

Message #33

Mark 9:38-50

There is a political movement that has caught on like wildfire among the American people and the slogan of it is “Make America Great Again.” Many Americans believe that America has lost much of its greatness and sovereignty and identity and, as a result, this idea is speaking to the hearts and minds of millions of people.

Now deep down inside almost all people have a desire to be great at something. Most people dream about being the greatest in the world. Some desire to be the greatest looking man or woman in the world. Some desire to be the greatest athlete in the world. Some desire to be the greatest business entrepreneur in the world. There is probably a little of that desire for greatness within each of us.

This certainly was true with the disciples of Jesus Christ. They were discussing the subject of being the greatest disciple not in this world, but in God’s Word.

So Jesus had been teaching His disciples about being great in God’s eternity. He had taken a little child into His arms and set him before them and He told them that whoever takes a child and points him to Jesus Christ will be great (9:36). Most think it was Peter’s child who was living in Peter’s home in Capernaum. **So Jesus said greatness is determined by pointing people to Me.**

Well after Jesus had said that, John decided to speak up. This is the only place in Mark’s gospel where John appears on his own to have a discussion with Jesus Christ. John had a fiery personality. In fact, John and his brother wanted to call down fire from heaven on a Samaritan village to destroy it for not receiving them and Jesus rebuked them (Luke 9:51-55). Jesus called John and his brother “sons of thunder” (Mark 3:17). John responds to Jesus’ instruction in somewhat of an odd way. It is a truthful response, but it is a strange response.

So Jesus decides to teach His disciples a very serious and sober lesson:

YOUR RESPONSIBILITY AS A DISCIPLE IS TO SEE TO IT THAT YOU DO EVERYTHING YOU CAN TO POINT PEOPLE TO BELIEVE IN JESUS CHRIST AND NOT HINDER THEM BECAUSE WHAT IS AT STAKE IS THE UNQUENCHABLE FIRE OF HELL.

There are many who do not like this topic of unquenchable fire of hell. But the One who brings up the subject is Jesus Christ. He warns of it strongly in this text. Hell is obviously a very real place. There are two key facts brought out about it in these verses:

- 1) Hell is a place of unquenchable fire. **9:43, 46, 48**—never burn out = which means eternal fire
- 2) Hell is a place where no one ever dies. **9:44, 46, 48**—never burn up = no annihilation

Now there are several very important lessons that Jesus teaches His disciples here. They needed to grasp this and so do we:

LESSON #1 – The program of God is all about Jesus' name and not our name. **9:38-39**

Now we may recall that when Jesus came down the mountain, the disciples had failed to cast out a demon (9:14-29). Apparently when they did get back down the mountain the disciples learned that there was some “rogue” disciple, who was not part of the twelve who was able to cast out a demon.

In **verse 38** carefully notice what it was that upset John and the rest of the disciples. The key is the pronoun “us.” In other words, they were upset because this person was not following the disciples. What they had not yet figured out was this was not about following them; it was about a relationship with Jesus Christ.

Apparently when Jesus was here on earth, this man, who was not part of the twelve, had tremendous faith in who Jesus was and he was able to spot one who was demon-possessed and cast out the demon. We must assume that before he did this he prayed to the Lord (Mark 9:29) and the Lord gave him the ability and the authority to do it. In this time exorcists used more of their deities and this man believed in the Deity of the name of Jesus. Later, in the first century, an unbeliever tried to cast out a demon using the name of Jesus and it backfired. So this man was a strong believer (Acts 19:13-17).

Now John and the rest of the disciples were upset about this. What they did not realize is that God’s program is not about our greatness, it is about Jesus Christ. He is the only way to having a relationship with God.

In **verse 39**, Jesus said don’t stop him or hinder him because what you don’t realize is that when we allow one to do something “**in My name,**” it leads to the truth and testimony I am the God/Savior/Messiah/King. One cannot speak evil of one who demolishes that which is evil.

Now the ability to actually see who is demon-possessed and to cast it out was an ability given while Jesus Christ was here on earth. So this is not a text that promotes the idea that today we can cast out demons using the name of Jesus.

Furthermore, this is not a mandate to embrace anyone who says anything about the name of Jesus. This is not a mandate to embrace anyone who claims to be a believer who is in a church that is making mockery of reverent worship. In fact, when Jesus addressed the seven churches of Revelation, He said that if they did not stop tolerating certain people, He would start executing people (Rev. 2:20-23).

What was happening here is that apparently this man believed that Jesus was the Messiah and He was praying in His name and, as a result, even though he was not following the other disciples, God did answer that prayer.

