

READ Mark 9:30-32

Since Peter's confession of Jesus as the Christ, the Messiah of God, our Lord has been busy doing everything He can to teach these men what it means to truly be disciples of His. We have seen Him emphasize the importance of taking up their own crosses in order to follow Him (**8:35-9:1**), the need for constant prayer and growth in faith (**9:14-29**), and we have also seen within this text we just read together at least the second occasion where Jesus has plainly spoken of His impending betrayal, death, and resurrection. Certainly He desires greatly for His disciples to be ready and prepared to handle the difficulties that are coming their way in the near future.

Unfortunately, instead of growing in their faiths and strengthening themselves for what is to come, the Apostles allow fear to control them. Mark writes, *"But they did not understand this statement, and they were afraid to ask Him."* (**9:32**) We have noted fear as being something that has shown itself on numerous occasions throughout this Gospel account (**5:33-Jairus & 5:36-woman with bleeding issue**), but instead of the Apostles using their fear as a springboard to move closer to Jesus...they allow it to create distance between themselves and Him through their lack of understanding (**4:40; 6:50; 9:32**).

Yet, Jesus is not going to give up on these men. He is going to continue stressing to them the importance of true discipleship and what it demands of them. As they arrive at Capernaum, we see a new issue rise to the surface...conflict among the Apostles and even between them and others outside of this inner circle of Jesus. Let's read this text of **Mark 9:33-50**, consider the three sections that are present, identify the sources of conflict, and recognize Jesus's solutions for peace to be present not only among these men, but also between all men and women as we seek to serve God.

Mark 9:33-50

A. Personal Pride Hinders Peace (Mark 9:33-37)

1. After arriving in Capernaum and entering the house they would be staying in, Jesus asks the Apostles what they had been arguing about along the way. Of course, this wasn't done because Jesus didn't know, but it was done as an opportunity for Jesus to teach upon the important issue of conflict and how we can grow past it in order to have peace with others. The Apostles are not very forthcoming with the topic of their argument, but that doesn't stop Jesus from sitting them down and admonishing them for their pride in wanting to be the greatest amongst themselves.
2. We don't know for certain, but it could be that Peter, James, and John are thinking a bit highly of themselves because they were able to be present for Jesus's glorified transfiguration where Moses and Elijah's spirits were also present. Perhaps they saw themselves as the most important of the Apostles and wanted to hold it over the other Apostles' heads, even if the others weren't fully aware of what had taken place. Maybe this event was the precipice for their argument, but again we cannot be certain. What we can ascertain is there was conflict among this group of important men, and pride was very much the instigator.
3. As a response to the conflict before Him, Jesus offers a very counterintuitive teaching point. *"If anyone wants to be first, he must be last and servant of all."* (**9:35**) Surely this teaching alone would have been befuddling to the Apostles, but Jesus wants to make sure they really get the point, so He calls a child to Himself and states, *"Whoever welcomes one little child such as this in my name welcomes me. And whoever welcomes me does not welcome me, but Him who sent me."* (**9:37**) Here we have Jesus teaching not only through principle, but He is also teaching strongly through illustration.

