

Mark 9:42-50 Salt Without Saltiness Falls OPC PM October 16, 2022

The three most prominent uses for salt in the ancient world were 1) to preserve or 2) to clean or 3) to flavor. In all three uses, salt was a benefit. It was good when salt kept meat fresh. It was good when salt was used as an agent in cleaning. It was good when salt was added to food to enhance the flavoring. In the same way, disciples of Christ were to have a good influence on society around. Most famously, Jesus said over in Matthew 5:13, “*You are the salt of the earth...*” Salt was a necessity of life, and so the people of God are a necessity of society! The world cannot endure without salt, and the world cannot endure without Christians!

Christ calls us to true discipleship (saltiness): stay humble, keep serving, and preserve peace in the church.

1. Avoid causing others spiritual harm with your pride. (v.42)

Who are these “little ones” in verse 42, that we must not cause to stumble? The little ones have shown up throughout chapter 9...in verses 38-41, a little one was the unknown man who was driving out demons, in verse 36, another ‘little one’ was the child being hugged by the arms of Jesus. Other little ones were those people whom that child represented, namely, any less significant disciples, such as any believer who offered a cup of water. These were the “little ones.” The little ones are Christians of any age or any number of years old. The little ones are anyone who is vulnerable to being led astray or tripped up.

Every single little Christian matters so much to Jesus that for one to be tripped up is an offense that deserves the death penalty – in fact, it is an offense that deserves more than the death penalty! Wait, how can there be more punishment than the death penalty? Ongoing death. Continuing death. Suffering and suffering death over and over again. Punishment of ongoing death in the lake of fire!

The lesson in verse 42 is that if we were to be the cause of another’s spiritual shipwreck, it would be so serious an offense that a quick drowning is to be preferred over the fate that is deserved! The large stone used in a mill was pulled by a donkey, and so the heavy weight ensures an immediate death by drowning. The stone is “placed around” the neck like a collar.

2. Avoid causing yourself spiritual harm; renounce your sinful habit of not serving. (v.43-49)

But the difference between verse 42, and verses 43-48 is that the person now being tripped up, is no longer now someone else, but rather is yourself. Each of us is warned against harming ourselves. You trip yourself up when you commit a sin with your hand, with your foot, or with your eye. Danger comes to each believer not only from outside of oneself, but also from within oneself! We are each called to examine ourselves individually to see which aspect of my behavior, my tastes,

my interests is a potential danger point for my own spiritual downfall. Upon such examination and discovery, we each have been coached to take extreme action according to our individual danger points.

The word picture of amputation of one's own hand or foot, or the tearing out of one's own eye is very shocking, graphic, drastic and disturbing. That is intentional. The message is right on and fitting. The message is that the matter of causing yourself to sin is a matter of ultimate seriousness. Nothing less than eternal life or eternal death is at stake in this matter.

Jesus demanded the most drastic renunciation of sin, in order to avoid the unquenchable fire. Jesus did not regard His own 12 disciples as immune from the need to examine themselves and take appropriate and immediate action to address that spiritual need.

This passage is the only place where Mark used the word Gehenna, which is the word for hell. It is 3 times, in verses 43, 45, and 47. In verse 43, it is described by Mark as a place of the unquenchable fire, in verse 45, a place into which people are thrown, and in verse 47-48, it is a place where their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched.

Fire is the agent of God's judgment and destruction. In addition, the mixing of two word pictures here, one about a worm never dying, and the other about a fire never ending are borrowed from Isaiah 66:24, which reads this way, "*And they shall go out and look on the dead bodies of the men who have rebelled against me. For their worm shall not die, their fire shall not be quenched, and they shall be an abhorrence to all flesh.*" These are the final words of the Book of Isaiah, clearly meant to make a lasting impression that is constantly kept in mind as a perpetual caution. The word picture painted by the prophet Isaiah was of the condition in which the dead bodies of God's enemies will be seen, presumably as both decomposing with the help of worms and burning on the battlefield after God's victory. The combination of both fire and worms as the fate of the wicked who rebel against God is a grotesque and yet a powerful deterrence against rebelling against God!

