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Mark 9:14 - 9:50



Gospel of Mark - Steve Gregg

In the passage of Mark 9:14-50, Jesus rebukes his disciples for their inability to cast out a demon from a possessed boy. He emphasizes the importance of humility, faith, and dependency on God for greatness in the Kingdom of God. Jesus warns against causing others, especially children, to stumble in their belief, and uses the word Gehenna to refer to the consequences of judgement and eternal punishment. The passage touches upon the importance of prayer and fasting, and the idea that Christians may face trials and hardships in their lives.

Transcript

Let's look at Mark 9. Mark 9. Last time we took the first 13 verses, which essentially was the story of the transfiguration, and the trip down the mountain from there when the disciples were asking Jesus about Elijah, and the expectation that the scribes had that Elijah would come first. And Jesus basically says, Elijah has come first, and he means, of course, John the Baptist. But now they come to the bottom of the mountain, and there's another crisis awaiting them.

In verse 14, when he came to the disciples, that means the nine disciples he'd left at the bottom of the mountain, but he'd taken three of them to the top with him, 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. Now, I'm not sure why they were greatly amazed when they saw him.

I don't know if they thought, well, they didn't expect him to be back so soon, or I wonder if he still had a little bit of that glow on him. You know, up on the mountain, he'd had that glow on his face. You know, when Moses came down from the mountain for meeting with God, he still had that glow on his face from having met with God.

And Jesus, on the Mount of Transfiguration, although Mark doesn't tell us, the other Gospels tell us that his face shone like the sun out there. Maybe it was still having a little bit of that glow fading off when he came down. Maybe he looked remarkable somehow.

I don't know. When they saw him, they were amazed. We're not told what they were

amazed at.

It's not as if most of the time he was just amazing to see. I mean, he did amazing things, but that's not what they're amazed at at this point. So we're not told.

So we might deduce that there was something perhaps different about his appearance as he came down that amazed them when they saw him. And he asked the scribes, what are you discussing with them? Now, Jesus' disciples were locked into a controversy with the scribes about something. Now, we find out it was about a demon possessed boy that the disciples have been unable to deliver.

Now, why this would become a conflict between the disciples and the scribes, we do not know. But it would appear that the scribes who are always looking for faults in Jesus and his disciples must have used their impotence on this occasion as an opportunity to criticize them somehow. I don't know what criticism could be brought against them.

The scribes themselves were not able to cast the demons out either. So I don't know why they would criticize the disciples for not being able to. Maybe they were criticizing the disciples for endeavoring to cast out the demon without really having the power to do so.

After all, I've heard that kind of criticism before, even in modern times. People who seem to be demon possessed and you go and you try to minister to them. There are Christians or non-Christians who would say, you know, that person is mentally ill.

If you treat them like they're demon possessed, you're just going to disappoint them. You might even get them to misinterpret their ailment. Better not to try it.

I mean, if you can't cast out demons immediately, then you may do damage to them by maybe making them think that they have a demon when they don't. I've heard that kind of criticism. I don't know if the scribes were saying to the disciples, listen, you're not exorcists.

Obviously, you can't help this person. Why are you even raising false hopes in him? I'm only guessing because I have no idea what the nature of the dispute was and we're not told what the dispute was, what the contents of the sides of the dispute were. Jesus asked, actually, that very thing.

What are you discussing? And one of the multitude answered and said, teacher, I brought you my son who has a mute spirit and wherever he sees him, he throws him down. He foams at the mouth, gnashes his teeth and becomes rigid. So I spoke to your disciples that they should cast him out and they could not.

Now, he says, I brought my son to you. That is, I brought my son hoping to see you, but you weren't here. And so I brought him to your disciples and they weren't able to help me.

It's interesting that here the child is said to have a mute spirit, and that seems to be confirmed also when Jesus speaks to the demon in verse 25, because Jesus addresses it as a deaf and dumb spirit. It's a mute spirit. It causes the boy to be mute, but apparently also deaf.

It's a deaf and dumb spirit. Interestingly, that Jesus would speak to a deaf person and get results. But what's interesting even more so is that symptoms that are described are not the symptoms you'd normally associate with muteness or being deaf or dumb, but rather it looks like he's having seizures.

