

Mark 9:30-50
April 18, 2010
Lynchburg, Virginia

EXHORDIUM

Remember to keep this chapter in context. The Lord is teaching us about what it means to be transfigured, transformed into the body of Christ. We are to be like Jesus. His disciples know this but find themselves again and again struggling to be like the Lord. Jesus patiently teaches them that they must forsake their own ways, their own plans, their own way of looking at the world and embrace His.

This entails sacrifice, self-denial, and renewal. He drives this home very well in this section.

EXEGESIS

And they departed thence, and passed through Galilee; and he would not that any man should know *it*.³¹ For he taught his disciples, and said unto them, The Son of man is delivered into the hands of men, and they shall kill him; and after that he is killed, he shall rise the third day.³² But they understood not that saying, and were afraid to ask him.

Jesus has now returned to Galilee and was not desirous of crowds. Perhaps this is because He wanted some time to spend teaching His apostles. The lesson He teaches them is a hard one and they still do not get it. They assume that Jesus is still telling parables. Or, perhaps they were afraid that He was warning them that their nice ride was about over.

We should wonder why they were afraid to speak to Him. Were they afraid of Jesus? Then, perhaps they did not know Him well enough. Were they afraid of the truth? Then, perhaps they were not submitted to the authority of God.

The Bible tells us to ask God for wisdom. If we do not understand, we should ask. The disciples do not do so.

³³And he came to Capernaum: and being in the house he asked them, What was it that ye disputed among yourselves by the way?

Jesus knew the answer to His question. He knew what they were disputing. The reason all of the events are happening around them the way

they are happening is expressly because Jesus knows what they are disputing.

³⁴But they held their peace: for by the way they had disputed among themselves, who *should be* the greatest.

They held their peace. Their response reveals that they are getting some of Jesus's points. They have a reason to be ashamed of their talk. Their silence reveals their shame.

Sometimes this is not from shame. It may come as an unwillingness to put oneself forward. You may think that you should put yourself forward but are unwilling to do so because of how it might look. Many men do not want to be seen grasping for power, even if power is the exact thing they desire to grasp.

³⁵And he sat down, and called the twelve, and saith unto them, If any man desire to be first, *the same shall be last of all, and servant of all.*

This saying seems to make sense to us now but it is not the sentiment of the ancient world. Power was the way to move forward. So, the way Jesus did things was definitely a new way of thinking.

The desire to be first in God's Kingdom is a good way to get humbled by the Lord. Christians should be pleased with honoring the Lord. If the Lord exalts you, then you should be glad. If you exalt yourself apart from the Lord's blessing, you should be worried. The Lord raises the humble but humbles the proud.

So, Jesus is looking for the kind of men who are willing to serve others. *The best servants are the best men in Jesus's Kingdom.* That is really a new leadership quality. We do not ordinarily understand true service and humility as a good quality for a leader. That sort of man would be seen as soft or compromising. But Jesus both served, remember Him washing the disciples' feet? And was tough, remember Him driving the money changers from the Temple. The fact that He was a true servant did not make Him weak.

Humble men must be comfortable in their own skin. They do not feel threatened by others. They can serve because they are not concerned about keeping others down. They are truly glad if someone is exalted over them. That is contrary to worldly thinking. But it is most definitely the way of Jesus.

This passage is one that is confusing. We have all seen the good Christian kids who desire to be first, trying to get the last place in line. But that desire to be last is in fact a hidden desire to be first. They still have not got over the disease of self-promotion. If you are working hard to be first, the less honorable among you will be exalted above you. If you are truly trying to serve them, the fact that the Lord is moving you up the line will not even be noticed by you.

The seat of honor is often sought out by aspiring young men. When they do not get the seat of honor, they are angry and bitter. They feel they deserve it. However, when a truly humble man is given the seat of honor, he is almost embarrassed because he knows that he really does not deserve it. And, as it turns out his knowing that he does not deserve it is the exact qualification for receiving the honor.

There is another way to be tempted in this area. Christians learn the lingo. Oh, you go ahead of me, I am unworthy. But we are fishing for a compliment as to how worthy we really are. We really do desire the seat of honor, and we think we deserve it. We are just trying to get someone else to say so, instead of ourselves. Let another praise thee and not thine own mouth. The truly spiritual thing is to realize that you do not really deserve any honor. Once you are there, then you are sure to get the kind of honor that matters, honor from the Lord.

³⁶And he took a child, and set him in the midst of them: and when he had taken him in his arms, he said unto them, ³⁷Whosoever shall receive one of such children in my name, receiveth me: and whosoever shall receive me, receiveth not me, but him that sent me.