- a) First, Jesus speaks against the pride that was causing these men to fight and bicker over who was the most important among them. His response is to tell them that greatness in His eyes wasn't for the most prideful, but it was reserved for those who were the most humble. The one who would be great before Jesus was the person who was willing to serve those around him. Just how far was this to go? To what extent were they to serve others?
 - b) Secondly, Jesus states they are to take it so far as to even be willing to welcome, love, and serve children. This illustration doesn't have the same impact on us as it would have for that audience because we, for the most part, put great value upon children in our culture. However, that simply wasn't the case in the first century. In *Exploring The New Testament World*, Albert Bell gives us insight into the attitude towards children in antiquity as he cites what Pliny writes concerning a friend of his, "*He has several children, for here too he has done his duty as a good citizen, and has chosen to enjoy the blessing of a fruitful marriage at a time when the advantages of remaining childless make most people feel a single child is a burden.*" (Bell, 238) Did you catch that? At that point in history and in that culture, children were often seen as nothing more than a burden. They were seen as useless in many ways which is why they were often rushed through childhood and into a more mature state as quickly as possible. (Bell, 238) Therefore, for Jesus to say that His disciples ought to even serve the needs of a child would have been completely against the norm. Few saw any need to serve children because they couldn't do anything for you in return.
4. Herein, lies the point Jesus is getting at. Those who would be great would be like Jesus Himself. Let's remember that Jesus has been speaking for some time about His impending death, and He was doing so with the knowledge that He was giving up His life for people were who completely undeserving (**Romans 5:6-11**). Yet, that He was still willing to carry out such a humble sacrifice is why God would exalt Him to a position above all others as Lord of the heavenly Kingdom. (**Philippians 2:9-11**). Those same principles that applied to Jesus in what He was doing were ready to be applied to His Apostles if they would only humble themselves in order to serve others, especially those who were the least among them. Many people in positions of influence seek to throw their weight around and run over the little guy, but Jesus said this was not to be the case for His Apostles and His followers.

B. Partiality Hinders Peace (Mark 9:38-41)

1. Yet, even with this strong rebuke and admonishment, John still speaks up and raises another issue of conflict that had been experienced by the Apostles. He tells of the Apostles coming across someone who was driving out demons in the name of Jesus. He states they had tried to stop him, and he gave the reasoning for them doing such as the fact that the man wasn't following the Apostles. This man seemingly was not a part of this inner circle of Jesus followers who had been with Him throughout His ministry.
2. I'm not exactly sure why John thought this was the appropriate thing to share at the moment since he and the others have just been told about the need for humility and servitude, but Jesus again quickly corrects John and the Apostles for their behavior towards that man. He begins by stating that such a person doesn't need to be stopped since he is doing such a great deed in His name. Now, we have to balance this out with a couple of things. First, we have already seen where it is believed that evil forces could be capable of doing such a thing as a trick. Remember this was claimed by the scribes in **3:22**. Additionally, Jesus also taught that simply doing something in His name didn't mean it was acceptable before God (**Matthew 7:21-23**). However, these issues don't seem to be at play here because Jesus rebukes John and the Apostles for trying to stop this man...which it doesn't seem they were able to do anyway. So what is Jesus getting at with these comments?

3. I believe His next statement of *"For whoever is not against us is for us"* gets to the heart of what Jesus is trying to get across to these men. They were seeing this situation as if this other guy wasn't on their team so he shouldn't be doing whatever it was he was doing in the name of Jesus. They saw him as being an outsider to their special group and as a result he wasn't fit to do the incredible deeds he was performing. Jesus says this mindset is wrong and those who were doing such things were for Jesus and supporting His causes. Yet, we might be left wondering who this guy was. Let's remember that Luke's Gospel account speaks of another group of about 70 that Jesus would send out in the same fashion as He had these twelve Apostles. They would be serving in the same capacity as the Apostles as carriers of the message of Jesus and the kingdom, and they even came back praising Him for the ability to cast out demons in His name. **(Luke 10:1-20)** I'm not sure if the chronology fits to where this particular man would be one of that group, but it does simply show us that there were others out there doing mighty deeds in the name of Jesus besides this single inner circle of the 12.
4. Yet, it doesn't seem as if the Apostles were all that thrilled with this reality which shouldn't surprise us all that much. Recall that this section began with their pride getting the best of them as they argued over who would be the greatest. Now we see them trying to stop another person not because he was doing something wrong, but they were opposing him simply because he was not a part of their group. They were showing partiality in thinking they were the only ones who had the right and privilege to do such a thing for the Lord. They were in need of teaching and admonishment that even a small deed as someone giving them a cup of water in Jesus's name would reap the greatest of rewards. They were in conflict with one another because of their pride, but they were also allowing that pride to put them in unnecessary conflict with others, as well.

