

# Our Tender Love for God's Children

**Preached by:** Matthew S. Black

**Text:** Mark 9:41-50<sup>1</sup>

**Date:** September 5, 2010, 10:30am

**Series:** Mark (What if God were One of Us?)

**Introduction:** Open your Bible to **Mark 9:41-50**. This morning we are talking about "Our Tender Love for God's children".

God loves little children. Did you know that? Our Lord would often gather children around Him. When there were those who saw them as unimportant, it says in **Mark 10:14**, "he was indignant and said to them, "Let the children come to me; do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God."

**Matthew 18:10** "See that you do not despise one of these little ones. For I tell you that in heaven their angels always see the face of my Father who is in heaven."

I think this text and the text we'll look at today tell us God is especially concerned about children. I also believe these verses apply to all God's people, especially the weak and ignorant. Society has a tendency to discount unimportant people. They are forgotten.

I want you to know God does not forget them. He puts His love on them and calls them to Himself. "Not many mighty are called. God calls the foolish things of the world to confound the mighty" (**1 Corinthians 1:26ff**).

The greatest people on earth and in the future kingdom of heaven are those who love the least and lowliest, most vulnerable disciples of Christ. Paul says in **Romans 12:16**, "associate with the lowly. Never be conceited." Or as the KJV puts it: "condescend to men of low estate". We need to make it a practice to esteem the least among us.

We come to our text and see the gentleness and love and care that Christians have for each other, esteeming the weakest among us. Many people want to bring the rat race into the church. There's more corporation building than actually Kingdom building, and pastors become hirelings who do not love the sheep.

On the other hand, we learn in this Mark 9 that there is a sincere vulnerability in following Christ.

**Mark 9:36-37**, "And he took a child and put him in the midst of them, and taking him in his arms, he said to them, 37 "Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me, and whoever receives me, receives not me but him who sent me."

---

<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture is from the *English Standard Version* of the Bible.

**Mark 9:41-50**, “For truly, I say to you, whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because **you belong to Christ** will by no means lose his reward. 42 “Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him if a great millstone were hung around his neck and he were thrown into the sea. 43 And if your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life crippled than with two hands to go to hell, to the unquenchable fire. 44 45 And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life lame than with two feet to be thrown into hell. 46 47 And if your eye causes you to sin, tear it out. It is better for you **to enter the kingdom of God** with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into hell, 48 ‘where their worm [lit. maggot] does not die and the fire is not quenched.’ 49 For everyone will be salted with fire. 50 Salt is good [for seasoning], but if the salt has lost its saltiness, how will you make it salty again? Have [the qualities of] salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another.”

Christ’s people are so precious to Him that making major sacrifices for His people should seem small in comparison to Christ’s love for them. No sacrifice is too great for Christ’s people—a hand, a foot, an eye. Tear out your eye if it causes trouble in Christ’s Body.

And here is the principle here. Your sin is not just your private sin. It affects everyone around you. And so we as God’s people have a tender love for His children.

Those who belong to Christ count Christ’s people precious. Christ loved His Bride and gave His life for her. He loves her and we ought to love her. How can we demonstrate that love?

In Mark 9 and 10, the Lord’s disciples were being selfish and truly unloving. They were serving themselves, but true greatness Jesus teaches is discovered by serving and having a tender love for others.

I. We ought to have a **Providing** love for God’s children (vs. 41).

**Verse 41**, “For truly, I say to you, whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because **you belong to Christ** will by no means lose his reward.”

A. When you see your child in need, you want to **give** for them. A tender love for God’s children means we love the least among us in generous, giving service because they belong to Christ.

Christ gave us the example. **1 John 3:14, 16**, “We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers. Whoever does not love abides in death... 16 By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers.”

You love by giving—giving a glass of cold water in His name.

Do you esteem only those who can help you?

*He goes on to say that absolutely nothing is too great to sacrifice for them.* If it will help them to have Christ formed in them, we will sacrifice whatever it takes—an eye, a foot, a hand.

Even the smallest needs of the lowliest and weakest disciples ought to grab our attention.

- B. God **rewards** those who love and care for His children. The Lord takes the smallest labors of love seriously. He rewards all of our acts of compassion.

**Verse 41**, “For truly, I say to you, whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because you belong to Christ **will by no means lose his reward.**”

When you serve the least, lowliest person, you are serving Christ and will be rewarded.

You’ll love the least and the lowliest. Look around and ask yourself, who can I serve? Not who can I impress? Not who can scratch my back if I scratch theirs. Who can I serve for nothing given in return? A glass of water will not go unrewarded, because in the most insignificant act, we are serving Christ when we serve His Bride.

