

Mark 9:38-41 Allegiance to Christ Falls OPC PM October 2, 2022

There is a connection to the third commandment this evening, just as there was this morning. Not taking the Lord's name in vain.

First, notice the irony as we transition from the previous passage to tonight's passage. Back in verse 37, Jesus had just finished teaching them that they need to receive people in His name. The words were still hanging in the air when a disciple told The Teacher that the disciples had rejected someone, and tried to stop him.

The previous lesson defined greatness as dying to ourselves, serving others and receiving people. Receive people like they would welcome a child. Why? Because our Lord says they would welcome the child, "*in My name.*"

Tonight's passage has that phrase 3 more times for a total of 4 times.

The second instance is in verse 38, where the disciples said to Jesus that they saw someone "...*casting out demons in Your name.*..."

The third instance is in verse 39, where our Lord said, "...*no one who does a mighty work in My name will be able soon afterward to speak evil of Me.*"

The fourth instance is in verse 41, where our Lord did not actually say the exact same phrase, but rather substituted it with a phrase that means nearly the same thing, "...*truly, I say to you, whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because you belong to Christ.*..."

Our entire passage has to do with the topic of the 3rd commandment, the name of the Lord! We welcome people in the name of the Lord. This is different from the scribes and Pharisees who were protective and exclusive, rather than welcoming and inclusive. It all comes back to allegiance to Christ. That is the main point of this sermon...**An indispensable lesson for believers is allegiance to Christ.**

1. Not allegiance to us. (v.38)

In verse 38 is the only time in the Gospel of Mark that the apostle John does something solo. John started by calling Jesus by the title "Teacher" which is good and acceptable, but the content of John's statement to Jesus is not good and not acceptable. John reported on behalf of the disciples that they saw someone casting out demons in Jesus' name, and they tried to stop that someone from casting out demons in Jesus' name. The reason given? John said it was because that someone "*was not following us.*"

Please note that John actually said "following us", as in following the disciples, rather than following You, as in following the great Teacher Jesus! The allegiance that John wanted was allegiance to us, instead of allegiance to Christ, in the name of the Lord! John valued his membership in the exclusive and authorized circle of the Twelve. He thought only they could cast out demons, and wanted to keep it that way!

We must not be possessive about the ministry of Christ nor the people of Christ. They do not follow us. They do not belong to us. They must not be restricted in their service in the Lord's name, in order for us to gain followers!

The ministry of driving out demons was a prominent feature of the ministry of Jesus and the ministry of His disciples. For the disciples to suddenly encounter a person who was carrying out this practice in the name of their Rabbi undermined their special status with Jesus. The issue of status, which is the issue of who has the greatest status, was still the wrong focus of the disciples.

To make matters worse, remember that back in verse 18, the disciples were not able to drive out a demon! But here in verse 38, the disciples saw an 'outsider' succeed in driving out demons in Jesus' name. The contrast was doubly distressing to disciples who thought one of the 12 was the greatest!

Were the apostles of Jesus showing any care for the poor souls who had been suffering under demon possession, but now were set free? No. The apostles were only thinking about themselves and their own desire for greatness. Thinking leads to action. They took action to attempt to stop the demons from being cast out of these poor people. Why? Because it did not serve their own purposes. They were not showing allegiance to Christ, but to themselves!

Christians must never make our service into something about ourselves. As soon as we do, we have broken the third commandment and we have used the Lord's name in vain. A church is a church in the Lord's name, not our own.

In the book of Numbers, chapter 11, verses 26-29, we are told of the time when two men named Eldad and Medad had the Spirit rest on them and the resulting privilege of prophesying words from the Lord to the people, in the Lord's name. Someone ran to tell Moses that these two men were prophesying in the camp, assuming that Moses would feel threatened by other people suddenly prophesying. Joshua expressed allegiance to Moses, instead of allegiance to the Lord, when Joshua asked Moses to stop these two men from prophesying! What Joshua said, sounds a lot like what the apostle John said here in verse 38.

Old Testament Joshua had been trying to prevent others from prophesying.

