



THE GOSPEL OF MARK

**Study Guide Full
Mark 9:38-50
February 16, 2020**

We continue on in Mark 9 with Jesus' proclamations about the nature of true cruciform (cross-shaped) discipleship.

Last week we saw that, within the context of death and resurrection, Jesus proclaims that the life of the Christian is inherently the life of a servant, as we are called to "be last of all and servant of all."

These themes echo through this week's text, as we see the ethic of being last reformulated in an ethic of hospitality and cooperation among Christ's disciples, and as we see the truth of death and resurrection in the call for a kind of spiritual surgery to maintain our flavour of saltiness.

Consider beginning your time this week from Sunday's song "Jesus, All for Jesus":

Jesus, all for Jesus, all I am and have and ever hope to be
Jesus, all for Jesus, all I am and have and ever hope to be

All of my ambitions, hopes and plans, I surrender these into your hands
All of my ambitions, hopes and plans, I surrender these into your hands

For it's only in your will that I am free
For it's only in your will that I am free

Jesus, all for Jesus,
all I am and have and ever hope to be.



Mark 9:38-50

38 *John said to him, "Teacher, we saw someone casting out demons in your name, and we tried to stop him, because he was not following us." 39 But Jesus said, "Do not stop him, for no one who does a mighty work in my name will be able soon afterward to speak evil of me. 40 For the one who is not against us is for us. 41 For truly, I say to you, whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because you belong to Christ will by no means lose his reward.*

42 "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. 43 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. 45 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. 47 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 with two eyes to be thrown into hell, 48 'where their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched.' 49 For everyone will be salted with fire. 50 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."

Commentary Notes:

v. 38. It hardly seems surprising that Mark would place this material discussing the source and authority of casting out demons immediately after the discussion among Peter, James, and John about who was the greatest (9:34). Keep in mind that the disciples had just seen first hand their own

Notes:

Discussion Questions:

Confess: Have you ever been guilty of inhibiting the work of God in others because of your own pride? If so, confess and receive his grace.

inability to cast out a demon (9:18). Frustration, indignation, and pride surely comprise a part of this unflattering picture of the disciples.

vv. 40-41. “The “mighty work” language here—the translation of (δύναμις, *dynamis*) points us back to verse 23, where we see the same Greek root in “all things are capable (*by power*)” for the one who believes.” By his power, in God’s strength, the one who believes in his name is able to do works of wonder.

The essence of this passage, captured in the ancient proverbial phrase “whoever is not against us is for us,” echoes Numbers 11:26-29, in the discussion there of God’s prophets and spirit.

v. 41. The language of “giving a cup of water” takes us back to the idea of welcome and hospitality that we saw last week in our study of Christ’s servants, for although a small act, the giving of a cup of water in biblical context was particularly valued in light of water’s value in the ancient world, especially in desert areas. Note also that in God’s economy, a little bit of generosity goes a long way, as the Lord works in and through such generosity.

Confess: In what ways have you, in your own human understanding, drawn boundaries around the family of God to limit its size? Consider carefully this question, and ask for his forgiveness and grace.

Study: Read the Numbers 11:26-29 passage and see there Moses’ response to concerns about being on the “right side” when doing God’s work.

Reflect: When was the last time that you fellowshiped in some way with Christians who do not consider FBC their “church home”? How have you sought fellowship and peace with the Church, capital “C” in Vancouver?

Meditate: How might the Spirit be showing you, in the past and upcoming weeks and months, that the boundaries of participation in God’s mission and kingdom are more expansive than we might expect?

Discern: Who are those organizations in your area of Vancouver that are seeking the good of our city? In what ways might your Connection Group consider befriending and cooperating with those groups? Ask for the Spirit’s enlightenment in this regard.

Study: When was the last time that you thought carefully of a Christian ecclesiology—a theology of the church? If it’s been too long, consider spending time with Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen’s *Introduction to Ecclesiology: Ecumenical, Historical & Global Perspectives*.

The language of “reward” anticipates, through contrasting material, the verses in the next section, with their emphasis on judgment; but this verse first makes clear the boundary-blurring nature of service in Christ.

v. 42. The verb here for “cause to stumble” is σκανδαλίζω (*skandalizo*), referring to anything that might compromise the faith of another believer, as by the temptations of sin, the acceptance of false teaching, or the result of offense.

Note the word for “great millstone” is literally “millstone of a donkey” μύλος ὄνικος (*mylos onikos*)—it is large enough that, in grinding grain, it cannot be powered by human hands!

vv. 43-48. The verb σκανδαλίζω (*skandalizo*) of verse 42 is repeated multiple times in these verses, but with a change of subject and object, as we consider how *the way in which we live* causes *us to stumble*. Clearly the language here is hyperbolic, but that does not mean that we might need true spiritual surgery.

vv. 49-50. Keep in mind that salt was particularly critical to the ancient world, not only for flavouring, but also for preserving and cleansing. So might we consider saltiness “among ourselves”—of relationships cleansed and preserved.

Lament: YouTube search “What is the Main Problem in the Western Church?” and “N.T. Wright.” Watch the short video. In mournful prayer, lament the Christian reality of “*the scandal of disunity*,” and pray for the Spirit’s grace and guidance in this respect.

Reflect: Out of the sermon consider: Have you ever undermined anyone else’s discipleship through a pseudo-discipleship, claiming to be Christ’s disciple, but not living by his radical service and sacrifice? Quietly look upon your past.

Discuss: This material in verse 42 and following clearly links with what we read last week, around the topic of “little ones.” Yet, what is the connection between verses 38-41 and verses 42-50? Do you sense any thematic overlap?

Pray: Spend time quietly considering those parts of your body that might be in need of spiritual surgery. How is the Spirit prompting you to respond specifically to this word? Might it be in what you are doing, where you are going, or what you are watching? Pray for his strength, grace, and humility to lead you in this regard.

Discern: How are saltiness and peace related? At FBC, how can the peace of God within our church be an element of our saltiness as disciples? Are there ways that we can organically and humbly demonstrate our peace-making before a watching world starved of a “salty diet”?