

# The Seriousness of Sin

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[ 0 : 00 ] But it's a joy to be back in the pulpit and to open God's word for us this morning. So if you would please turn your Bible to the Gospel of Mark, chapter 9.

And as you're turning there, it's good to see my long-term friend George Baxter walk in very late. But not good to see that you walked in late, but good to see that you walked in. And I haven't seen him in quite a long time.

He is moving between countries here in Jamaica and the U.S., and it's good to see him. It's also good to see Tim playing the keyboard this morning and did a great job.

Thank you, Tim, for serving in that way. The Gospel of Mark, chapter 9. And this morning, our attention will be directed to verses 42 through 50.

So please follow along as I read. And I'm reading from the English Standard Version. 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 was thrown into the sea.

[ 1 : 15 ] 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.

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.

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.

Where the worm does not die and the fire is not quenched. For everyone will be salted with fire. 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.

[ 2 : 26 ] We always pray before we look at God's word. And I will tell you that this text is one that I especially need to pray and ask for God's help on.

So let's do that right now. Father, we pray that you would speak to us now as we open your word. Lord, we thank you for your word.

But these words that we have read are indeed weighty and sobering. And I pray that you would grant us all the ability to hear these words as they are intended to be heard.

And, O Lord, I ask that you would help me to proclaim them in a way that would enable us to hear the words of the Lord.

To take them to heart and then seek to obey them. Father, I pray that you would give us the singleness of mind and attention that we need in this moment as we hear your word.

[ 3 : 37 ] We ask that you would do this for our good and for your greater glory. We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen. I want to begin by asking you a question.

It's not a question to be answered out loud. You can certainly just answer it in your mind. And I will tell you from the outset that it is an unusual question. But I think it's an important question.

And the question is this. How seriously do you take sin in your life? How seriously do you take sin in your life?

And as I ask you the question, I'm asking myself the question as well. And what I can say is I believe that for those of us who are believers, those of us who are followers of Jesus Christ, I think it's fair to say that we do take sin seriously.

But I think it's also fair to say that we don't take sin seriously enough. And if you're here this morning as someone who has not put his or her faith in Jesus Christ, I can say to you that you don't take sin seriously at all.

[ 4 : 53 ] And so, bearing that in mind that there would be some of us who don't take sin seriously enough and some who may not take sin seriously at all, I believe that the words of Jesus this morning are words that we all need to hear.

And what we hear Jesus saying in these words that we have just read, sobering and frightening, is this.

He warns us that sin in our lives can harm others and will send us to hell if not dealt with.

Those are the very sobering words that the Lord spoke to his first group of disciples. And he speaks these words to all who would hear him.

Sin in our lives can harm others and will send us to hell if we don't deal with it.

[ 5 : 55 ] Sin in our lives can harm others and will send us to hell if we don't take sin.

from verses 30 through 37 in chapter 9, where the disciples, in the face of Jesus going to Jerusalem to die, the disciples were arguing among themselves who is the greatest.

They were filled with pride, comparing themselves to one another, jockeying for the highest position and saying, asking, arguing. who's the greatest among us?

And then if you were here last week, you'd have heard Brother Linden in the sermon titled Worldly Competition from verses 38 through 41, talk about how the disciples went to Jesus and told him, Master, we saw a man who was casting out demons in your name and we tried to stop him because he was not with us.

And what we see is this sense of jealousy, this competitiveness that the disciples had, so much so that someone who was casting out a demon, they felt that they could go and stop this person.

[ 7 : 32 ] You can rest assured they were not just talking to him. I think they tried to physically, literally stop this man from doing what he was doing. And Jesus tells them that someone who is, on the one hand, doing a good work in his name can quickly turn around and despise him.

Now, I think when we look at how Jesus addresses those two situations, it's easy to think that Jesus just slapped them on the wrist, say, you know, that's not a good thing, don't do that, and that he was pretty gentle with them.

But in the passage that we have come to this morning, it's very clear that Jesus was not gentle with them at all. Jesus took their sin very seriously, and he addressed it in these verses.

And so in our remaining time, I want us to consider two sobering realities that Jesus addresses in this passage. And they are, number one, sins harm to others.

And number two, sins consequence for us. So first, what did Jesus say about how our sin can harm others?

