

Are You for Christ?

Mark 9:38-50

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Introduction

The Lord Jesus Christ who saves is very precious to those who truly know His salvation.

- He becomes so important to them that they detest anything that would get in the way of their own relationship with Him or with anybody else's.

That is what Mark 9:38-50 addresses.

- In the previous passage, we saw how Jesus predicted His death and resurrection again, only to have His disciples show their misunderstanding again—this time by arguing about which of them would be the greatest in His kingdom.
- Jesus called them to Himself, took a child in His arms, and instructed them that the one who is great in His kingdom is the one who serves everyone else including little children like the one in His arms.
 - His disciples were looking at greatness the way the world does—who has a position with the most people serving him.
 - That is a kind of greatness, but not the kind that Jesus is looking for in His kingdom.
 - In His kingdom, greatness is seen in giving yourself in love to others.

Our passage today continues in this stream.

- First, we see Jesus correcting John, who tells Jesus about forbidding someone who was casting out demons in Jesus' name because "he does not follow us."
- Then we see Jesus stressing how wrong it is get in the way of serving Him—and how serious it is to leave anything in our own life that keeps us from serving Him.
- He tells us that we must be sure that we are full of salt as living sacrifices for Him.

Let me read this passage to you... Mark 9:38-50:

Mark 9:38-50: Now John answered Him, saying, "Teacher, we saw someone who does not follow us casting out demons in Your name, and we forbade him because he does not follow us." ³⁹ But Jesus said, "Do not forbid him, for no one who works a miracle in My name can soon afterward speak evil of Me. ⁴⁰ For he who is not against us is on our side. ⁴¹ For whoever gives you a cup of water to drink in My name, because you belong to Christ, assuredly, I say to you, he will by no means lose his reward. ⁴² But whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his

neck, and he were thrown into the sea. ⁴³ If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter into life maimed, rather than having two hands, to go to hell, into the fire that shall never be quenched— ⁴⁴ where 'their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched.' ⁴⁵ And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life lame, rather than having two feet, to be cast into hell, into the fire that shall never be quenched— ⁴⁶ where 'their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched.' ⁴⁷ And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye, rather

than having two eyes, to be cast into hell fire—⁴⁸ where ‘their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched.’⁴⁹ For everyone will be seasoned with fire, and every sacrifice will be seasoned with salt.⁵⁰ Salt is good, but if the salt loses its flavor,

how will you season it? Have salt in yourselves, and have peace with one another.”

May the Lord add His blessing to the reading and to the exposition of His Word.

You do not read the scriptures as you should unless you read them to consider how they apply to you.

- The Bible is unique.
 - It is God’s Word which is given to speak to the church in every age.
 - If we read it as a mere history book or as interesting ideas about life to work in as we will, we read it in a way that is entirely mistaken.
- The Bible is God’s Word which, when heard as such, penetrates the very heart and marrow of our entire being.
 - An old friend of mine went to Berkley and studied religion, especially Paul Tillich and other theologians who deny the truth...
 - My friend had great disdain for those who took the Bible as God-breathed until the day that he realised while mocking the sermon of simple country preacher that he had nowhere to go and began to lie awake at night in a sweat until at last he repented and turned to Jesus Christ in true saving faith.
 - For the first time, the scriptures were coming to him not as the word of men, but as they are in truth, the word of God, which effectively work in all who believe.
- The passage before us today will be nothing but a curious relic from the past unless you receive it as the word of God.
 - If you do that, it will have a powerful impact on you.
- This passage tells you, each of you, what you will be like if you are one who is for Christ. It tells you what you are like if you have a saving relationship with Him.

I. If you are for Christ, you will never hinder those who follow Him or those who would follow Him.

A. What a wretched business it is to oppose those who are serving Him!

1. Here He is, the Saviour of the world who has come to you and called you to follow Him...
 - And you have learned of Him and of His grace and love—of how He went to the cross to make atonement for sin when you were His enemy.
 - And you have come to Him and found Him to be a welcoming Saviour who has taken you to Himself forever and who restores you to His Father in heaven.
 - He has given you His Spirit to seal you and to work in you and to show you more and more of the riches of His grace and to establish you in the beautiful ways of His household.

