

FIRE, SALT, AND PEACE

Mark 9:38-50

Intro: I have mentioned a number of times since we started the study of the Gospel according to Mark, that much of the Lord's ministry on earth was devoted to *the training of the twelve*, those last five words being the title of a book I have mentioned before. It was written by A. B. Bruce, who many years ago was the Professor of Apologetics and New Testament Exegesis at the Free Church College in Glasgow, Scotland. It is a book of over five hundred pages in which he took various passages out of the Gospels in which we see where and how the Lord devoted Himself to the preparation of the twelve disciples for the apostleship to which He had called them. And this 9th chapter of Mark is one of the passages that he discussed. Our Lord's ministry to His disciples is not only important from the standpoint that we can see the problems that the disciples had, and how the Lord sought to correct them, but they are important for us. We have the same problems that the twelve disciples did, and so the help that the Lord gave His disciples, has been preserved in the Gospels to be of help to us. The Lord did not want His disciples to simply go through the motions of serving the Lord, but He wanted them to glorify God in their service, and to be fruitful!

The nature of the problems that were demonstrated by the disciples, came from different sources. In the passage before us here in Mark 9 show that one of their biggest difficulties came from their relationship with each other. We saw, for example, in the passage that we had last week, that when the Lord and His disciples got back to Capernaum, the Lord asked them what they were disputing about as they journeyed from Caesarea Philippi back to Capernaum. None of the disciples wanted to tell Him because they were arguing about who was to be "the greatest." That showed how little they had learned about the Lord because you don't talk about being "the greatest" unless you have a proud heart. As Bishop Ryle said in the comment which I read to you, "We were all born Pharisees." He meant by that we are all proud by birth. You can see how even babies will fight over toys. Dr. Mitchell used to say that pride is the root sin, the sin from which all other sins are produced. Pride was responsible for the fall of Satan when he rebelled against God. And there is not a one of us here who has not had real trouble with pride. By nature we are proud. All people are. And it is tragic when it works its way into the work of the Lord. Nobody wants to be last; we all want to be first. We will start our own team rather than be the last one to be chosen for somebody else's

team.

Well, where does pride come in as far as our text today is concerned? You see it in verse 38, the first verse of our text. The spokesman was the Apostle John. It was very clear that he was speaking for the twelve.

I. THE ACTION TAKEN BY THE TWELVE (Mark 9:38).

Twice you have the pronoun “we,” and twice you have the pronoun “us.”

Notice what this person they had found, was doing. He was casting out demons, but he was doing it in the Name of the Lord. He may have been a disciple of John the Baptist who had not joined with the disciples and others who were following the Lord, but he was performing genuine miracles, delivering people who were demon-possessed (a miracle, by the way, that the nine disciples were not able to perform while the Lord, Peter, James, and John were on the Mount of Transfiguration. From what the Lord told His disciples when they asked Him why they could not cast out the demon from that little boy, we can assume, I believe, that this man to whom the apostles objected, was a man of prayer. He must have been. And yet it did not appear to John that they were objecting to seeing people delivered from demons, the Devil’s henchmen. Twice they said that it bothered them that “he followeth not us.” Pride also makes us jealous, and the disciples were clearly jealous of this man.

We are not told why this man did not join with the disciples of the Lord, but as David Brown brings out in his commentary on this passage, *why he didn’t* was not the disciples’ business. But, as the Lord pointed out, if this man were doing his work in the Name of the Lord, the Lord Jesus, he was on their side. This means that the attitude of the disciples was driving a wedge between themselves and another servant of the Lord, a thing which greatly displeases the Lord. But it is wonderful to read 1 John and be reminded of how, in the intervening years, the Apostle John had changed for him to write so strongly that we should, as the Lord’s people, love one another.

But what was the Lord’s response? Evidently John and the other disciples thought that they would have the Lord’s approval. But they didn’t get His approval. His response begins in verse 39, and goes down to the end of the chapter (v. 50). The Lord did the talking, all of it, and the disciples did the listening. Weren’t John and James and Peter told on

the Mount of Transfiguration by the Father's voice from heaven, that they were to "hear Him." And that is what they were doing as He spoke to them at length.

