

95-08-13bMark

As we approach the study of the Word of God this evening, let's take a moment to clear our minds and prepare our hearts and seek the ministry of God the Holy Spirit so that these things will accomplish the purpose for which God has given them to us, which is to transform us into the image of His Son. Shall we pray? Father, we thank You for the life that You have given us in Jesus Christ. We thank You that You have left us in this life, in time, in a fallen world with a fallen nature, in this period between the giving and the fulfillment of our promise of complete salvation, of ultimate sanctification.

We thank You that You have given us the opportunity to learn of You in circumstances that will never be repeated in all of the eternal future. We pray that as we study the truth of Your Word that these things will become a part of the resources in our soul. We pray that they will be the object of our faith, that we will be motivated and encouraged to walk by faith and not by sight.

That we will learn by these examples and be drawn closer to our Savior Jesus Christ. We ask it in His name. Amen.

We're going to move forward in Mark chapter 9 this evening, and I was just thinking about that last song that we sang, Trust and Obey. The fourth verse, which we did not sing, echoes the principle that we reviewed this morning about that element of following Jesus Christ that involves self-sacrifice, the setting aside of earthly goals, of earthly desires, of things that are a part of our natural man, and taking up the cross, which seems like a foolish thing to do from a human perspective, and to establish a pattern in our life of following Jesus Christ. This was one thing that the nation of Israel had a difficult time in doing, particularly certain generations of that nation.

And as they existed in their day, picture for us our lives as individuals. We've seen this picture all the way from the inception of the nation, the promises to Abraham, the lives of Isaac and Jacob and Joseph, and the 400 years of bondage, and then that great emergence from Egypt under the blood of the Passover lamb. And the deliverance of the nation of Israel is a picture of our deliverance as believers by the blood of the lamb.

And so the entire Old Testament record pictures for us, through Israel's national life, the things that we face as believers. Turn with me to Jeremiah chapter 7. We're going to see something in Jeremiah that's going to really illuminate our study of this next couple of episodes in Mark. Of course, Jeremiah is often called the weeping prophet.

He's the author of Lamentations. He watched a very similar generation in his day reject the word of the Lord and miss the great opportunity to reflect God's glory on earth. So in chapter 7 of Jeremiah, the word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord saying, Stand in the gate of the Lord's house and proclaim there this word and say, Hear the word of the Lord, all you of Judah who enter in at these gates to worship the Lord.

Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, Amend your ways and your doings and I will cause you to dwell in this place. Do not trust in these lying words saying, The temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord are these. For if you thoroughly amend your ways and your doings, If you thoroughly execute judgment between a man and his neighbor, If you do not oppress the stranger, the fatherless and the widow, And do not shed innocent blood in this place or walk after other gods to your hurt, Then I will cause you to dwell in this place, in the land that I gave to your fathers forever and ever.

Behold, you trust in lying words that cannot profit. Will you steal, murder, commit adultery, swear falsely, burn incense to Baal and walk after other gods whom you do not know, And then come and stand before Me in this house which is called by My name, And say, We are delivered to do all these abominations? Has this house which is called by My name become a den of thieves in your eyes? Behold, I, even I, have seen it, says the Lord. But go now to My place which was in Shiloh, where I set My name at the first, And see what I did to it because of the wickedness of My people Israel.

And now because you have done all these works, says the Lord, And I spoke to you, rising up early and speaking, but you did not hear. And I called to you, but you did not answer. Therefore, I will do to the house which is called by My name, in which you trust, And to this place which I gave to you and to your fathers, as I have done to Shiloh." Now let's pause here and reflect.

We've covered 1 Samuel. We know what happened in Shiloh, don't we? Because of Israel's lack of obedience, because of their lack of faith in God, their trusting in human solutions, God allowed the Philistines to come in and utterly destroy Shiloh. God says, this temple that you're placing your trust in, this temple that you are banking on for your acceptance by God in your regular life, you do all kinds of terrible things, but then you come to the temple, and you say, because I come here, I will be preserved.

God will accept me. He says, this place in which you trust, in verse 14, this place which I gave to you and your fathers. Is the temple a bad thing? Is it a bad place? It's not.

God gave it to Israel. But they have focused on the temple and its rituals rather than on the God who ordained them, the God who commanded them, the God that they are supposed to represent and reflect. Because of that error, God is going to wipe out that temple.

