

Mark 9:38-50. ³⁸“Teacher,” said John, “we saw a man driving out demons in your name and we told him to stop, because he was not one of us.” ³⁹“Do not stop him,” Jesus said. “No one who does a miracle in my name can in the next moment say anything bad about me, ⁴⁰ for whoever is not against us is for us. ⁴¹ I tell you the truth, anyone who gives you a cup of water in my name because you belong to Christ will certainly not lose his reward. ⁴² “And if anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to be thrown into the sea with a large millstone tied around his neck. ⁴³ If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life maimed than with two hands to go into hell, where the fire never goes out. ⁴⁵ And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life crippled than to have two feet and be thrown into hell. ⁴⁷ And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into hell, ⁴⁸ where ‘their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched.’ ⁴⁹ Everyone will be salted with fire. ⁵⁰ “Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can you make it salty again? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with each other.”

Let nothing hinder the name of Jesus Christ from being shared.

- 1. Rejoice in the work being done in Jesus' name.**
- 2. Watch your life and doctrine closely.**

“Have salt in yourselves and be at peace with each other.” Salt is good. Who doesn't like salt? In fact, some of our doctors will probably tell us that we like salt a little too much. Salt adds flavor. We sprinkle salt on vegetables and potatoes and that table salt makes everything taste better. Before the time of freezers and refrigerators salt was a vital preservative that kept food from spoiling. Salt is good and very useful. In fact, there is a useful trick that I learned using salt, if you sprinkle some salt on your napkin or coaster at a restaurant it will keep your drink from sticking to the napkin or coaster. Salt is good. Table salt is tasty, salt as a preservative was and still can be extremely vital, and soon enough we will once again haul out the rock salt that will melt the ice on the roads and sidewalks and keep us from slipping and falling. Salt is good, I think that much is clear. But what does Jesus mean when he says, “Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with each other.”

Well, let's back things up for a moment and consider what is going on here in Mark chapter 9. Last week we saw the disciples making fools of themselves as they were bickering about who was the greatest. And we remember how Jesus brought a child before them and reminded them what was truly important. ***Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me.*** The prideful egos of these men were preventing the message of the gospel from being enjoyed and proclaimed, and so Jesus gave them this vital lesson. Be humble! Be welcoming! Rejoice in the simple truths of the gospel! And let nothing hinder the name of Jesus from being proclaimed!

It was a needed lesson that was masterfully taught, but it didn't quite sink in for the disciples, as John responded with something that he may have thought to be something that might repair the egos of these men and possibly propel them back into Jesus' good favor.

Hearing Jesus say the phrase, “in my name”, reminded John of something that the disciples did. The disciples had chastised a man who was healing people in the name of Jesus and made him stop. In John’s way of thinking they had defended the name of Jesus. But it soon becomes clear that the disciples were off base in this as well. Jesus had taught them a lesson that reminded them of what was important, sharing of the love Christ. Be humble! Be welcoming! And let nothing hinder the gospel of Jesus from being proclaimed! And yet John refers back to stopping a man who was helping others in the name of Jesus. Whether John was making a confession to Jesus, seeking approval, or speaking with a glow of satisfaction to his teacher, whatever his motive or tone, the event once again showed that the disciples were letting pride, and envy, and jealousy get in the way of sharing the love of Jesus with others.

Knowing these disciples like we do, knowing the thick headedness of sinners like you and me in general, it really shouldn’t be a surprise that the disciples were struggling with applying the teachings of Jesus to their lives and putting them into practice. And so we see how Jesus was so patient and yet firm with his disciples and we learn how Jesus is the same with us. In love instructs his disciples then and his disciples today that we **should let nothing hinder the name of Jesus Christ from being shared**. Rather we are to **rejoice in the work being done in Jesus’ name**. And instead of looking enviously at others we are encouraged as individuals to **watch your life and doctrine closely**.¹

The sin of pride that came over the disciples had also has spawned the evil twins of envy and jealousy, and all too often these sins of envy and jealousy serve as barriers to hinder the proclaiming the name of Jesus still today. When the disciples stopped this man, there was a part of them that meant well, but at the root of their actions were also these sins of envy and jealousy. They wanted the credit. They were Jesus’ 12 disciples after all. That kind of stuff was only for them to do.