Because whenever this mute spirit seizes him, it throws him down. He foams at the mouth, he gnashes with his teeth, he becomes rigid. Actually, in Matthew's parallel, in Matthew 17, 15, it says, instead of saying he has a mute spirit, the father says he's epileptic.

At least that's how it's translated in the New King James. The Greek word that is used in Matthew's version is that he's moonstruck, which is what the word lunatic means. Lunar.

The word lunatic in English comes from the idea, from the root word of lunar. A lunatic was someone who's considered to be moonstruck or affected by the moon. We know that the moon affects the tides.

Apparently, in the old days, they believed that the moon also affects the psyche. And maybe they were right. We know that dogs howl at the moon.

It affects their psyche. And it's really hard to know. I mean, there's those stories about werewolves and so forth, you know, that are affected by the moon.

And I don't know if this is just all superstition or if there really is some sense in which the moon's phases causes some people to go nutty. But this boy who is here said to have a mute spirit is said to be moonstruck in Matthew 17, 15. And it's translated epileptic by the English translation, probably because of the symptoms.

We would we would suggest that these are the symptoms of a grand mal seizure. And apparently they were associated with the moon. It would seem that he was affected when the moon was full or at least something in the phases of the moon they had associated with his behavior and his seizures.

But there were a variety of symptoms. There were the symptoms of an epileptic. These came on him, probably in association with something sometime of the month when the moon was in a certain phase.

And he also is deaf and mute, at least at the times when this came upon him. Perhaps he was normal at other times and could hear and speak. But when this demon came upon him and he had this, he said he could not speak and apparently could not hear.

So the disciples were unable to cast it out. And Jesus, in verse 19, answered the man and said, Oh, faithless generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I bear with you? Bring him to me. Now, Jesus obviously seems a little impatient here and it's not entirely clear why he would be.

Jesus had healed many people before he cast out many demons. And this is just another case that needs his attention. Clearly, although it is a severe case, it yielded immediately to the authority of Christ.

Although he later told the disciples, this kind of demon doesn't come out except through special things like prayer and fasting. But Jesus' authority was adequate to cast it out with a word where his disciples had failed. But why Jesus would criticize, for example, this man? Because we are told that he spoke this to the man.

Oh, faithless generation, how long must I put up with you? It would seem that this man had brought his son to the disciples. Or to Jesus, as he said, without complete confidence that Jesus could heal him, because this man's own faith seems to be criticized here. Although Jesus also criticized the disciples faith afterwards.

In any case, they brought the boy to Jesus in verse 20. And when he saw him immediately, the spirit convulsed him and he fell on the ground and wallowed foaming at the mouth. Now, here's this boy having a seizure and Jesus decides to interview the father of this boy's wallowing on the ground, foaming at the mouth.

And Jesus said, how long has this been happening to him? Seems like that's a question you could ask after delivering him. I wonder why he asked this question. It's a little bit like, why did Jesus ask the man of the tombs, the demon there, what his name was? The demon gave his name, but Jesus never made any use of that information.

It's not like, what is your name? My name is Legion. OK, Legion, I command you to come out. There are people involved in deliverance ministry who say you need to ask the demon its name because you can't get it to go without calling it by name.

There's nothing in the Bible that supports that idea. The only time anyone ever asked the demon's name was Jesus. And once he knew the name, he didn't make reference to it again.

He didn't use it. It appears perhaps that these interviews getting information about the name of the demon or in that case, not just the name, but the number of demons, because Legion means thousands. And in this case, asking how long he'd been this way, not that that would probably make any difference in Jesus being able to cast the demon out and how long he'd been there.

But it may be that this information is asked and received in order that the onlookers or we, hearing the story later, or the disciples would come to know that information and

would realize what a miracle this was. To cast out a legion of demons or to cast out a demon that had been a chronic condition of this boy from childhood. But he says, how long has this been happening to him? And he said, from childhood.

Now, that's a rather vague answer. It's possible this boy was a grown man now and therefore he's the same from childhood. But I've always had the impression this was a younger boy.