And these words apply to Jesus' generation. What did Jesus say when He passed by the temple, talking to His disciples? There shall not remain one stone upon another that shall not be thrown down. For the very same reason, temple worship, the Pharisaical worship, the leaven of the Pharisees, has so permeated life in Israel that God is going to utterly destroy that temple just as He predicts the destruction of this.

Notice what it says in verse 15. I will cast you out of My sight as I have cast out all your brethren,

the whole posterity of Ephraim. This, of course, is the northern kingdom that has already gone into bondage under the Assyrian conquest.

Therefore, in verse 16, do not pray for this people. Here's something else that we take for granted. It's always right to pray for someone, isn't it? No matter what their condition, we generally always feel like we can pray.

But what does God say here? Do not pray for this people. Do not lift up a cry or prayer for them. Nor make intercession to Me, for I will not hear you.

Do you not see what they do in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem? The children gather wood, the fathers kindle the fire, and the women knead dough to make cakes for the Queen of Heaven. And they pour out drink offerings to other gods that they may provoke Me to anger. Do they provoke Me to anger, says the Lord? Do they not provoke themselves to the shame of their own faces? Therefore, thus says the Lord God, behold, My anger and My fury will be poured out on this place, on man and on beast, on the trees of the field and on the fruit of the ground, and it will burn and not be quenched." Now keep in mind, we're talking about Israel.

We are talking about a nation that represents believers. This is the Israel that came out under the blood of the Passover lamb. This is a status that believers can achieve in God's eyes.

This is a level of disobedience and a level of judgment that can come on believers. This is what God can do with His people when after salvation, they do not walk by faith. Pursuing other gods, we say, well, none of us are idolaters, but we can easily do this in this generation.

We can pursue financial security and make that the object of our trust. We can pursue the good opinion of people or the good thoughts of those in our periphery and we make that a god. We pursue that and we place our confidence in that and we feel like if we have that, we're acceptable in God's sight and we're acceptable and we're secure if we have those things, if we have finances or if we have acceptance or if we have success or whatever.

And we make an idol out of those things. But God says, when that happens, my anger and my fury will be poured out on this place. Look down in verse 23.

This is what I commanded them when I brought them out of Egypt in that day. He's talking about Israel coming out of the land of Egypt. I should start in verse 22.

I did not speak to your fathers or command them in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt concerning burnt offerings or sacrifices. It's one of the things we don't tend to think about and observe too much, but when God brought Israel out of bondage in Egypt, the first thing He did was not to dispense the laws for sacrifice, the Levitical offerings and so forth. What's the first thing God gave Israel from Mount Sinai? It was the standards of behavior.

It was the Ten Commandments. It was to give them God's expectation for attitude. Have no other

gods before Me.

Don't make any graven images. Observe the Sabbath to keep it holy. Don't take My name in vain.

And then the six commandments that cover dealing with one another. Those commandments can be summed up with love the Lord your God with all your heart, your soul and your strength and love your neighbor as yourself. It was initially the very similar command to what we have been given in this age.

Walk in love. A new commandment I give unto you that you love one another. The standard is not that different than what God initially gave Israel, but when Israel failed and broke those commands, God added the commandment.

God added the sacrificial system as a picture of the coming remedy that would be fulfilled in Jesus Christ. And by giving us that standard and showing us how we fail, God then demonstrates our need for salvation. And that's why Jeremiah reviews this here by recording God's words.

I did not speak to your fathers or command them in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt concerning burnt offerings or sacrifices. This is what I commanded them saying, Obey My voice and I will be your God and you shall be My people. And walk in all the ways that I have commanded you that it may be well with you.

Yet they did not obey or incline their ear. They followed the counsels and the dictates of their evil hearts and they went backward and not forward. Since the day that your fathers came out of the land of Egypt until this day, I have even sent to you all My servants, the prophets, daily rising up early and sending them.

Yet they did not obey Me or incline their ear, but they stiffened their necks. They did worse than their fathers. Therefore you shall speak all these words to them, but they will not obey you.

You shall also call to them, but they will not answer you. So you shall say to them, This is a nation that does not obey the voice of the Lord their God, nor receive correction. Truth has perished and has been cut off from their mouth." I want to talk about the further abominations that they have committed and the judgments that are going to go on.