[ 8 : 50 ] He tells us in verse 42. He tells us that our sins, the sins that we commit, can have a harmful effect on other people and cause them to sin.

But what is most important in this verse for us to see is that Jesus has a particular concern. He has a particular concern. He has a particular concern for those whom he calls the little ones who believe in him.

He is showing particular concern, particular care for them, that they are not harmed by sin. And so he says, 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 was thrown into the sea. The little ones are the ones who are young in the faith, the ones who are impressionable. But they believe in Jesus.

And the point is that we must show care, we must show concern for them and help them forward in their faith and not cause them to stumble in their faith. Just imagine, and it seems from the text, that a little child, at least one little child, was not far away from what was going on with the disciples when they were arguing about who was the greatest.

[ 10 : 18 ] And imagine that little child, believing in Jesus, observing these who are close to Jesus, spending time with Jesus, claiming to follow Jesus, and they were indeed following Jesus.

But they're arguing about who's the greatest in the face of Jesus going to Calvary to be crucified. Or imagine a young believer watching them going up to someone who just because he wasn't a part of them trying to stop this person from casting out a demon, serving Jesus, simply because he was not a part of their group.

I think both were ugly scenes. I think both were unbecoming scenes for those who belong to Jesus. And the truth is that such incidents can cause young believers in Christ to sin, either by believing that that's okay to conduct yourself in that way, or causing them to be discouraged.

Causing them to be confused. And in some cases, even causing some to turn away from the faith for a season. They stumble, they fall.

Because of the conduct of those who should be mindful of the effect of their sin on others. And Jesus speaks in very graphic terms when he says, listen, the better option for you, rather than do that, is to have a great millstone hung around your neck and have someone to throw you in the ocean.

[12:06] He says, that is a better option than if you harm one of these little ones who believe in me by your sinful conduct. And friends, when we know that Jesus speaks the truth and Jesus is not playing games and issuing empty threats, we know that he takes us very seriously.

And what he's saying is something greater than that, something more serious than that will happen to you if you, by your sinful conduct, bring harm to young believers, impressionable ones, who believe in him.

Now I think we all know, I'm no swimmer, but I think we all know that the best swimmer with a millstone, a great millstone, and this is not when Jesus talks about a great millstone, the disciples sort of understood that he was referring to a millstone, not the small millstone that the women used to use to grind grain, but the one that only a donkey could pull.

It was so big that the donkey had to pull that one. The best swimmer with that hung around his neck didn't stand a chance. And Jesus says, that is a better outcome than if you cause a little one who believes in him to stumble.

And the point can't be clearer. The point is that God's judgment against those who cause young believers to sin is more certain and more severe than if a person had a millstone, a great one, tied around their neck, and they were thrown into the sea.

[14:01] It's easy for us to read this and read over it fast and pass it up, but friends, this is very sobering. These are very sobering words, and I think they call us to be more thoughtful about sin, our sin, and the effect of our sin on others in general, but in particular the vulnerable ones, the weaker ones, the younger ones, the impressionable ones who believe in Jesus.

and I think as we gathered this morning, we can think about the fact that, for example, those of us who are parents and we have young believing children, I think we need to give thought to our own conduct, whether in speech or whether in deeds, and the effect that our words and our deeds, sinful, may have on our children, whether it's to help them grow in righteousness or whether it causes them to stumble, to sin, to do what we do or to be discouraged from following Christ.

I think this is very relevant for us to consider those of us who are married because we know that conflict is a part of marriage.

Conflict inevitably and invariably will mark the marriage of sinners and that's who we are. We are fellow sinners married to another sinner.

I think, though, we would agree that even though conflict is inevitable, there is a way to have our conflicts in a way that can be honoring to the Lord.

[16:08] There's a way that we can engage in conflict that does not have to be sinful. Yet, I think we all know and because none of us is perfect, I think we would all admit that at some point or another, to different degrees or another, those of us who are married, we engage in conflicts in ways that have not been godly, that have been sinful and sometimes not being careful and we may carry out that sinful conduct rather in word or in deed in the face, in the presence of our believing children.

and this is heartening to them and sometimes it can cause them to stumble in particular ways where they believe that that kind of speech or that kind of conduct is fine to imitate.

but the good news is even when that happens we have yet another opportunity to show what biblical repentance looks like where we can demonstrate that where we can be mindful that they may have seen or heard our sin that we can say to them hey, you know, when I did that, when I said that, that was wrong, that was sin, I shouldn't have done that.

