churches. He is a good man. He has said (the figures are rough) that 99.66% of the New Testament text is secure. No doctrine, no major doctrine of Christianity, rests on a textual issue. This is because, for the most part, individual words are debated, and these words are fairly innocuous.

Now, I actually have just finished training my New Testament in Exegesis class, over about three hours, in textual criticism. And that is just a start. You could do much more than I am able to do in that class. I think the result of that time with my exegesis class is that as they learn the process and are able to actually look at apparatus that get you into the manuscripts and label and date the manuscripts for you, their confidence in the New Testament actually increases greatly. This is because we actually have the advantage of not having a single copy with everything else burned. We actually have the advantage of having many manuscripts. But this does produce an occasional issue like this one. Let me just mention the two other major issues, in terms of things that are omitted in the early manuscripts that I think are surprising to Christians who have not heard of this before.

Aside from the ending of Mark, there is also the woman caught in adultery in the Gospel of John. The issues there are not only is it not found in the earliest manuscripts, but Eusebius of the early church refers to this as a separate tradition he does not know from the Gospels. Thus it seems that in the first century this account was circulated separately from John's Gospel. Therefore I would not consider the woman caught in adultery to be original to John. It is an edifying story, but it is not original to John. The last thing that is a shock to some people is the end of the Lord's Prayer: "For yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory." That is not in the earliest manuscripts either. That makes sense to me as well, because otherwise the ending of the Lord's Prayer is, "and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil." Well, that is just not exciting, is it? It does not pump you up the way the phrase, "For yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever and ever," does, does it? In its liturgical use—and the Lord's Prayer was widely used in liturgies from very ancient times—people added a sort of long amen to it, a long way to end it. I think that is a possible origin for that ending. It is also a very edifying ending, by the way. I would say that, for instance, in church—"For yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever and ever"—because all of that is true. God's kingdom is forever and ever. Therefore I can say amen to that. However, I personally would not preach Mark 16:9-20 or the woman caught in adultery because I am not confident that they constitute true Scripture. What we hold to be inspired is that which is in the original manuscripts, that which actually came from the pen of Mark or John or the scribe writing for them. So there is something to say about all that.

Before I end that discussion, in my undergraduate years, I was a religious studies major at Rice University, and we had a very interesting array of people coming through from a variety of theological viewpoints. One semester we had a man named Hans Küng. Some of you may know of Hans Küng, especially if you know anything about contemporary Catholic theology. Hans Küng is a very famous Catholic theologian from this century, and he is famous, in part, for breaking with the traditional Catholic doctrine in a variety of ways. He taught against the infallibility of the pope, and that lost him his chair of Catholic studies at the University of Tübingen. He has taken some very interesting stands, and also stands that have cost him quite a lot. He is also very interested in inter-religious dialogue. I took a class from him on monotheistic religions and how there should be dialogue between the religions. It was a very interesting class, but one of the things he tried to do in it was to show that Christianity has changed so radically over the ages that we should not presume that what we hold to be traditional Christian doctrine should stand in the way of inter-religious dialogue. That was basically one of his points. One of his illustrations in this regard was the Gospels. He said that there was a development in the Gospel tradition where if you were to view roughly the story of the Gospels, all the Gospels, including Mark and Matthew and Luke and John (and I am grouping them that way because he did), will tell the story leading up to the cross, but Matthew and Luke have an infancy narrative. They talk about where Jesus came from, and he came from the Holy Spirit. And they also clearly have a resurrection narrative, and Luke has an ascension narrative. John has no infancy narrative, but he has an incarnation narrative and a resurrection narrative. Mark has no infancy narrative and, on Küng's terms, if you say that the ending of Mark 16 is not original, there is not a resurrection narrative either. His point was basically that the concept of Jesus having been born, and especially of the resurrection, was a later teaching in the church and then the incarnation was an even later teaching still. How would you react to this?

Someone might point out that before the disputed ending in Mark 16, the angel does appear to the disciples, and he declares that Jesus has risen, so that is somewhat of a resurrection narrative there. The angel comes and announces the resurrection of Jesus, and even more than that, the text says, starting in Mark 16:3, "And they were saying to one another, 'Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance of the tomb?' And looking up, they saw that the stone had been rolled away, although it was extremely large. And entering the tomb, they saw a young man sitting at the right, wearing a white robe;

and they were amazed.”—By the way, Mark often describes angels as “men wearing white.”—“And he said to them, ‘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 laid him.’” I mean, it is not just like, “Oh, he has risen.” It is much more emphatic than that. “‘He has risen; he is not here; here is the place where they laid him. But go, tell His disciples and Peter, ‘He is going before you into Galilee; there you will see him, just as he said to you.’” And they went out and fled from the tomb.” The angel describes this, certainly, so there is a clear understanding when you get to the Gospel of Mark that there is a resurrection, so I do not agree with what Küng says about there being no resurrection in Mark.