But I want to point out a couple of features of this description of this generation in Israel. What does God say about them? He says in verse 26, they do not incline their ear, but they stiffen their neck. In verse 28 He says, This is a nation that does not obey the voice of the Lord their God.

They do not receive correction. Truth has perished and has been cut off from their mouth. If you were going to picture this generation in Israel, in a human being, what kind of human being might you put before people? Perhaps a human being that is completely in the grip of evil.

A human being that is completely controlled by evil. A human being that does not hear and that

does not speak. That would be a good example if you wanted to sum up that generation in a single person, wouldn't it? Because that's what God says.

They don't hear. They stiffen their necks. They don't speak the truth.

They neither hear nor speak. They are consumed with the evil that they have chosen. And that's exactly what we find in our passage tonight over in Mark chapter 9. Because when Jesus descends from the Mount of Transfiguration, He encounters the nine disciples that He left behind.

And these nine disciples are in a dispute with the scribes at the bottom of the mountain. And there are people gathered around. And in verse 14 of chapter 9 it says, When He came to the disciples, He saw a great multitude around them and scribes disputing with them.

Immediately when they saw Him, all the people were greatly amazed and running to Him, greeted Him. And He asked the scribes, What are you discussing with them? Then one of the crowd answered and said, Teacher, I brought you my Son who has a mute spirit. And wherever it seizes Him, it throws Him down.

He foams at the mouth, gnashes His teeth and becomes rigid. So I spoke to your disciples that they should cast it out, but they could not. He answered Him and said, O faithless generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I bear with you? Bring Him to Me.

Then they brought Him to Him. And when He saw Him, immediately the spirit convulsed Him and He fell on the ground and wallowed, foaming at the mouth. So He asked His Father, How long has this been happening to Him? And He said, From childhood.

And often He has thrown Him both into the fire and into the water to destroy Him. But if you can do anything, have compassion on us and help us. Jesus said to Him, If you can, all things are possible to him who believes.

Immediately the father of the child cried out and said with tears, Lord, I believe. Help my unbelief. When Jesus saw that the people came running together, He rebuked the unclean spirit, saying to it, Deaf and dumb spirit, I command you, come out of Him and enter Him no more.

Then the spirit cried out, convulsed Him greatly, and came out of Him. And He became as one dead, so that many said, He is dead. But Jesus took Him by the hand and lifted Him up, and He arose.

And when He had come into the house, His disciples asked Him privately, Why could we not cast it out? And He said to them, This kind can come out by nothing but prayer. Now, as we have seen in so many of the miraculous dealings of Jesus Christ, the healings and so forth, there is typically much more going on than just a simple record of an event. Out of all of the hundreds and perhaps thousands of healings that Jesus did, why are certain ones selected by the Holy Spirit to

be made a part of this record that we have in Scripture? Why are the details included that are included? Why do they differ? In one case, Jesus will cast out a demon, and the man will be perfectly sound.

Here is a case where He casts out a demon, and the boy is as one dead. These things are all significant, and they mean something to us. And in addition to the normal things that we see, which are expressions of Jesus' compassion, of His power and authority over demons, His ability to instantly diagnose and cure any malady that is a part of a human's circumstance, there is some symbolic value in this.

When is the last time we saw someone who appeared to be dead and who was spoken of as dead, and Jesus took them by the hand and raised them up? It was not long ago. It was Jairus' daughter, wasn't it? And we saw there a beautiful picture that is all tied together with the woman with the issue of blood and Jairus as the father of that daughter and his expectation for that daughter to be his future and the ongoing nature of his household and so forth, and that expectation being cut off. And Jesus says, don't fear, only believe.

And then there's an interim waiting period where something else happens. There is a similar value that we can see in this episode. And I'm not saying that we want to go into an allegorical method of interpretation, but simply that we need to be sensitive to some of the things that God can communicate at different levels in Scripture because we have the first key in verse 19.

Why is it as Jesus descends from the Mount of Transfiguration, the place where His coming in glory to establish the Kingdom has just been pictured, coming straight from that experience, He comes back down the hill and sees the generation in Israel and He says, O faithless generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I bear with you? This episode with the boy with the demon being mute and deaf and so forth, why does this call forth an observation about the generation? Think about the generation that Jeremiah pictures in chapter 7. What is the problem in that generation? They don't hear the Word of the Lord. They don't respond to what God has given them by way of command and by way of instruction. They don't live a life of faith.