Like the disciples before us, both pastors and parishioners alike can get into the same type of thinking. Maybe we think and act like there are only a certain few who are qualified to carry out this important work of sharing the love and speaking the name of Jesus. There is this almost territorial impulse that says such work is the “pastor’s job”, and we stop people or at least put up roadblocks that hinder people from using their gifts to serve the Lord. And this lesson shines some light on why that is. There is that envy, and that jealousy that creeps into our thinking. The pastor thinks that only he can do such things. Others in the congregation may either become jealous of another’s gifts or become suspicious of those who serve and jealously question their motives. Such actions and attitudes can be very corrosive and divisive within a congregation and it can become so apparent that when others outside of the congregation catch a whiff of what is going on it leaves a bad taste in their mouths not only when they think about our congregation, but our entire church body, and quite possibly even Christianity as a whole. But if we use our gifts and our time and abilities to share the work of the church it is done more effectively and the name of Jesus is honored and proclaimed, and perhaps others will give glory to God.

Dear friends there is no room in God’s kingdom for jealousy and envy. These sins grow like weeds out of our sinful hearts and the devil manipulates these sins and makes them his tools to choke out the work of the church. A pastor worth his salt should address such jealousy and

¹ 1 Timothy 4:16. Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers. | Paul uses this phrase with a similar concern as has Jesus in Mark 9. Teachers and preachers of the gospel are to watch their life and doctrine closely for their benefit and for the eternal benefit of their hearers.

envy in the congregation and also address it in his own heart. Such envy, such jealousy, will only choke out and suffocate the work of the church. Instead we are to recognize and encourage and rejoice in those who use their gifts even in the smallest of ways to serve their LORD. This was the very instruction that Jesus gave to his disciples, ³⁹ ***“Do not stop him,” Jesus said. “No one who does a miracle in my name can in the next moment say anything bad about me, ⁴⁰ for whoever is not against us is for us. ⁴¹ I tell you the truth, anyone who gives you a cup of water in my name because you belong to Christ will certainly not lose his reward.***

Whoever is not against us is for us. The same goes for our work in the wider understanding of the kingdom of God. At times we set up rivalries between congregations that exist simply because of jealousy and envy. Envious of another congregation’s size or success or history we make them out to be the enemy. We may even attend a local rally or watch a WELS connection and instead of rejoicing in the work of the kingdom that is being done we are envious of their success, and there is a part of us that immediately looks for flaws or questions their methods. Get rid of such envy! Rejoice in the work being done in the name of Jesus Christ. Another instance of this jealousy might be constructing unnecessary rivalries between church bodies to the point where we might look with critical or envious eyes at the church whose youth group fed the poor and because of that envy that jealousy that’s inside of we can’t find it in ourselves to rejoice even a little bit in work of the kingdom that is being done. We are suspicious of their motives, we are critical of their work. Get rid of such envy and jealousy. We are to look to Christ to cleanse of such jealous thoughts. We should be careful to avoid such acts of envy. ***Whoever is not against us is for us!***

However, that does not mean we are to throw doctrine and pure teaching out the window. We also must be careful to watch out for and avoid false teaching or anyone or anything that lead people into sin. Remember what Jesus said immediately after he encouraged his disciples to rejoice in the work being done by others in his name. In nearly the same breath he commends those who contribute to the work of the gospel in the smallest of ways, but then he gives this incredible warning. ***“And if anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to be thrown into the sea with a large millstone tied around his neck.*** False teaching and sinful practices are to be avoided. We may be able to rejoice in the charitable work being done by another church body, but if that church body is a place where false teaching is tolerated and promoted, and young people and old people alike are being told that certain sins are no longer sins, this cannot be tolerated. Warnings against of the dangers of such false teaching are to be communicated by a lack of fellowship and by continuing to proclaim the truth in our own circles. But all of this is to be done not in harsh, or contentious, or prideful, or envious tones, which often leaves a bad taste in people’s mouths, but it is to be done out of love and concern for the gospel.