Someone else might say that if the question is doctrinal as much as it is textual, then what about the fact that Christ’s birth and resurrection were both prophesied in the Old Testament? That is a part of the whole story. Another point is that Küng is basing his argument on what is not in the text rather than what is in the text. And even what he says is not in the text actually is in the text! There is the assumption of the resurrection in the text, so I think you have to say, “I am sorry, but the resurrection is there in Mark.” Finally, this assumption discredits the authors of the Gospels and says they are not authoritative or inspired by the Holy Spirit. It simply dismisses them as not being credible sources.

The suggestion that Mark 16 is not original may be surprising to some of you, and certainly to some of the people in your congregations. What I am trying to do is to ask the question, “What is inspired?” What is inspired is that which originally goes back to Mark, and if there is a strong case to be made that this ending may not go back to Mark, then I am going to back off on it a little. At the same time, I would caution all of you in sharing this with people in your churches, because your goal should not be to shock people or to hurt people’s faith. Nevertheless, I think our faith needs to be founded on an accurate understanding of what Scripture actually says. We must walk a very fine line here, which is also why I have taken 15 minutes to talk about just a few verses to try to say two things to you.

The first thing is that there is some evidence that this is not original, and so there are some ramifications for that. On the other hand, frankly, what I am doing with this is to say that Mark describes the resurrection, so there is no doctrine that is impinged by saying that the end of Mark is not original. What I am really interested is that which is truly inspired, which is that which we can show to go back to the first century and to Mark himself. I think it is good to warn you that you should be very careful about how you convey this to others, and whether or not you will do that depends on your particular congregation and the circumstances there. You certainly should not just blurt out, “Oh, the ending is not original.” You need to provide enough context so that people understand what you mean by that and so that you do not damage their faith in mentioning it.

If I can mention one last thing with regard to Mark and the resurrection, it is not merely that you get this strong hint or even a pronouncement on the lips of an angel that the resurrection has occurred—which obviously we should take seriously in and of itself!—but remember, again, that there are these passion predictions throughout Mark as there are throughout Matthew and Luke. For instance, in Mark 10:33, Jesus says, “Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be delivered to the chief priests and the scribes; and they will condemn him to death, and will deliver him to the Gentiles. And they will mock him and spit upon him, and scourge him, and kill him, and three days later he will rise again.” That is not the only place that idea appears in Mark. Jesus specifically predicts His resurrection multiple times. So what I would say about the Gospel of Mark is, even if you do not accept verses 9 through 20—and therefore you are standing in between, as I am, whether the book actually ended in verse 8, “for they were greatly afraid,” or whether there was an original ending that was at some point lost in the transmission process—in either case, we can say there was a resurrection in Mark. There was a resurrection both in the sense that it was anticipated and Jesus taught that He was going to be resurrected, and there is the clear pronouncement of the resurrection on the lips of the angel. So you

have a resurrection throughout. The issue of the infancy narrative, I think, is fairly innocuous. The reason Mark has no infancy narrative is that Mark brings us immediately in to the ministry and times of Jesus. He is not concerned with what came before, because he really wants you to meet the Man and be amazed at the Man, as the crowds were amazed at the Man when He just appeared and started teaching. Then, immediately, they were amazed at His teaching and amazed at His miracles. So he did not see a need to mention the birth of Jesus. Did he think that Jesus was born? Well, yes, and so I think all of Küng's allegations there are not accurate.

Finally, this idea of the incarnation occurring in John but not in the other Gospels: what really is lying behind that? The concern that could be raised there is whether the other Gospels think that Jesus was God incarnate. Certainly John does. He begins his Gospel with "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word *was God*." (Emphasis added). Then he has the incarnation: "And the Word became flesh." What about the other Gospels? Well, this is why Mark 12:35 says, "And Jesus, answering, began to say, as he taught in the temple, 'How is it that the scribes say that the Christ is the son of David?'" The Messiah is the Son of David, almost by definition, and that is certainly pronounced about Jesus as well, elsewhere in the Gospels and certainly in the early church. But what Jesus is trying to do is create a dilemma here. I will read from 12:36, "David himself said in the Holy Spirit, 'The Lord said to my Lord, "Sit at My right hand until I put your enemies beneath your feet." David himself calls him "Lord," and so in what sense is he his son?" And the great crowd enjoyed listening to him."