2. How could it be that you should see another person that He has also called and redeemed and taken in His service—that He has loved as He had loved you...
 - How could you see one like that and oppose that one—and somehow block them and discourage them from going on to follow Christ?
 - I tell you, that would be a very wretched thing for you to do—surely an inexcusable thing—surely a thing that you would repent of at once!
 - You can't say that you love Christ if you hate another who follows Him.
- B. Jesus makes this clear how wrong it is to be an impediment to any of His followers in verses 38-42.
1. First, He corrects John for opposing another minister for serving Jesus.
 - Right after being corrected for aspiring for status in Jesus' kingdom, John says (v. 38): **“Teacher, we saw someone who does not follow us casting out demons in Your name, and we forbade him because he does not follow us.”**
 - to which Jesus replies (v. 39-40): **“Do not forbid him, for no one who works a miracle in My name can soon afterward speak evil of Me. ⁴⁰ For he who is not against us is on our side.”**
 - The spirit of John was all wrong.
 - Here he is, one of the three leading apostles, showing, as Peter did in chapter 8, that he does not understand the ways of Jesus his Master.
 - If this man was able to cast out demons using Jesus' name, that shows that Jesus was with him.
 - John, rather than wanting to see many people serving Jesus, seemed to think that this other disciple might steal some of the limelight.
 - Did he not care about Jesus his Master?
 - Did he not realise how much work needed to be done to bring the world to his Master?
 - It should have thrilled John to see someone else serving Jesus.
 - Certainly there will those that will use Jesus' name falsely that John and the others will have to rebuke,
 - but they must not assume that just because there is someone who is not in their circle, he must be unfaithful.
 - It is a love for status, not a love for the Saviour that prompted John.
 - Be sure what spirit is in you when you either support or oppose those who are claiming to do the work of Christ.
 - 2. Jesus goes on to show the disciples how pleased He is with those who do even the most menial services for those who are doing His work.
 - He says (v. 41): **“For whoever gives you a cup of water to drink in My name, because you belong to Christ, assuredly, I say to you, he will by no means lose his reward.”**
 - Here is someone who loves Jesus and wants to help those who are spreading His word in whatever way he can...
 - He cherishes Christ and yearns for people to know Him.

- When you love the Saviour as you should, you will be delighted whenever you see someone ministering for Him.
 - It will thrill you, and you will do what you can to help.
 - Jesus will recognise that you did this for Him, because of your love for Him, and will reward you.
3. Jesus also shows here how displeased He is with those who cause those who have come to follow Him to stumble—who turn them away from following Him.
- Think of it!
 - a. His words are very strong.
 - **“But whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were thrown into the sea.”**
 - Jesus tells us that the one who does this would have been much better off if he had been at the bottom of the sea with a millstone around his neck to keep him there.
 - Do you know why His words are so strong?
 - Because He loves His little ones who believe in Him, and He delights to have them follow Him.
 - He died to save them, they are His prized possession.
 - b. What vengeance will He bring on those wretched ministers who preach a false gospel!
 - There are hordes of them about!
 - They tell their hearers—baptised people that Christ has called them to teach—that the Bible has errors, and they don’t handle it as the Word of God.
 - They set aside certain commandments that Christ has given to His people that they don’t like—for instance, that homosexuals or those who murder their unborn children and do not repent will not inherit God’s kingdom.
 - They never warn anybody about hell—they may even deny it.
 - They deny that Jesus is truly God and is the only way of salvation.
 - These men lead Jesus’ little ones—the members of the flock—astray.
 - Do you think that Jesus is going to overlook this?
 - Jesus says that these false teachers would be better off at the bottom of the ocean with a millstone around their necks than conducting such ministries.
 - It is a very serious matter because Jesus loves His people.
 - Our land is filled with little ones that have been led astray.
 - What a contrast we find in Paul.
 - He said that he bore all things for the sake of the elect that they might be saved.
 - He would not bend the truth of his Saviour to please men, even when it meant that they beat him and whipped him and stoned him and slandered him and put him in prison.