I've asked God to forgive me and I ask you to forgive me as well. We have the opportunity to do that. I think we can think of work situations where perhaps there are young believers in our workplace and we want to be mindful.

What is the effect of my speech, my deeds on them? Is it causing them to stumble? Causing them to sin? Or is it causing them to be discouraged about what the Christian life is all about?

[18:04] Or is it causing them to be strengthened in their walk with Christ? Again, friends, these are not idle words from the Lord. These are not an empty threat.

We have to take them seriously and the evidence that we're taking them seriously is that we recognize that our sin can have a harmful effect on other people and then we take great lengths, we go to great lengths to ensure that that is not the case and that we deal with whatever the sin might be.

And this brings me to the second point in this passage and in my sermon this morning, which is sin's consequence for us.

Jesus gives us the consequence in verses 43 through 48. And he tells us that if we do not deal with sin in our lives, there will be an eternal consequence of loss for us.

He uses three illustrations. He uses three different but similar illustrations to make the point that sin undealt with will take us to hell.

[ 19 : 29 ] And he talks about a hand, a foot, and an eye that causes us to sin. And essentially what he says is if a limb of your body is causing you to sin or your eye is causing you to sin, you're to cut the limb off, you're to tear the eye out.

Now it's very clear that Jesus is not speaking literally. We know he's not speaking literally. But what he is really saying essentially is we must not be sympathetic to anything in our lives that is causing us to sin.

He's saying to us that we are to deal with it. So he's not telling us, you know, if, for example, we think of a hand that steals, he says, he's not telling us literally cut it off.

He's not saying to us that a foot that walks into sin, walks into situations that leads to sin, that we are to cut the foot off, or an eye that lusts, that we are to gouge the eye out.

He's not saying that at all. The reality is after we cut off one arm, or one foot, or gouge of one eye, we still have one other one left.

[ 20 : 49 ] And so clearly Jesus is not telling us to literally do that. And we know that especially because, remember, earlier in chapter 7, Jesus helps us to see where sin really comes from.

He told us in chapter 7 that sin comes from our heart. He said, all the sins that we commit, they come from our heart, and the reason is our heart is a sin factory.

We are all endowed with the ability, because of our fallen nature, through Adam, to sin from within. And so the act of sin is really just a limb, or an organ, an eye, a part of our bodies carrying out the sinful desires of our hearts.

It's just a manifestation of the sin that is in our hearts. Jesus is telling us that sin undealt with in our lives will take us to hell.

[ 22 : 02 ] Now, when Jesus talks about hell, to his initial audience, they had a different understanding that we would have had. We get our understanding from the descriptions that we have in scripture, where the disciples would have had a more vivid understanding of what Jesus meant by hell.

Notice in verse 48 that Jesus refers to hell as the place where the worm does not die and the fire is not quenched.

And here he's quoting from the very last verse of the book of Isaiah, Isaiah 66, verse 24. A place where the worm does not die and the fire is not quenched.

But in speaking of hell as this place of everlasting punishment, where the worms don't die, Jesus uses a word for hell that his original audience would have understood.

He referred to a place, it was a physical literal place, a valley called the Valley of Hinnom.

[ 23 : 13 ] In the Hebrew language it's Gehennom and in Greek it's Gehenna, which is what is in the original language that Mark was written in.

He refers to hell as Gehenna. And what happened in the Valley of Hinnom was they used to, the Israelites used to offer human sacrifices to the foreign gods, to the gods of Moloch and Baal.

And you find these recorded in 2 Chronicles and the book of Jeremiah. And these sacrifices were eventually stopped during the reign of Josiah, which we find in 2 Kings 23.

But the Valley of Hinnom, even though the human sacrifices stopped, this valley became a place for dumping garbage and they would burn the garbage. And so this was a place where the fire just continued.

It just never went out. It was a place of constant burning. And that was the picture that Jesus was communicating to them when he said to them, sin unaddressed in your life will take you to Gehenna.

[ 24 : 23 ] It'll take you to hell. But although he used the name that they understood, Gehenna, that location, something on earth to refer to hell, Jesus was literally referring to someplace else.