Can you name a figure in Judaism greater than David? Possibly Moses, but in terms of what David is saying, how is it that one Lord can talk to another Lord and they are both the Lord over David? There is something going on there that takes you out of just a pure human expression. There is a very strong indication of the deity of Christ there; it is even heightened in the account in Matthew. There are all those little hints throughout the Gospels just like that. All you need to do is just pull out a good work on Christology. If you take Millard Erickson's *Systematic Theology* and look at the section on Christology, he will give you verse after verse after verse in the Gospels that show the deity of Christ. An even better book would be, say, Klaas Runia's *The Present-Day Christological Debate* or David Wells' *The Person of Christ*. What you will see there is that there is this sense of deity in a number of places in the synoptic Gospels. Although they do not explicitly talk about incarnation per se, instead they talk about the Holy Spirit coming into Mary (that is not just your typical birth). Working out what that means in light of the deity teaching that happens elsewhere means that you have incarnation in the synoptic Gospels. I would encourage you in that regard as well.

Someone might ask what Hans Küng was trying to do by taking out the incarnation and resurrection. His basic objective was this: if you take those out, then you have something a lot closer to what historical Jesus research asserts. Historical Jesus research says that Jesus was just a man who taught some really good things, and we need to figure out what it was that He actually taught as opposed to what the Gospels say He taught. Once we work all that through, we learn that He founded a good religion, taught a lot about love and charity and things like that, and if we bring those principles to bear and say that is the core of what Christianity is, then it becomes easier to dialogue with another faith. By contrast, if you start with John and you have an incarnate Son of God who says that He is the way and the truth and the life and no one can come to the Father except through Him, then inter-religious dialogue becomes a lot more difficult. Küng was trying to make it easier.

Another question, related to the end of Mark and the story in John 8, is whether there is anything in those passages that is contrary to the rest of Scripture. In other words, is there anything that we should worry about that is taught in those passages that might lead people astray? It really depends on how they

are interpreted. I do not see much to be concerned about in the story of the woman caught in adultery, although frankly, there have been some who have taken it and have pushed it a little farther than I think it should go. What I mean is certainly forgiveness is offered in Jesus Christ and any sin can be forgiven, except for the unforgivable sin, and so I would affirm that. It is also the case that Jesus says, “Go now and sin no more,” which I would also affirm. What is often done with the woman caught in adultery is that people forget to add the sentence, “Go now and sin no more.” So there is a slight danger in misinterpreting that passage.

I think, in a similar way, there is a slight danger in misinterpreting Mark 16, specifically the signs in verse 17—“and these signs will accompany those who believe: in my name they will cast out demons, they will speak with new tongues, they will pick up serpents, and if they drink any deadly poison it shall not hurt them. They will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover.” There have been some excesses of that, of course. There are a few churches, especially in the southern United States, that take this very seriously.

Here is just a quick story off to the side. My wife and I were on staff with Campus Crusade for Christ, which is a wonderful college ministry, and prior to our coming on staff, I heard the story of a summer project that was held in Florida. The students would work during the week, they would do evangelism and discipleship in the community, and they would also go to different churches and speak in them. Well, this group was invited to a church, and they all gave their testimonies, and the people became very excited and pulled out the poisonous snakes and started passing them around to engage in true worship of God. That, I think, is fairly excessive.

If I were to understand Mark 16 in terms of the correct interpretation of what is going on there, can you think of any biblical instance of someone handling a snake? Paul, in the book of Acts, is bitten by a poisonous snake and does not die. So this passage in Mark 16 is specifically focused on the early church and the amazing miraculous ministry of the early church that you see recorded in the book of Acts. In a sense, it is a summary of the very kinds of miracles you find recorded in the book of Acts, which provides a nice transition into our next segment here, but I think, properly interpreted, it is fine. However, there are some congregations that, based entirely on this verse, have a view that worship involves reptiles, and I would not endorse that view. Effectively, what I would say is that, properly interpreted, I do not have any problems (in the sense of theological issues) with those passages, and there have been similar misinterpretations with many other undisputed passages.