- He loved his Saviour and was not ashamed of the gospel.
 - He was poured out like a drink offering for others and said, “Woe is me if I do not preach the gospel!”
- c. But it is not just ministers that can cause Jesus’ little ones to stumble.
 - What of your life?
 - Is it a life that draws others to Christ or that repulses them?
 - I am not talking about changing the gospel to make it more appealing—that leads people away from the real Jesus.
 - Many will hate you if you follow Him, but it is not because you are doing anything to lead them away from Him.
 - I am asking you if your life points to Jesus.
 - Do your words encourage others to follow Christ?
 - Does your example encourage them to follow Him?
 - Do people who know you know how much love Him? how much He means to you?
 - Are you like the Shulamite woman to whom the daughters of Jerusalem said, Song of Solomon 5:9: **What is your beloved more than another beloved, O fairest among women? What is your beloved more than another beloved...?**
 - And then do you tell them of His excellence so that they say, Song of Solomon 6:1: **Where has your beloved gone, O fairest among women? Where has your beloved turned aside, that we may seek him with you?**
 - Yes. We are all called to adorn the doctrine we profess.
 - We are to love Him so much that others are either drawn to Him or hate us for His sake.

TRANS> All this that we have seen so far makes sense, doesn’t it?

- If you love Christ and truly know His salvation, you will be thrilled when you meet others who know Him and promote Him and you will spur them on their service to Him.
 - That is the first thing that Jesus tells you that you will be like if you are for Him.
- Now let’s look at the second thing:

II. If you are for Christ, you will expunge from your life all that causes you to stumble.

- Not only you will avoid hindering others from following Jesus, you will also get rid of whatever is keeping you from following Him

A. Of course you will.

1. How could you leave things in your life that would come between you and the one who has loved you and given Himself for you?
 - the one who has saved you from your sins by bearing your sins in His own body on the cross?

- Could you be said to love Him if you hang on to those things that are destroying your relationship with Him?
2. You'll be like the saints of old...
- a. Like Abraham who left his home land to go to the land where God promised to establish a city that would be under His blessing and that would bring forth Christ to bless the nations...
 - Abraham left all to seek this city whose builder and maker was God.
 - He was ready to sacrifice Isaac, the son of the promise, believing that God would raise him up again.
 - b. You'll be like Moses who had all the privileges of royalty in Egypt but chose rather to suffer affliction with the people of God.
 - He did this because he saw that the reward of having God as his God was far greater than anything that the Egyptian palace could offer him.
 - Hebrews 11:26 actually says that he "esteemed the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt.... he forsook Egypt because he saw Him who is invisible."
 - c. You'll be like Jacob's son Joseph, who, though exiled from his people—having no fellowship with other believers—a young man in the prime of life forced into slavery—rejected the solicitations of his master's wife.
 - Here is the account: **Gen 39:7-10: And it came to pass after these things that his master's wife cast longing eyes on Joseph, and she said, "Lie with me."** ⁸ **But he refused and said to his master's wife, "Look, my master does not know what is with me in the house, and he has committed all that he has to my hand. ⁹ There is no one greater in this house than I, nor has he kept back anything from me but you, because you are his wife. How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?"** ¹⁰ **So it was, as she spoke to Joseph day by day, that he did not heed her, to lie with her or to be with her.**
 - Joseph refused the offers of this wealthy woman because he loved the LORD who had redeemed him. He did not wish to do anything that would destroy his relationship with Him.
 - The LORD meant too much to Joseph to allow that.
- B. Jesus says very strongly here that we must let go of things that are precious to us if they are things that make us stumble—that draw us off from God.
1. He says we must be willing to let go of even our very body parts if they cause us to sin:
 - Listen to His words in verse 43-48: **"If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter into life maimed, rather than having two hands, to go to hell, into the fire that shall never be quenched—** ⁴⁴ **where 'their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched.'** ⁴⁵ **And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life lame, rather than having two feet, to be cast into hell, into the fire that shall never be quenched—** ⁴⁶ **where 'their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched.'** ⁴⁷ **And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck**

it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye, rather than having two eyes, to be cast into hell fire—⁴⁸ where ‘their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched.’