II. THE LORD'S RESPONSE TO HIS DISCIPLES (Mark 9:39-50).

This is not an easy passage to explain. Much has been written on it, and there has been much disagreement over what the Lord said to His disciples. I will tell you what I think is right, and what I am not clear on, I will acknowledge that also.

In the first place, in verses 39 and 40, the Lord said that you don't have to worry about a person who could perform such miracles as this man was performing *in the Lord's Name*. *He was giving the Lord the glory. He was saying that it was by the power of the Lord he was able to cast out demons.* And so the Lord said that this kind of a man is not going to speak evil of the Lord. "Lightly" means that he is not going to be in a hurry to say bad things about the Lord. Instead, He will give the Lord the glory that His Name deserves.

So the Lord was saying that even though this man had not joined with us, he actually is on our side. What a person says about the Lord Jesus Christ is important to notice. That is the key point. Notice that the Lord was emphasizing that phrase in these verses. See verses 37, 38, 39, 41.

This man which John and the other disciples opposed, was actually a better example of what a true disciple should be, than the twelve disciples were. He did not oppose them. He was not critical of them, nor was he trying to stop them. He was just serving the Lord quietly and effectively as evidence that the Lord's blessing was upon him.

Sometime people may not know as much as we think we know, and they may not be living as close to the Lord as we think we are, but still they belong to the Lord, and we need to rejoice if there is true evidence of the blessing of the Lord upon them. The evidence that we belong to the Lord is not to be seen just in the works that we do, but it is in that we know the Lord and are doing what we do in His Name and for His glory, not our own.

And then the Lord went on to talk about little, insignificant deeds in verse 41, and in little, insignificant people in verse 42. The point that the Lord

was making, was that we need to be taking care of each other, even to giving another believer a drink of water, or making sure that we do not offend even a little child. To offend means to cause a child to stumble morally, to entice them into sin. People may think that they are getting away with a lot of the things that they are doing today, especially to little children, but let me say right now that they are getting away with nothing that is displeasing to God – absolutely nothing!

Evidently millstones came in different sizes – a size that a housewife would use in preparing a meal, and another size that would be more like was used in a mill. The Lord was speaking of the latter. He meant that what a man, or woman, would get for molesting a little one who believes in Him, would be infinitely worse than having a millstone tied around his neck and then throwing him in the sea.

And then the Lord did a very unusual thing. He spoke of a person's hand, a person's foot, and a person's eye. And he used the same word for "offend" with each one of them, that He used for offend a little child who believes in Him. It is the Greek word from which we get our English word *scandal*, or the verb *scandalize*.

Now I will tell you what I think the Lord was doing at this point in His words to the disciples. He was emphasizing what a morally rotten world we live in. The disciples were being called to be apostles, to learn (that is a disciple, a learner), and then to go (an apostle is one sent out from the sender to those who need his message). But what kind of a disciple will we be if we are self-seeking, jealous people who can't even get along with each other? If we are going to fight each other, how can we expect to fight and win against the enemy? This man whom the disciples wanted to shut down, was delivering people from demons. Why would John and the disciples want to stop that?

People are on their way to hell, and they don't know it. They are going to a place where the fire shall never be quenched, and yet where even a worm will survive. People, even some evangelicals, don't believe in an eternal hell anymore, but that doesn't change the truth about hell. That is what the Lord was speaking about here. People are going to hell every day, and while they go, the Lord's people are fighting among themselves motivated by pride and jealousy, which are both sins.

The Lord says we need to get people to think about their hands, and then

about their feet, and then about their eyes. We all have two of each of them – two hands, two feet, and two eyes.

Let us all stop and think for a moment about our hands, our feet, and our eyes. How have I been using my hands this week? Have they gotten me into trouble, into sin? What about my feet? Where have I let them take me? They brought us to church today, but where have they taken you this week, or any time in the past? And what have you been looking at this week? Would you be ashamed to tell us about the book you are reading now, or the magazine that you looked at this week, or the program on TV that you have been watching?

