

Seasoned with Salt and Fire.
Mark 9:42-50

Romans 12
1 Corinthians 6:12-20
Congregation Colossians 3:12-17

Last week I fully intended to actually finish out this chapter because this last half really all fits together into one big piece but I ran out of time so, that means this week...we will finish up chapter 9. I want to start this morning by reading this last half of the chapter to put it all together and remind us where we were last week since the passages this morning I think really are the flip side of what we studied last week and it's helpful to see them all together to get one big picture. So let us start this morning by reading verse 30 to the end of the chapter.

As we can see this entire section here is all about conduct. It is Christ instructing his disciples as to what discipleship looks like. Verse's 30-41 look into the aspect of humility in service to the gospel. That we are to guard ourselves against improper judgment and we see that Christ uses a child in his example of how his disciples are to be loving, and patient of those who are under them. It is the whole concept of greatness through servitude. Other religions throughout the world have taken on this theme, by teaching that one must eliminate creature comforts, one must suffer and live a life lacking of food, or sleep, or money all in the name of making oneself more spiritual, more enlightened. But that is not what Jesus is teaching here, he is not teaching elevation through suffering, or servitude, but rather that servitude is the standard, not the process in which we gain anything.

We do not serve so that we may gain, but we serve out of love for the father recognizing the grace that he showed toward us when we were not deserving, as the model for how we too approach the world around us. It is not to make oneself holier, or more spiritual, it is just the simple fact of what those who are followers of Jesus do. As we have seen over and over again in this gospel account the disciples seem to not be able to grasp Jesus teaching, but we must remember we are on a different side of the cross then they were, we have the scriptures and the full revelation of God, they did not. But eventually after the death and resurrection it does all become clear to them and they then are able to see, hear, and understand that which Jesus had taught them.

But as I said last week there are 2 sides to this coin and we must be careful to balance and not fall to either side. We must not be guilty of accepting false teachers and beliefs under this concept of humble service and love just as much as we should not harden our hearts and minds being convinced that we are only ones who are right and close our doors to others who we may not completely see eye to eye with. I was talking with Josh about this very thing Sunday afternoon and he quoted someone who I can not remember the name, but in paraphrase they said that in the Christian faith there are 3 levels of dispute. The 1st tier issues are those that if you differ from then you fall into heresy and can not be considered to actually be a Christian. Such as the Trinity, the bible is God's inspired word, the birth, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. These and others that are central to the christian faith, if you deny any of them it is to deny Christ himself. Then there is the 2nd tier issues, which are important things within the church and the body of believers but not on issues of salvation, such as eschatology, baptism, administration of the covenants, these are things that Christians can differ on, maybe to a point that they each find their own place to gather and worship but in the end we are still all one in christ.

Then there are the 3rd tier issues, which fall under things such as liberties, for example, drinking, smoking, music, observance of holidays, or the way that we conduct our church services. So it is important to understand these distinctions, what things fall under them so we can rightly react when we are confronted with any disputes or disagreements between our brothers and sisters, or those who are outside the faith who claim Christ. As Josh went on to explain, the problem with liberalization within the church is that it seeks to level the field, making all issues 3rd tier issues. Being accepting of all different beliefs and ideas under the guise that we are all going to the same place we just get there differently. And likewise the same problem is within the overly conservative understanding making the same error making all theirs equal to the 1st tier. This is where we get legalism, putting too much importance on things, we see this in such things as the King James Only view, or even making political affiliations a test of belief. IN other words, if you don't vote republican, there is no way that you are a christian.

Now that may sound absurd and a bit overboard to some, but there are many people out there, and some of us maybe even know some who make these 3rd tier debatable issues into 1st tier non debatable issues. And that is the challenge that we have in our passage here in Mark, this last half. It is the balance between humble ministry, and standing for the truth of gospel. This can be a very challenging thing to do because as we all know not everything in life is as black and white as some people like to believe that it is, and that is where we need to use discernment in our witness and ministry as to where and when it is proper to minister to others as we are ministering to children, or when it is proper to call out false teachers and liars who are leading God's people astray. One reason that this can become difficult is that a person may very well be teaching something that is not really biblically founded and leading people astray but maybe doing so out of ignorance. I think of those who in their gospel witness push and drive people to make a decision for Christ.

It is what they have been taught, it was what I was taught growing up in the church, you corner and button hole people driving them to make a statement of belief. The problem with this system of ministry is that it has over the years created 1000's of false converts who go away believing that they are saved because they said the sinners prayer on this certain date, but yet their life is a continual down slide into sin, there has not truly been repentance, nor belief but they have been convinced that there has been and the churches ministry has become instead of preaching the word of God in such a way as to convict and bring about repentance and belief, it is about managing emotions, depression, doubt, and fear and reassuring that their belief is true because you can always go back to that specific date that you asked God into your heart. So the challenge is, how do we deal with such a system? How do we deal with those who continue to minister in such a way essentially making false converts. Now I must clarify, please do not misunderstand me to say that their ministry is completely ineffective, and that all who come to Christ through this teaching have a false faith. It was through this teaching that I was saved, and many of us sitting here today have this very same experience.

But it is dangerous, it is a witness focused on mans ability, will, and desire, pushing, prodding, convincing, begging, people to just confess Christ. Instead of a witness not focused so much on creating converts, or pastor's teaching not geared so much about bringing people into the congregation, but rather just being a witness in your own life, faithfully following God, answering for the hope that is within you, sharing the gospel when the doors have been open and letting God create the converts, instead of trying to button hole every person you come across turning the gospel ministry into some sort of pushy multi level marketing style ministry.

So as you can see, it is not easy to determine which one of the 3 tiers that everything falls into, and can be difficult to discern how to react but I think it helpful to keep the teaching that we see that Jesus teaches his disciples here in Mark close to heart. I think simply, if we believe that this person is a brother or sister in Christ and we are given the opportunity to discuss such things, we must remember that this person is also a Child of Christ and should be treated as such. We should seek to instruct, to teach, and hopefully God will bring about understanding through such debates and conversions. We should have the example of Christ with the little child on his lap when he tells his disciples whoever receives one of these who are like little children, receives me. We should not be like example we have John, pointing fingers, calling out and casting judgment upon them. But instead in love, instruct, and teach with all humility and faith believing that if they are a child of God, understanding that ultimately it is the holy spirit who will open their hearts and minds, not our arguments or convincing words.

I recall Pastor Vic's story debating the Calvinists in seminary, so vehemently, he tells one that he will throw him off the balcony to see if God predestined that he will hit the ground. We have all been there have we not? Frustrated, angry, thinking that we are right, they are wrong and we react, and act out of our frustration sort of like John did here with the exorcist, who was doing what they could not. Remember they just had the demon possessed kid they could not cast out, and then they seemed to have run into someone who was as John said, Not one of us, doing something that they believed only they should be able to do. Even my own reaction when we started attending church here was one of anger. After our first Sunday here I remember telling Diana, what kind of weird cult did your mom bring us to? Vic was Preaching in (ENTER PASSAGE HERE!) talking about predestination, and salvation, and I was greatly offended for it was I who asked Jesus into my heart, it was I who decided. But Diana was intrigued and said, lets give him a few more times to explain himself.

Ultimately, when confronted with the bible, against what I believed, I had no choice to give into what the bible taught. But it wasn't through an aggressive, combative, you are wrong I am right type ordeal, it was the quiet preaching of the word that caused an explosion of anger and confusion in my heart making me have to work through my own salvation because if I didn't choose God all those years ago then how do I know I am saved! See where the danger lies in the arminian free will gospel presentation? Now I believe I was saved, not because of, but in spite of the arminian gospel message I had been taught in the churches my entire life, but for ever one who is saved, there are many who are not. There are some who I think see this gospel as a false gospel, pointing to man's ability to make a decision that the bible clearly states he is not. Making it a work of man, instead of a work of God, and there is a level where I can agree with that. It is a deceptive gospel, whose end goal seems to be to gain large numbers of people to fill the pews on Sunday.

But what do we see in our churches? There is a great falling away, churches are like revolving doors, people come and go constantly, and the youth is leaving churches in droves seeing the emptiness in the teaching, having become ministries of convincing people they are ok and need to stay on the right path instead of creating ok people who will stay on the right path through God's grace the the conviction of the holy spirit. So this is a hard one for me, as to how to classify this in our 3 tier system, and my basic rule of thumb is that I hold those who are the teachers and preachers of such things to a much higher standard as to those who are out ministering and witnessing just what they have been taught. My approach would be different to those who through study, prayer and weekly sermon prep would have had to wrestle with such issues as predestination, man's fallen condition, God's sovereignty, and seem to rather avoid those areas instead of dealing with them.

So that sort of Segways into our passage this morning on dealing with false teachers. There are many that we can listen to, or that we know of who are quite easily and obviously teaching a different gospel. And it is these that I think these verses are talking about, it is those who are knowingly, deceiving, who are peddling the gospel for their own gain, for their own power, and their own glory. They really care little about doctrinal purity, or orthodoxy and are rather concerned in selling another best seller self help book I think it is these that Jesus is talking about here in verse 42. "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." It does not bode well for those who are peddling the gospel. They will be held accountable for each and every single person that they have lead astray, that they have deceived. Verse 42 is tied directly into verse 37, whoever receives these little children receives me, and whoever receives me receives the father. The flip side of that is whoever deceives, or causes one of these little ones to stumble, to sin, has likewise done this to me and it would better that they would die a horrible death then to continue in such an act.

It is because of this harsh language that I think that Jesus is talking about those who are out and out false teachers, and deceivers, those who violate the 1st tier issues. We need to be careful as we study passages like this to not turn it into a justification to fight against everything or everyone that we disagree with. That is why I think understanding and differentiating between different tiers that we layed out earlier is important. So up to this point from verses 30 to 42, Jesus has been talking to his disciples about discipleship. Instructing them that a disciple of Christ is a humble servant who cares for the insignificant, the little children, and this applies spiritually as well as physically. Taking care of each other as we struggle and fall, having patience and love and preference towards, as Paul puts it, the weaker brother.

But as we continue on here in verse 43, there is a shift. The focus changes from discipleship, to personal conduct as Jesus goes into rather graphic detail about the importance of keeping one self apart from sin. There are some cultures who have taken some of these ideas of what Jesus says and use them in criminal punishment. You steal, you loose a hand, but that is not what Jesus is talking about here. He does not mean to start hacking off your body parts that you have used for sin, because as we know sin is not just the act, but it is the thought and intent of the heart. A footless, handless, blind man can sin just as easily as a fully able bodied person. So its obvious that he does not mean for his followers to literally start chopping off parts of their body, but rather is uses hyperbole to demonstrate the seriousness of sin, and maybe some drastic actions that need to be taken to avoid it.

As I think on what an example of this could look like, taking maybe extreme actions to avoid something that causes you to sin I instantly thought of an article that Aaron posted this week which the author was imploring his readers to cancel Netflix. He went on explaining that dangers of Netflix with it's 24/7 availability, the constant almost daily additions of new shows and movies and how some people become trapped into spending so much of their time watching Netflix that other aspects of their life start to suffer. While this author offered canceling netflix as a solution to all of his readers, that is not really the answer for we all struggle with different temptations, different sins and in his case it would seem he recognized that the temptation of netflix was to much and it was cutting into his ability to do things that truly were important, that truly mattered. He recognized his sin, and cut off that which was the tool he used to entertain that sin. But I think he missed a bigger teaching point, by not expanding it, netflix is only one picture that effects some people, but like whys there are many other things that we do that if we are not careful become addictions that start to rule our lives.

One guy I knew was addicted to buying books, said he had a basement full of books and was constantly buying books on amazon nonstop, and he recognized it was an addiction and set boundaries and limitations for himself so he would not become a slave to his addiction. Same can be said about sports, video games, family, work, money, or anything that distracts us and takes us away from our ministry and witness or prayer, or bible study, or gathering to worship, anything that is elevated above God, becomes idolatry and is therefore sinful. Notice that none of these things in and of themselves are bad, as Paul says, in 1 Corinthians that we read this morning, All things are lawful for me, but all things are not helpful, all things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any. And that is the point that I believe this author should have made in his article, and I think is a good example of putting the practice that which Jesus is teaching here in the last half of Mark 9.

There maybe things that we need to remove from our lives, or even people who cause us to stumble in our Christian faith. Anything can become sinful and what it all really depends on, what the central issue really is, is the intent of the heart. Sin starts in the heart, it starts as a thought in our minds and then acted out in our actions. But even without the actions, the sin has already started in our heart and minds. IT can be helpful to recognize things that we are particularly challenged with, things that are a temptation of sin for us and seek to remove them, but ultimately that is only once piece of the larger puzzle for it originally began in our hearts and minds. These sins, the ones that are cerebral, these thoughts of sinful acts, or things such as pride, arrogance, our only combat against them is Christ himself. We have all been there, thought something we shouldn't have, but instead of beating our heads against a wall trying to remove the thought, instead we turn to Christ for forgiveness, and strength to persevere, and to overcome. The intent of the heart, is the core of the issue, and coming to Christ is our recourse, that is how sin is dealt with. By going to God, repenting, and moving forward. Removing ourselves from what maybe a temptation we maybe facing, and continuing ever onward and upward.

These statements by Jesus here about the severity of sin, attest to the uncompromising importance of God, and the authority of Jesus, that nothing, not even that which we value the most such as our hands, feet, and eyes should stand in the way of eternal life. Jesus including these 3 things here fully encompasses the entire person, and each aspect of our lives, that which we see, that which we do, and where we go. And as we all know, these things will always be a struggle, and will always be an issue as long as we are in this body. Sin arises in our hearts and in our minds sometimes without warning, what Paul says in 2nd Corinthians chapter 10, is exactly this very issue verse 3, "For we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh." This is why cutting off body parts is not the point, "for our weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high things that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ"

And that is why it is all about, obedience to Christ, humble servitude toward God, and each other through the love of Christ shining through each and every one of us. And if there is something that is hindering you, keeping you from christian discipleship, or fellowship, or causes you to fall into sin it is better to remove it then to be tempted. But do not kid yourself that you will one day reach a point of sinless perfection and I think that is some of what Jesus is talking about I the last 2 verses here. While in this body we will never fully escape sin, "for everyone will be seasoned with fire, and every sacrifice seasoned with salt." There will be trials, there will be testing, there will be falling, but with that there should also be repentance and a turning away from sin. Salt is a preservative, and Christ is our salt, he preserves our hearts, and covers over our sins with his blood so that when the fires of temptations arise we pass through to the other side because we are preserved in Christ.

And as we know, how we come through these fiery trials and temptations help us to grow as Christians, verse 50 “Salt is good, but if the salt loses its flavor, how will you season it?” How we deal with sin in our lives, how we deal with temptations and trials proves our faith. The bible over and over uses the concept of a purifying fire, something very hot, very painful burning away the dross, the worthless parts leaving only that which is good left. And it is the same here, if Christ, our preserving salt, has no flavor then he has become worthless and our faith is nothing. When we sin, I say when not if, because it is inevitable in this life that we will, it is how we come out of it on the other side that proves the preserving salt of Christ in our life. Do we even have a recognition of sin, is there conviction of sin, is there repentance? If so, then Christ is preserving, and guarding your soul. If we think that we have no sin, or we believe that we have reached a point in our life that we no longer sin really what that is telling you is that you are lacking the holy spirit's work of conviction of sin, and if you lack the holy spirit, then you are not truly a disciple of Christ. Your claim is false, your salt is flavorless and Christ is not in you.

So “Have salt in yourself, and have peace with one another.” This final statement by Jesus sums up the last half of Mark chapter 9, it is all encompassing of Jesus teaching here on discipleship, and our personal walk in faith. Have faith in Christ who has delivered you from the bondage of sin, who has paid the ransom for you reconciling you to God. serve him humbly, with love, preferring one another over one self, and you will have peace with one another. These are the marks of a true disciple of Christ.