C. **Sin Destroys Peace (Mark 9:42-50)**

1. How devastating could that conflict be? Let's just say, hypothetically, this person who they had unnecessarily rebuked had become discouraged because of the behavior of these men to the point that he gave us his faith in Jesus all together. How serious of a situation would that have been? So serious that Jesus says that it would be better for the offender to have a millstone hung around his neck and thrown into the sea. To Jesus, it is the most serious of situations that someone would cause another to sin. Such a thing absolutely destroys the peace that ought to exist between men. There is nothing that is more devastating to relationships than sin, and this is true not only from the perspective of relationships between people, but it is also true when it comes to the relationship between mankind and God.
2. The seriousness of such conflict between God and mankind can be seen in the lengths to which Jesus says someone ought to go in order to rid themselves of sin. If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. If your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. If your eye causes you to sin, gouge it out. Jesus says living without these things within the Kingdom of God is better than having them all and being thrown into hell. Jesus describes such a place as *"where worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched."* **(9:48)** Some manuscripts do not repeat this phrase in **vv.44,46**, but it is unanimously found in **v.48** which assures us this is a real place Jesus is referring to (Weirsbe, Be Diligent,112), and such a description would stand out to those hearing. First, this is a quotation of **Isaiah 66:24** which speaks of the dead bodies of those who would stand against the Lord in His efforts, *"for their worm will never die, their fire will never go out, and they will be a horror to all mankind."* Their condemnation would be the same as those who are unwilling to give up sin in this life. Further, the specific word Jesus uses for hell is *gehenna* which would bring to mind the Ben Hinnom Valley which was a place of horrible history for it was where King Ahaz worshipped Molech and offered his children as

sacrifices. (**II Chronicles 28:1-3; Jeremiah 7:31;32:35**) (Weirsbe, Be Diligent,112) This was a place of death, anguish, and torment. It was certainly not somewhere these men or any man or woman would want to be...especially when it could be avoided by putting away sin. Yet, it would be the reality for those who choose to sin and create conflict between themselves, others, and God.

3. Jesus closes out this hard teaching the important truth that there will be sacrifices in our lives no matter what. This is the idea behind *"for everything will be salted with fire."* This comes from **Leviticus 2:13 & Ezekiel 43:24** which both speak of the need for salt as a purifier during the sacrificial process. The meaning is that we can either go the way of sacrificing our lives forever in torment as being "without salt" or we can be purified by sacrificing whatever sin we might engage in that will create that conflict between us, others, and God "with salt." This language is very similar to what Jesus says during the Sermon on the Mount in **Matthew 7:13** where the salt speaks to our positive purifying influence, but here in Mark Jesus seems to be speaking more to our own lives being purified through salt which is the sacrificing of that which will lead us to sin. Again, why does this matter? It matters because sin creates conflict between all of us, so we must therefore be purified and salty if we want to *"be at peace with one another."* Yes, pride and partiality can greatly hinder out peace with others, but looking big picture we must recognize that sin absolutely destroys any chance at having peace with our brothers, sisters, and God.

Application Questions

A. Am I willing to humble myself to serve others, even the least, around me?

1. Let's again recognize just how drastic of a difference there is from **9:30-32** to **9:34**. Here is Jesus speaking of this incredible sacrifice He is going to make, and then we quickly find these men focused so much on themselves and making sure others know just how important and great they are within this group they are a part of. The contrasting mindsets couldn't be more different, but where do we fall in this spectrum? Specifically for myself, am I the person who humbly serves others or do I give every effort for them to make sure they know just how great I am?
2. Jesus shows us that the better way of living that will lead to peace between ourselves and others is the way of humble service. Is this present within my own life? This is especially a question that must be asked by those of us in positions of authority and influence. It can be very easy to wield authority and influence like a club that demands that people respect me and recognize me in the high and mighty position that I hold. Whether on the job, in the community, in the home, or in the church...all of us in such positions must embrace a humble mindset if we want to lead as Jesus would have us lead. Instead of demanding loyalty and obedience no matter what I do, I should be considerate of others in my decision making. I should consider how my decision making affects them and not simply do as I desire.
3. Further, I should be willing to consider and serve those who are least around me. Remember, this was an important point in Jesus's teaching in this text. Am I willing to humble myself to help those who can't help themselves? Am I willing to help those who have absolutely no ability to repay me for the good I do for them? Too many people are only willing to help those who can repay them in some way. Jesus says true greatness is found in serving those unable to return the favor. Is that the type of person that I am? If I want to be found great and pleasing in the sight of Jesus then that is who I must be. I must be a humble servant.