The issue came up that this makes us feel uncomfortable, because we are saying that the Bible potentially has errors in it if Mark 16 is not original, and that makes us uncomfortable with regard to the doctrine of inerrancy. My point was to say that the English Bible is, to state things extremely, not inerrant, because what is inerrant is the Bible in the original autographs, the original Greek and Hebrew as it originally came from the hands of the people who first wrote the documents of which we now have copies. That is what is inerrant—what Matthew, Mark, and Luke and the others actually wrote. Now I said that was a bit of an overstatement. It is an overstatement in that one of the things that we are trying to do with the doctrine of inerrancy is not simply to state some kind of abstract doctrine about things that were written 2000 years ago, but to state a stance that we as Christians should have in approaching the reading of our Bibles. In that sense, I want to treat this English Bible as inerrant, because if I approach it as “this is true,” then that is the correct way to approach Scripture. So I would say that there is an objective issue in the doctrine of inerrancy, and there is also a subjective issue. The objective issue is to state what exactly is without error, and that is the original autographs. The subjective issue is to approach how we actually ought to approach our Scriptures, and we ought to approach them as true. However, in between those, it allows us to have the discussion of whether the end of Mark was in the

original autograph. If it was, then it is, in the Greek form, inerrant. If it was not, then it is not inerrant—it does not partake of that doctrine—and therefore I would not have the same respect for the English translation of it that I would have for the first eight verses of the English translation of the Gospel of Mark.

You may wonder why the end of Mark 16 is in your Bibles at all, if the translators find it so dubious, and the real reason that it is there is that it was in the King James Version. There is only so much that you can do as a translator, and if you do not include something in your translation that was in the King James Version, then people in many of our congregations would become very upset. The other thing, apart from that, is that including it in the translation permits us to have the discussion of whether it is original or not. The translators, by putting it there in brackets, are signaling that they do not think it is original, but they want you to have it there so that you can have this discussion. I think that is fairly reasonable.

At this point I want to move into a discussion of the Gospel of Luke, and actually Luke and Acts. In keeping with the purpose of this class to do both history and theology, I am going to move quickly into the book of Acts. We will spend less time on the Gospel of Luke. We have spent a lot of time on the Gospel of Matthew, by the way, not that we explicitly had a class on Matthew, but do you remember the devotionals that we have done through Matthew? I feel like we have signaled a lot of the key issues that come up with Matthew. Mark has been brief; I recognize that.

I guess the last thing I should say about Mark, and any of the Gospels, is this: I hope you noticed when I came to interpret Mark, while I certainly emphasized the beginning, and we talked about the ending, there is a sense in which you have to read the whole thing through. One of the good things about the way that we approach Scripture is that we hold every little paragraph to be valuable to us and edifying to us, and that is true. One of the downsides to that is that we get so used to reading the Gospels, or any narrative work in Scripture, in these little tiny pieces. We say, “I am going to read this parable,” and then next week in our Bible study we read the next parable, and the week after that we read the miracle story that comes after that, and so you do not get the sense of starting in chapter 1, verse 1, and reading all the way to the end of chapter 16. You just do not read all the way through. The problem is that probably is not how it was intended to be read, in some respects, so that occasionally—not always, but occasionally—it does us great good just to start and read all the way through and get a feel for the whole, to get the big picture. That is what I was trying to give you with the beginning of Mark, at least. The big picture is “Oh, my goodness, look at this Man!” That is the big picture, and once you see the big picture, then you can go back and look at the individual miracle stories and the individual parables and see how they fit in the whole flow.

A quick piece of advice that was given to me by someone when I was in seminary, especially having to do with preaching Old Testament narratives, but I would say also having to do with New Testament narratives such as the Gospels, is that, again, there is this tendency to preach individual parts. What do you do with that? Do you go to the other extreme where you preach a single sermon on the entire Gospel of Mark in 30 minutes? And you can only preach through all 50 chapters of Genesis in one shot, all the way through? No, you cannot do that either, and that is not appropriate to the inerrancy and inspiration of Scripture, because every little part matters, as well as the whole. So what this person suggested was that you should see the preaching of narrative as a string of pearls, where you have the individual pearls all along, and you look at the individual pearls and you appreciate each one, but you also need to step back and see the whole in order to see the beauty of the whole string. The result is that while you are preaching through the narrative—and obviously, this is applicable in Bible study and counseling sessions and in whatever context you are working through the Bible—that you constantly see both the

forest and the trees. You bring people out and in so that you get the big picture as well as the individual contributions. I think that is a very helpful way to think through how we should approach the narratives of Scripture. That would certainly refer to the Gospels as well as to Luke-Acts.

Moving to our discussion of Luke, then, the first thing I want to cover has to do with the unity of Luke and Acts. This probably can best be seen by looking at the prologue to Acts—Acts chapter 1, starting at the very beginning of the chapter. Acts 1:1 says, “The first account I composed, Theophilus, about all that Jesus began to do and teach, until the day when he was taken up to heaven, after he had by the Holy Spirit given orders to the apostles whom he had chosen. To these he also presented Himself alive after His suffering, by many convincing proofs, appearing to them over a period of forty days and speaking of the things concerning the kingdom of God. Gathering them together, He commanded them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait for what the Father had promised...” Thus in the very beginning of Acts, Luke refers back to this account that he calls his first account, which is clearly about the life of Jesus. Acts is the sequel to Luke. It is as if this is Luke 1 and Luke 2. Acts is the sequel to the Gospel.

