

The Gospel of Mark- Chapter 9 Part 5

If you would open your Bibles with me to the Gospel of Mark once again in the 9th chapter. For those that may be listening for the first time we have been endeavoring to preach our way through this gospel. This actually makes our 41st week in this gospel and it seems to me like we just started. If you have missed the earlier ones, all of the previous sermons are available on the app and website.

Now before we get into the message, let me remind you of what we have talked about the last couple of weeks because the scene bleeds over into what we are going to look at today.

First let me remind you that we are in the last few months of the ministry of Jesus. He is now focused primarily on ministering to his disciples. No longer is he pursuing the great crowds like we saw before.

Secondly, Jesus is also now making his way from Northern Israel to Jerusalem and along the way he and the apostles come to the city of Capernaum very privately. It is here that the scenes of the last couple of weeks have taken place. This is probably at the home of Peter where so many activities early in the ministry of Jesus kind of centered around.

Thirdly, the disciples had been debating over who was fit to be number one in the kingdom of heaven and Jesus told them the one that lowers himself below everyone else and serves others.

And lastly, we saw how John the Apostle asked the question concerning the one who was without authority and was out there casting out devils in the name of Christ. Jesus said to leave him alone. He was promoting the kingdom of heaven. He was serving others and he would have reward. There was a sobering message for us the last couple of weeks for all of us I think.

Now as we get to our passage here today in verse 42 through the end of the chapter the scene has not changed. We are still in Capernaum where Jesus is in a home with the Apostles and other close disciples privately. The conversation is still rolling on from the two previous paragraphs.

Let's read our passage,

Mar 9:42 And whosoever shall offend one of these little ones that believe in me, it is better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he were cast into the sea.

Mar 9:43 And if thy hand offend thee, cut it off: it is better for thee to enter into life maimed, than having two hands to go into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched:

Mar 9:44 Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched.

Mar 9:45 And if thy foot offend thee, cut it off: it is better for thee to enter halt into life, than having two feet to be cast into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched:

Mar 9:46 Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched.

Mar 9:47 And if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out: it is better for thee to enter into the kingdom of God with one eye, than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire:

Mar 9:48 Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched.

Mar 9:49 For every one shall be salted with fire, and every sacrifice shall be salted with salt.

Mar 9:50 Salt is good: but if the salt have lost his saltness, wherewith will ye season it? Have salt in yourselves, and have peace one with another.

The passage that we have before us is not an easy one to say the least and to be honest, though I have heard reference to these verses on more than a few occasions, I don't recall a lot of messages being preached directly from this text and I think in large part because it is a challenging piece of scripture.

So let's just try to unravel this passage as best we can beginning in verse 42.

Mar 9:42 And whosoever shall offend one of these little ones that believe in me, it is better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he were cast into the sea.

Again, the scene is still the same that Jesus had picked up the little child in verse 36. Probably one of the disciple's children. Probably a toddler at that because the child could stand, but still young enough to pick up. So, think about that size of a child. That child that starting about 18 months enters that terrible two stage that lasts somewhere to close to four. That is the age of the child running around and that Jesus is holding and I know I mentioned it then, but I just love this image.

One of the reasons I love this image is because kids were not well thought of at this time. They were pretty low on the social status board.

Today we orient our lives around the child. Starts before they are even born. We have to have big reveal parties about whether it is a boy or girl and then we throw elaborate birthday parties from the earliest of ages that they will never remember and then we put them in sports, music lessons, art lessons, all sorts of things and we run to and fro and spend all our dough to make sure they have a great life. That's the way it is now.

That was far from the case in the culture Jesus was in. Men would have little to do with children until they would come of age. I know that is a hard thing for us to imagine, but that is the way things worked. The Jewish writings even talk about how it was worthless to try to teach a child the Torah until around the age of 12.

That lowering of children in the eyes of the apostles becomes apparent even in the next chapter when we read of how people were bringing young children to Christ and the apostles rebuked them telling them no they couldn't bother him. We know of course when Jesus saw it he was angry and told the apostles not to stop them from coming. As the old Sunday School hymn goes- Jesus loves the little children.