Instead, they pursue what they consider to be a better solution. In their case, it was idolatry. It was trust in some other system.

The system that prevailed in the world of their day, which was praying to false gods. That's what has happened in this generation. The leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod has polluted the Word of God.

It incorporates it. It has the ring of truth. It's based on Scripture.

People spend a lot of time talking about God and being righteous and so forth and referring to Moses and Abraham. And yet, it's a polluted system. It's an adulterated religion.

It is a false system. And Jesus condemns it roundly in His condemnation of the scribes and the Pharisees that we have seen as He pronounces the seven woes on them. And if He comes down from the mountain, what does He see? Here is the very embodiment of that situation.

Here is a young boy who does not hear and does not speak. He is in the grip of evil. It controls him.

It throws him down on the ground and causes him to thrash about and foam at the mouth. The Father will later on tell us that many times this evil has thrown him into the fire and into the water seeking to destroy him. This has been the plague in Israel virtually since its emergence from Egypt.

Falling back into the trap of human solutions and human ideas and human ways of worshiping that place Israel in the grip of evil so much so that God has had to discipline them Himself. And Jesus sees this and He says, O faithless generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I bear with you? And we notice that the nine disciples who are representatives of Jesus Christ, these are experienced men. Jesus sent them out in teams of two to go out and cast out demons and to heal the sick.

And they have done so. That's already a part of their experience. And yet in this case, they are powerless.

Now what has happened? Did Jesus take back the authority that He gave to those disciples and they can now no longer cast out demons? We have no record of that. This seems to be a special case. Why is it that these disciples who have been given authority, who have experience, cannot eradicate this particular demon? The disciples themselves scratch their heads and they say, Lord, we really expected to be able to do this and we could not.

What's the deal? And what does Jesus say at the end of this section? This kind can only come out by prayer. Some Bibles add and fasting, but that is a late and fairly poorly attested reading. This passage should say by prayer and end with a period at that point.

And what is Jesus talking about there? Think about this. This is not a lesson in demon casting out, demon exorcism. This is talking about the condition that this particular boy is in and the particular nature of the affliction because this problem can only be solved by prayer.

And this little boy, of course in reality as an individual these principles are not applicable, but in His representation of the nation, what does God tell Israel in Jeremiah 7? What does He tell them in Ezekiel 36.26? And in Jeremiah 31.31, talking about the new covenant to Israel, He says they are disobedient. They are a stiff-necked people. They are rigid.

They bow the neck. They reject. They kill the prophets who have been sent to them.

Jesus pictures this also. And here we have representatives of Jesus Christ who do the normal things, the normal presentation of Jesus' authority and it doesn't work. And why is that? Because there is a missing element and that is that the generation that Jesus is addressing here with His message of the gospel of the kingdom must turn to God and reflect that in prayer.

It's not the people praying to have the demon removed. Jesus Himself, He says this kind comes out only by prayer. Jesus does not pray to eradicate this demon.

Jesus commands it to leave and it leaves. And that's what it's going to take to cleanse the nation of Israel. Those within the nation that have turned to God with a pure heart and a sincere faith, those that have loved the Lord their God with all their heart and all their soul and all their strength, they must be the ones to constitute the nation.

They must be the ones to make up the nation of Israel and the millennial kingdom. And that's the only way that Israel is going to be cleansed. It's the only way that they're going to be brought back as a nation is to be constituted of people who love the Lord.

These generations who accept the Lord and then completely disobey Him, picture this deafness and this muteness, inability to communicate, inability to be a testimony, inability to do any good thing. They're in the grip of evil. And so what is it going to take? It's going to take the solution that God provides.

When you look back at that new covenant, what does God say? I will cut out their heart of stone and give them a heart of flesh. They will no longer have a need that anyone teach them. You look at Ezekiel 36, beginning in verse 26.

I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you. I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes.

And you will keep My judgments and do them. Then you shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers. You shall be My people and I will be your God.