The critical lesson that we need to grasp here is that our goal is not to get people to follow us or to follow some denomination; it is to point them to Jesus Christ and to the Word of God. Our goal is not to make us great, but Christ great.

LESSON #2 – God wants His disciples to know if someone is not against us he is for us. **9:40**

There is certainly a key theological point that is seen in this verse: **there is no neutrality when it comes to Jesus Christ. You either believe in Him or you don't!**

In the first century world, to stand up for the name of Jesus Christ was a risky proposition. Religious and political leaders wanted Him dead. So to take a stand for Him meant you risked your own life. Jesus says people not against us are for us.

Jesus uses an interesting preposition in saying that he is “for” us. It is the preposition “hyper.” Now the main thrust of this particular preposition is the idea of substitution. So what Jesus is saying here is someone believes in Me and My name, he is our representative or our substitute. He may not be traveling with us, but he is representing us.

LESSON #3 – God wants His disciples to know that whoever does something nice for them because they are connected to Him will be rewarded. **9:41**

Now this verse is not designed to promote a philosophy that says all charity will be rewarded. This verse is for the purpose of teaching that those who provide for the needs of His disciples and for the Kingdom work will be rewarded.

Now notice the title that Jesus gives to Himself here. It is a rare moment when He does this. He identifies Himself as the “Christ.” This is the proper noun that means Jesus is the Messiah.

What that means is whoever ministers to one who is promoting that Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah will be rewarded. Whoever does something positive for one who is ministering the truth about Jesus Christ will be rewarded. The illustration is doing something small like giving a disciple a cup of water to drink.

LESSON #4 – God wants His disciples to know that whoever causes a child to stumble in his faith about Jesus Christ will suffer horrible judgment. **9:42-48**

Now the reference to “little ones” is a reference to little children (Matt. 18:5-6) and also a reference to those who had a little childlike faith in Jesus Christ. Children are precious gifts from God. Their hearts and their faith are tender and teachable. Many children were coming with their parents to see Jesus. The religious leaders were trying to turn people away from believing in Jesus. Obviously, one thing that people were saying and believing was that Jesus was the Christ, the Messiah.

Now Jesus gives a strong warning and the warning is this: if you cause one of the children to stumble in their faith about Jesus Christ, it would be better for you to suffer a death of a millstone being hung on your neck and cast into the sea than to face Him at judgment.

The Greek words “heavy millstone” (v. 42) are words that describe a millstone that was so heavy it had to be pulled by a donkey. The imagery Jesus is using is tying some brick on someone’s neck and drowning them. This was a very heavy stone that would drop them to the bottom fast. The Romans were known for this kind of execution. Jesus says any who cause people to stumble in faith in Jesus Christ would be better off suffering a horrible drowning judgment than what will happen when they face Him. This is a very serious warning.

I would hate to be a Mormon leader or a Muslim leader. I would hate to be a Jehovah’s Witness leader. I would hate to be Buddhist leader. I would hate to be a Christian Science leader. I would hate to be a Church of Scientology leader. I would hate to be a minister who taught people they can be saved by their works. Why? Because they all have used their mouths to communicate theological lies to even children, that are causing them to stumble in a total and complete faith in Jesus Christ.

In **verses 43-48**, Jesus gives a series of third class conditional “if” clauses. One of the purposes of a third class conditional “if” clause is to present a hypothetical situation that is not probable reality (Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond Basics*, p. 696).

The point of this is to show how serious it is in the mind of God to do something that would cause someone to stumble in their faith in Jesus Christ or prevent you from coming to faith in Jesus Christ. For anyone to do something that prevents even a little child from coming to faith in Jesus Christ is damnable.

Before we tackle the “if” clauses, we need to make four observations:

(Observation #1) - Jesus taught “any” sin could be forgiven by believing on Him (Mark 3:28). That is the very point. Only Jesus Christ can forgive sin. Do not be guilty of preventing people from coming to Him.

(Observation #2) - Not all body parts that cause sin are mentioned. For example, the “tongue” is not mentioned and we know from James that the tongue can be deadly. The heart is not mentioned and we know that evil starts in the heart.

So the point Jesus is making here is you had better get rid of anything you are involved in that would hinder someone including yourself from coming to Jesus Christ. This is not discussing the fact that people ought to mutilate themselves because even if they did they could not stop their sin problem in their heart or mind.

Kent Hughes tells the story of A. J. Gossip, who was a famous Scottish preacher in the early 1900’s. He was a great preacher and skilled theologian. One night a brilliant theological student who was studying for ministry went crazy and cut off his hand with a razor. When Gossip found him he was laughing and saying, “I did right...I can look Jesus in the face” (*Mark*, p. 227).