Paul echoes these words of Christ when he writes in Colossians. ***Conduct yourselves with wisdom toward outsiders, making the most of the opportunity. Let your speech always be with grace, as though seasoned with salt, so that you will know how you should respond to each person. (Colossians 4:6).*** It is possible for us to stand up for what God’s Word has to say without speaking with words that seemed to be seasoned with jealousy and envy and contempt. Instead we are to speak the truth out of love for and devotion to God’s Word.

Our LORD Jesus wants us to be devoted to his Word. He wants us to take God’s Word seriously. He does not want us to alter his Word or add our own thoughts and fillers and

additions. This is what he meant when he said, ⁵⁰ **“Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can you make it salty again? We are to watch our teaching of God’s Word, our doctrine, closely and we are to watch our lives closely as well. As mindful as we are about what God’s Word has to say and how our churches conform to its teaching, we are to be mindful of how we are following God’s Word in our daily lives. Just as Jesus grabbed the attention of his disciples with such a vivid warning against false teachers, *it would be better for them to have a large millstone tied around their neck and be thrown into the sea...* likewise he grabs our attention with a graphic illustration of how closely we should apply his word to our lives. *If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off; your eye, then gouge it out.* With these words Jesus he reminds us of what is at stake: eternity. Nothing in our teaching or in our lives should keep us from following our Savior or proclaiming his name. Eternity is at stake! Nothing in our public teaching or in our personal lives should hinder others from following Jesus or bring shame on his name. Eternity is at stake! For our enemy is not those rivals that we have in jealousy constructed within our own congregations, nor is it that bigger church down the street that we have villainized because of sinful envy, but rather our enemy is the devil and his forces of evil. Our enemy is our sinful natures, and the world around us, and we are even fighting against the powers of the devil and hell itself. Paul once again picks up on these thoughts of our Savior when he writes in Ephesians chapter 6. *For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.***

Finally, Jesus reminds us that we are salted by fire. God’s Word is that salt that is in us. It purifies and preserves. It also sears our hearts and burns at our conscience when it tells us that there is a fiery place called hell. Hell is a real place where ***the fire does not go out and the worm does not die.*** In other words, hell is a real place of eternal suffering. But the LORD Jesus has come to rescue us. He was separated from God’s love, he suffered hell, so that we wouldn’t have to. He has given us his life and his Word that saves us. And he has also commissioned us to work in his kingdom and to share this saving message; to share the love of Jesus and proclaim the saving name of Jesus so that more and more men, women, and little children believe in God’s one and only Son and do not perish but have eternal life. Dear friends, we have been given this blessed gift of salvation and we have been called to carry that gift to the world through our words and our actions as his dearly loved disciples. What a high calling! What joyous and important work! So of course there is no room in our hearts, or in the work that we have been banded together to carry out, for jealousy and envy. Instead we are to heed the words of Jesus, ***“Have salt in yourselves and be at peace with each other.”***

Salt is good. Having the Word of God that saves us from hell in our hearts is good and it extremely useful for it keeps sins like jealousy and envy from sticking to us. Having the love of God that has been sprinkled on us through water and the word since our baptism saves us from perishing and will daily preserve and strengthen us so that we may do our part to honor and proclaim the name of Jesus. Having that life-saving message on our hearts will melt our cold selfish hearts and will compel us to do our best to avoid anything that we say or that would spoil our personal faith or leave a bad taste in people’s mouth. Yes, dear Christian friends, Jesus has saved us from perishing in the fires of hell that we deserved as sinners and has given us the peace and certainty of heaven as his blessed saints. ***Have salt in yourselves and be at peace with each other*** to the glory of our God who saves and preserves us. Amen.