3. Retain your saltiness, resulting in peace with others. (v.50)

Verse 49, "*For everyone will be salted with fire.*" The extreme seriousness of the demands of discipleship and the call for renunciation of sins prepare the reader to consider the cost of following Jesus. The universal scope now of this saying (notice in verse 49, the word everyone), reminds us of the conviction with which Jesus has predicted His own suffering. Mark 8:31, "...*the Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected, ... and be killed...*" And again in Mark 9:12, "...*the Son of Man...should suffer many things and be treated with contempt...*" And again Mark 9:31, "...*the Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill him...*" So, here in chapter 9, verse 49, the phrase

‘...everyone will be salted with fire,’ may reasonably be considered to have a relationship to the cost of taking up one’s cross and following Jesus, such as we were told in Mark 8:34.

It is because Christ went to the cross for us, that we are saved. We are made salty by Christ. But why ‘salted with fire’? Why are salt and fire being mentioned together? We get an ancient instance of salt and fire together in Leviticus 2:13, “*You shall season all your grain offerings with salt. You shall not let the salt of the covenant with your God be missing from your grain offering; with all your offerings you shall offer salt.*” So, the requirement when an Old Testament sacrifice of grain was burned on the altar with fire, was that salt would always accompany that sacrifice. But that was not all. It was not just with grain offerings. It was specifically added in that Leviticus quote that salt must be offered with ALL of your offerings. It is a sweeping generalization. Each offering was offered with salt.

So, what does it mean in our study passage tonight in Mark 9:49, that ‘everyone will be salted with fire.’? It seems to show a word picture of temple sacrifices. But there is one difference. Instead of the sacrificial animals being salted, it is the people – the worshippers themselves - who are to be salted. The dedication of the worshippers to the suffering Messiah is like the dedication of the sacrificial animals – that the worshippers, just like the animals, were totally and irrevocably dedicated to the LORD. The animals were burned, so they could no longer be used for chores on the farm. The worshippers were put to living service to the LORD, so they could no longer be used for chores in the world. All for God.

In Numbers 18:19, “*All the holy contributions that the people of Israel present to the Lord I give to you, and to your sons and daughters with you, as a perpetual due. It is a covenant of salt forever before the Lord for you and for your offspring with you...*” Salt is linked with being holy and pure. Salt is linked with holy and pure. Persons who are salted with fire are persons who are totally dedicated to God’s service. Even if that service is costly in terms of personal suffering, that person is still completely dedicated to God’s service.

Salt symbolizes that we serve the LORD in a way that we serve no one else. There are services we would perform for the LORD, such as an uncomfortable missions trip, that we would not do for anyone else. Only for the LORD.

Now here in verse 50, salt seems to no longer represent an experience undergone by a disciple, but rather salt represents a good quality to be preserved. But the connection is evident. The believer who has undergone the process of salting with fire, is a believer who is rendered salty.

We do not have salt in ourselves. We needed Christ to die to cleanse us of our sins and to rise again to provide for us the humility we need, the willingness to serve, and the Christ-likeness in our lives.

Concluding applications: 3 applications, spinning off the 3 points.

1) In Christ, be a blessing. Verse 42 showed us that we should not cause a little one to sin, but verse 37 told us to receive a child in the name of Jesus. Being salt in this respect means to have a general quality of being beneficial to have around. (v.50), Salt is good. Be good. Be good to have around. Be a blessing.

Our presence ought to have a healing and preserving influence on our surroundings. Our involvement ought to awaken the consciences of others, elevate the conversation, promote honesty, encourage a better atmosphere. Our presence makes a difference, because Christ is in us. Christ said in Matthew 5:13, “*You are the salt of the earth.*” We are open and loving to all, accepting and tolerant of all people, but not tolerant of their sins. We bring people back to decorum and civility and creating loving communities.

