

Standing in the way of Sinners

Luke 9: 46~50/Mark 9:33~50

The overall teaching of this passage, is that, being the disciples of Jesus Christ, we must not allow pride to reign in our lives. We must not allow “*Self*” to come between us and other men. That’s what the cross is all about, we must put “*self to death*,” and walk humbly before men. This is extremely important for the fact, if we allow pride in our life, we become a hindrance between men and the lord.

Listen, the Lord has gone to great lengths to remove every obstacle that would keep anyone from being saved. “*Theologically speaking*,” there is nothing that “*stands between God and man*” that would keep them from being saved. There is no sin so great, that God cannot forgive, no man has gone so far, that God cannot reach. God stands ready to forgive and receive every man/woman who comes to Him. Anyone who comes broken, and cries out to God in the awareness of their desperate condition, God will save them.

But even though, there is nothing between men and God, to keep them from Him, men are often yet hindered or kept from God by other men! Beloved, you do realize, that many will never come to Christ, because of what they have seen out of, or personally encountered with some of those who identify with Christ. Based on what some have seen or heard, from those associated with the Church of Jesus Christ, they want nothing to do with it! Beloved, it’s one thing, for a man to reject Christ, simply because he loves his sin, and wants nothing of Christ’s offer of forgiveness. But it’s quite another thing, if men reject Christ, by being offended by those who claim allegiance with Christ!

Hey listen, everyone of us in this room, are identifying with Christ... Therefore, how we live our life becomes extremely important. Our testimony reflects on Him! And it is not how “*good we live*” or the so called “*Great works*” we do that matters so much, as it does, as how LITTLE we are! The world don’t need to see “YOUR GOODNESS”...they need to see the Lord’s Goodness! Beloved...we must “*Humble OURSELVES*”...and get out of the way, so they can see Him! Because if we don’t, **we** will be “*in the way of others*.” As long as **I** am exalted in my life...**I** will be a hindrance to others in coming to Christ.

Listen, God forbid, that **I** become a “*hindrance*” to others! God forbid, that **I** become a “*stumbling block*” to keep men away from Christ! God forbid, that **I** be found “*standing in the way*” of lost men and women, keeping them from the salvation which is in Jesus Christ, by the way **I** live my life! God forbid, that men “*fall short*” of the kingdom of God...because of **ME**! In order to ensure that that is not the case, **I** must make every effort to ensure that **I** am not in the way!

(Act out spiritual metaphor) STANDING IN THE WAY OF SINNERS...

Picture of the child here is that of *humbling ourselves*...lowering ourselves...that of setting SELF aside...

Here we find our Lord, teaching His disciples, what in my mind, has to be the most important truth, in regards to His kingdom here on this earth, that being, the matter of “*Humility*.” Humility refers to the “*Spirit of Selflessness*...” For someone to be described as *humble*, means they are empty of self. The opposite of that would be “*Prideful*.” “*Pride*” simply refers to the “*Spirit of Self*.” For a man to be “*Prideful*,” means that he is full of the “*Spirit of Self*.” **Self** is “*exalted*”. Humility is at the heart of the gospel message, in that is what the cross is all about, putting SELF to death... If you are going to follow Jesus, you must “*Deny yourself, take up the cross*...” Any man who is not willing to die to self, any man who is not willing to “give up his life here in this world” (to live it to Christ) need not even think they will ever see the kingdom.

Here we find Jesus, rebuking His disciples for their “*Selfish ambitions*,” and warns them of the dangers of such. We see here in this passage, as a result of each man’s “*Selfish ambition*,” to be “*first*” or “*Greatest*,” they were at odds with one another. Their “*Selfish ambitions*” had resulted in “*Division*” among

themselves... As Luke said, “*Knowing the thoughts of their heart...*” knowing how they perceived greatness, Jesus uses the opportunity to teach about true greatness, and how it is acquired.