And here in this scene before us this afternoon Jesus, God in the flesh, the one in whom all things were made that were made showed his love of this little child by holding him and embracing him, and he didn't just show his love to one child there around Jesus because in our verse he speaks of children in the plural sense in this verse. Jesus had these young children around him, and he loved it.

Now, let's think about what this verse is saying when it says the word offend. That is a word we need to come to grips with as we look at the entirety of the passage.

If you are carrying a NKJV or an NASB you will see it says something to the effect of causing one of these little ones to stumble. That might not help us understand what is meant here any better.

The best understanding and the only understanding for that matter is in this verse and the verses that follow that when it speaks of offending it is speaking of sin.

The ESV translates this clearly for us when it says,
Mar 9:42 "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.

So, every time we see offend in this passage from verse 42 on and we see that word offend it is speaking about sin.

Now how is it that one could cause a child that believes in Jesus to sin? You could do that by directly making a child to sin. How can we make a child to sin? How about when you force them to lie about their age to get a cheaper meal at Golden Corral or at Disney when that ticket is getting ready to go up a \$100 because your kid is 10 instead of 9.

Not only are we making them lie we are also instilling in them the idea that lying is okay at times especially if it saves you money.

Far worse than that though, some parents force their children to steal and commit acts of sexual immorality with other adults. Let's just be real parents and adults who have children under the custody legally or illegally have caused children to engage themselves in great sins.

And again, what is being engrained in these children at these early ages is that these sins are okay. That these sins are just a normal part of life, but these things are not a normal part of life.

Listen, you know as parents and as adults it is our duty to show a lifestyle that they can follow in that fosters both love and righteousness. A life that puts value in living a life pleasing before the Lord.

And folks maybe we aren't doing such a good job of that anymore because with the passing of every generation it seems as if the ills of sin grow more and more and kids know far more than they should at earlier and earlier ages. I know I may sound like an old man ranting to the youth here today, but if the Lord should tarry for another 40 years you who are young will be saying the same thing as well because it is only going to get worse.

So, what does Jesus say about this one that would cause this child to fall into a life of sin? He says that it would be better for that person to have a millstone hung about his neck.

Now what is a millstone? A millstone was a stone that was used to grind meal. Millstones came in different sizes. Matthew in the parallel passage uses the word to indicate this is the large stone that a donkey would be used in turning. A stone that weighs tons. This is the kind of stone that if you had hung around your neck and it was thrown into the sea you are going to drown at the very bottom of the ocean.

Now get the extremeness of what Jesus is saying. Jesus says that would be a far better fate than for you to continue doing what you're doing by causing a child to sin.

You see Jesus takes it personally whenever you offend or help one who believes in him. We see that in Matthew when the Lord speaks to the righteous and says:

Mat 25:35 For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in:

Mat 25:36 Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me.

When the righteous asked when did we do that? What was his reply:

Mat 25:40 And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.

Jesus identified personally with the least of these my brethren.

Likewise, when Paul was still Saul and he was out there hauling in Christians to be killed for their beliefs and on when he was on his way to Damascus to do the same and he came face to face with Jesus. What was it that Jesus said to him?

Act 9:5 And he said, Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest:

Paul hadn't personally persecuted Jesus, but Jesus took it as personally persecuting himself whenever Paul was doing the atrocities he was doing to believers.

Jesus when he talks about these children here in Mark, he is showing that they are just as important as adults. They aren't lower than others. They aren't to be pushed away. In fact, he puts more judgment on the one that would cause a child to fall into sin than an adult causing another adult to stumble. Causing one to sin is never a good thing, but Christ speaks of the greatest of punishments for those that do so to children.

Now, I think that is the easy part of the passage for us to understand today. Now we need to move on into the parts that if taken for face value would leave the world blind with no hands or feet.

Let's read again,

Mar 9:43 And if thy hand offend thee, cut it off: it is better for thee to enter into life maimed, than having two hands to go into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched:

Again, I have to say that if taken literally people would be hacking off their parts all the time and some people have done just that. There are records of men cutting off certain parts to avoid the sins of fornication. In fact, many have done that and they did it based on this passage.