A place created by God that would be a place of eternal, unending, fire, and torment for those who would be taken there.

not just talking about some literal thing that they would have seen there, but he was talking about something that was far greater that God himself would prepare for those who would be disobedient and rebellious to him.

Now I know when we listen to all this talk about hell and sin, it's easy to think that Jesus has in mind the greatest sins, the big sins that we tend to think about, the sin of murder and other serious kinds of sins.

And though we know that some sins are more serious than others, you realize that Jesus does not distinguish. He doesn't distinguish between greater sins and lesser sins. What he tells us is that all sin that is not dealt with will take us to hell.

[ 25 : 54 ] The nature or the size of the sin doesn't matter. And I think this is one of the deceptions that many people are under, where they would say, you may ask them where they think they would spend eternity, and they would say things like, well, I never murdered anyone, I never raped anyone.

They go to the big sins and they say, I try to be a good person, I don't do harm to other people. that's what Jesus says. He says, sin that is not dealt with, sin that is not seriously dealt with, sin that is not radically and mercilessly dealt with, will in the end take us to hell.

Now, in passing, I want to just mention something because some of you may notice it, others may not, and some of you may know the reason why it is, but for those of you who have the English Standard Version or the New International Version, you would notice that the counting of the verses go from verse 43 to 45 and then from verse 45 to verse 47.

Now, if you have a King James Version, it will have filled in verses 44 and 46, but if you have the ESV or the NIV, those two verses would not be there, they would be missing.

If you have the New American Standard Bible, it would have the verses 44 and 46 in italics. Now, those of you who have the ESV, if you notice to the foot of your page, there's a note, should be a note number six, that says some manuscripts add verses 44 and 46, which are identical with verse 48.

[ 27 : 45 ] So, if you look at verse 48, what they're saying is verses 44 and 46 read identically in some manuscripts as verse 48, where their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched.

So, you have some manuscripts that leave them out and some that have them in. And just to quickly give you an appreciation for why that is, remember that when Scripture was originally written, written by someone, the Holy Spirit moving on that man to write the words of Scripture, that is what we call an autograph.

It's the original document of Scripture. Now, there were no photocopies. And so, the only way that you could get copies of that original document is very skilled men who were scribes, they would copy by hand from that original document onto another document.

And then, what would happen, obviously, over time, is you'll have someone who is now another scribe who is going to copy, not from the original document, but from manuscript, one that was scribed out.

And sometimes in the process of these copies, making these copies, errors and omissions take place. This is one of the realities of how the Scripture came to being.

[ 29 : 18 ] But what you find is that even when these different manuscripts are compared, the differences between them are not in any substantial area of doctrine where we would come away saying one thing about God and one and another thing about God.

It's not like that. It's in these areas where they are of no consequence. And so, for example, if we consider those of us who have the ESV or the NIV, the difference it makes having verses 44 and 46 not in our Bibles versus those who have them in their Bibles, it really is of no consequence because it's repeating the same thing that is actually there.

That's just one of the realities of the transmission of the scriptures over time. And I thought I should just mention to you in case anybody noticed that you have these verses missing.

And of course, some of you may have seen these things that go about on social media where they will say, oh, the King James version of the Bible is the only true version is the best version and

those other versions of the Bible have verses missing.

And really, when you think about that, the King James was written in 1611 or it was translated in 1611. And since that time, and this is a very specialized area of activity where you have manuscript specialists who are able to compare these documents and they know the languages and they understand documents and dating of them and what would be a more recent document versus an older document.

[ 31 : 04 ] And today, we have far better manuscripts than they would have had back in 1611. And also, the level of expertise involved in translating the scriptures is also much greater than it was back in 1611.

So, those who say that the King James version is the best version of the Bible for all those reasons, the facts don't support that. The ESV, the NIV, these are faithful translations, and they point out this is what the issue is.

So, essentially, what has happened is the translators for the ESV and the NIV, having the manuscripts before them, made a judgment that the better manuscripts had these repetitions, in this instance, missing.

They were not there and they, for whatever reason, ended up in some of the manuscripts. But that's really just an aside that I thought I should point out this morning.

time. But if you go back to the text, I want to draw your attention to verses 43 and 45. Notice that Jesus, he says something in a very similar way two times.