That new covenant to the house of Israel and the house of Judah will be fulfilled when Jesus Christ reconstitutes those nations. That nation of Israel appears to be dead, doesn't it? It's gone. And even today the civil state of Israel that we have isn't founded on spiritual principles.

They don't worship God. They're not founded by a deliverance from God. It's a good start.

It's nice to have the land claimed in the name of Israel, but this is not the fulfillment of prophecy. That will not take place until Jesus Christ Himself comes to sit on the throne of David and that nation is reconstituted by those who love the Lord. So this new covenant, when it talks about cutting out the heart of stone, that's not talking about individuals because God doesn't override

our choice.

But it does talk about the nation. And when that nation has a generation that is not faithless, a generation that is not foolish, a generation that doesn't turn away from the Lord, but turns to Him and trusts Him, that is when the nation of Israel will, in effect, be raised from the dead the way that we saw Jairus' daughter raised, the way that we see Jesus raise this. And the disciples say, why could we not cast this demon out? The prophets of old might ask the same question.

Why is it that we went to Israel and we proclaimed the Word of the Lord and it didn't do any good? The nation did not change. They didn't repent. We still went into captivity.

Read Lamentations. Jeremiah is broken-hearted that the Word of the Lord did not produce a response in the nation of Israel. Why is that? Jesus answers that question here at the end of this section.

This kind can only come out by prayer. The generation in the nation of Israel needs to turn to God and seek His face. You shall seek Me and find Me when you search for Me with all your heart, God says to Israel.

This faithless generation doesn't do that. What is it going to take? It's going to take, essentially, that generation dying out like the Israelites in the wilderness and the nation of Israel being resurrected, literally, with Israelites of faith. So coming down from the Mount of Transfiguration, coming down from the picture of Christ's glory in the Kingdom, we see His relationship to that generation.

They're a faithless generation and they don't respond. And, in essence, that generation will have to die. The prophecy in Jeremiah 7 will be fulfilled for this generation that Jesus addresses.

Not one stone will be left upon another in that temple. Turn over a couple of pages in Mark to Mark 11. Verse 15.

Jesus comes in in the triumphal entry and everyone proclaims Him, Hosanna in the highest, Hosanna to the Son of David, and so forth. They come to Jerusalem and Jesus went into the temple and began to drive out those who bought and sold in the temple and overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold doves. And He would not allow anyone to carry wares through the temple.

Then He taught, saying to them, Is it not written, My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations? But you have made it a den of thieves. And that den of thieves phrase is a quote from Jeremiah 7. Jesus compares His own generation to the generation of Jeremiah's day. And He says, You are faithless.

You do not turn at the reproof of the Lord. You do not turn at the words of the prophet. We saw this morning over in Deuteronomy when Moses said that God would send another prophet who

would confront Israel with the same words that Moses himself had brought.

That's what has happened. Jesus in His role as prophet as well as priest and king has brought that word and this generation has rejected it. Jesus tells the disciples that that's what's going to happen.

And that's when Peter rebukes Him and says, Oh Lord, that can't be the case. And He says, Get thee behind Me, Satan. You've got your mind on the things of man instead of the things of God.

So this is one of the things that is suggested to our minds as we see this picture of this mute and deaf boy. Why is it that after Jesus removes the demon, He lays there as one dead and Jesus raises Him? It's a picture of what's going to have to happen in Israel. This generation in Israel is going to have to drop as that generation in the wilderness, the 40 year wandering, drops.

And God will have to reconstitute the nation before that transfiguration scene can take place. Now look in Mark 9, verse 30. They departed from there and passed through Galilee and He did not want anyone to know it.

For He taught His disciples and said to them, The Son of Man is being betrayed into the hands of men and they will kill Him. And after He is killed, He will rise the third day. But they did not understand this saying and were afraid to ask Him.

Why do you suppose they were afraid to ask? Do you think they were afraid to come to an understanding of it? Were they afraid to be embarrassed? I think sometimes in our Christian life we have been believers for a long time and we've been in church a long time and then a question will arise in our minds that sometimes we're afraid to ask because we feel like people expect us to perhaps know more than we do or to have all of the answers at some point and a little bit of our pride gets in the way. They did not understand and they were afraid to ask Him. Then He came to Capernaum.