He hadn’t solved anything because he still had his mind. The problem now was he was missing a hand but still had his mind. You could literally cut off your hand, feet and eyes and still be the most proud and arrogant and materialistic person in existence.

(Observation #3) - Mutilating yourself was forbidden by the Law of God (Deut. 14:1). Only godless heathens did this (I Kings 18:28).

(Observation #4) - Carefully notice that Jesus changes the emphasis of causing others to stumble into causing “you” to stumble. In other words, you had better make certain you have personally believed on Jesus Christ.

If Clause #1 - If your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off. **9:43-44**

Now often the “hand” is a metaphor for one’s practices in life or what one uses his power to accomplish. **The hand symbolizes what we do.**

Jesus is teaching that if you are doing anything that is preventing you from having a relationship with Him, stop doing it and get rid of it because there is a very serious judgment coming.

If Clause #2 - If your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off. **9:45-46**

Now the foot has reference to where you go. The foot often symbolizes what we spend our life pursuing. It is a metaphor for what direction we are moving in life. The point is cut out anything from our life that would prevent us from having a relationship with and true faith in Jesus Christ.

If Clause #3 - If your eye causes you to stumble, throw it out. **9:47-48**

The eye has a reference to what we see. The eye often symbolizes the things we look at and focus on and esteem. This has a reference to what we look at with our eyes. The point is cut out looking at things that move us away from a relationship with Jesus Christ. Cut out things that demean Jesus Christ.

One thing is very clear from this text, we cannot be close to Jesus Christ until we see our sin and hate our sin and stop doing that which involves us in the sin. No specific sin is named. Spurgeon said there are sins that almost all people hold dear. Some sins that fascinate me may not fascinate you and some sins that fascinate you may not fascinate me. But the sins are there. Paul lists a bunch of them in Galatians. There are immoral sins, greed sins, idolatry sins, temper sins, tongue sins, drunken sins. Each of us is responsible to analyze what we are doing and where we are going and what we are seeing and get rid of things that hinder us from coming to Christ. **We must all believe in Jesus Christ and we must get rid of anything that will prevent this because if one does not come to faith in Jesus Christ, one will end up burning in hell forever (v. 47-48).**

The word “hell” (geenna) (v. 43, 45, 47) describes a real, literal place where there was real literal fire. During the days of some of the Kings of Israel, this was a place where people literally sacrificed their own children to a false deity Molech by throwing them into a red hot fire. Ultimately it became a place where garbage was burned. Isaiah said there was a place of punishment where “the worm shall not die and their fire shall not be quenched” (Is. 66:24).

Jesus is referring to the same place. **If you do not personally come to faith in Jesus Christ, you will die in your sins and you will end up burning in hell forever. You will never get out of that place and you will never have the fire quenched. That is what Jesus is saying.**

LESSON #5 – God wants His disciples to know that everyone will be salted with fire. **9:49**

Everyone will face judgment. Verse 48 is designed to move us from the fire of punishment and verse 49 is designed to move us to the fire of purification.

This idea of salt with fire comes from the O.T. temple sacrifices (Ex. 30:35). Sacrifices were to be seasoned with salt (Lev. 2:13). The point of this is that God wants each life a sweet savor sacrifice for Him.

Now every person will face judgment, both believer and unbeliever. For the unbeliever it will be the Great White Throne Judgment. Works will be examined and the unbeliever will be shown how depraved they were and they will be cast into everlasting fire.

For the believer it will be the Judgment Seat or Bema Seat of Christ. The purpose of this will be to analyze us to determine whether or not we receive or lose rewards.

LESSON #6 – God wants His disciples to know that they need to maintain a good, effective, salty life and ministry. **9:50**

The Jews have a statement–“the world cannot survive without salt.” It is needed. It is a preservative. The primary way that salt lost its saltiness in this culture was by exposure to air. The primary way we lose our saltiness is by exposure to this world.

Really, if our faith makes no difference to what we do, where we go, how we spend our money, how we use our time, how we do our job or how we talk, then what good is it?

We need to analyze ourselves to make certain our lives are salty. We do not want to lose our saltiness for Jesus Christ.

If we are working on being salty ourselves, we won't be arguing about who is the greatest among, we will be at peace with one another.

PRACTICAL LESSONS:

- 1) We are to promote and communicate truth about Jesus Christ.**
- 2) We need to live our lives so that we do not cause children to stumble in their relationship with Jesus Christ.**
- 3) We need to live life in such a way so that we do not stumble ourselves.**
- 4) We need to live a life that is salty in that it does make a difference in this world.**