

September 29, 2024

St. Mark 9:42-50:

We're Facing the Truth

- I. It's About the Heart. vv. 42-47a
- II. It's About where Sin Takes Us.
- III. Consequences
- IV. Salt

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Dear Friends in Christ,

You know, I never realized that the folks who manufacture mirrors were using materials that caused mirrors to distort the reflection in a shorter period of time. So, one day I went out and bought a new mirror, then put it next to the old mirror and looked into them. I was shocked! I looked the same - old! I don't know who the commentator was who wrote this, but here it is:

...the doctrine of hell should be preached in all its terribleness. It is no kindness to spread a pretty covering of leafy branches over a pit into which many have fallen and broken their necks. That may be a cunning hunter's business, as it is the business of him who hunts the world for souls. But it is not the business of preachers to ruin people's souls to spare their feelings.

You see, sometimes it's very hard too look into a mirror and see what you don't want to see. It's just as hard to look into the mirror of God's Word, specifically the Law, and see yourself as God sees you. To repeat, *it is not the business of preachers to ruin people's souls to spare their feelings*. You know there's a good line of people who've sat in these pews with hurt feelings. You surely understand that the pastors experience the same feelings after studying, writing, preaching, and teaching God's Word. We're here to look into the mirror of God's Word.

WE'RE FACING THE TRUTH

I. It's About The Heart. vv.42-47a

I want to first take us to the account of the woman caught in adultery:

The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery and...they said to (Jesus), "Teacher, this woman has been caught in an act of adultery. Now the Law of Moses commanded us to stone such women. So what do you say?" This they said to test him, that they might have some charge to bring against him... (he) said to them, "Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her." ...When they heard it, they went away, one by one (Jn.8:3-8).

They went away because they saw the sin in themselves after Jesus, the Word made flesh, spoke, revealed, the Word to them. If we look into the Word we would come to the same understanding. It's what's in the heart, as Jesus said: "...what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this defiles a person. For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander... (Mt. 15:18,19)."

In Hebrew 4:7&8, God's Word warns: "Today if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion, on the day of testing in the wilderness." This refers to God testing His people in the journey He led through Moses. And all this is about where sin takes us; *we're facing the truth* . . .

II. It's About Where Sin Takes Us.

"Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him if a great millstone were hung around his neck and he were thrown into the sea. And if your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life crippled than with two hands to go to hell, to the unquenchable fire. And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life lame than with two feet to be thrown into hell. And if your eye causes you to sin, tear it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than to be thrown into hell, where their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched (vv.42-48)."

Jesus is not saying we should cut ourselves to pieces, amputate body parts that commit sinful acts. He is drawing us to see our sin and God's hatred of all sin; to cause us to understand how the heart drives our minds and bodies.

Our text for this morning further magnifies this in a very sensitive way: "Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him if a great millstone were hung around his neck and he were thrown into the sea (Mk.9:42)." Listen to this from R.C.H. Lenski:

Let no on deceive himself by thinking that only one of "the little ones is hurt, only a child or a humble believer... This is a word that should awaken... parents, pastors, teachers... What if only one humble soul be lost through our teaching or conduct (Lenski, Mark, p.401)!

III. Consequences.

Also, I'm sure you noted Jesus' words: "Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me...". The Greek word used here for "believe" is the same word in John 3:16, "whoever believes (in Christ) has eternal life." The Greek word used for "little ones" is "micron". It refers to the youngest ones. And you noted the severity of that sin: "a great millstone hung around his neck...and...thrown into the sea." Taken down to the deepest depth! Let's never say the Holy Spirit couldn't possibly work repentance and faith in any child. And let's remember David's words: "Yet you are he who took me from my mother's womb; you made me trust you at my mother's breasts. On you was I cast from my birth, and from my mother's womb you have been my God (Ps.22:9,10)." It's crucial for Christian parents to examine how and where they're guiding their children.

The early church Bishop, Augustine, wrote: "The perpetual death of the damned will go on without end and will be their common lot, regardless of what people prompted by human sentiments may conjure up." We would be blessed to keep that in mind, and communicate to those without Christ the meaning of . . .

IV. Salt

Salt. "For everyone will be salted with fire. Salt is good, but if the salt has lost its saltiness, how will you make it salty again? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another (vv.49-50)." If you put salt on an open wound it stings like fire. Put salt on certain foods it improves the flavor and can preserve. So, what is Jesus saying?

First, there's the salt of the Law. It confronts us with our sin and God's hatred of sin. It's "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (Rm.3:23)." It's the salt that stings us with, "All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; not one does good, not even one (Rm.3:12)." It's "...by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight (pronounced not guilty of sin) since through the law comes knowledge of sin (Rm.3:20). It stings.

Second, there's the salt of the Gospel. This is about how salt is used to preserve, and used to make food palatable. It moves us from the burning of sin, death and hell to eternal preservation; life. Moves from "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" to "(we) are justified as a gift (declared 'not guilty' of our sin)) through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus (bought us with Christ's blood), whom God put forward as a propitiation (the gift to win His favor), to be received by faith (Rm.3:23)." You see, the faith God works in us makes us - if I may say it this way - makes us palatable; acceptable.

This turns us away from self-righteousness and seeing ourselves as more deserving of God's love than others. And so, we hear Jesus say, "Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another." It is the salt of the Law that keeps us mindful that we still struggle with sin. It is the salt of the Gospel that reminds us that for Jesus' sake we are forgiven.

If a person becomes tired of hearing about sin and guilt - the salt of the Law - then that person is tired of hearing about Jesus and why He came here, as clearly revealed in Scripture. It's just that simple. Life becomes whatever a person thinks it should be. And look at where that is taking everything; even our personal lives.

It's the salt of the Gospel that leads to the final moment when, as we're taught, "He will wipe away every tear from (our) eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away (Rev.21:4)." You see, there's just one direction: "But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself (Phil.2:20-21)."

I appreciate these words from Luther:

I have often experienced, and still do every day, how difficult it is to believe, especially amid struggles of conscience, that Christ was given, not for the holy, righteous, and deserving, or for those who were His friends, but for the godless, sinful, and undeserving, for those who were His enemies, who deserved the wrath of God and eternal death. (Luther's Works, Lectures on Galatians, Chapters 1-4, Jaraslov Pelikan, Editor, Walter A. Hansen, Associate Editor, Vol. 26, Concordia Publishing House, Saint Louis.)

Life is not about what we want or think. It's about facing the truth. It's looking forward to that moment when we will no longer need mirrors, but about the "eternal moment" of standing face to face with the unending joy and love of the Triune God. Glory be to Jesus!

Amen.

Pastor Bill Abbott