2. This is serious business.
 - Listen to me. Jesus Christ is the only Saviour there is, and He is a very wonderful Saviour who saves all who come to Him.
 - He delivers us from the guilt of our sin through His cross, so that we might be restored to God as our God—to Jesus and His Father and the Holy Spirit.
 - But if you don't care enough about His salvation to turn from those things that you know will draw you away from Him—even if they are as dear to you as your hand, your foot, and your eye, then you will go to the place of eternal punishment.
 - Jesus describes it as being cast into hell fire—Gehenna—where their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched.
 - If you avoid this Saviour, that is where you will go: to a place of eternal torment.
 - If you reject Jesus, who else is there to save you?
 - I do not mean that you won't struggle with sin—you will—that is why we must keep coming to Jesus and getting rid of things that draw us away from Him.
 - How small a thing a hand or a foot or an eye is it is keeps you from coming to Him where you are welcomed into God's house and restored to Him forever to live with Him!
 - Even with your physical body, if a body part has gangrene, you cut it off to save the rest of you.
 - Perhaps you have heard about the Aaron Ralston, the young man who was rock climbing and fell so that he was hanging from his hand that had gotten wedged in between two rocks for five days. He could not get it loose.
 - He thought he was going to die there until he realised that he had a pocket knife with which he could cut off his arm to save his life.
 - He first broke his arm, then he cut the rest of it off with his knife because his life was worth more to him than his arm.
 - How much more should we give up whatever it is that keeps us from Christ. He is worth far more than a hand or a foot or an eye.
 - Look how ready people are to give up things to protect from Coronavirus, yet they will cling to things that keep them from Christ!
 - Hell is infinitely worse than Coronavirus because of what Jesus says—it is the place where the fire is not quenched and the worm does not die.
 - What can be worse than that?

- C. You can live without that hand that clings to sin; without that foot that pursues sin, without that eye that looks longingly at sin.
1. Cut off that hand that clings to the pride in you that won't forgive others, to that pride that won't ask for forgiveness, to that love of money that makes you lie and cheat to have more of it, to that bitterness that you hang on to as an excuse to justify why you are as you are, to that arrogant reputation that makes you embarrassed to confess the truth... cut it off!
 - Why would you save a hand like that if it keeps you from Christ?
 2. Cut off that foot that runs to entertainment, runs after riches, runs after drink or drug, runs after honours, runs after romance, runs after sex, runs after food, runs after attention, pleasure, honour, popularity, status...
 - Jesus says, "Cut it off if it keeps you from Me."
 - There is something better to go after than what that foot is after.
 - What good is that foot if it pulls you away from Christ?
 - Why do you keep it? Cut it off at once!
 3. And pluck out that wretched eye...
 - That one that is full of envy, the one that lusts after riches and the things of this world, that keeps returning to pornography instead of to Christ, that eye reads of romance instead of Christ—those constant longings and dreams that are never satisfied.
 - Why let that eye wreck what you might have with Christ?
 - Those things that are so attractive to you—they are nothing compared to Christ and all that He is.
 - Pluck out that eye!
 - Replace that eye with an eye for Christ, for holiness, for a place in God's house forever, for a new life of love for God and your neighbour.
 - For an eye that looks on the beauty of Christ and the Father to worship and adore Him.

TRANS> Our loving gracious Saviour does not tell you of hell because He hates you.

- Remember, He is the one who went to the cross that we might be saved.
 - He tells you about hell because He loves you and He wants you to come to Him to that you might enter into life—eternal life—enter into the kingdom of God...
 - A member of the royal family once asked the dean of his cathedral if there is a hell. The dean hesitantly replied: "Jesus thinks so, Paul thinks so, the creeds say so, and the churches think so," to which the member of the royal family replied, "If that is so, then why don't you ever tell us about it, and warn us not to go there?"
- So now we have seen two things that will be true about you if you are for Christ...
 - That you will not get in the way, but will encourage others to come to Him.
 - That you will not let anything get in your way to keep you from coming to Him.

- Now let's look at the third thing that will be true of you if you are for Christ...