Jesus receives a baby. What a wonderful picture of our Lord, one who is a bachelor but who loves the little children.

Literally, He took him in the crook of His arms.

Whoever receives children related to Me, receives Me. Jesus says this directly before John protests about it.

Whoever receives Jesus's people, receives the Father. BUT, whoever rejects Jesus and His people, reject the Father.

This and other verses about the way Jesus received little infants are strong textual reasons why we receive little children at baptism and the Lord's Supper. We do not want to be among those who do not receive the children. Jesus says that is tantamount to rejecting the Lord.

³⁸And John answered him, saying, Master, we saw one casting out devils in thy name, and he followeth not us: and we forbad him, because he followeth not us.

John has a party spirit. We are not told if this man was basically in the right or not. Perhaps this man was confused and stayed separate from the disciples for a specific reason. Or, perhaps he was really on board with them but he was just going about his business a different way. Either way, the response of Jesus toward him is quite different than the response of John and the Apostles. Jesus includes him. John excludes him.

³⁹But Jesus said, Forbid him not: for there is no man which shall do a miracle in my name, that can lightly speak evil of me. ⁴⁰For he that is not against us is on our part.

The man is attempting to do a miracle by the power of the name of Jesus. If he is successful he will no doubt understand that his power comes directly from the Lord. Thus, he will speak well of the Lord and not evil. That promotes the Lord Jesus and Jesus seems to believe that is reason enough not to condemn the man.

Paul makes a similar statement in the epistles that even when Christ is preached for ill motives, Christ is still preached. *There are many true Christians who were brought into the kingdom of God by hucksters and charlatans. This only shows the power of God.*

But Jesus makes the further statement that he that is not against us is on our part. He only counts as enemies those that are actively against Him and His doctrine. Remember, He did count Peter a temporary enemy when he was acting like the devil. But those who are speaking well of Jesus or acting appropriately in His name ought not to be counted as enemies. Until they show themselves as enemies, we should assume that they are on our side.

This is very important. Our world of righteous zeal tends to quickly mark out enemies where there are friends. As a result, what ought to be real enemies become friends to our enemies. So, instead of having the two righteous men as allies against evil, we have a righteous man and an evil man taking up the same side against righteousness. Yes, I know, this cannot be. At least, it cannot be for any length of time. When the righteous take up sides with evil, it will not be long before the righteous one is turned to do evil.

Jesus seems to think the same about the one who has ill motives, or ‘does not follow with us.’ If such a man follows with the right people or doctrines,

he, himself, will likely be turned from his questionable or evil way towards Jesus and righteousness.

⁴¹For whosoever shall give you a cup of water to drink in my name, because ye belong to Christ, verily I say unto you, he shall not lose his reward.

Even a small deed done in the name of Christ receives a heavenly reward.

A cup of water is cheap. But a cup of water is vital. This can be read that whoever does even the smallest thing for my people, gains a great reward. But it can also be seen as doing the one thing that is vital. If you do the vital thing, that is recognize who my people are, then the Lord will reward you.

Of course, the reverse is also true. Whoever refuses to give water to the Lord's people will not receive a reward. Furthermore, they may receive wrath in place of mercy, where their worm dieth not and the fire is not quenched.

⁴²And 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.

Who are the Little Ones?

First, the little child who was demon possessed. Second, the one who was casting out demons but was not traveling with the disciples. Third, the little child that Jesus placed in their midst. Fourth, the disciples themselves.

We must be very careful about who we make our enemies, who we declare to be outside the Kingdom of God. We must not cause God's true disciples to stumble. There is a great deal of this going on today. Some would rather err on this side, saying that so and so is not a Christian. If that statement causes further love and service in order to bring them closer to Christ and assurance, then that is okay. But if it causes you to write them off as unbelievers, then you are putting a stumbling block in their way. I hope you are a really good swimmer.

⁴³And 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:

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

We need to understand the context of this statement. Jesus could have delivered this entire scene in twenty or thirty minutes. Maybe it went 40 and was the perfect sermon. We tend to dissect a passage like this in many weeks and thus we lose the entire thrust of the story.

Jesus is giving some general teaching here about the nature of discipleship. Some of this applies specifically to His expectations of the disciples and Apostles. Some of it applies more generally to the nature of obedience in the New Testament.

This does not come out clearly until the very end of the passage which speaks of having peace with one another. However, the Lord is establishing an entirely new paradigm in the Earth about the nature of ruling. Since the fall of man, ruling had always to do with dominance and power. But now Jesus is instituting a new way. *Of course, the new way that Jesus is instituting has always been God's way. God has not changed. But now that God has come in the flesh, He has been able to dramatically show how man must serve man. He did this by having God serve man. This entire mindset is still foreign to the masses, even to those closest to Jesus.*

So, this passage about removing offending parts has to do with creating strife and division among the brethren. It has to do with replacing the need to dominate with the command to serve.