Be a blessing. If salt loses its saltiness, if Christians are not a blessing to have around than what good are we? The first application point is to be a blessing.

2) Because Christ died for you, be willing to pay any cost required for allegiance to Christ. Our study in verse 40, of the phrase “salted with fire” showed us that because Christ offered Himself for us, we are now equipped to offer our very selves to God. Because Jesus died and rose, we have become living sacrifices. Paul wrote in Romans 12:1, “...*present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.*” Count the cost of following a crucified Savior! Walking with God is serious business. Discipleship is a serious matter, and we remain willing to lose a hand, a foot, or an eye in our service to God. Those body parts are just representative. Half-way commitment to Christ will not be sufficient. We remain willing to lose anything for Christ. Any self-denial. Any sacrifice. Any cost. **WE ARE WILLING TO SUFFER.**

Pastor Bonhoeffer, the German pastor during World War II, who wrote *The Cost of Discipleship*, wrote, “Suffering, then, is the badge of true discipleship. The disciple is not above his master...” When many Christians left, Bonhoeffer stayed in Germany and stood up against the atrocities of the war, and was arrested, and imprisoned. He was hanged on April 9, 1945 as the Nazi regime was collapsing. Being salty is being willing to suffer. Willing to serve others.

A better way to look at your hand, your foot, and your eye, is that they are given to you in order for you to show allegiance to Christ by serving others. If your hand is not serving others, then what good is your hand? Put some salt on your hand! If your foot or your eye are not serving others, then what good are your foot or your eyes? God gave them to you in order for you to serve, serve, serve.

Here is the question – are you willing to serve? This is our second application point, to be willing to pay any cost, perform any service, in allegiance to Christ. We can use our hands to bring a cup of water to someone, or make a

meal. We can use our feet to go visit someone who is sick or lonely. We can use our eyes to watch another person's children in the nursery or read Scripture to someone who needs wisdom and encouragement. This is being willing to do anything for Christ, who died for us and rose again to give us victory.

3) Go to Christ for enough salt to be a peacemaker.

Consider the absence of salt in verse 34 – that the disciples “...*had argued with one another about who was the greatest*” That is the sort of problem that Jesus was addressing here in verse 50 by saying, “*have salt in yourselves.*” Properly “salted” Christians do not argue about who is the greatest! Instead, we live at peace with one another. But how? Jesus gave us the recipe. Just add salt.

If someone started arguing with you about him being greater than you, you should have enough salt, have enough maturity, that you respond to the other person by saying I completely agree...You are greater than me!

Paul wrote in Philippians 2:3, “...*in humility consider others more significant than yourselves.*”

The properly salted Christian views himself as the least significant person in the room. Everyone else is more significant than I am. The “secret sauce” of peacemaking is 3 words, just add salt!

Listen to Paul write about peace within Christian relationships in in Romans 12:16, “*Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty; but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight.*”

Some of the rabbis of the Old Testament had writings that spoke about salt representing wisdom. Salt representing pleasing speech as we speak to one another. Good speaking toward each other is a necessary aspect of good relationships. Consider how Paul wrote clearly about this very sort of thing, after all, Paul was a well-trained rabbi, and also a New Testament Apostle! Paul wrote in Colossians 4:6, “*Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person.*” Paul had the same recipe as Jesus for the secret sauce - just add salt! The connection of salt with wisdom was well understood, and Paul was saying it remains true in all generations of human society. Christians are always needed to bring salt to the speech of our generation. Since every generation of human history has had a struggle with harshness and damaging words, Paul provides the solution. Christ making His people salty. Christians speaking like Christ. Christians letting their speech be gracious. Believers not following the culture, but rather leading and distributing kind words and gracious ways back into society's discourse.