

St, Mark 9:42-50

Dear Friends in Christ,

Some 700 years before Christ was born God said through Isaiah:

“Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter!

“Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes, and shrewd in their own sight!” (Is. 5:20-21)

Sound familiar? That fairly well sums-up the way it is: “evil good and good evil.” Try these words the Holy Spirit gave Paul:

But understand this, that in last days there will come times of difficulty. For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God... (I Tim. 3:1-4)

That’s quite a list, isn’t it? *In the last days*. We’re over 2,000 years into the last days. How about the last part of the last days? So, what do you think? It appears that the major sin of the day is calling sin, “sin”. Let’s take a look at . . .

HEART, HELL AND SALT

I. Heart

Please recall with me the following verses from the account of the woman caught in adultery:

The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery, and placing her in the midst they said to (Jesus), “Teacher, this woman has been caught in the act of adultery. Now the Law of Moses commanded us to stone such women. So what do you say?” This they said to test him, that they might have some charge to bring against him...(he) said to them, “Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her.”...when they heard it, they went away one by one... (Jn. 8:3-8)

Jesus’ words hit them where guilt hits as the result of sin: the heart - if a person has a heart. As the Scripture says, “Today if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion, on the day of testing in the wilderness (this referring to God testing His people in the journey led by Moses).” (Heb. 4:7-8)

Why am I telling you this at this point? Well, listen to these words from our text: “...if your hand causes you to sin, cut it off...if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off...if your eye causes you to sin, tear it out...” (vv. 43-45) Jesus is giving a very earthly, dramatic picture of the seriousness and severity of sin. He is not saying we should literally amputate body parts that commit sinful acts. If so, there would be nothing left of us but pieces! What He says powerfully draws us to see our sin and God’s hatred of all sin - what is in the heart. Jesus said:

“For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person.” (Mk. 7:21-23)

And most appropriate for our consideration is this from the Proverbs: “The heart of man plans his way, but the Lord establishes his steps.” (Prov. 16:9) Everybody has plans for life. The plans are altered a multitude of times, and sometimes never get implemented. The reality is, *the Lord establishes*, determines, our *steps*. And the Lord establishes the eternal outcome; not our hearts.

II. Hell

Consider these words of our text: “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 were thrown into the sea.” (v.42) To sin is eternally dreadful. It’s the death sentence into unending hell. To lead someone to sin is ultra dreadful. Again, Jesus gives a dramatic earthly picture: “...it would be better for him if a great millstone were hung around his neck and he were thrown into the sea.” (v.42) That is, to dwell forever in the deepest horror. There are degrees of hell.

In our text Jesus says, “It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into hell, where their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched.” (vv.47b-48) Jesus is echoing the picture of hell that was given to Isaiah: “And they (those belonging to the Lord) shall go out and look on dead bodies of the men who have rebelled against me. For their worm shall not die, their fire shall not be quenched, and they shall be an abhorrence to all flesh.” (Is. 66:24) “Dead bodies” but “their worm shall not die.” This is unending dying; agony in body and soul. This is completely incomprehensible to the finite mind. The object is to stay out of it.

The early church Bishop, Augustine wrote, “The perpetual death of the damned will go on without end and will be their common lot, regardless of what people prompted by human sentiments may conjure up.” We would do ourselves a great favor to keep that in mind, and communicate to those without Christ the meaning of . . .

III. Salt

Salt! “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.” (vv.49-50) So, what does this mean: “everyone will be salted with fire”? Put salt on an open wound and it’s like fire. It burns. So, what is Jesus saying? The reference is to the Word of God.

First there is the salt of the Law. It confronts us with our sin and God’s hatred of sin. It’s, “for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” (Rom. 3:23) It’s the salt that burns us with: “All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one.” (Rom. 3:12) It’s “...by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight (that is, given a sentence of “not guilty”) since through the law comes knowledge of sin.” (Rom 3:20) It burns!

Second, there’s the salt of the Gospel. This is about how salt is used to preserve, and used to make food palatable. It moves us from the fire of sin, death and hell to eternal preservation. Moves us from “for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” to this: “(we) are justified as a gift (pardoned from the wages of sin: eternal fire), through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood (the gift that would win God’s favor), to be received by faith.” (Rom. 3:23-25a)

And so, we hear Jesus say, “Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another.” This salt is the Law and Gospel. Again, it is the Law that confronts us with what we are to do and not to do and how we are to live a God pleasing life. At the same time the Law confronts us with the fact that we are still sinful and will struggle with sin until the day God takes us home. This keeps us from becoming self-righteous and seeing others as something less than we are. If a person becomes tired of hearing about sin and guilt then that person is tired of hearing about Jesus. It’s just that simple.

And again, it is the Gospel that promises the forgiveness of all sin and eternal life through faith in Christ. But we know all that, right? But how easy it is to forget, especially those times when we see others as something less, and those times when we are filled with fear that God won't love or forgive us anymore.

Dear friends, we have been purchased, redeemed, by the blood of Jesus. Through faith in Him we belong to God, and that takes us to this: "But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself." (Phil. 2:20-21)

I frequently read over these words of Luther:

I have often experienced, and still do every day, how difficult it is to believe, especially amid struggles of conscience, that Christ was given, not for the holy, righteous, and deserving, or for those who were His friends, but for the godless, sinful, and undeserving, for those who were His enemies, who deserved the wrath of God and eternal death. (Luther's Works, Lectures on Galatians, Chapters 1-4, Jaroslav Pelikan, Editor, Walter A. Hansen, Associate Editor, Vol. 26, Concordia Publishing House, Saint Louis.)

That would be you and me. We must never take for granted - not for a moment - the love of God in Christ! It's about *Heart, Hell, and Salt*.

Amen.

Pastor Bill Abbott

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“Heart, Hell and Salt”

- I. Heart
- II. Hell
- III. Salt

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