B. Am I willing to allow others to work for the Lord without my personal input?

1. The Apostles were very upset that this man who was not a part of their group was doing good work in the name of *their* Rabbi, but Jesus tells them this is such a horrible attitude to have given that good work was being done in His name. Could we be guilty of the same poor attitude?

2. This might manifest itself in our being unhappy when we see others engaged in good work, but they didn't ask us our opinion or input on such a good work. This reminds me of the story from **Numbers 11, specifically vv.21-30** that we read just a couple months back in our Walking Through HIStory studies when the people have complained about food and the Lord shows His infinite power in providing for them. Part of this process included Moses bringing seventy elders to gather around the tent of meeting which was outside the camp. The Spirit of the Lord was given to them as well and it caused them to prophesy there in that moment. At the same time there were two men (Eldad & Medad) inside the camp that the Spirit also rested upon. They also prophesied within the camp, but a young man came and reported this as happening to Moses. Joshua was extremely disturbed by this and asked Moses to put a stop to them. However, Moses responds to Joshua with, *"Are you jealous on my account? If only all the Lord's people were prophets and the Lord would place His Spirit on them!" (Numbers 11:29)*
 3. This attitude from Moses was certainly the appropriate attitude to have, and it ought to be the attitude we have. We see the wrong attitude in the Apostles and Joshua as they thought that only their special groups had the rights to doing good work for the Lord, but both Jesus and Moses rebuke that type of partial mindset. No one has exclusive rights to doing good works for the Lord, and we would do well to simply rejoice when we see other disciples busy being engaged in good kingdom work. My input isn't always needed, but do I feel slighted when it isn't asked for? If I feel that way then I am allowing pride to sour me, and I must put that away from myself in order to be at peace with others.
- C. **Am I willing to do everything I can to be free from sin and not lead others into it, as well?**
1. Finally, do I see the effort being put in throughout my life to rid myself of that which might lead me into sin which causes so much conflict between myself, others, and God? Are there situations where I see a propensity for me to lose my temper? Are there places I go where my heart begins to lust for that which is not mine? Are there people in my life who are poor influences on me and I always seem to end up regretting the time I spend with them?
 2. We often go to this text and we gloss over it because the language is so explicit and drastic, but we shouldn't allow the principles behind it to escape our notice. All sin can be traced back to our hearts so what might I need to put out of my life that is going to allow me to protect my heart? Are there situations I need to refrain from being in? Are there places I don't need to go any longer? Are there people I need to stay away from? Am I willing to recognize the conflict these things are creating within my life? If I see this then these are the arms, feet, and eyes I need to cut off and throw away from myself in order to live in peace with others and God. It will be far better if I sacrifice these things and live a purified life than to keep them and suffer eternally away from the presence of God as a result of my sin. I can either stand in my selfish pride or humble myself to give these up for the betterment of my relationship with others and most importantly my relationship with God.

Main Point/Conclusion: *Humility before God & others is the greatest effort we can put forth in order to foster peace with our brothers & sisters!*

This section of Mark is full of strong practical teachings that hit at the heart of what real discipleship means to Jesus. It all begins with putting away pride, arrogance, selfishness, and any other sins that might destroy our chances at peace with others and God. May we lean upon the incredible example of Jesus to live the better life of humility and enjoy the blessings it will surely create in our lives as we are able to live in peace with those around us and with our God in heaven.