New Testament John was trying to prevent others from casting out demons.

In the Book of Numbers, the main leader Moses then made a statement as a prophetic sigh and yearning, basically saying that Moses longed for the day when all the LORD's people would be prophets, and when the LORD would put His Spirit upon all the LORD's people! Moses knew it was not right for them to be loyal exclusively to Moses. They were to be loyal to the LORD God.

In the same way, in our passage here in Mark 9, the main leader Jesus made a statement saying that allegiance was not to the Twelve disciples. Rather, allegiance is to Christ.

2. Everyone either has allegiance to Christ or is against Christ; no one is neutral. (v.39-40)

So, the question is – can the name of the Lord Jesus be used outside of the group of His own 12 disciples, in order to perform mighty deeds?

In verse 39, the actual statement from Jesus is this, *“Do not stop him, for no one who does a mighty work in My name will be able soon afterward to speak evil of Me.”*

Jesus answered by showing that this other man could not be an enemy. The fact that he was able to work a miracle in the name of the Lord Jesus, proved that he could not be opposed to Jesus!

Everyone has a tendency to form a clique. A group. But it is a worldly thing to do, and must not happen in the Kingdom of God. What unites us is when we all are in the same clique with Christ. We are all on the same team. We are all brothers and sisters in Christ. We love our Baptist brothers and sisters, and the Methodist and Lutheran and Episcopal!

As Jesus said it in verse 40, *“the one who is not against us is for us.”*

3. Serving done to serve Christ’s people shows allegiance Christ. (v.41)

Verse 41, Jesus said, *“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.”*

Now the Lord’s name is named. Christ! People are to be welcomed, and miracles can be done in the name of the Lord, who is Jesus Christ. It is in His name, that we welcome others. It is in that name that we give cups of water, and do other actions of service. We help anyone who belongs to Jesus, and we do so in His name.

Galatians 6:10, *“So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.”*

Our allegiance to Christ is what drives us to serve others. We serve in Christ’s name. That is why we do what we do.

When we say it the opposite way, it is also true...whenever we serve the people of Christ, we are serving Christ Himself.

What is interesting is the example Jesus used. A cup of water. Nowadays, if you go to a ballgame and you want a bottle of water, it might surprise you how much it costs. If your friend buys you a bottle of water, you might want to write him a thank-you note! However, giving a cup of water was such a basic feature in the ancient practices of hospitality, that it would require no acknowledgment, and certainly no reward. The lesson of Jesus is made stronger by His selection of this example of a simple cup of water. Even so small of an act of a person giving one of the disciples of Jesus a cup of water, is something that will not go unnoticed by Jesus, and will not be unrewarded by Jesus. Here is the only time that the word reward is used in the Gospel of Mark. Jesus has underscored our understanding of the importance of the name of the Lord, the third commandment, and caring for fellow believers in Christ’s name!

Concluding applications: We find 2 concluding applications.

1. Be comforted that we belong to Christ. Christ will take care of us. He will pay for all of our care, for anyone who provides care for you. Verse 41, if someone gives you a cup of water because you belong to Christ, then Christ will reward that person for giving you that cup of water. This gives us glimpse into all that it must mean that we belong to Christ. This is what Paul expresses further in Romans 14:7-9, “*For none of us lives to himself, and none of us dies to himself. For if we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord. So then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's. For to this end Christ died and lived again, that he might be Lord both of the dead and of the living.*”

Believers alive today belong to Christ. Believers who died already belong to Christ. This is the beauty of the death and resurrection of Christ, that it transcends time and it transcends the grave. We are in that number! We belong to Christ!

Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 6:19, that even our bodies belong to Christ, for we are a temple of the Spirit, and we are to glorify God in our bodies.

Again, Paul wrote of this in 2 Corinthians 10:7, “*...if anyone is confident that he is Christ's, let him remind himself that just as he is Christ's, so also are we.*” It is a two-way street, and it helps us to be comforted in relating to one another.