That said, is this a passage we are to take in the literal sense? Is this what Jesus expects if we follow him? Well Jesus in the last verse certainly wasn't speaking a literal sense. It was a metaphor to show how radicle it should be to stop sin. Cause a kid to stumble have the heaviest stone around tied to your neck and cast

into the ocean. You have to admit that's pretty dramatic.

It's pretty dramatic because it might be you didn't mean to do that. Might be that you did it and repented after and instructed the child after. Should that man still be thrown into the sea and drowned? In the literal sense the answer would still be yes.

The verse though should not be taken in the literal sense. You see verse 42 was a radical statement to show how extreme would should think about sin.

The fact is we can cut off our hand as it says here if it causes us to sin. Maybe it is because of stealing or putting your hand somewhere it doesn't belong. You can think of the scenario. I don't know. But the problem is that we can cut our hands off, but it hasn't cured where sin comes from. Where does sin come from it comes from the heart.

Jesus already taught us a couple of chapters ago these words.

Mar 7:21 For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders,

Mar 7:22 Thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness:

Mar 7:23 All these evil things come from within, and defile the man.

Everything that we do whether it be with our hands or our eyes or our feet it is a reflection of the greater problem. It is a problem with the heart that is above all deceitful and desperately wicked.

You can cut off your hand, your eye or anything else to follow and yet if you don't cut out the heart you can't stop the thought of sin.

Now Jesus here says that it would be better to cut it off- go through this radical thing and enter into the next life maimed than for us to have two hands take us to hell.

Folks Jesus again here is metaphorically speaking about the seriousness of sin. The seriousness of getting the things out of our life that cause us to stumble.

Jesus here by the way when he speaks of hell he doesn't use the word Hades that lost man goes to when they first die. Instead he uses the Gehenna which symbolizes the eternal torment of the lake of fire that we see the lost cast into as well as the devil in the book of Revelation. So, Jesus here is being very serious about the nature of sin and its consequences.

Then we read verse 44.

Mar 9:44 Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched.

This verse is found for us three times in this text in the KJV. In the earlier manuscripts it is only present once in verse 48. So, if you are carrying a newer version you will see the absence of verses 44 and 46 or in brackets as it is in the NASB.

That said, this verse is actually a quote from Isaiah 66:24 and again speaks of the fact that the eternal punishment to come is one that will not fade away. The Bible doesn't teach soul annihilation. The Bible teaches an eternal destination of unquenchable fire for those that die without Christ.

The fact is you can cut off the hand of a thief who is lost and he will still go to hell. Cutting off that hand might keep him from stealing more, but it will not change his eternal destination. Only putting your faith in Christ will change your destination.

Scripture teaches us,

Act 4:12 Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.

Now we have looked at the hand. Christ is not done. He moves now to the foot.

Mar 9:45 And if thy foot offend thee, cut it off: it is better for thee to enter halt into life, than having two feet to be cast into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched:

Mar 9:46 Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched.

The nature of this verse is like the last. This is not a command that we cut our feet off whenever our feet lead us into sin. Again the problem is not with the feet, the problem is with the heart. But the structure of the verse is the same.

And then we have the eye next.

Mar 9:47 And if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out: it is better for thee to enter into the kingdom of God with one eye, than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire:

Mar 9:48 Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched.

Out of the three verses this is the one that usually captures our attention the most. Again, though the thought is the same. We are metaphorically speaking.

A metaphor though is used to teach us something practical though. So, in all these things cutting off the hand, the foot, the eye what is the real practical instruction?

Well I find myself reminded of a Sunday School song we used to sing that went like this:

*O be careful little eyes what you see
O be careful little eyes what you see
There's a Father up above*

*And He's looking down in love
So, be careful little eyes what you see*

The song goes on to mention be careful little hands what you do and be careful little feet where you go. There is good instruction in that song.

You see we need to be careful of the things we allow to come into our lives as Christians. If there is something in our lives that we are doing with our hands, we aren't too literally cut off our hands, we are to cut off that thing from our lives so that it doesn't have dominion over us.

When we have places in our lives or people that we run to that aren't good influences on us in life, the solution is not to be bound to wheelchair. The solution is cutting those people and those places out of our lives.

And likewise, if there is something that is causing us to look with covetousness whether it be the things of this world that we lust after or perhaps even a person we need to not pluck our eyeball out because that won't change our heart. We need to do our best to remove that desire from our life.

What Christ is talking about here folks is the seriousness of sin. We ought not to tread it as lightly as we often do. We often think of sin as no big deal. They are a big deal though and it is for those sins that Jesus had to come to this earth to die in our stead. He had to pay the penalty of our sin in full so that could even enter into the kingdom of heaven.

Let's read on.

Mar 9:49 For every one shall be salted with fire, and every sacrifice shall be salted with salt.

I would love to tell you that with all certainty I know the meaning of this verse. Turns out no one seems to be clearly sure. Most every commentator I looked at began with a statement

to the effect of "perhaps no passage in the New Testament has given more perplexity to commentators than this".

So, I will speak not in definite terms with this verse as far smarter men than me have scratched their heads over this verse, but I will say this we know. In the Old Testament whenever a sacrifice was made on the altar it had to be seasoned with salt. Salt has a great deal to do with sealing a promise in those sacrifices. No sacrifice was to be made without salt.

So again, the imagery here of salt and fire draw us back to the Old Testament. And we are drawn to the thought of judgment being made in that offering. When the offering was made it was an offering that was to cover sins. That animal was taking the place of the judgment of sin.

I believe this verse is speaking about the judgments on this earth that we will go through because of our sins. You see, Christ may have taken our judgment of sin away in the eyes of God in the life to come, but sin here on this earth will bring judgment in the life of the believer. We still bear the consequences of our actions in this life.

But salt preserves us doesn't it. This speaks of the fact that though in this life we may suffer loss for our sins or even the trials of life, yet we are preserved to eternal life.

Now let's look at our next verse and hopefully this one will be plainer in its interpretation.

Mar 9:50 Salt is good: but if the salt have lost his saltness, wherewith will ye season it? Have salt in yourselves, and have peace one with another.

Salt was essential to life in these days when there was no refrigeration. Salt was used to preserve foods. It was used for medicinal purposes. Lots of things salt was used for.

Sometimes though salt appeared to lose its saltiness. This was because it was often mixed with things that wasn't really salt to begin with.

Jesus has told them already in the Sermon on the Mount that we are to be the salt of the world. The teaching is the same. We need to keep the salt in our life up so that we can be a help to the world. When we lose our savor, when we get involved in the things of this world that aren't salt, we become worthless.

Christ says to be salt and to cultivate that salt by having peace with one another. Cultivate that by fellowship. Don't forget these men were just arguing over who was the greatest. All of these things are related.

The passage before us today was no doubt one of the hardest we have come across in this Gospel, but the one thing about exposition of scripture is that you can't leave it out because it might be hard to understand. Exposition forces us to look at the whole council of God's word whether the passages are easy or not.

I hope it has been a blessing.

If we could sum all of this up in just few words, it would be that we need to be very careful about

sin in our lives. We need to make sure that we don't lead anyone else into sin no matter the age because every life is important in the eyes of God. Every saint is important in the eyes of God. He takes it personal when we cause others to sin.

It would also be that if there are things in our lives that cause us to stumble we should do our best to remove those things from our lives as well.

Being saved doesn't give us a license to sin. Sin always separates from God and sin always comes with consequence. We need to strive to separate ourselves from the things of this world.

And lastly, be the salt of this earth that God called us to be lest we lose our savor and become good for nothing in the kingdom of heaven.

Next week we will be taking a break from this gospel, but when we return we will be turning that metaphorical page over to chapter 10 and be looking at the subject of divorce. Not always a comfortable topic, but again we don't just get to pick and chose the stuff we want to preach. We have to preach what the Bible says.