

Love, Hate and Holiness

(Mark 9:42-50)

(preached 5/17/15 Pine Grove BC)

Introduction

Take your Bibles and turn with me to Mark 9:33...

The last time we were together in the book of Mark was 2 weeks ago...

So to stir up our memories of part of what we looked at then, I want to read some verses that we have already looked at to lead up to today's text...

So, let's begin reading in Mark 9:33

*³³ They came to Capernaum; and when He ^[u]was in the house, He began to question them, "What were you discussing on the way?" ³⁴ But they kept silent, for on the way they had discussed with one another which of them was the greatest. ³⁵ Sitting down, He called the twelve and *said to them, "If anyone wants to be first, ^[u]he shall be last of all and servant of all." ³⁶ Taking a child, He set him ^[v]before them, and taking him in His arms, He said to them, ³⁷ "Whoever receives ^[w]one child like this in My name receives Me; and whoever receives Me does not receive Me, but Him who sent Me." ³⁸ John said to Him, "Teacher, we saw someone casting out demons in Your name,*

and we tried to prevent him because he was not following us.”³⁹ But Jesus said, “Do not hinder him, for there is no one who will perform a miracle in My name, and be able soon afterward to speak evil of Me.⁴⁰ For he who is not against us is ^[x]for us.⁴¹ For whoever gives you a cup of water to drink^[y] because of your name as followers of Christ, truly I say to you, he will not lose his reward.

Now, what we are going to look at begins in verse 41, but notices that the scene is still the same...

Jesus is talking to the disciples with a child still under his arm....

Verse 42..

⁴² “Whoever causes one of these ^[z]little ones who believe to stumble, it^[aa] would be better for him if, with a heavy millstone hung around his neck, he^[ab] had been cast into the sea.⁴³ If your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life crippled, than, having your two hands, to go into^[ac] hell, into the unquenchable fire,⁴⁴ [^[ad] where their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched.]⁴⁵ If your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life lame, than, having your two feet, to be cast into ^[ae]hell,⁴⁶ [^[af] where their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched.]⁴⁷ If your eye causes

you to stumble, throw it out; it is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye, than, having two eyes, to be cast into ^[ag]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 becomes unsalty, with what will you ^[ah]make it salty again? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another.”

Let us pray...

Last Sunday was Mother's Day and we took a little break from our study in Mark to look at the world's very first mother, Eve.

But I want us to think about mothers again today as I introduce the passage that we are going to look at today.

In the animal world, it is amazing the lengths that mothers will go to protect their children.

Orangutan mothers will literally carry their babies for the first 4 months of their life.

Never letting go even when they are eating or sleeping.

An octopus will protect her young from predators that most often die shortly after because they have been too busy to eat.

One of the most amazing ways of protecting offspring may be what a mother alligator will do.

When a predator is looking at her young as a nice snack, mama alligator will often gather all of her little ones in her own mouth until trouble leaves.

We even understand this from a human perspective as mothers today engage in some pretty unusual behaviors trying to keep their children safe.

Well, the same is true when it comes to God's protection of His children.

He cares for His children in an even deeper way than a mother cares for her young.

2 weeks ago, we looked at Mark 9:30-41, which I read a portion of earlier.

IT was a passage where Jesus took a child in his arms and used him as an illustration of how valuable even the most insignificant Christians are in God's sight.

Jesus talked about the value of serving the least as a way to be the greatest in the kingdom.

And it was a lesson on how well God cares for all of His children...

But this week, God is going to extend that truth in a negative way....

And here is what I mean,....

As much as God cares for his children and encourages others to care for them...

He protects them just as much and will defend them from anyone wanting to harm them...

And the verses that I read from 42-50 highlight the incredible importance that God puts on protecting his children.

So, the first question is are you one of His children..

And the second question is if you are, how well are you doing at protecting God's children...

And so I want to break this passage into 3 tests that you can give yourself this morning as we move through this passage.

In verse 42, we find Test #1....

I. Do You Truly Love the People of God? (9:42)

Test # 2 is found in verses 43-48...

II. Does You Truly Hate Sin (9:43-48)

And then test #3 will be found in verses 49-50...

III. Do You Truly Pursue Holiness? (9:49-50)

And so let's begin our self-examination in verse 34...

With question #1..

I. Do You Truly Love the People of God? (v34)

Verse 34...

⁴² *“Whoever causes one of these ^[z]little ones who believe to stumble, it ^[aa]would be better for him if, with a heavy millstone hung around his neck, he ^[ab]had been cast into the sea.*

Now, you may say what does this have to do with loving God’s people...

Well, let me explain...

You see the picture...

Jesus is teaching the disciples and he is affectionately embracing a child in his elbow...

And he says whoever causes a little one who believes in me to stumble...