And to say he's been in this condition since childhood almost seems like a way of saying, as long as we remember, he's always been this way. I don't know if that means that some people believe that a child can be born demon possessed. And I know of nothing in the Bible that forbids that possibility.

In fact, the statement that God visits the iniquity of the father of the children of the third and fourth generation is sometimes interpreted that way in that demon possession can be a judgment from God on idolatry or on occultism. I wouldn't I wouldn't put this down as documents in the Bible doesn't state it clearly, but if indeed God sends an evil spirit on my soul or send me the spirit aligns with the mouth of a have profits. And, in fact, if it is the case that God delivers over tormentors, those who do not forgive their brother, as it says in Matthew 18, these tormentors could be demons and possible that demonic possession in many cases is a judgment of God put on a person because of their occult or idolatrous dealing.

If so, that might be just the kind of thing that he visits on the children to the third and fourth generation. That's the judgment of idolatry. Now, we don't know enough about this case or probably much of any case to know if this is so.

I do know that there are missionaries who have encountered demons in children and often the demons have indicated now whether demons tell the truth or not, who can say that the demons have indicated that they've been in the family for generations. And I, you know, I would not rule it out. I couldn't say this.

So, but this man seems to be saying this demons been as long as I can remember from his childhood. Now, if someone says, but it's not fair that a child be born demon possessed. That's quite true.

The devil has never been represented in Scripture as a fair individual and and the devil takes advantage of the weak and helpless. It's not really fair that children are born blind or born crack babies or that they are born in any handicap condition or born with cleft palate. None of those things are fair.

They are unfortunate circumstances in a fallen world that babies sometimes are born suffering from things that they are not responsible for personally. And if they can be born physically handicapped or mentally handicapped, it would seem that they could be born

spiritually handicapped as well. We don't have any reason to rule that out.

In any case, if we even said, well, of course, a baby can't be born with a demon. That's not fair. Was it very fair that a child is this boy had a demon from childhood.

It seems obvious that the devil does not always attack just people who deserve it. In this case, we have an instance of an innocent child, presumably having been afflicted with demons from a very early age, if not from birth. We don't know.

So first, 22, the man explains to Jesus. He's been like this from childhood and often he is thrown into both the fire and into the water to destroy him. So this is an additional bit of information besides what we had in verse 18, where he has these seizures, foams of the mouth, gnash of the teeth, becomes rigid.

Also, he sometimes is thrown into water and into fire seeking to kill him. So they have to watch him closely so that they can save him from his self-destructive behavior. You can see why the parents would be at their wit's end.

And the father says, but if you can do anything, have compassion on us and help us. Now, this statement, if you can do anything, may reflect the reason that Jesus had said to an old faithless generation. This man brought his son to Jesus, but he's not really sure if Jesus can do anything.

If you can, please help us. Now, it's possible that he had more hope that Jesus could do something before the disciples proved to be such abysmal failures. I mean, he may have come with some faith about this, but seeing that the disciples couldn't do anything, he may have begun to have his doubts.

But Jesus answered him and said, if you can believe all things are possible to him who believes. Now, that's how it reads in the Texas Receptive, followed by the King James and the New King James. The Alexandrian text leaves out the word, the first instance of the word believe.

So that in the Texas Receptive, it says, if you can, all things are possible to him who believes. And some modern translations punctuate it as if Jesus is quoting back to the man, the man's own words. If you can do anything, Jesus, if you can, that is, you're asking if I can do anything.

You say, if you can, all things are possible to him who believes. And that's how it's punctuated in some modern translations. So that Jesus is, in a sense, being taken aback and a little offended by the man saying, if you can do anything, he kind of repeats back those words to the man, echoing the man's own statement back to him to show that the man is showing lack of faith, but it's not necessary to assume that that's what's happening here.

That's just one way that some of the manuscripts can be read if it's punctuated a certain way. It's also possible that Jesus is saying to the man, if you can believe, it's not a matter of whether I can do anything, it's a matter of whether you can believe, which is still something of a rebuke to the man, because anyone should be able to believe if they choose to. Jesus almost talking about this guy, if his faith is so weak, maybe he can't believe.