Remember, Capernaum is not Bethsaida, is it? Jesus called Peter and Andrew out of Bethsaida and they made their headquarters in Capernaum. Kafar Nahum, the village of Nahum, the prophet, the place where the Word of God was proclaimed. When He was in the house, He asked them, What was it you disputed among yourselves on the road? But they kept silent for on the road they had disputed among themselves who would be the greatest.

Naturally, I would keep silent also and I think they were a little embarrassed when Jesus asked this question. So He sat down, called the twelve, and said to them, If anyone desires to be first, he shall be last of all and servant of all. Then He took a little child and set him in the midst of them.

And when He had taken him in His arms, He said to them, Whoever receives one of these little children in My name, receives Me. And whoever receives Me receives not Me, but Him who sent

Me. Now John answered Him, saying, Teacher, we saw someone who does not follow us casting out demons in Your name and we forbade him because he does not follow us.

But Jesus said, Do not forbid him for no one who works a miracle in My name can soon afterwards speak evil of Me. He who is not against us is on our side. Whoever gives you a cup of water to drink in My name because you belong to Christ, assuredly I say to you he will by no means lose his reward.

Now what does all of this suggest to us in the light of what we've just seen? Jesus is moving forward. He doesn't want to do a public ministry now. He wants to work with the disciples.

He travels and He does not want it to be known. And He's teaching them. He's working on their attitude.

And they're thinking, well, if this kingdom is coming, Peter and James and John just saw a foretaste of it on the mountain, now they're talking among themselves, well, which one of us will be at the Lord's right hand and which of us will be at His left hand and which of us will have the seat of honor and the position of prestige and so forth. And Jesus says, if that's your desire, you're going to wind up last in the kingdom. And we find ourselves with some of this also, don't we? We want to be well thought of.

We want to be approved by our peers, by our fellow believers. We sometimes feel a sense of competition as a church. There are other churches that are bigger.

There are other churches that have more pages in the bulletin and more ministries and more things going on and more people and better variety in the presentation of things and the services and so forth. And we look and we start to feel a little bit of a sense of competition. And we say, well, I want to compare favorably with that church or as an individual, I want to compare favorably with this other person.

And Jesus says, if that attitude creeps into our thinking, we're going to wind up last in the kingdom because that's not what God has called us to in this life. We've got to keep our eyes on the kingdom and not on this life. We don't want to be first here.

We want to be first there. We want to serve and reflect God's glory there. And with that as our goal, that educates us on what to do here.

And so, what do we do here? First of all, we don't throw rocks at one another. Here's a man that's casting out demons. And of course, this has got to prickle a little bit on the disciples' skin because they just came off of a failed experience of trying to cast out a demon.

And here's a man that doesn't even follow Christ. He's casting out demons in Christ's name. This really rankles a little bit.

Lord, we've followed You for two and a half years and we couldn't get a demon out. This man doesn't follow at all and he's having success. I don't compare favorably with him.

We want to go rebuke him and stop him. We think we ought to kind of have the corner on the market of this good work. Jesus says, do not forbid him.

No one who works a miracle in My name and can soon afterwards speak evil of Me. He who is not against us is on our side. And of course, immediately we think of Matthew 12, 30 where Jesus says, he who is not for Me is against Me.

And here He says, he who is not against Me is for Me. How can that be? That seems like a contradiction. And once again, context is what helps us out.

What is Jesus saying here? We're talking about a man who is doing things in the name of the Lord. If he is actually casting out demons in the Lord's name, which apparently He is, then He is on God's side. He's not an enemy.

He's not attacking Jesus Christ. He is producing good in Christ's name. And that's not a person to go attack.

And He is not going to be attacking the Lord. He is someone that is for the Lord. He's not against Him.

So He's not a person to attack. He's not a person to call down and criticize and forbid to operate. Even if the disciples don't agree with Him and they say, well, if you're such a good demon exorcist, why don't you come join us? And so forth.

Jesus says, don't criticize those that are on our side. Save your perception of wrong for preaching against sin and righteousness and judgment. Don't bite and devour the people that are on the good side.

And that's different. When you go over to Matthew chapter 12 and verse 30, Jesus is talking about an entirely different category of people. He's talking about casting out demons once again.

It's my personal observation that a lot of times when you see demons being cast out, somewhere in that you're having a picture of salvation. Because demons and the indwelling of demons picture the control by evil that plagues us as unbelievers. And typically, at least in my observation, something about salvation and the transition from death to life and from the power of Satan to the power of God is in view any time you have demons being cast out in the context.