Now again, the child is a word picture of what Jesus is teaching about...

Two weeks ago, Jesus was teaching the disciples to serve the least and he was using a child to represent the most immature Christian.

And he was telling them to serve this child, and he didn’t mean that we should just concentrate on serving children...

The child represented the most insignificant Christian...

And this week, he still has that child in his arms and the child still represents the immature believer..

But the lesson is not to serve the most immature Christian...

IT is a warning not to make the most immature Christian stumble....

And the word has a definite connection to sin...

It means to cause to fall into sin....

And again this isn't a warning to not cause kids to sin, it is a warning to not cause any believer to stumble and fall into sin...

Now, it would certainly apply to younger believers but it isn't limited to people 13-18....

Jesus is saying that we shouldn't cause any believer, especially those who are weak in the faith to sin.

And then he ends with a shocking warning...

It would be better for a person to tie a millstone around his neck and be cast in the sea than to cause a believer to sin.

A millstone would a large circular stone used for grinding wheat.

Right down the road is a stone mill...

And at a stone mill, you would find a mill stone...

Some of them weigh more than a ton..

And it would be better to tie one of those around your neck and be drown in the sea than to lead another believer into sin.

Now, the Jews had a great fear of the water.

They were not a sea faring people.

They were farmers and shepherds.

And the fear of the sea was very real to them.

The Romans would often threaten drowning as punishment if they broke Roman law.

And so to hear Jesus say that it is better to drown than to cause another to sin is shocking.

Drowning was last on the everybody's list of things to do, but Jesus made leading someone to sin even worse...

And what does this have to do with love?

Well, true love according to 1 Corinthians 13:6
“does not rejoice in unrighteousness.”

Everybody asks for 1 Cor 13 to be read at their wedding but very few even understand what true love is.

But it is clear that when you truly love someone else, you take no pleasure in seeing them sin.

True love would never lead someone else into sin.

True love would never tempt someone to sin.

A person who causes you to sin, contributes to your sin, tempts you into sin or lures you away to sin does not truly love you according to the word of God.

And the clear message of verse 34 is that anyone who leads another Christian to sin does not that love God's people like God loves His people.

So you might as well be cast in the sea with 2000 lbs tied around your neck?

Do you love God's people that way?

Do you seek to keep from sin or lead them to sin?

Do you enjoy watching people sin or does it grieve your heart?

Are you making it easier for others to sin or are you trying to keep people from sinning?

If you say that you are a Christian, you must love the things that God loves...

And God loves His people.

Everyone of them.

And you should too.

And if you don't, maybe you don't belong to God after all.

So, the first test is Do You Truly Love God's People?

The second test is found in verses 43-48, and it is this...

II. Do You Truly Hate Sin? (v43-48)

Verses 43 -48 are closely connected to verse 42 because...

The surest way to lead someone to sin is to be leading a sinful lifestyle yourself.

The surest way for you to not give someone your cold is to stay healthy.

The surest way to not lead others into sin is to stay away from sin in your own life....

In the late 60s, the town of Gaffney SC was on edge.

Someone had strangled 4 women to death, and he hadn't been caught.

Well, my great aunt lived in Gaffney and she worked at the mill which was just a block from her house.

So, she had walked to work for years.

However, she felt safe because she had always walked with another man who lived a few houses down from her.

Come to find out, that man was named Lee Roy Martin, and he turned out to be the one responsible for all 4 murders.

Well when my aunt learned that, she was horrified.

She was seeking protection from the one responsible for all the deaths...

In some ways, that relates to what we see here.

You can never be a protect God's people from sin if you are deep in sin yourself..

So, Jesus follows up his warning on keeping others from sin by a warning to keep yourself from sin...

One commentator said this...

“Talking simple people into sin is rather easy work, but talking yourself into sin is even easier.”

And if impossible, Jesus takes the warning even higher than a mill stone around the neck in verses 43-48..

In verses 43, 45, and 47, you see these 3 “if..then statements that are incredibly shocking...

If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. Better to have one hand and go to heaven than have two and go to hell.

IF your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. Better to be cripple and go to heaven than have two good feet in hell.

If your eyes cause you to sin, pluck it out. Better to have one eye and go to heaven than two good eyes in hell...

Couple things to recognize here...

First, this is not a call to self mutilation....

Jesus is not saying to literally cut off your hand, foot or pluck out a eye...

This is what is called hyperbole...

Let me give you an example....

You are a little kid and you accidentally spill your drink on the new carpet...

Your mom walks in and says, "I have told you a million times not to bring paint in the living room."

Has she really told you a million times? No. She is exaggerating to make a point.

Or we say things like, "I'm so hungry, I could eat a horse."

Would eat a hyour drink on the new carpet...