This is a faithless generation. This man perhaps can't believe, but if you can believe, well, then you'll find there's no inadequacy on my side of the situation. All things are possible to him who believes.

Immediately, the father of the child cried out and said in tears, Lord, I believe, help my unbelief. So these are the various indicators that the man did have weak faith and that the rebuke that Jesus gave him. In verse 19 was well chosen.

The man said, if you can do anything and then he admitted, I've got I've got unbelief. I have some faith, but I need more faith. Lord, I believe that help my unbelief.

Now, what's interesting about this is this man did not have great faith and yet his petition was answered when Jesus saw the people came running together. He rebuked the unclean spirit, saying to him, you 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's dead. But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him up and he arose. Now, what's interesting about this is that Jesus said, if you can believe this can happen.

And the guy said, well, I kind of believe I do believe you're going to help me with the part of my unbelief. And apparently he did. I'm sure this man's faith was tremendously built by seeing this miracle take place.

But Jesus did the miracle for him while he was still having weak faith. And that indicates that really, we can't really blame the fact that lots of times when we pray for healing and so forth, that if it doesn't happen. That all we didn't have enough faith.

I know people who really got their faith strong and they don't see the miracle. And yet they would be accused by some. Well, if you had enough faith, it would have been done.

Well, this man, Jesus healed this man's son through this man's son without the man having great faith. It's not as if God requires that someone has absolutely great faith, although he he wants us to. But there are God can make up for the deficit, apparently.

And it's encouraging to see that that this man is not like Abraham, a man who didn't waver in his faith, but offered up Isaac not and didn't count his body is dead when he

when he was promised that he had a child was strong in faith. This man was not strong in faith. He's rebuked for being faithless.

He's not sure what Jesus can do. He wants to believe that he's having a hard time. And Jesus responds to what little faith the man has showing that God can do that.

He doesn't have to wait till we have great faith. And so the spirit comes out. And in this case, once the spirit came out, the boy was apparently motionless and they thought he had died.

And maybe he had. But Jesus took him by the hand and raised him up. We don't know if the boy had died and Jesus raised from the dead or that he only appeared to be dead.

The narrative does not commit itself one way or the other. Now, it says in verse 20. And when he had come into the house, his disciples asked him privately, why could we not cast him out? Luke does not record them asking this question, but Matthew does.

And the answer given in Matthew is because of your unbelief. In Matthew 17 20, they asked, why couldn't we cast the demon out? He said, because of your unbelief. But then in here, it says this kind can come out by nothing but prayer and fasting.

Now, the Alexandrian text leaves out the fasting part. In the Alexandrian text, it says this kind comes out only by prayer. The text is receptive includes the words and fasting.

Now, this is also this line is included in Matthew's parallel, but only in the text is receptive, not in the Alexandrian text. In Matthew 17, Jesus answered to the disciples is somewhat more complex than here in Mark and Matthew 17, 20 and 21. Jesus said, and because of your unbelief, for surely I say to you, if you have faith as a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, move from here to there and it will move and nothing will be impossible for you.

Interesting, he said that you would have seen more results if you had faith, even as a mustard seed, which shows that they didn't have a little bit of faith. They didn't even have a mustard seed worth. So this is quite a rebuke to them.

Even a mustard seed size faith would have been able to move mountains and presumably also resolve this crisis. But you didn't have it. And then in verse 21 of Matthew 17, 21.

However, this kind does not come out except by prayer and fasting. But that whole verse is missing from the Alexandrian text. So if we are using the Alexandrian text, we don't have any reference to prayer or fasting in Matthew.

But if we're using that same text in Mark, we do have reference to prayer, but not fasting. Because the Alexandrian text says this kind can come out by nothing but prayer.

Fasting, therefore, is not mentioned in the Alexandrian text in either place and is only found in the textus receptus.

Now, is fasting an important part of deliverance? It seems so. We're not told very much about fasting in the Bible. Prayer is definitely a part of having demons go out.

And it would appear from what little experience I've had in the matter that when demons don't come out immediately, when you command them to prevailing, continuing prayer eventually gets the job done. I don't know how long one has to pray in each case. But Jesus said this kind does not come out except by prayer.