Do you care about something so insignificant that someone might be thirsty? You do it and serve even the least of the brothers and sisters, and you are doing it for Jesus.

- C. Kind acts of the smallest magnitude are service to **Christ** Himself. This especially true in regard to the church. We do and give for people “because...[they] belong to Christ” (vs. 41). We are to love all God’s children from the least to the smallest.

“It is not necessary to perform great miracles to prove our love for Christ. When we lovingly receive a child or compassionately share a cup of cold water, we are doing something of greatness. After all, we are serving Christ, and that is the highest service in the world”.<sup>2</sup>

Paul says again in **Romans 15:1**, “We who are strong have an obligation to bear with the failings of the weak, and not to please ourselves.”

Often we think of distinguished kingdom service as evangelizing atheists on a far away mission field. Surely that is distinguished, but it is no less important than

---

<sup>2</sup>Wiersbe, W. W. (1996, c1989). *The Bible exposition commentary*. "An exposition of the New Testament comprising the entire 'BE' series"--Jkt. (Mk 9:30). Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books.

caring for the kingdom needs right where you are. If you give a cup of water to a brother or sister in Christ, you will be rewarded for kingdom service.

We must be careful to acknowledge our brothers and sisters in Christ, even if they are so poor they cannot provide themselves a glass of water.

II. We ought to have a **Protecting** love for God's children (vs. 42).

A tender love for God's children means we are careful not to take advantage of any of them. **Verse 42**, "Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him if a great millstone were hung around his neck and he were thrown into the sea."

Very little children can be born again. That's clear in this text. God loves children. He loves all His children. So Christ is talking about children, but also about all His children. He has a jealous love for them. We also all ought to have a tender, vulnerable love for one another.

A. Those who lead God's children have the most severe **accountability**. **Verse 42**, "Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him if a great millstone were hung around his neck and he were thrown into the sea."

Sadly there are some who would enter the ministry for selfish gain. I know it is unthinkable, but it is all too common. For those who would take advantage of a position of spiritual leadership for selfish gain and cause others to sin, the magnitude of God's anger is against them.

Now remember Jesus has that little child that He's holding as He says this. This is weighty! A child abuser is shown no mercy. Even in the prison population there is no mercy for child abusers.

B. We must be very concerned with **how** we as leaders and mentors teach children as well as vulnerable, weak brothers and sisters in Christ. All of us are called to be mentors. It is utterly wrong for leaders to look at people almost as cattle. I've seen church leaders abuse their power simply by becoming the CEO of the church. Jesus damns that kind of a minister as a freeloading hired hand. He's not a shepherd. You'll know a true shepherd because he lays down his life for the sheep as Jesus did.

But there are spiritual child abusers. There are those who would take advantage of the vulnerable. Be very careful to treat God's children as the Lord treats them. He laid down His life for them. He loves them.

God's children are precious! There is absolutely no room for insincerity or spiritual abuse. In the last few years I have heard of two very high ranking men in

the church who were abusive in the church in adultery and worse. One was proud and died in prison unrepentant. The other committed suicide.

You ought to be very afraid of what the human heart is capable of and fear God. You ought to be diligent about your sincerity and earnestness in how you serve Christ. Many through their lives are teaching that you can serve Christ carelessly and for worldly means and sin grievously and cause many little ones to sin and to forsake the Lord.

Instead we must help each other in holy living. Those who belong to Christ are careful to help other Christians in holy living. Serving Christ is a serious thing. Those who seem to not take Christ seriously and use their position to exalt themselves and seem to be experts at causing others to sin and deviously covering sin with Christ's name need to repent and turn to Christ. If not, they will pay for their sins in hell forever.

### III. We ought to have a **Purifying** love for God's children (vs. 43-49).

This love for Christ's people means we deal drastically with ourselves.

**Verses 43-47**, "And if your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life crippled than with two hands to go to hell, to the unquenchable fire. 44 45 And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life lame than with two feet to be thrown into hell. 46 47 And if your eye causes you to sin, tear it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into hell."

If cutting off sin were as easy as cutting off your hand, we would all do it. But Jesus is not telling us to cut off our body parts or gouge out our eye. The problem lies with our heart. We are in need of radical amputation of all that which provokes us to temptation.

- Ambition and hard work are good, but if it turns into covetousness, you need to amputate it. Ambition can turn into greed and you start doing crazy stuff with your money, or you start neglecting your relationship with God and His people so you can work.
- Intimacy is good. It is to be cherished in marriage. But if it turns to raging lust, it must be cut off. You can't control it. Amputate it.
- Computers are good, but if you can't control it, you may have to cut off what would otherwise be a very useful item of technology.
- Friendship is good. But if you have a friend that tempts you to sin, you need to amputate that friendship. It will be painful.