Your mom walks in and says, "I have told you a million times not to bring paint in the living room."

Has she really told you a million times? No. She is exaggerating to make a point.

Or we say things like, “I’m so hungry, I could eat a horse.”

Would eat a horse? No.

Well, you may if you go to Taco Bell.

But you are exaggerating for effect.

Who has said after they catch their kid misbehaving...

“I’m going to kill him.”

Well, we don’t mean that, but we say that to point out the seriousness of the bad behavior...

Here Jesus is pointing to the seriousness of how we fight sin in our lives in order to keep others and ourselves from falling into sin.

And he is using exaggeration to make his point.

Besides all that, this isn’t literal because we also know that one less hand does mean less sin.

The issue at stake when it comes to sin is not a bad hand, foot or eye, it is a bad heart.

But Jesus talks about the hand, foot, and eye because these are the instruments of the bad heart.

A sinful heart will cause your hands to sin.

A sinful heart will cause your feet to go to sin.

A sinful heart will cause your eyes to gaze upon sin.

So, this is not to be taken as literal instruction on how to win the battle against sin...

But it is instruction to hate sin like God hates sin.

You should hate it so much that you are always taking steps to avoid it...

Keep your hands from doing sin.

Keep your feet from leading to places where you do sin.

Keep your eyes from looking at sin.

The point that Jesus is trying to get across is to take the battle with sin seriously.

Stop playing with sin in your life.

Stop hanging around sin in your life.

Stop taking sin lightly in your life.

The statements are shocking so that they wake you up to the dangers of sin..

And how it kills you and leads you to contaminate others.

Before we leave this section, I want to make one very important point that seems to get lost as pastors preach this passage...

This radical killing of sin,....

This extreme approach to dealing with sin in your life.....

This call to crucify sin.

None of this is optional to those who call themselves Christians.

If you claim to know Christ, this is foundational to what it means to be truly saved.

Just like we looked at in chapter 8, where following Jesus meant laying down your life, picking up a cross and denying yourself.

These are not words reserved for the special group of disciples or for the preacher or the Sunday School teacher or the author of Christian books.

What Jesus just said applies to everybody who says they are saved.

If you claim to know Christ, you need to be putting off sin every day.

And why do I say that?

Well, some people say...

Well, I'll just say a prayer....

Maybe walk a church aisle...

Get baptized and then I can go and live any way I want and I'll be fine in the end...

There are thousands of people who think that all they need is a little fire insurance found in a prayer, church membership or a baptismal.

Where does Jesus ever say that in here?

Where are those verse that say get wet and then live however you like?

They are not in here.

They are in your head, and they will lead you to hell.

You know how these verses apply to everyone who claims to be a believer?

Because what is the alternative for not taking the fight against sin seriously?

Well, look at verses 43, 45, and 47?

It is hell.

These verse don't say... "IF your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. Because it is better to have one hand and go to heaven than to have two hands and lead a less successful Christian life."

If your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better to have one foot and go to heaven than to have 2 good feet and just barely make it in the gates.

If your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out. It is better to have one eye and enter the kingdom than to have 2 good eyes be least in the kingdom.

No, the choice is to either be a Christian who takes the battle against sin seriously...

Or be headed to hell.

This isn't a description of a higher Christian life.

Jesus is simply describing what it means to be truly saved.

And this should come as no shock to us.

He has been saying this since he first called the disciples back in Mark 1, where the Peter and Andrew were called to leave their life behind to follow Jesus.

And this has been the consistent call to true salvation for most of church history.

It is only in the past 50 years of the church where the call to true salvation has been watered down to something that looks nothing like what Jesus taught.

And the clear lesson of verses 43-48 is exactly what famous preacher John Knox said years ago..

“Be killing sin or you can be sure it will be killing you.”

And I would add that it will lead you to cause others to stumble as well...

How do you answer that question this morning?

Do you truly hate the sin that you see in your life, and more than that are you taking steps to avoid that sin?

You cannot love sin and love the Lord....

Psalm 97:10 says this...

“Hate evil, you who love the Lord..”

So, we have tested our love of God’s people and our hatred of sin...

But there is one final test in verses 49-50...

III. Do You Truly Pursue Holiness (v49-50)

Look at verse 49 with me...

⁴⁹ “For everyone will be salted with fire.”

When Anna was just a little girl, we were at the beach with our entire family and someone had made a pitcher of tea.

So, we poured Anna a glass of tea and she took a big drink.

As soon as she swallowed, she said in her best toddler voice...

“Somebody didn’t stir the tea.”

The tea didn’t taste right and that was the only reason that she could think of why it didn’t taste good...

Turns out, someone had used salt instead of sugar to sweeten the tea...

And salt definitely has an effect on everything it touches...

It is a strong flavoring agent to any food.