Now, this kind suggests there's different kinds of demons. Some come out without a long warfare, without a long battle, apparently without a lot of prayer. Some demons seem to come out just by being told to come out.

That's the end of it. There's other kinds of demons that are more stubborn. There appear to be different strengths and different ranks of demonic powers.

And there are some which will not come out just by being told to come out by a Christian. A Christian has to pray. Now, Jesus, we do not read that Jesus had to pray except that he had just come down from the mountain of transfiguration.

And although Mark does not tell us so, Luke's gospel tells us that Jesus was up there praying. In Luke it says, as he was praying, Moses and Elijah appeared to him. So, Jesus may have spent the night in prayer.

And having come down and encountering this situation the next morning or the next day at some time, he's all prayed up. He's been praying all night, perhaps. In any case, the disciples had not been.

And so they have not been able to cast the demon out. So, it would appear here that there are times when you're dealing with demon-possessed people that you command the demons come out and they don't come out, maybe because you haven't been praying enough. Or maybe it'll take some prolonged prayer in some cases.

It is true that some miracles occur and some prayers are answered only after a prolonged period of prayer. And that appears to be to include prayers for the deliverance of demon possession. Fasting, again, there's some textual question as to whether Jesus mentioned fasting here, but notwithstanding the very slight reference to fasting, the few references to it in the New Testament, and very little is said about it, we do know that Jesus endorsed fasting and in connection with prayer, apparently, because in the Sermon on the Mount, in Matthew 6, he said to the disciples, when you pray, don't be like the hypocrites.

And then he said, and when you fast, don't be like the hypocrites. He mentioned these

two in connection, apparently, with each other, assuming his disciples would both pray and fast at times. And I've mentioned this before, only because I think it's an interesting insight.

Pastor Blumhardt of Germany in the 1800s faced the most terrifying instance of demon possession I've ever read about, where a girl in his congregation had thousands of demons that were cast out over a period of two years of almost constant prayer and confrontation. Apparently, almost every time that Pastor Blumhardt confronted the demons, some came out, but there were more behind that didn't come out. And the last didn't come out for almost a whole two years after the confrontation began.

But Pastor Blumhardt learned a lot about that through the situation. He'd never dealt with demons before, had never even given it a thought until he encountered this case. But in the course of it, he apparently was using the Texas Receptive, and he saw the, he was probably using the Luther Bible, which was taken from the Texas Receptive, and saw that this kind did not come out, but by prayer and fasting.

So he decided to do some fasting along with his praying. And he made an interesting observation about fasting that I've never heard anyone else make. But it made sense to me.

He said that fasting is something of a continuous prayer. That is, if you're fasting specifically for the thing you're praying for, your fasting is ceaseless. That you're praying gets interrupted by other activities and responsibilities.

If you're going to pray for something over a period of days or weeks, not very often that you can get free from all responsibilities to just go off the side and pray without interruption. Your life is interrupted by many other things and therefore your prayers too. But fasting doesn't have to be interrupted.

Fasting can continue 24-7 as long as you're fasting. And as you are neglecting meals and so forth, and specifically attaching that to the thing you're praying for, he suggested that it's like your prayer is being continually offered in the form of your fast. And I don't know if that's true, but I think it probably is true.

It sounds right to me. And by the way, his success was remarkable. Now, if you haven't heard of him, I don't need to go into detail about it, but I wanted to just make it clear.

He was not some kind of a newfangled deliverance minister kind of guy who advertised himself as an expert on casting demons out of people. He was a Lutheran pastor in the 1800s in a small town in Germany. Had never had any experience with this and never sought it.

And most of what he learned, he learned through the battle that he conducted with these demons. And his study and meditation on the scripture and prayer. And I tend to

trust him more than I trust people who seem to be making a name for themselves as deliverance ministers sometimes.

Not that they're all wrong, just there is something sensational about deliverance ministry that some people are attracted to for that reason. In any case, he wasn't attracted to that at all. It just was thrust upon him as a pastor.