[ 32 : 23 ] In verse 43, he says, it is better for you to enter life crippled than with two hands to go to hell. And then in verse 45, he says, it is better for you to enter life lame than with two hands to be thrown into hell.

What does it mean to enter life? What is Jesus referring to when he says it is better to enter life crippled or lame than to go into hell not being crippled and not being lame.

Well, we don't have to guess on that because what Jesus does further in verse 47 is he says the same thing, but he says it in a different way to help us understand exactly what he means.

In verse 47, he says, and if your eye causes you to sin, tear it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God. He doesn't say enter life.

He says to enter the kingdom of God than with one eye than two eyes and be thrown into hell. So what Jesus refers to here is he refers to entering life and he refers to entering the kingdom of God and I think the point is clear that there are two outcomes for us.

[ 33 : 52 ] The two outcomes are deal with sin and enter life, enter the kingdom of God, or don't deal with sin and enter, be thrown into hell.

Not enter hell, but be thrown into hell. Now the language of entering the kingdom of God is the same language that Jesus used with Nicodemus in John chapter 3.

And Jesus said, unless someone is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. And the point really should be very clear for us, that those who have eternal life now and who will enter into eternal life on the day of judgment, in the fullness of time, in the fullness of the purposes of God, are those who have made a radical departure from sin.

Those are the ones who will enter life ultimately, who will enter the kingdom of God ultimately. See, when you think about our salvation, our salvation, we think of it in three ways, or in three parts, or three tenses.

The Bible speaks about us being, that we have been saved, that we are being saved, and that we will be saved. And by referring to hell, I'm referring to entering the kingdom of God, I think Jesus is referring to the ultimate of our salvation, when he talks about entering the kingdom of God.

[ 35 : 27 ] But the point that I think we need to see is this, there is no entering into life, there is no entering into the kingdom of God without a radical departure from sin.

A radical departure, a radical dealing with sin in our lives. It's the only way that we will enter into life. And see, this is why we must take the warnings of scripture in this area very seriously. Listen to what the apostle Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 6, 9 through 11. He writes, do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God?

Now, pause for a moment and think about what Paul is saying. Paul is not talking to unbelievers.

The letter of 1 Corinthians was not written to unbelievers, it was not written to the unrighteous.

Paul is addressing this because this is a real issue among the people of God, in the community of the people of God, which we know is not a pure community, a perfect community, it is a mixed

community.

[ 36 : 46 ] And so what Paul says is, do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. And I encourage you whenever you see those four words, mark them in your Bible, take heed to them, they are there for a reason, the reason they are there is we can be deceived.

And many are deceived. He says, do not be deceived, neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.

But there's good news. The good news is in verse 11. He says, and such were some of you, but you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the spirit of our God.

And friends, those of us who have been washed, those of us who have been sanctified, those of us who have been justified, we do not continue to practice those sins.

We depart from those sins. And those who continue to practice those sins give evidence that they have not been washed, that they have not been sanctified, that they have not been justified, and that they have not entered into life now and that they will not enter into life on the final day.

[ 38 : 18 ] They will not enter into the kingdom of God finally and ultimately on that day. And Scripture is clear. Despite whatever profession of mouth that they may make, despite whatever external habits they may show to indicate they belong to the people of God, Scripture is clear.

They are deceived. If they continue to live in such a way where sin is very active as a way of life for them, there's no radical departure from it.

Those who enter the kingdom of God are those who make a radical departure with sin. And here's the truth.

It's not easy. And I think that's the point that Jesus is making in verse 49. This is not easy. This is a very difficult thing.

verse 49 says, for everyone will be salted with fire. We could say that in another way, which is because everyone will be salted with fire.

[ 39 : 45 ] Now, the way we understand, I think, what Jesus is saying in verse 49 is to appreciate that is the conclusion for all that he has been saying up to this point.

He's saying, because everyone will be salted with fire. So this teaching that Jesus gave is culminating now beginning in verse 49.

He says, because everyone will be salted with fire. Now, this is a very difficult verse. And one view of what it means is that everyone means everyone who sins or everyone who practices sin and causes others to stumble.

Those who don't radically deal with sin in their lives, that they're the everyone. They're the ones who will be salted with fire. But there's another view which I think is a more faithful understanding of what Jesus seems to be saying in this passage.

