

The Gospel of Mark

Mark 9.38-50

November 16, 2014

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- As we step into this scripture, it is important to remember the journey that the disciples have been on over the last 2 chapters.
- It has been event after event of them just not getting what kind of kingdom Jesus was there to usher in and who exactly Jesus was.
 - **Jesus predicts his death:** Peter reprimands Him for saying this because of his expectation of a military Messiah.
 - **Transfiguration:** Peter, James and John experience the glory of God and are told by Him that Jesus is His son and that they are to listen to Him.
 - **Failed Exorcism:** the disciples fail to cast a demon out of a boy because their hearts were not aligned with God and his kingdom purpose.
 - **Arguing over who is the greatest:** the disciples still have an attitude that what they are a part of has to do with their own gain (leaven of the Pharisees and Herod).
- This scripture is a continuation of the context that Jesus and his disciples were in when Jesus taught about who is the greatest.
- They were meeting in a house in Capernaum because they were no longer welcome in the temple. Along with his disciples, there were other followers including children there with them.
- In all of this, the disciples continue to miss who Jesus is and that He is teaching about a kingdom that is different than what they are expecting. An **upside down kingdom**.
 - This idea continues into Jesus' teaching in this next section as He tells the disciples how they are to live as his followers; both personally and in community.

Mark 9.38-41

- Just after Jesus teaches the disciples that this new kingdom is not about status, title or exclusivity, the disciples get right back into that attitude.
- Following Jesus' teaching on being welcoming, John "tattles" to Jesus about a man who had cast demons in Jesus' name.
 - John reports this to Jesus with an "us and them" attitude. They think that because they are in Jesus' inner circle, then they are to be the only ones doing the work of Jesus.
 - The ironic part about this is that just earlier (vs.18) the disciples had failed at doing the exact thing that this man had done successfully.
- Jesus responds by reminding the disciples that this new kingdom is one of inclusiveness, not exclusiveness.

- You are either against Jesus or you are for Him. There is no in between. The disciples are no more special than anyone else who works in the name of Jesus (for the right reasons).
 - In order for the name of Jesus to have effect through this man, he would have had to welcome Jesus in his life.
- Jesus sees us all on the same level. There is no one person who is greater than the other no matter how close they are to Jesus. This goes against the Pharisee's attitude.
- Even a cup of water...
 - Even the smallest of things done in the name of Jesus matter to the kingdom.
 - The reward for choosing to be "for Jesus" is eternal life.
- We are missing what Jesus and his kingdom is all about as soon as we start to compare ourselves to each other. When we look at others in the body of Christ and think we are either better than them or less than them, it's going to bring nothing but trouble.
- Within our smaller groups in our community we should always have the attitude of inclusiveness and welcome. Fight against the attitude that creates cliques!
- However we serve within our community, our attitude should not be about ourselves and how we are seen or how "good" our gifts are, but it should be about advancing the kingdom of God.
- **Moses & Joshua: Numbers 11:26-29**
- If we have a kingdom-minded attitude, the Lord will continue to grow His church and move as He wants to. Let's not get in the way by getting caught up in titles, hierarchy or exclusiveness!
- Let's avoid comparing ourselves to other communities of believers.
- It is so easy to compare with the church down the road and put them down because they don't do things like we do.
- We need to celebrate and be excited for what God is doing no matter what it looks like. If it is done in Jesus' name, it is for the kingdom.
- We are all on the same team!
- The "better than" attitude is one that can destroy Christian community.
- "The forces who call on Jesus' name in the battle against evil can only be weakened by the cutthroat competitions among themselves." – David E. Garland

Mark 9:42-49

- Although Jesus did not mean this literally, what he says in this script is something that he is very serious about.
 - He repeats the idea to show that he means many different sins, but also to get the point across.
 - Not only that, he emphasizes the consequences of choosing not to cut the sin out that is causing you or others to stumble.
 - Disqualification from eternal life: HELL.
 - Everyone will be tested with fire in the end. Will that fire will be purifying, or destructive?
 - So this is definitely not a teaching to be taken lightly.

- The seriousness is emphasized right away with Jesus' description of what would happen if you were to cause other believers to stumble.
 - Remember that "little ones" describes believers from the disciples to those who are seen as the least of the least.
- We need to check our hearts and remember that it is NOT ABOUT US. When we trip others up, it's usually because we are being selfish and wanting to live the way we want to live.
 - This goes again this **upside-down kingdom** that Jesus is ushering in.
- We also need to be willing to cut out things that are causing ourselves to sin.
 - Doing this can be VERY hard and can cause a considerable amount of pain.
- Jesus is giving the option of life or death when it comes to sin lives.
- The beauty about this is that cutting something off, though painful at first, will actually bring healing in the end.
- *Christ is worth any possible loss or pain!*

Mark 9.50

- Rikk Watts says it best:
 - "Salt losing its saltiness signals a shift to God's purpose in salting the disciples. Imitating Jesus' cross-bearing character, they are to be God's salt in his world. For this reason, in contrast to the divisive yeast of Herod and the Pharisees, the disciples' 'salty' welcoming of the little ones and not causing even the least to stumble maintains the peace that is the hallmark of God's new exodus."
- When we take on this kind of character, not only can we bring peace to our Christian community, but we can make a difference in the "flavor" of the world!
- Let's get on board with the reverse kingdom and start making a difference in Christ's church and in this world!

Discussion Questions

- Do you have an "upside down" kingdom attitude? What kind of things should we put aside in order to line up with what the kingdom is all about?
- Are there things in our lives that are causing OTHERS around us to stumble? Are they setting the wrong example or even influencing them to live in a way that is not Christ like?
- Are there things in your life that are causing YOU to stumble? Relationships, jobs, or habits that are against God's will.
- How do we go about cutting these things out of our lives in a healthy way so that we can find life?
- How can you show the character of Christ in your daily life so that others will see Jesus in you?