Instead of fighting with each other, we need to talk to people about sin. I know that is not anybody's favorite subject, but sin is our problem. And the people who do not find the remedy for their sin, are going to hell. And the fire there never goes out. It just keeps burning and burning and burning for all eternity. And if you die without trusting in Jesus Christ as your Savior, you are going to be locked into hell forever. Then nobody will have to convince you how terrible sin is before God.

In verse 40 the Lord Jesus said, "For every one shall be salted with fire." I don't think that the Lord was talking there about the fiery trials that we as the children often go through in this life. I think that He was saying that instead of being salted with salt, and brought to Christ, you will be salted with the eternal fire of hell from which there will be no deliverance. Should we as the Lord's people be trying to make a name for ourselves and contending with each other instead of spending our lives as the salt of the earth, making the Gospel tasty and delicious by the lives we live, not only for God, but for each other.

We as Christians need to study our Lord's words found in the Gospel of Matthew concerning ourselves as salt. Matthew 5:13 parallels what we are looking at this morning here at the end of Mark 9. Listen to the Lord's words in Matthew 5:13. He said, speaking to His disciples (the Sermon on the Mount was for His disciples):

13 Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? it is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men (Matt. 5:13).

Christian, are you listening to me? The Lord Jesus said that we "are the salt of the earth." This means that the Lord intends for us as Christians by the lives we live, do for the Gospel, what salt does for our food. When

you have a good meal, you tell people about it, don't you? Have you ever heard a message that can compare with the Gospel, that Christ died for our sins, that whosoever believeth in Him shall not perish, shall not go to hell, but shall have everlasting life.

As most of you know at the present time I am teaching the first epistle of Peter, and I can hardly wait to get to the fifteenth verse of chapter 3. Peter teaches in 1 Peter that times will get tough for us as Christians. The world will always give us a bad time. But even when the trials become fiery, it is not to make any difference in the way we live. We are to go right on seeking to please the Lord in every part of our lives. No trials are to change the way we live. And then Peter says this in 1 Peter 3:15: "Be ready." Ready for what? "Be ready to give an answer to every man that asketh a reason for the hope that is in you." And we are to do it "with meekness and fear."

When this happens, people will be to realize, by the grace of God, what it means that we are the light of the world.

Now I understand that salt can never really lose its saltiness. But a Christian can. And a part of that is when we fight with each other. That is what the Lord was concerned about with the disciples. If they were worrying about what other Christians were doing, critical of them, jealous of them, then the world not see the power of God in action. I know that the Lord can reach people any way He wants to. After all, He is God. But I also know that the normal way He has chosen to spread the Gospel is through His people.

We often forget some of the last words that our Lord spoke to His disciples before He was crucified. You will find what I am referring to by reading John 13:34-35:

34 A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another.

35 By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.

Concl: I want to close with our Lord's words at the end of our text in Mark 9. Everyone who dies without Christ will be salted with fire, the fire of hell. But those who are offered as a living sacrifice to God, are salted with salt. And this is good, meaning, the best. But the Lord said, "If the salt have lost its saltiness, wherewith will ye season it, *i.e.*, the

sacrifice?” Have you lost your saltiness by your pride, by your jealousy, by your coldness of heart, by your disobedience to God’s Word, or by some particular sin? If so, “have salt in yourselves.” This means, get back into fellowship with the Lord, *and with His people*. You can’t be in fellowship with the Lord if you are out of fellowship with any of His people. What we need if we are to be useful and fruitful instruments in the hands of the Lord, is to “have peace with one another.”

A greater tragedy than the immoral condition of the world, is the lack of spiritual power that there is in the professing church today. Much of the trouble is inside the church, among ourselves. When believers are in fellowship with each other, and with the Lord, the church will once again be a mighty force in the world, “the salt of the earth” and “the light of the world.” May the Lord meet our need that we may be useful in His hands in attracting others to Christ.