I think what Jesus is saying in this passage is, listen, either way, whether you radically deal with sin in your life, being ruthless with it to the extent that whatever it takes that you are willing to do that, or whether you choose not to do that and you end up in hell, either way, there's a fire that comes.

[ 41 : 19 ] For the one who is going to, in a figurative sense, cut the arm off that causes to sin, or cut the leg off that causes to sin, or tear the eye out that causes to sin, there's a fire that is involved in that.

There is a denying of self that is involved in that, and it's painful, and it's difficult because our nature screams out for sin. It's not a catwalk.

It's not a walk in the park to do what Jesus has said. But his point is, everyone is going to be salted with fire. Choose your fire. Choose the fire of dying to self now.

Enduring that fire of, the figurative fire of self-denial and resisting sin, or endure the literal fire of hell where the worms don't die and the fire is not quenched, because everyone is going to be salted with fire.

our resistance of sin and what it requires and the punishment for sin and what it entails are fiery experiences that can be escaped.

[ 42 : 38 ] It will be one or the other. Everyone will be salted with fire. And I think Jesus makes it very clear about the effort, the self-sacrifice that is involved in this process of fighting sin.

I remember a number of years ago when I was changing glasses and Alexian convinced me, something I had vowed I would never do, to get contact lenses.

And I remember getting these contact lenses and she was trying to tell me how to put them in and I'm opening my eye and I'm pushing these things in. I mean, it was the most unnatural feeling. Even after you got them in, it felt like something was in your eye. And the most relieving thing for me was to get that thing out of my eye. and it's never gone back since.

I thought about that as I read what Jesus said about tearing your eye out. I mean, how unnatural that is. Who would tear his or her eye out?

[ 44 : 02 ] We just have a problem just touching our eyes, how sensitive it is, but Jesus uses that illustration to talk about how we need to be serious about fighting sin in our lives.

And here's the truth. Fighting sin in our lives is as contrary to our nature as cutting off a limb or tearing out an eye.

You know what Jesus said about us in John chapter 3 verse 19? He said, we love the darkness. Even though light has come into the world, we wouldn't come to the light because we love darkness.

That is who we are naturally and left to ourselves. We love darkness. It is foreign to us to fight sin. Left to ourselves, we will grovel in sin. As a pig loves mud and muck and mire, we love sin.

[ 45 : 13 ] Naturally. And so to do what Jesus is saying involves something that is so painful, something that is so contrary to who we are and what we are about.

But everyone will be assaulted with fire of some form. Now again, I think when we think of all this talk about sin and hell and worms, it is easy to think that Jesus must be talking about adultery and fornication and murder and homosexuality and child molestation and whatever sin you consider serious.

But you know what? In verse 50, he helps us to see the sin that he has in view. in verse 50, we're able to see that Jesus actually has in view the sin of pride that leads people to jockey for position. He has in view the sin of jealousy that leads to worldly competition which the disciples had acted out. And so he says to them, have salt in yourselves and be at peace with one another.

Jesus is teaching about sin in light of what the disciples had done in those two particular instances and he's calling them to have salt within themselves and to live at peace, be at peace with one another.

[ 47 : 04 ] Now here Jesus is using salt in a figurative way. He's not talking about literal salt because you know literal salt can't really help us but he's using salt in the figurative sense that salt as we know it is a kind of preservative.

It prevents decay. It prevents corruption. It preserves things that otherwise would decay. salt in but Jesus alludes to fake salt in verse 50.

When he asks the question, when he says salt is good but if the salt has lost its saltiness the question is how will you make it salty again?

sodium now I'm told that sodium chloride which is the chemical name for salt is a very stable substance.

It doesn't just automatically break down. It holds together and very little is able to cause it to break down but sometimes this compound can be corrupted by impurities.

[ 48 : 19 ] Impurities can get involved and contaminate it and cause it to become useless and even dangerous and we're told that in the day of Jesus there was fake salt.

There was salt that had gotten contaminated. There were contaminants that got involved caused it to break down and because the sodium chloride was the most soluble part it would wash away and would leave this white powder which many people were deceived in thinking that it was salt and it actually was very deadly and could be very harmful but you could do nothing with it.

You couldn't make it into salt after it was in that way. And Jesus seems to be almost implying to the disciples this possibility of having this association with him, having this belonging to him outwardly but it's not real, it's not true, it's fake, it's false.