Now, verse 30, then they departed from there and passed through Galilee and he did not want anyone to know it. That was the area where he'd had the largest crowds falling before. And he's been over in the Decapolis and over out of out of the main populated areas.

And now he needs to pass through Galilee, but he doesn't want it to be known because he doesn't want crowds together. For he taught his disciples and said to them, the son of man is being delivered into the hand of men and they will kill him. And after he is killed, he will rise the third day.

But it says they did not understand this saying and they were afraid to ask him. So this is the next. The second time we've been told that they were very dull about this.

And the last time he said something about it in verse 10 of chapter nine, it says they questioned among themselves what he meant by rising from the dead. But here he has now again made it very plain he's going to die. They probably aren't taking that literally either.

So they don't understand what he's talking about. Then he came to Capernaum and 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've been disputing among themselves about who would be the greatest.

They heard Jesus talking about how he's going to die and be rejected. And they're just not getting it. They're thinking they're thinking he's going to Jerusalem to take charge and become the new emperor, the new Messiah.

And so they think, OK, when Jesus takes over, I wonder which of us have the highest ranking here. I think I should because I have these qualifications. No, no, I rank much higher than you because of whatever.

Now, they apparently, though they were talking among themselves like that, they wouldn't talk that way in front of Jesus. They somehow knew there was something inappropriate about that whole discussion. But he knew they were talking about it as they're walking.

Twelve men, you know, Jesus at the head and they're stringing down the narrow trails, probably guys toward the back of the talking, hoping Jesus doesn't know what they're

talking about. And then he goes in the house and says, what were you guys talking about back there? And it says they kept silent. They were afraid to let him know because they were disputing who is the greatest.

And he sat down and called the twelve and he said to them, if anyone desires to be first, he shall be last of all and servants 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, in John's excuse me, Matthew's gospel, he says much more on this occasion where he puts the child on his lap. Over in chapter 18 of Matthew, it says in chapter 18 of Matthew, the opening verse, at that time, the disciples came to Jesus saying, who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven? Now, this has them raising the question with him.

And it's possible that they did. Remember, they kept silent at first. Then we're told in Mark that after they kept silent, Jesus raised the subject, but maybe they raised it first, maybe after a period of awkward silence, one of them spoke up and said, well, Lord, who is the greatest in the kingdom? And that could have elicited the response that we read about in Mark.

And Jesus called a little child to him and set him in the midst of them and said, assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become like little children, you'll by no means enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. And whoever receives one little child like this in my name receives me.

So you can't be too proud to associate with low ranking people like children. Children are the lowest ranking people in the society. And yet to receive a child as Jesus did was something that would show humility.

Jesus actually showed that humility and the disciples did not. A chapter later in Mark chapter 10, when people wanted to bring their children to Jesus. In Mark 10, 13.

It says the disciples rebuked those who brought them, but Jesus didn't. He said, let the children come to me and do not forbid them. In other words, Jesus was willing to.

Associated with children, whereas children like they were considered to be, although parents love their children, they were not. They were not citizens of any rank. They didn't have specific stature or prestige in society.

And a proud person usually wants to hang out with people who will enhance their reputation to hang out with. To be kind to children was not something the disciples were humble enough to really do. And they didn't think Jesus was either.

So they were wrong. And so he says, listen, you want to be great. You've got to hang out.

You've got to receive children. You've got to be humble like a child. You've got to be converted and be changed inside so that you're a child like.

So, of course, his teaching is very clearly the person who's the greatest is the one who's most childlike and the most humble. Now, we might say, well, I know some children. They don't strike me as really humble.

A lot of times children sometimes can be bratty and arrogant and naughty and so forth. And I don't know that humility is the main thing that you describe them as. But humility has many manifestations.

The main thing about children is that they are dependent on their parents. And they exhibit it by asking for things whenever they need them rather than just taking care of themselves or thinking they can take care of themselves. They know that their parents have to take care of them.

They also know that they don't know stuff. As evidenced by the fact that children are always asking questions, you know, why is the sky blue? Why is the grass green? Where do babies come from? Children are always asking questions because they know that they don't know and they assume their parents do. They see themselves as ignorant.