The connectedness of Luke-Acts can also be seen in the beginning of the Gospel of Luke. He says the following: “Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile an account of the things accomplished among us,”—we have already gone through this material, which is why I am breezing through it. I do not mean to trivialize the Scripture—“it seemed fitting for me as well, having investigated everything carefully from the beginning, to write it out for you in consecutive order, most excellent Theophilus...” Thus we have Theophilus in the beginning of Luke and Acts. That alone sets up a natural connection between the Gospel and Acts.

Another feature that sets up a fairly natural connection between Luke and Acts is at the end of Luke, in chapter 24. Luke 24:50 says, “And he led them out as far as Bethany, and he lifted up his hands and blessed them. While he was blessing them, he parted from them and was carried up into heaven. And they, after worshiping him, returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and were continually in the temple praising God.” This parting from them is not described in great detail in Luke, but it is a parting that is different than the sequence of resurrection appearances. This is a final parting. Well, at the very beginning of Acts you have the ascension of Jesus. This is something that is distinctively part of Luke and Acts. Certainly Matthew, Mark, and John all depict the resurrection, but Luke is also particularly interested in the ascension, when Jesus goes up into the clouds. Thus you have these different elements to show that Luke and Acts were written by the same author.

There are other elements we will not discuss now, such as theological themes, which we will discuss next time. These elements show that Luke and Acts are Luke part one and Luke part two. This is so evident that in the last 30 or 40 years scholars have spoken increasingly of the unity of Luke and Acts. I think in this regard they are quite correct. One example is a book by Robert O’Toole entitled *The Unity of Luke’s theology*. Thus he believes there is this unified aspect of Luke and Acts. He believes this so strongly that the subtitle is “An analysis of Luke-Acts.” Many modern scholars do not speak of simply Luke or Acts, but of Luke-Acts, as if there is this continuous narrative in Luke 1 and Luke 2, the original and its sequel, if you would. Now, I think there is some great help there. At the same time, we do need to realize these are autonomous works, written with a beginning and ending trajectory. Thus I think the idea of a sequel is more helpful. Acts is a sequel to Luke with similar themes, some of the same characters, the same God doing the same kind of work, the same emphases—but each has its own beginning and end. They form their own coherent whole.

Let us begin with some of the themes of Luke-Acts and where the theology is, if you would, unified. Let us return to the beginning of Acts, chapter 1. Listen to the things he highlights about the things Jesus

began to do and teach. It is not just the teachings of Jesus, it is what He did. And it is not just what Jesus did, it is what He taught. That is very consistent with what Luke says in his Gospel. There is this very interesting phrase that Jesus “began to do and teach.” Does that mean He is still doing and teaching in our day? Many have studied this, and I think there is truth in this conclusion: through His apostles He continues to do and teach. Thus the acts of the apostles are even the continuation of the story of Jesus. He began to do and teach in Luke, He continues to do and teach through the apostles in Acts. Acts 1:2 continues, “...until the day when he was taken up to heaven, after he had by the Holy Spirit given orders to the apostles whom he had chosen.” There we have the ascension of Jesus as a theological Lukan distinction.

We also have the theme of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit shows up many, many times in Luke and in Acts. Some say it shows up in Luke more often than in the other Gospels, but I have not done the study to confirm that. But He shows up often. And the Holy Spirit shows up very often in Acts. The Holy Spirit is part of this theological unity of Luke and Acts. And here we have the apostles, who will obviously figure very prominently in this account of the acts of the apostles. The apostles are part of the unity because these are the people Jesus “had chosen.” Then 1:3 says, “To these he also presented himself alive after his suffering, by many convincing proofs, appearing to them over a period of forty days and speaking of the things concerning the kingdom of God.” Here we have the resurrection (“He presented himself alive...”). The phrase “by many convincing proofs” shows that Luke was concerned with evidences. Certainly he was concerned with evidences for the resurrection, but also for the Christian faith, which is a theme that continues throughout Acts. Acts provides continuing evidence for the Christian faith. Here we also have the kingdom of God, or the rule of God over all of life as it is shown in Luke and Acts. Acts 1:4 continues, “Gathering them together, he commanded them not to leave Jerusalem...” Then He promises the Holy Spirit and ultimately commissions them in their mission, which links them into His mission in Luke. What I am trying to say is if you want to see some of the themes that are most highlighted in Luke and in Acts, these first few verses lead you into that very well.