That's what we have over in Matthew chapter 12. Jesus in verse 27, If I cast out demons by Beelzebub, by whom do your sons cast them out? Therefore, they shall be your judges. But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, surely the kingdom of God has come upon you.

And he talks about in verse 30, How can one enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods unless he first binds the strong man? Then he will plunder his house. He who is not with me is against me. And he who does not gather with me scatters abroad.

And here we have a different issue. This is talking about people who don't recognize God's power, who are in the grip of that evil. And they refuse to gather with the Lord.

Over in Mark, we've got a man who has gathered with the Lord and is invoking His name and by extension, is preaching the Gospel. The power of God is freeing people from the grip of evil. And that's a picture of salvation.

We have a similar statement made by Paul when he says, even though some people are preaching Christ from wrong motives, at least the Gospel is being preached. And so I'm not going to quarrel with those who, for whatever reason, are putting out the Word of Truth. That's a good thing.

And I'm not going to quarrel with them even though I disagree with them, even though they're doing it from bad motives. The Gospel being preached and the Word of Truth being put out there to make an issue in people's souls, I'm not going to quarrel with those people. Jesus tells the disciples the same thing.

If this man is invoking My name and freeing people from the grip of evil, don't criticize him. Don't hinder him. Don't forbid him.

But here in Matthew 12, we have a different situation. Here Jesus Christ is being rejected and accused of being in league with the devil. And Jesus goes on to say that this is a blasphemy of the Holy Spirit because the power by which Jesus operates is the power of the Holy Spirit.

And if you reject the ministry of the Holy Spirit, you are rejecting Christ. You're putting yourself in the camp of the unsaved. And yes, you are against Christ when you're in the realm of the unsaved.

It's a completely different idea. So, something to meditate on there. But then back in Mark 9, as we conclude this chapter, He says He returns to this idea of the little ones.

In verse 42, whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck and he were thrown into the sea. If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter into life maimed rather than having two hands to go to literally Gehenna, into the fire that shall never be quenched and so forth.

This section here that talks about if your eye offends you, if your hand offends you, if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off and so forth, which is recorded in several of the Gospels. And it talks about cutting that part off and entering into life because by retaining it, one's body will go into the

fire of Gehenna. This is a fascinating passage.

We really need a whole lesson to cover it and we don't have time, so I will present to you the interpretation of this passage as I understand it and leave you to do the research on your own. I can document this a lot of different ways, but notice as we observe this, I think we're all familiar with what Jesus says here. Separate from that which causes you to sin so that you can enter into life.

Failing to separate from that which causes you to sin causes your body to go into the fire of Gehenna. Now Gehenna is not the lake of fire. This is not eternal punishment due to failure to receive Jesus Christ.

This is an instruction that's given to disciples. This is something that's given to believers. And we have seen that in our day and in our generation, there is a lot of ignorance when it comes to the level of discipline that we can experience as God's children.

The level of scourging and the loss of reward that can take place for believers. We typically come to those passages and we say, oh, that must be unbelievers. We're in sweetness and light and glory and blessing and happiness and everything's going to be great.

We don't want to acknowledge the responsibility that God has placed upon us with the calling to holiness and the consequences of failing to heed that calling. Look at what happened to Israel. Those people who died in the wilderness wandering for 40 years are a picture of the believer, not the unbeliever.

Entering into the land of Canaan is not a picture of salvation as on Jordan's stormy banks I stand and so forth, our wonderful old hymns that I love that are wrong on this point. Crossing Jordan is not a picture of going to heaven. It's not a picture of salvation.

It's a picture of blessing in this life and reward in the next. It's a picture of reaching that place of production and blessing where we are fruitful and multiply and we enjoy the blessings that come from that status in God's plan. Those were believers that dropped into the wilderness.

It is believers who will suffer loss. No one can get around the passage where Paul points this out in Corinthians and he says that the wood, hay, and stubble will be burned and that people can be saved yet so as by fire. And that is the situation here.

Salvation is not achieved by separation from sin. We know that. It's salvation by faith plus nothing.