(Mk 9:35) “If any man desire to be “*First*”...(Greatest) “He must seek to be “*Last*”...(Least)

To illustrate this truth, Jesus uses a child... The child becomes the “*Example*” of “*Greatness*” in the kingdom of God. The point is simply that rather seeking to be “*Great*”...they should seek to “*Be Little*” like this child.

Jesus points to a child, & calls for the men to “*Humble Themselves*”...to “*Become Little.*” (From a Man-Child) To **Humble** *ourselves* is to **Lower** “*Ourselves.*” It was a call to turn from their own strength, their own selfish ambitions... Greatness in the kingdom of God, is not determined by power and might, but rather meekness and dependence. It is the “*Weak*” who are strong...the “*Meek*” who are powerful...the “*Humble*” that is exalted... “*He that is “Least among you” shall be the greatest...*”

(Mk 9:36~37) Having declared this truth, Jesus takes a child in his arms, and says...

³⁷*Whosoever shall receive one of such children in my name, receives me: and whosoever shall receive me, receives not me, but him that sent me.*

It’s important not to miss-understand this to be referring to the child, and to children in general... Though true, the Lord does highly esteem little children, and love them deeply, that is not what is in view here. Here the “**Child**” he is referring to here, is not the child He’s holding in His arms, but rather the “**Man who humbles himself**” and becomes like this little child... The picture here of Jesus holding the child, is one of “*Embracing the truth*” he just taught on “*Humility.*” Remember, He’s teaching this because the disciples were *arguing between one another*, as to who would be the greatest. Each one seeking to be first, resulted in animosity and division among the group. The point of the whole analogy, is to teach them to lay that selfish ambition aside, and seek to put themselves last! Then, rather than resulting in animosity and division, there would be love and unity.

(Mk 9:36~37) The picture here is that of “*Embracing a child-like spirit.*” Humility, or being “*Little.*”

(Vs 38~40) It appears that John “GOT” what Jesus was saying; because (out of nowhere) he brings up a certain encounter they had with a man who was casting out devils in Jesus name, whom they had “Turned away.” A man that they had *rejected!* John states that they had “*forbade*” the man, since he didn’t walk with them. Jesus rebukes them, and declares that if this man was able to cast out devils in His name, that no doubt this man was no enemy, but a brother. If that man had even slightly opposed Christ, he couldn’t have done it! That man was standing against the devils, and therefore, he was on “*our side.*” As I thought about this passage, I began to wonder what happened to this man? Was he still trusting in the Lord, or had this caused him to turn away from the Lord.

In the remainder of this passage, Jesus warns the disciples about becoming stumbling blocks to others.

(Vs 41~42) He does so in the context of a “*Loving Father*”... Holding the “*child*” in His arms, Jesus stresses the importance of the proper treatment of “*God’s children.*” Beloved...God is SERIOUS about His children. God loves every single man, woman, boy and girl on this earth. They are all His children, in the sense, He created them, He gave them life. Though the majority wants nothing to do with Him, and have turned from Him to live of life of sin...He still longs for them to return to Him. And God has done everything in His power, to make that possible... **Woe unto the man**...that stands in the way of sinners!

Jesus declares a two-fold promise...

(Vs 41) First we see the promise of “*Blessings*” on those who bless His children...

(Vs 42) And then we see the proclamation of “*Woes*” on those who those who offend them...

Holding the “*Child*” in his arms...Jesus that anyone who **offends** “*one of these little ones*”, would be much better off, if he had a milestone tied around his neck, and was cast into the sea! Listen, you do not want to mess with God’s children! I know, as a father myself, what my children mean to me. And needless to say, if you do something to my children...woe unto you! But regardless the harm I might inflict to a man who has done something to my children, it does not even begin to compare with what God will do to the man who harms one of His Children!

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.