III. If you are for Christ, your life will be a savoury sacrifice for Him.

A. Jesus begins verse 49 with the declaration that everyone will be seasoned with fire.

1. The word "seasoned" means "salted," so more literally He says that everyone will be salted with fire.
 - This is a difficult passage, but I would agree with those who see this as the refiner's fire.
 - Malachi 3:2 speaks of this: **But who can endure the day of His coming? And who can stand when He appears? For He is like a refiner's fire and like launderer's soap.**
 - A refiner takes a lump of gold—in this case, the Jewish church—and melts it.
 - This separates the gold from the other metals. Because the gold is heavier, it sinks to the bottom, and the impurities rise to the top.
 - Jesus' coming was like a refiner's fire because it tested God's people, separating the gold from the dross.
 - It made a clear distinction between those who were looking for God to save them and those who wanted to save themselves.
2. The refiner's fire, as Jesus says, salts everyone—it shows what they are.
 - Jesus' coming was like a big trial for all of Israel—it brought them into the deepest humiliation that they had ever experienced because God the Son was given as an offering for their sins.
 - It was one thing to have animals offered, but the Son of God???
 - That is downright offensive to all of us—God is telling us that we are so bad that His Son must go to the cross to pay for our sins.
 - We'd rather blame the God who says that with being severe and unjust than admit that we are in need of such salvation.
 - But in those that God has appointed to salvation, that same fire, while it offends them too, breaks them so that they see that this is what they need.
 - They see that they cannot possibly save themselves.
 - They are broken—all the self-esteem goes out of them, and they come to Jesus to save them.
 - It causes them to see the truth—that they are wretches who cannot be saved apart from Christ crucified.
 - The same fire leaves one greatly offended and other delighted that there is salvation here for him.
 - These emerge from the fire wanting nothing but Christ.
 - They see that there is no hope for them apart from Him.
 - They are ready to leave all—to cut off the offensive hand and foot, and pluck out the offensive eye that would keep them from Christ.
 - They cast themselves on Him that they might be saved.

- They see that no one else but the Son of God crucified can save them.
- They become what Paul calls a living sacrifice—in Rom 12:1-2.
- They die to self that they might find life in Christ.

TRANS> So the fire of the gospel makes two groups—those who are offended by the cross and those who are leave all to embrace Christ... as living sacrifices.

B. Jesus tells us that every one of these sacrifices will be seasoned with salt.

- Notice how He says that *everyone* will be salted with fire, but that *every sacrifice* will be salted with salt... it is only these sacrifices that are salted with salt.

1. In the Old Testament, a sacrifice was not acceptable unless it was seasoned with salt—all the sacrifices had to be salted.

- It is clear from verse 50 that the purpose of the salt is to make the sacrifice flavourful.
- It says: **“Salt is good, but if the salt loses its flavor, how will you season it? Have salt in yourselves, and have peace with one another.”**
 - The salt in Galilee was sometimes mixed with gypsum and the salt itself could leach out, leaving only the gypsum.
 - Such salt with no flavour was worthless.

2. Salt is added to your life by Christ... when you leave you own way and come to Him.

- He makes your life a sweet aroma to God.
 - He gives you His grace, He fills you with His Spirit so that the fruits of the Spirit begin to appear... love for God, love for others, joy and delight in Christ, patience in service to Him—
 - A sacrifice that is a sweet aroma of a life poured out to God in Christ.
 - It is not that you save yourself, but that He saves you—He transforms you.

3. The question presses upon you... what are **you** seasoned with?

- What savour comes off of you unto God?
 - Is it the Saviour of Christ in you?
 - Or are you seasoned with something else? entertainment? riches? sex? romance? security? or perhaps things like fear? pride? frustration? anger? bitterness? strife? intolerance? discontentment? immorality? gluttony? drunkenness?
- What comes out of you when you are tested with the refiner’s fire—when you are squeezed and pressured?
 - Are you driven to Christ so that you lay down your life for God by His grace and bring forth fruit? So that you cut off the offending hands and feet, and pluck out the offending eyes?
 - Or does it drive you to sin, so that you deepen your rebellion and hardness against the living God, as one who rejects Christ, the only Saviour?

- C. I tell you, your life cannot be seasoned with Christ unless you come to Him.
- Jesus calls you to have salt in yourselves and to have peace with one another.
 - Without Him you can do nothing.
 - Cut off whatever is keeping you from Him by casting yourself entirely upon Him for salvation—for forgiveness, acceptance, adoption, and new life in the Holy Spirit with Him and the Father.
 - Are you for Christ or against Him?