

Bible Study Guide: Week of 9-20-2021

1. Read through the passage below
2. Read my notes and commentary
3. Read the questions at the end and ponder or discuss with others

Pastor Andrew

Mark 9:38-50

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

⁴²“If any of you put a stumbling block before one of these little ones who believe in me, it would be better for you if a great millstone were hung around your neck and you were thrown into the sea. ⁴³If your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life maimed than to have two hands and to go to hell, to the unquenchable fire. ⁴⁵And if your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life lame than to have two feet and to be thrown into hell. ⁴⁷And if your eye causes you to stumble, tear it out; it is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and to be thrown into hell, ⁴⁸where their worm never dies, and the fire is never quenched.

⁴⁹“For everyone will be salted with fire. ⁵⁰Salt is good; but if salt has lost its saltiness, how can you season it? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another.”

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We begin with John ironically tattling to Jesus about someone outside of Jesus’ inner circle who apparently had the power to cast out demons—a power the disciples conspicuously lacked earlier in the chapter. It seems probable that John was motivated by jealousy at worst or by a misguided sense of self-righteousness at best. John (and the other disciples by extension) are concerned with prestige, with rank and order, and with their own authority. Jesus, however, recognizes that the coming of the kingdom of God is the truly important issue. Jesus realizes that one who does not belong to his inner circle, but who still act in ways that bring about the kingdom of God are allies, not enemies. Further, Jesus notes, such people may one day save the life of a “true” disciple by providing water when it is needed.

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Jesus uses earthy, grotesque imagery throughout this passage. One might call his language “salty” (pun intended). Verse 42 seems partly connected with verse 41—these could be seen as two options laid out before those who will encounter Jesus’ disciples in the world: show kindness and mercy to the disciples of Jesus or cause the disciples of Jesus to stumble—trip them up. The Greek word here is *skandalizo*—a cognate of our English word scandal or scandalize. Further, one’s hand, foot, or eye (centrally important body parts, particularly in an agrarian society) could cause one to stumble or be tripped up. Jesus urges getting rid of that which trips us up, even when it is something we value greatly. He is obviously speaking hyperbolically—otherwise, there would be a lot of one-eyed,

one-handed, one-footed Christians in the world. This passage is somewhat parallel to Jesus' earlier question from Mark 8: "what does it profit one to gain the world world, yet forfeit one's life?" The imagery of worms and fire here are stock images of the place of torment and punishment used in the Old Testament. The term "hell" is the Aramaic word *Gehenna*, which refers to a deep ravine on the outskirts of Jerusalem that was associated with pagan worship and metaphorically believed to represent a place of purging or torment in the afterlife. Clearly, whatever else Jesus is saying here, he is saying that how people live and act toward others in this life matters in some lasting, eternal sense. He is calling those who would follow him to purge our lives of those things that keep us from true faith.

Both fire and salt were used in antiquity for purification and cleansing. Jesus' point here seems to be that we should not set aside our faith or give up on living the way he calls us to live (that is, salt losing its saltiness). Salt that is not salty is simply called dirt. It is literally worthless. He urges those who would follow him to retain that which makes them distinctive and, finally, to live at peace with one another. The main themes of this passage are: How Christians are to treat outsiders, how outsiders may treat Christians, and how Christians are to live in distinctive and intentional ways—perhaps even sacrificing things of great value for our faith.

Discussion/Reflection Questions:

- 1. Which part of phrase of this passage is most disturbing to you? Why do you think this is?**
- 2. In what ways might we be tempted to complain to Jesus about what others are doing in our world today as John did? How do you think Jesus**
- 3. What do you think Jesus means by "have salt among yourselves and be at peace with one another"?**