And Jesus is simply telling the disciples that the flavor of your lives is going to be persecution.

You are going to be salted with the fire of persecution.

He was right.

All of the men that he was talking to on this occasion with the exception of Judas suffered for the simple fact that they were Christians.

And the history of the church, it is a history of persecution of believers.

Many of us have no idea what real persecution is, but unfortunately the persecution that other Christians endure is coming to our shores as well.

It is already here, but it will only intensify.

People sweat because churches may lose tax-exempt statuses..

But eventually Christians here will lose their lives for the sake of the gospel..

That is not gloom and doom; those are the facts of what Jesus is saying here.

The flavor of your life will be the fire of persecution.

But then he adds,....

⁵⁰ Salt is good; but if the salt becomes unsalty, with what will you ^[ah]make it salty again?

How are believers described in the world?

We are the salt of the earth.

And what does that mean?

Well, salt is not a flavor enhancer to food, it is also used as a preservative.

Before the days of refrigeration, salt is what was used to keep meat from spoiling...

And the same is true of Christians....

We serve to keep the world from spoiling as we seek to live lives that are different in the world.

The examples of our lives in some ways keeps the world from falling into greater sin...

Which goes back to the point of this passage...

The point of killing sin and pursuing the holiness of a righteous life is to keep yourself pure but also to keep others from sin....

Our pursuit of holiness pleases God but it also acts to keep others from being contaminated with sin.

In that sense, we are called to be salt.

But trouble comes when salt loses its saltiness...

The point is that when people who are supposed to be living holy lives aren't living holy lives, we become useless in the world.

We are not only useless; we actually bring harm to others who think we should be different but find out we aren't.

And so Jesus says....

Have salt in yourselves...

Be people who pursue holiness, not only for your own good but for the good of other Christians who are watching and even as examples to the world...

Be holy people because your God is a holy God.

And then he adds, be at peace with one another...

Do you remember what started this whole lesson to the disciples?

Well, they had been arguing about who was the greatest....

And the greatest solution to stop fighting among yourselves is to know that persecution is coming....

And the command is to live holy lives in the face of persecution and part of that holy living is to stop competing with one another...

The disciples and the church are on the same team, and when persecution comes, their love for one another will be a test to their holiness...

John 13:35...

³⁵ By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."

The clear principle of these final 2 verses is that true believers are those who are filled with salt, or holiness.

And the question for you is this....

Are you truly pursuing holiness in your life?

Are you trying to live for the Lord or are you living like the world?

Do you look, act, and think different or do you look like everybody else in the world?

Are you laying up treasure in heaven or are you trying to make the most of this life?

Is your holiness a constant pursuit or is it something that you simply think about on Sunday mornings and never do anything about it?

Conclusion

This sermon should hit all of our hearts because it asks some difficult questions...

For many believers in here, it reminds us that Jesus calls us to love our brothers more fully, to take sin more seriously, and to pursue holiness more forcefully..

For others in here today, this verses may have simply revealed to you that you aren't a true follower of Christ.

Because you don't truly love God's people...

Because you don't truly hate sin.

And because you don't truly pursue holiness...

And if you have realized that this morning, that is a good place to start...

You only know which direction to go when you truly know where you are.....

Many of you may not the name Aron Lee Ralston, but I bet many of you know his story..

He was the mountain climber who got his trapped beneath a rock while climbing down a mountain in Utah.

After 5 days of trying to free his hand, he ran out of water and food..

So, he filmed his final goodbyes on his phone...

Carved his name in the rocks round him and waited to die...

Then he got the crazy idea of cutting of his hand.

After some careful thinking he decided to break the bones in his forearm and then cut it off about halfway between the wrist and elbow.

Which he did, and then he climbed down and was eventually rescued 6 hours later.

He survived the accident, and there has been a book and movie about his ordeal...

And there are those of you here this morning who are just as trapped by sin as Aron Ralston was by that rock...

Yet, freedom doesn't come by cutting off your sinning arm or foot or plucking out an eye...

Freedom comes when you take that rock of sin that is pinning you down...

And you come to Jesus as the only one who can free you from that burden...

After Aron cut off his arm, some men went back to retrieve it from under the rock to see if it was salvageable and could be reattached...

It took 13 men to lift it along with a winch and a hydraulic jack...

Let me tell you something this morning...

You will never free yourself from the rock of sin that pins you down...

The only way out is through repentance and faith in Jesus alone.

Here is what Aron Ralston said about the moment when what was left of his arm broke away from that rock...

“In that moment, my arm fell down but my mind filled up with just one thought...

“I AM FINALLY FREE!”

And I will tell you what dear friend, the moment you truly repent and trust Christ...

There is but one thought that will race through your head as well....

“I am finally free.”

Let us pray.