This cannot be talking about salvation. And it doesn't say that if you fail to separate from sin, you're going to go to the lake of fire. That's not in view.

Well, if it's not the lake of fire, what is it? First of all, we're not talking about unbelievers. First of

all, we're not talking about believers. Secondly, we're talking about a very serious loss that a believer can experience.

What was Gehenna? Most of you know this. It was the great pit outside Jerusalem that had originally started out as a valley and it filled up with trash and it burned day and night. It was the city dump.

It's where discarded corpses of the unclean were taken, where dead animals and refuse from the city were taken and burned and the fire burned day and night. It's a place of disintegration. It's a place of loss.

It's a place of refuse and garbage and that which is worthless and that fire burns. As believers, if we fail to separate from the sin that so easily besets us, if we fail to lay aside every weight and pursue the life of faith, what's going to happen? If we don't separate from that, the fruit of this life, our body of work. You know, an artist talks about the body of his work that he produces in a lifetime.

We produce a body of work spiritually. Our physical life here produces something that goes into the next life and we're evaluated and judged and rewarded on that basis. And if we screw up in this life and we don't live by faith and we pursue something else, we fail to separate from sin, that body is going to be discarded.

That body, essentially, picturing our life here, is going to go up in flames. It's the flames of the garbage heap. It's the flames that consume the wood, hay, and stubble.

Do you really think that your resurrection body in the eternal future will be minus a hand or minus an eye or minus a foot? No. What's he talking about? It's better to enter into life minus some part of your life so that you enter into the eternal future getting blessed and rewarded for those things you did right than by retaining that and refusing to separate from it, have the entirety of your life discarded as worthless. Because what happens with sin? Sin spreads.

Sin leavens. You get a little bit of leaven in a lump of dough and it will creep and leaven the whole thing. A little bit of sin unremitted, a little bit of evil unchecked that we don't exercise and eliminate from us will permeate our entire life and pollute everything that we do.

Our church service, our giving, our prayer, our singing, our ministry can be completely polluted by the presence of unconfessed sin, of unaddressed evil, by those things that we don't wake up and realize that the Kingdom is coming and we want to enter into life and be approved. By failing to identify and cut off even things that may be dear to us, things that we may consider to be essential, if they lead us into that realm of non-production, if they're going to cause everything we do to be polluted, it would be better to enter into life minus that. Perhaps separation from people.

Perhaps changing churches. Perhaps changing locations. Changing associations.

Changing habits. Changing lifestyles. Separating from anything that adulterates and pollutes our life.

It may be a painful thing to do, but it's necessary if you want to enter into life and have anything left after the fire of God's judgment because we will all be tested by fire, Scripture tells us. If your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye.

Now, we know that this is not a literal eye. We're not going to all look like pirates in the kingdom with a hook and a patch and a peg leg. This is like the pirate passage.

What's it talking about? Enter into life. Enter into the kingdom. What's going to carry forward from this life into the next? It's the fruit of faith, not the fruit of evil, not the fruit of twisted motives and mixed signals, mixed thinking on our part.

We've got to identify that which does not comport with the Word of God. Otherwise, we're going to lose the whole ball of wax. And the entire fruit of our life can be discarded and destroyed in the fire of Gehenna.

The fire of Gehenna is not the lake of fire. It is the fire of judgment. It's the fire of loss.

It's the fire that burns the wood, hay, and stubble. And that fire is applied to every believer of every age. We will face that test.

What does the fruit in our life spring from? If it springs from human energy, human motives, human ideas, it will burn. Better to enter into life with a small amount of divine good than a huge pile of wood, hay, and stubble. Let's close here in prayer.

Father, we thank You for this passage of Scripture. We thank You for the admonition that every one of us will be seasoned with fire. Thank You for the warning.

Thank You for the testimony of our Savior and the encouragement that we have to purge ourselves of uncleanness, to purge ourselves of sin and evil and to seek to produce that fruit that lasts eternally that Jesus spoke of over in John. Father, we pray that as we go forward in this life, that You will give us the insight to see those things in ourselves that by the power of Your Word and the power of Your Spirit, we can be renewed in the spirit of our minds. We can be cleansed by the Word that is spoken to us.

We can be thoroughly equipped for every good work, the works that will last, the works that will stand as a testimony to Your grace and Your glory throughout all eternity. We ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen.