

## The Real Jesus, Mark 9:38-50, The One with the Tough Sayings About Sin, 8/28/22

Read: Mark 9:38-50. What a text we have before us today! An exorcism, a drowning, cutting off limbs and poking out eyes, worms that don't die, and Hell. Welcome to church! I haven't seen these verses in the children's Bible. But we aren't the kind of church that skips hard stuff in the Bible. And we aren't interested in an edited for K-Love, PG version of Jesus. We are after the Real Jesus, even the parts that makes us uncomfortable or when he disagrees with our worldviews.

Now, these verses may not only be rated R, they also might seem random. But as I studied the text this week I saw a theme that tied this teaching of Jesus altogether. **Clearing the Road to the Kingdom of Heaven.** Now, that's stating it in the positive, although most of Jesus teaching here is stated as a warning and can be summed up like this: "Do not dare cause anyone, including yourself, to stumble on the road to the Kingdom, for it is a matter of life and death."

### Three Warnings and Three Calls on the Road to the Kingdom of Heaven

#### Warning #1: Don't cause Ministry to stumble.

<sup>38</sup> "Teacher," said John, "we saw someone driving out demons in your name and we told him to stop, because he was not one of us." Now the irony here is that Jesus' own disciples couldn't cast out the demon from last week, but this unknown exorcist was having success. Maybe that played into the reason they tried to stop him? Jealousy? Whatever their motive, it seems that the disciples were developing an exclusivist mentality. Because he "wasn't one of us" he must be against us, he mustn't be on team Jesus. To this Jesus replies: <sup>39</sup> "Do not stop him, for no one who does a miracle in my name can in the next moment say anything bad about me,

<sup>40</sup> for whoever is not against us is for us. <sup>41</sup> Truly I tell you, anyone who gives you a cup of water in my name because you belong to the Messiah will certainly not lose their reward.

While the disciples are trying to narrow and restrict access to Jesus and his power to the exclusive disciples only, Jesus has the complete opposite view. He's looking at the big picture- There is good and evil. There is team Heaven and team Hell. There is team Jesus and team Satan. This guy might be a stranger to you, might look different than you, he might not know as much as you, he might even have some different doctrinal understandings as you, but he's one of us. Jesus is expanding access to the Kingdom of Heaven through Him, which will eventually include gentiles and extend its availability to the whole world through gospel proclamation. This is a lesson the disciples will need as the gospel will spread like wildfire among all kinds of people groups, languages, cultures, traditions and they will not be able to control the Spirit's movement around the world.

One commentary- "This brief incident stands as a firm rebuke to the spirit of sectarianism [Christian division]. It condemns that exclusive attitude which insists that only those who carry on their work in harmony with our own views and practices can be accepted as really doing

**God's work.**<sup>1</sup> Unfortunately, we Christians have a penchant for eating our own members. The last three years of political, social upheaval have brought that ugly underbelly of Christian division to the forefront, more and more splintering, finding more and more things that divide us. I remember seeing a Christian write a post on social media that said something to the effect of, "If you pastor quotes John Piper, Tim Keller, Matt Chandler, Beth Moore" leave that church. Seriously? "You know those Christians who have like 99.6% of the same beliefs as you? Yeah they aren't on our team..." This is one of the biggest things that turn off young generations to Christianity and the church. When we divide and are ugly toward one another over politics, or social issues, or minor doctrinal differences, or just how we worship differently. We put a stumbling block in front of people on the way to the Kingdom of Heaven.

### **Call #1 Be a "Big Tent" Christian.**

Now this is not universalism. Jesus calls us to unity in Christ over and over again. The apostle Paul in response to this kind of exclusivism asked, "Is Christ divided?" 1 Cor.1. He warned of "biting and devouring one another and destroying one another." Gal. 5. Scripture takes this very seriously! This is why we have core values like- Bible-Centered, Graciously Orthodox and Unity in Diversity, and Gospel Partnerships in our City and World. Yes, we have core convictions and doctrinal distinctives. But it's a call to partnership for the sake of the gospel. And if revival breaks out at the church down the road with some different views than us, we ought to be excited, supportive! And if a ministry that isn't our ministry sees a lot of success, we should be happy about that! What is your attitude to other denominations? Other churches? Other ministries?

### **Warning #2 Don't cause the Vulnerable to stumble.**

<sup>42</sup> "If anyone causes one of these little ones—those who believe in me—to stumble, it would be better for them if a large millstone were hung around their neck and they were thrown into the sea."

I'm not going to try to explain Jesus here or defend him- I'm going to let him speak for himself. Like a good parent, Jesus is very protective of his vulnerable children. This reminds me of the [Picture] biting comic after the sex abuse scandals in the catholic church came out with the millstone tied to a priest's neck. Jesus loves the vulnerable, particularly children. Jesus welcomed them into his arms and said when you welcome a child you welcome God.

[Warning #2 Slide] But I think this extends beyond the literal usage of "little children", to children in the faith. Paul uses this same language of not causing someone weak in their faith to stumble. It could be a new believer who is very impressionable. It could be someone coming out of addiction, or who has experienced trauma of divorce, grief, pain in some way, someone who has disabilities, disorder of some kind.

This is a strong warning, so we need to make sure we don't cause the vulnerable to stumble. What would it look like to cause a vulnerable person to stumble? 4 ways: **1) False teaching or**

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<sup>1</sup> Hiebert, D. Edmond *Mark: A Portrait of the Servant*. Chicago: Moody Press, 1974. P.231

**distracting ideologies.** 1 Timothy 1 <sup>3</sup>...*Command certain people not to teach false doctrines any longer<sup>4</sup> or to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies.*

*Such things promote controversial speculations rather than advancing God's work—which is by faith.* <sup>6</sup> *Some have departed from these and have turned to meaningless talk.* Works-based salvation, cults, prosperity gospel, social gospel... After you have been a pastor for a while you see dozens of teachings, ideas, movements that distract for the gospel. Bible numerology, miracle-chasing, Christian nationalistic movements, obsession with speculative prophecy, conspiracy theories...I have seen these things shipwreck the faith of so many over the years. Does this teaching advance the work of the Gospel? No? Then why are we wasting time?

**2) Temptation.** With can tempt a vulnerable Christian to sin. Some obvious: It could be a boy pressuring a girl to become physically intimate with him. It could be through exposing someone to drugs, pornography, inappropriate music or entertainment, or to lie or cheat or gossip.

**3) Rejection.** By making those who are vulnerable feel like they are outcasts, they are unacceptable, they are beyond God's grace. Excluding them from your friend group, being overly harsh or judgmental. Making them feel like 2<sup>nd</sup> class Christians.

**4) Bad Example.** If a vulnerable, young Christian, child or teen sees you flaunt what you consider a Christian freedom, it may cause them to sin. How we live our lives matters because people watch. Are there people when you watch how they live make you question if they follow Jesus?

## **Call #2 Guide Vulnerable Christians**

How do we make sure we guide the vulnerable? **1) Focus on the main thing:** The gospel of Jesus. 1 Corinthians 2 <sup>2</sup> *For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.* Teach them that Jesus loves them. Teach them grace, forgiveness, mercy, how to obey. What it means to follow him. How to read the Bible. **2) Encourage what is good.** Hebrews 10:24 *And let us consider how we may spur one another on to love and good deeds.* **3) Be hospitable and accepting.** Invite them into your life and open up your circle. Show them they don't have to be perfect, model grace and forgiveness. **4) Set a good example.** How we live our lives matters because people watch. They watch how we behave. Can you think about people you know, when you see how they live they show you more about Jesus? You can't set an example of perfection, but you can of faithfulness. Some of you know one of our members Ali Whitney. Her husband Chuck wasn't a Christian, while he was supportive of Ali's faith, he was pretty skeptical and didn't think it was for him. For decades Ali would ask for prayer that Chuck would come to faith. But every day she set an example of Jesus, of unconditional love for Chuck, fruit of the Spirit, he would see her relationship. Back a few years ago, Chuck and Ali came on our Holy Land tour. One evening we were all sitting on a porch at our Jerusalem hotel, sharing with each other what has made the most impact on them, everyone went around and shared, and then we came to Chuck. And he began to get emotional, and he said, "I'm so moved by how spiritually connected you are to this land." God surrounded Chuck with Christians, including his son, Chip who gave him a Bible and wrote him a letter encouraging him

to faith in Jesus. God had been softening his heart slowly but surely, even using his own vulnerability through his Parkinson's disease. A couple weeks ago, Chuck went and got that Bible his Son gave him, re-read the letter, and began reading the Gospel of John. Chuck gave his life to Jesus. I had the privilege of baptizing Chuck in his home. And what mercy from the Lord, because just weeks later Chuck passed away and I will be leading his Celebration of Life service on Friday. Never under-estimate what your Christian example, because people are watching!

### **Warning #3 Don't allow Sin to cause you to stumble.**

*<sup>43</sup> If your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life maimed than with two hands to go into hell, where the fire never goes out.*

*<sup>45</sup> And if your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life crippled than to have two feet and be thrown into hell.*

*<sup>47</sup> And if your eye causes you to stumble, pluck it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into hell,*

*<sup>48</sup> where "the worms that eat them do not die, and the fire is not quenched."*

Now a few observations we need to look at before we make our application point. Firstly, **Jesus taught that Heaven and Hell are real and eternal.** Notice Jesus three times contrasts entering "life" "the kingdom of God" with "Hell". Some people believe that Jesus is all about peace and love and acceptance, and that he would never judge anyone, and he would definitely not send people to hell. And in order to do that you have to erase lots of Scripture, including this one. Jesus talks more about Hell than anyone in Scripture. And while I don't know how literal or figurative the description in the Bible is about Hell- what I do know is that there is not an ounce of God's presence, grace and goodness there... and I don't want to go there, and I don't want any of you to go there either.

Second observation: **This is a metaphor.** Otherwise, the primary ministry of the church would be to amputees. Hands represent sinful actions, feet represent our sinful plans and schemes, eyes represent our sinful desires and wants. And the point is quite simple and blunt. Do whatever it takes to deal with your stuff. Take drastic measures. Be willing to do spiritual surgery to remove the spiritual gangrene before it infects the whole body.

Third observation: There is a primary warning, and a secondary implication of that warning for us today. The **primary warning is UNBELIEF due to a faith barrier** that would keep you from the Kingdom of Heaven. This is not talking about truly saved people and their daily struggles with the presence and temptation of sin. He's warning, do not stumble over anything that would cause you to miss out on the kingdom of Heaven. The Bible word for this is idolatry. Placing something, even good things, as ultimate things in your life instead of God. **Mark 8:36 What does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul?** It could be the idol of material wealth and the security and power it brings that would blind someone to their need for a savior. It could be your intellectual pride and you think you have outsmarted God. It could be

your own goodness so that you are on a “self-salvation” plan. Don’t miss out on the Kingdom and end up in Hell.

But there is a secondary implication for followers of Christ who are already Heaven bound.

**Call #3 Stay vigilant against sin.** You may not be in danger of missing the kingdom, but your sin strongholds need to be dealt with. I think this is what Jesus is talking about with this next metaphor. *<sup>49</sup> Everyone will be salted with fire. <sup>50</sup> Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can you make it salty again? Have salt among yourselves, and be at peace with each other.*”

Now we don’t have enough time to attempt to decipher all of what Jesus means here. But what we do know is that salt was used as a preservative and for flavor, as it is today. A Christian who is stumbling in sin loses their saltiness. They lose their effectiveness, their witness, their power. What is causing you to stumble? To lose your saltiness? **If I was to fully follow Jesus in my life I would have to \_\_\_\_\_**. Cut out porn? Stop hoarding money and be generous? Address my workaholicism? Deal with my bitterness? Deal with my self-pity? Get out of a toxic relationship?