As men submit to the loss of a bodily organ or limb in order to preserve the body as a whole, so it is to their interest to sacrifice powers and functions of their spiritual

nature which have been found to be inevitable occasions of sin. Better to live under a sense of partial mutilation and incompleteness than to perish in the enjoyment of all one's powers.<sup>3</sup>

We keep ourselves holy. We don't test the waters and see how close to the world we can get. Sin is nasty. It will blind you. A person who knows Christ is going to early on learn about radical amputation. Growing in Christ means you pull the weeds out of your heart, or you are going to languish. If you love your brothers and sisters in Christ as those for whom Christ gave His very blood for, you are going to be careful to cut sin out of your life.

A. Sin not only **affects** you, it has an influence on everyone around you. We must cut it off out of our lives like a gangrene body part. You may love that limb, but it is polluted. Cut it off.

To "cut off the hand," of course refers to eliminating the actual act that is wrong, the evil deed and to go so far as to remove all temptation to it. If you have a dirty mind, a filthy mouth, stop thinking evil thoughts, stop using obscene terms. Deal with the hand, cut it off. If you are engaged in sexual wrong, stop it. If your attitude toward another is bitter and resentful, stop thinking that way. Stop saying the things you say about them. Deal with the act, cut it off. Otherwise you waste your life.

So it is with all the sins that men cherish. Sin is usually the abuse of one of God's good gifts.

You don't want any good thing to turn into an idol that keeps you from heaven. If you are a believer you can cut off sin in your life. You can't do it in your own power, but you can ask the Spirit's help.

B. The way we avoid that loss and wasting of life is, as Jesus said, to **salt** ourselves with fire, i.e., to give ourselves as a sacrifice to God.

"For everyone will be salted with fire." (vs. 49).

To understand this phrase you need to go back to the time of the OT sacrifices. They would salt that sacrifice and put it in the fire. It would burn up and the smell was sweet.

Jesus presents two options – to burn with hell fire or to burn with His fire. You will be tested in this life. You will need to deal severely with yourself. You will need to cut off those darling sins and deal with them. You will face hardship for

---

<sup>3</sup>Wuest, K. S. (1997, c1984). *Wuest's word studies from the Greek New Testament : For the English reader* (Mk 9:43). Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.

service to your dear brothers and sisters. But you will be a “living sacrifice” to God.

- C. Those professing Christians don't care how their lives influence others are in danger of **hell**.

Christ's people are worth sacrificing for. If you have the heart of Christ in you, you will be so careful not to cause another believer to sin. If you really don't care about Christ's people, then it's doubtful you have Christ's heart. John tells us much about this in 1 John. There's a serious love—a jealous love for the people of God if God's Spirit is in you. And you are careful not to hurt other Christians.

Now this is such a strong warning because we are all so prone to hurting God's people. We have a natural tendency to gossip and complain about each other. Don't do it. God wrote this because He knew you'd have a tender heart to receive it.

That's a strong statement I know. But if you can just take your liberty and not care how it affects God's people, I wonder if you have Christ's heart in you. Christ has a jealous love for us, is that clear from this passage? But he puts the same weight on us. We ought to have a jealous love for each other. We ought to fear what we are capable of. If some professing Christian has no fear, it's likely that his love for Christ is just words. Anyone can dress like a Christian and hang out with Christians, but you need the grace of God to actually have the heart of Christ.

Those who have no love for true Christians reveal themselves to be frauds. You've seen those Gucci watches that you can buy a dime a dozen on the street. They ain't for real. You know there are tens of thousands of Strattovarius violins for sale on Ebay. The only problem is there were only 400 made. Can we all see how easy it is to sell a fraud?

Can I say if you are selling fraudulent Christianity, Jesus is not buying. He calls all fakes on their bluff. Only truly born again people enter heaven. All people who are not born again go to hell. In other words, appropriating Christ by faith has an influence on how we approach people, especially other Christians.

Those without Christ enter hell.

Some people are shocked to hear from the lips of Jesus such frightening words about hell. Jesus taught the literal reality of hell, where torment is horrible, fire is real, and punishment is everlasting.<sup>4</sup> He told the story of a rich man who ends up in hell, and what it will be like for those in hell.

---

<sup>4</sup>Willmington, H. L. (1997). *Willmington's Bible handbook* (569). Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers.

If you deny hell, you must deny the words of Jesus.

The Valley of Hinnom had been desecrated by the sacrifice of children to Moloch so that as an accursed place it was used for the city garbage where worms gnawed and fires burned. It is thus a vivid picture of eternal punishment.<sup>5</sup>

“Two bold figures of Gehenna combined (the gnawing worm, the burning flame). No figures of Gehenna can equal the dread reality which is here described.”<sup>6</sup>

Hell is not temporary; it is forever. **Revelation 20:10**, “And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever.”

Hell is a literal place. It’s a place where the rich man had all the desire to drink, but could not get even a drop of water to cool his tongue. It’s a place of hell fire and sulfur. If you deny that, you must deny the very authenticity and reliability of Jesus’ words.

IV. We ought to have a **Preserving** love for God’s children (vs. 49-50).

**Verses 49-50**, “For everyone will be salted with fire. 50 Salt is good [for seasoning], but if the salt has lost its saltiness, how will you make it salty again? Have [the qualities of] salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another.”

As God’s people we ought to do all we can to preserving peace in His Body.

What is Jesus after in all this? He wants his people to be at peace with each other. He wants us to jealously look out for each other as He jealously looked out for us.

“These little ones” refers to all God’s children who follow Christ and seek to serve Him. The way believers treat others in the family of God is a serious thing, and God wants us to “have peace one with another” (Mark 9:50).

We need to have the qualities of salt in ourselves. Salt was used in ancient times as a preservative for meats and as a means of payment. The soldier who was “not worth his salt” had not earned his “salary”<sup>7</sup> We need to care for and preserve each other like salt preserves food from going rotten. Live a holy life. Preserve your brother and sister in Christ. Don’t tear them down. Don’t throw stuff at them that will rot them. Be salt. Help them—they are like children. They need you to be strong.

---

<sup>5</sup>Robertson, A. (1997). *Word Pictures in the New Testament*. Vol. V c1932, Vol. VI c1933 by Sunday School Board of the Southern Baptist Convention. (Mk 9:43). Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

<sup>7</sup>Hughes, R. B., & Laney, J. C. (2001). *Tyndale concise Bible commentary*. Rev. ed. of: *New Bible companion*. 1990.; Includes index. The Tyndale reference library (433). Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers.

We are all needy as believers. We are like children.

**Illustration:** Let me tell you what has never happened to me. I've gone to the mall a couple of times with Lauren. I always try to get out of it, but every once in a while I'm there. At the mall they have the pity seats. That's what I call the benches that sit outside of the shops for the husbands while their wives are shopping. And so I've sat in one of those pity seats, and no one ever came up to me and went, "Aw, where are your parents? Where are they? Where are your folks? Are you okay?" No one ever did that. Because I'm strong. I'm "grewed" up. But if you put a child out there, in about thirty seconds you're going to have people trying to find who this child belongs to, helping him or her.

In the same way we've got to come along side our brothers and sisters and help them! We need to be strong. Walk with God. Help those who are struggling. Don't be judgmental. Your time will come. There'll come a time when you need someone to carry you.

**Conclusion:** Here's another passage of Scripture in the next chapter.

**Mark 10:13-16,** "And they were bringing children to him that he might touch them, and the disciples rebuked them. 14 But when Jesus saw it, he was indignant and said to them, 'Let the children come to me; do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God. 15 Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it.' 16 And he took them in his arms and blessed them, laying his hands on them."

If you want to enter God's kingdom, you've got to do it as a child.

Two years ago, we gave birth to a son. And by "we" I mean Jill. And what we found out was that Evan needs a lot of help. He needs a lot of patience. You can't expect him to do much.

So how do we receive the kingdom of God like a child? By feeling the weight of our desperation to be saved, to be forgiven, to be healed, to be provided for, to be cared for, to be protected. That's how we receive the kingdom like a child. We come open-handed, filled with glee, trusting that the triune God of the universe will do these things. We come to Him to save us. We can't save ourselves. We're completely dependent on Him to save us.

Let me warn you all who've not yet had children yet. Once the child arrives, for the next eight years there's going to be a lot of crying that goes on.

- If you don't get the bottle there quick enough, there's going to be some crying involved.
- If she sits in her dirty diaper a little too long, there's going to be crying involved.
- If she's uncomfortable or hurting, there's going to be crying involved. That scream, as cute as it is for the first 24 hours, is just this really beautiful, primal example of how we're to come to the King of Glory.

- “Help me. I can’t do anything about this. I’m hungry. Help me. I hurt. Help me. I’m dirty. Help me. I don’t know where to go. Help me. I don’t know how to fix this. Help me. I’m scared. Help me. I’m trusting in this, this and this and it’s not working. Help me.” How do you receive the kingdom of God? Like a child.

We’ve come to him as a child. Now let us love all his children with a tender, jealous love!