It doesn't hold together. He's calling them to have this genuine salt of belonging to Christ in them and he's calling them to live at peace with one another.

suppose the gospel of Mark ended right here. Suppose the gospel of Mark ended with Jesus giving us his teaching on sin, telling us, look, you need to be radical with sin, so much so that you will do whatever you need to do to get it out of your life.

[ 49 : 57 ] Cut them off, gouge an eye out, figuratively, cut a leg off, figuratively. But suppose the gospel of Mark ended with this teaching from Jesus.

If the gospel of Mark ended with this teaching from Jesus, we would be the most hopeless and miserable people. Because even with our best desires and best efforts, we could not do what Jesus has called us to do because it's contrary to our nature.

And it's a deeper issue. It's not an external issue. It's a hard issue. It is a hard problem that we have. That no amount of external dealing with it can address this corruption that we have within us, in our hearts, that is a factory of sin.

And again, the plain truth is fighting sin is us contrary to our nature, is cutting off a limb or tearing out an eye.

And left to ourselves, we cannot do it and therefore we will not do it. And this is why Jesus had to come. Jesus had to come to do for us what we could never do for ourselves.

[ 51 : 26 ] Jesus came and not only went to the cross to die for sin, but he died for sinners so that we may be transformed, so that we can have new hearts.

And that's what God does when he brings the new birth in our lives. He makes us new creations. He reorders our desires.

He regimes us as it were. And no longer do we have this ongoing persistent desire only for darkness, only for sin.

The transforming work of God in our lives caused us to desire righteousness. Not perfectly now, but sufficiently. Where we desire to fight sin, where we desire to say no to ungodliness, where we begin to love the light, sin.

And so Mark's gospel does not end here. It ends where Mark is telling us that Jesus went to the cross, and Jesus became a substitute for sin.

[ 52 : 35 ] He died in the place of sinners, so that this transforming effect, this work of God can take place in our lives, that we can enter life, we can enter the kingdom of God, and we can desire to fight sin, and over time we grow in sanctification, and over time we become more Christ-like and less sinful.

And yes, we would be concerned about the effect of our sin on others, and ultimately our sin towards the Lord. And we do fight sin God's gospel and so Mark's gospel does not end here, and we should all be grateful for that, because if it did, we would be hopeless, miserable people, who are looking at something on a top shelf that we could never reach.

no amount of ladders could help us to reach it, but only through the grace that comes to us from Jesus Christ that we are able to desire righteousness and fight sin, and desire to glorify God.

And Jesus knew what he was saying, Jesus knew what he was doing, Jesus knew that even as he taught this, that in and of ourselves, none of us could perform it, because think about it, if we could do this, why would Jesus even need to die?

If we could do this, the death of Jesus would be unnecessary. If God would send his son to die when human beings are able to deal with sin in their lives in such a way that they could enter eternal life at the end of this world, God would be most cruel to send his son to die.

[ 54 : 48 ] But God isn't cruel, and he wasn't cruel when he sent Jesus Christ. When he sent Jesus Christ, he was merciful, because in a sense, we were all little ones like Solomon, don't know our left hand from our right, can't fend for ourselves as it relates to resisting sin.

And we can only do it through the transforming work of God in our hearts, made possible through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on Calvary's cross.

So, brothers and sisters, Christ is our only hope in this fight against sin. And he told his disciples that he was on his way to Jerusalem to be crucified, and he knew that that would enable this to happen.

God, I pray that none of us leaves this place thinking about our besetting sins and thinking that somehow we can grit our teeth and try harder and we can do more ways we can.

We can only look to Jesus us and we can only ask him to help us to be radically ruthless with sin in our lives.

[ 56 : 23 ] And not in a vacuum, but because he's so transformed our hearts, but now we are growing more in our love for God than in our love for sin. So I pray for us this morning that we would leave this place looking more to the Lord, less to ourselves, and trusting him for the grace, for the strength to fight sin and to be serious with sin.

Let's pray. Father, we are grateful this morning for your word that reminds us that sin in our lives can be harmful to others and will take us to hell if undealt with.

But we thank you that the Lord Jesus has made it possible for our sin to be dealt with. And therefore, those we who were consigned to hell can now enter into eternal life.

God, we thank you for your great mercy through Jesus Christ. We pray in his name.

Amen.