The hand is what you do. Giving water to a little one involves the hand. Giving a hand up. Touching the sick and needy.

The hands also are involved in stealing, rude gestures, touching what is defiled, opposing the brethren by shunning away.

Where their worm dieth not and the fire is not quenched. In Isaiah 66 at the very end of the glorious reign of Jesus we see that judgment still looms.

⁴⁵And 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:

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

The hand is vital. The foot likewise is vital organ. Our hands help us to do all that is good. Our feet take us to the right place.

The foot takes you to church. The foot walks a mile with a neighbor. The foot stands fast in storms, trials and struggles. The foot is the strength and power of a man. It holds firm. A sure foot keeps him from stumbling.

The foot also goes where it should not. It walks a course with sinners as well as saints. The foot trips and causes the entire body to stumble and perhaps even fall. A very small difference in the road or floor can cause the foot to stumble.

Time and place cause the righteous to stumble. Go where you should when you should and all will be well. Go where you should not when you should not and ever living worm and fire awaits you.

⁴⁷And 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:

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

How vital are the eyes? Eyes see the good of the world and the beauty of the creation. They read the Word of God. They make eye and soul contact with brothers and sisters in Christ. They look with devotion on their spouse and children. They also watch the minister, see the elements of the sacraments.

As has been accurately said, “The eyes are the window to the heart.”

The eyes also get easily distracted. The distraction of the eye causes the body to be led astray. A driver can be distracted causing his car to crash and it kills everyone in it. The eyes can be attracted by that which is not lawful; remember David and Bathsheba. It can desire another man’s wife, your neighbor’s stuff, the glitter of things that are not yours, movies and writings that should not be viewed. The eyes are a great gift but can also be an easy way to drift away from the faith. Cain saw the Abel sacrifice was received of the Lord. This produced a murderous envy in him.

⁴⁹For every one shall be salted with fire, and every sacrifice shall be salted with salt. ⁵⁰Salt is good: but if the salt have lost his saltness, wherewith will ye season it?

Salted with fire; Fire is a purifying element. It purges out the dross and leaves what is refined. It leaves that which is good. Speaking of spices, salt is the queen of spices. It takes a tasteless thing and makes it more than edible, even delicious. Consider potatoes, green beans, some mild flavored meats. Without salt, they would be bland. With the salt, they are pleasing to the pallet. Why not just eat the salt? Because by itself, it cannot be consumed, except in minute amounts. It enhances. We are called to do that. We are to be the salt of the Earth. We are to season that which is good,

adding our preserving, flavoring, healthy flavor to that those people whom God has given us.

But if you are not salty, what good are you. Salt is a preservative and a spice. But if it does not preserve or flavor, what good is it? It is useless.

EXHORTATION

Have salt in yourselves, and have peace one with another.

What is the process of losing saltiness? Well, we have seen part of the problem among the disciples. They were busy trying to advance themselves. They are meant to of service to others. They are to season and preserve the lives of others. Instead, they seek to advance themselves, even to the danger of little ones who are entrusted to them. They are meant to be of service but they seek to put themselves forward time and time again.

You might say that each time you do this, you become a little less salty. So, also, the reverse is true. Each time you serve others, you season them, proving your own ingredient, saltiness.

Men crave saltiness. We love it in crackers, or pretzels, or popcorn. Not too much but just the right amount and at the right time. We can get too much but that sense of too much also passes and we want more.

So, you can be too salty, overpowering those in your area of influence. You can also be too weak, not giving any flavor to anybody.

But what is the principle? To be salt, having salt in yourselves, and this saltiness is characterized by peace in your midst.

Peace shows your salt. Lack of peace shows that you are not salty, have lost your saltiness. And if you have lost your saltiness, then you are good for nothing. So, if you have been the cause of a lack of peace, then you are less salty, in danger of being trampled under foot.

Then, you must desire peace. And the only way to work towards peace is to humble yourself. Think of others more highly than yourself. Let love cover a multitude of sins. Do not think about grasping authority or power. Do not fight those who are on your side. Do not say good things about Christ and evil things about your brothers. For when you do this, your members, hands, feet, eyes, which are meant to serve, are now causing you to stumble. Pluck them out, lop them off, purge the sin that easily entices. Recognize those things in you so that you can be salty with your brothers and sisters, making them taste as good as they possibly can.

Do this and you will be at peace.