1 Peter 2:9, together, we are a “*...people for [God's] own possession.*”

Belonging to Christ is such an important aspect of the Christian's mind that the Heidelberg catechism saw fit to start off with this concept in their first question. Q. What is your only comfort in life and death? A. That I am not my own, but belong with body and soul, both in life and in death, to my faithful Savior Jesus Christ. He has fully paid for all my sins with his precious blood, and has set me free from all the power of the devil. He also preserves me in such a way that without the will of my heavenly Father not a hair can fall from my head; indeed, all things must work together for my salvation. Therefore, by his Holy Spirit he also assures me of eternal life and makes me heartily willing and ready from now on to live for him.

Acts 4:12, “*...there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.*”

We belong to Christ. Salvation is ours in the name of Jesus. We belong to Christ, and that is a foundational comfort for our lives!

2. Be welcoming to Christians from other churches and denominations.

Later, in Mark chapter 11, when our Lord is entering Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, what is it that the crowds shout out? “*... Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD.*” This phrase is in all four gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. It is important to welcome whoever comes in the name of the LORD, especially when it actually is the LORD!

But that is our insight into the 3rd of the top 10 commandments -- the name of the Lord upon a person means that we welcome that person as we welcome the Lord Himself! Allegiance to Christ means accepting Him when He enters Jerusalem on the colt. Allegiance to Christ means accepting Him when He sends us a little child for us to embrace and welcome in His name. Allegiance to Christ means accepting Christ when He sends us an adult Christian from another denomination for us to welcome in His name. Allegiance to Christ means we accept Him when He suffers on the cross for us, we accept Him when He is dead for us and then buried for us. Allegiance to Christ means we accept Him when He is risen for us, and ascended, coronated and glorified. Allegiance to Christ means we accept His Spirit that is sent upon us, and we accept all the people that He sends to us, in His name.

While we want to support our own denomination and its ministries and activities, we also want to be Biblical in how we do so. We learn the lesson that the disciples learned. Allegiance to Christ.

In our OPC meetings at presbytery level in our region and at the national level at the General Assembly, we welcome ministers from other denominations to give reports and updates about how they are doing. We pray for them. We applaud them. We encourage them. We see them as in the same kingdom, on the same team.

Here is a poem expressing the poor attitude of the disciples that we want to avoid:

*Believe as I believe, no more no less,
That I am right, and no one else – confess.
Feel as I feel, think as I think,
Eat what I eat, and drink but what I drink,
Look as I look, do always as I do,
Then and only then, I'll fellowship with you.*

No! What a sad way to be in error. This is what we avoid.

Instead, we will fellowship with any church or denomination that exalts the name of Jesus! We rejoice to call them brothers and sisters!

Let us not become more restrictive than Moses was in Numbers 11, or more restrictive than our Lord Jesus Himself was in Mark 9. Let us not take a different position on this than the apostle Paul. Notice that Paul calls them brothers in Philippians 1:14-18, “*And most of the brothers, having become confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, are much more bold to speak the word without fear. Some indeed preach Christ from envy and rivalry, but others from good will. The latter do it out of love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel. The former proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely but thinking to afflict me in my imprisonment. What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed, and in that I rejoice.*” Paul knows that what is important is Christ’s cause. Is Christ’s kingdom advanced? Then we rejoice.

We need to reach out our hand of brotherhood to all those who love our Lord Jesus Christ and build on the firm foundation of God's infallible Word.

SI - The great preacher of the mass spiritual movement in America called The Great Awakening, a Pastor George Whitfield was in the Methodist movement with John Wesley. Somehow, the movement became in danger of being divided, some following Whitfield, and some following Wesley. Whitfield decided to resign and turn it all over to Pastor John Wesley. Those close to Whitfield urged him to stay in leadership. They cautioned him that his name might be forgotten. Pastor Whitfield replied, 'My name? Let the name of Whitfield perish if only the name of Christ be glorified.'

The sole passion of every single faithful believer is to exalt the name of Christ.

The way we build the kingdom is having Christians and churches who are welcoming, big-hearted, with open arms, anyone who has allegiance to Christ.

Romans 15:7, *"Therefore welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God."*