The emphasis is that “*it would be better for that man...*” In other words, as bad and horrific as that may seem, it would be nothing compared to what God will do to him! A milestone was a heavy, flat stone used to grind grain. There were two common kinds of milestones in use at this time. One was smaller, and operated by a person. The larger one was connected to an ox or donkey, which would walk in a circle, causing the stone to roll and crush the grain. Mark used the word for the huge animal-operated one. To have one of these tied around ones neck, and then dumped into the sea, meant certain death by drowning. But even the horror of such a death, was minor compared to what this person would face in eternity!

(Vs 43~48) Jesus declares a sobering truth...

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. 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. 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.

Is He saying that we literally cut our hands and feet off? Is He suggesting that we literally pluck our eyes out? NO...but He is stressing the fact, that you better deal with any sin that might be in your life! To most severe measures you could take, would be better than holding on to it...and allow it drag you down into the pits of hell!

All three statements could be summed up like this...

“If there’s anything in your life, that causes offence, you had better do whatever you have to do, to get rid of it!”

Truthfully...this *kind of perception and attitude towards sin*, is completely foreign in the church of our day...

The testimony of God’s people is to be that of a total *abhorrence* of sin...and not TOLERANCE! We must live as though we truly believe that God is going to judge SIN! We ought to strive against sin so diligently, as though our lives depended on it! For it does!

Notice what Jesus says, will be the result of those who continue to walk in sin...

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The word translated “hell” is *Gehenna*... It is derived from the Valley of Hinnom, south of Jerusalem, where children had been sacrificed by fire to the pagan God Moloch. Later, during the King Josiah’s reign, it became the city’s garbage dump where the fire burned constantly to destroy the garbage and the worms infesting it. It served as a “*Graphic Picture*” of the place prepared for the devil and his angels and all those who do not know Christ.

It’s important not to miss the point here... In light of the “*vivid picture*” of HELL, Jesus calls on the disciples to take “*drastic action*” against sin! They must *do everything in their power*, to get it out of their lives!

Quote...IT HURTS... Jesus used startling language to stress the importance of cutting sin out of our lives. He requires painful discipline from His true followers. Giving up a relationship, job or habit that is against God’s will may seem just as painful as cutting off a hand, foot or eye. Our high goal, however, is worth any sacrifice; loyalty to Christ is worth any possible loss. We must be ruthless in removing sin from our lives now in order to avoid being stuck with them for eternity...

Having said that, that kind of mindset, that kind of perspective of sin, is all but nonexistent in the “*Church of Today*.” Beloved, one of the greatest “*hindrances*” to the lost in our day, is the lack of fear and reverence of God concerning sin. They don’t see sin as a big deal...and the reason is, because of what they see from “*God’s people*” in the church. I am desperately concerned that the “*Church of Today*” has lost its “*Saltiness!*”

Beloved the testimony of the church is to be one of total abhorrence and renouncing of SIN! Our lives is to bear witness that God is going to judge SIN! Beloved, we must do everything in our power, to put self to death, and walk humbly before the Lord. We must do what we have to, to get sin out of our lives...so that we leave a clear testimony to the world, the need of repentance! If we don’t, then we are no different than the world, and the salt has lost its savor or effectiveness.

(Vs 49~50) The disciples were to be SALT... (Preservative) Salt was used as a preservative, to keep meat from rotting.

(Vs 49) The references here to “*being salted*” was a reference to the “*Salting of Sacrifices*” that were offered in the temple. Jesus seems to be quoting from Leviticus 2:13, where it states, “*Every sacrifice will be salted with salt.*” Combined with what He says in the next verse, about salt and its usefulness, He seems to be referring to them offering up their lives, by living “*sacrificial lives,*” humbling self, putting self to death. If they continued to walk in SELF, they would not be an influence to those around them.

If they held on to sin...lived to self...what difference are they than the world?

If the testimony of the Church is tolerance of sin...then why does the world need the church?

The “*Salt*” that believers have in themselves refers to obedience, self-denial, humility and willing to suffer for the sake of the kingdom. In turn, they would be the purifying agents in the community and the world!