They see themselves as dependent. It's true that they have a sin nature, too, and they do naughty things and sometimes even proud things. But I've been noticing with Asher here, you know, whenever he walks, he's so cute.

Everybody's, you know, smiling, speaking to him, talking about how cute he is and stuff. He's like totally unaffected by it. It's like, I mean, he'll reach an age where it affects him.

But right now, just as a little toddler, it's like flattery. And compliments and fawning on him. It's like he could take it or leave it.

He's just not. It doesn't seem like he's into it at all. He's not thinking of himself as, you know, how does he rank among others? He's just kind of probably into his own world.

But children are humble in that respect. They're not trying to build a reputation for themselves. They don't pretend to know what they don't know.

In most cases, they don't pretend to be independent. They're continually showing their dependency. And that's what children are like.

That's what we need to become like. Now, verse 38, Mark 9, 38. Now, John answered him.

Same 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. For he who is not against us is on our side. For whoever gives you a cup of water to drink in my name because you belong to Christ, surely I say to you, he will by no means lose his reward.

Now, Jesus essentially sounds like he's saying right now, we're kind of desperate for as many friends as we can get. If anyone's even kind enough to give you a cup of water, knowing you're one of my disciples, that's noteworthy. But there was a time earlier in Jesus' ministry when everyone was following him, talking about him, revering him, inviting him over for dinner at their house and so forth.

But at this point, his ministry in Galilee seems to have diminished. And he's seeing himself as someone who's going to be rejected soon. And he knows it's going to happen.

And so he's saying, you know, we can use all the friends we can get. Now, you saw these people casting out demons in my name, but they're not in our company. I don't know who they are.

I don't know why they're using Jesus' name, but obviously they're favorable. No one's going to cast out demons in my name and then speak evil of me right away. So don't forbid them.

That we can use that favorable attitude from people. It's nice to have someone who's not going to be speaking evil of me right away. Whoever is not against us is on our side at this point.

Now, at a different point in time, Jesus has said, whoever is not for me is against me. But now he's saying whoever is not against us is for us. It is the same thing, but with an emphasis on the different side.

That is, right now, I'm willing to count as a friend anyone who's not opposed to me. For whoever gives you a cup of water to drink in my name. That is, because you belong to Christ.

Anyone who shows that much favor toward Christ that he wants to do you a favor because of you being one of mine, that person is taking an unpopular stand for me. And they'll not lose their reward for it. All these statements are made in the connection with Jesus' sensing and declaring to the disciples that his days of popularity are pretty much over now.

He's had a popular ministry, but that's over now. And anyone who's kind to them,

anyone who doesn't speak evil of them should be counted as a friend. And someone who gives you a drink for my sake is actually taking a risk because they're very associating with us is perhaps something that will bring danger or unpopularity upon them.

And therefore, God will reward them for taking such a stand. Verse 42, and 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. And if your hand makes you sin, cut it off.

It's better for you to enter into life maimed than having two hands to go to Yehenna into the fire that shall never be quenched, where their worm does not die and their fire is not quenched. And if your foot makes you sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life lame than having two feet to be cast into Yehenna into the fire that shall never be quenched, where their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched.

And if your eye makes you sin, pluck it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than having two eyes to be cast into Yehenna fire. Where their worm does not die and their fire is not quenched.

Now, here he has a very strong reference to judgment coming on those that reject him or who otherwise do not reflect his spirit. And, you know, he talks about special rewards for those who have even a little modicum of kindness toward him at this point, giving a cup of water to a disciple because he's a disciple, refraining from speaking evil of Christ, not being against him. There's special at this point in time because of Christ's unpopularity.

There's special rewards for people like that. But there are people who are hostile. And in fact, it's because of the hostility of most that it's so commendable to find some you know, who aren't hostile people who will take our side in the present environment and the present climate is going to be less common and more remarkable and more commendable of them because there are actually people out there trying to stumble you, trying to keep you from being my followers, finding those who are following me and seeking to cause you to lose your faith and to leave.

Now, anyone who does that, anyone who damages the faith or causes to stumble one of these who believes in me now, he says, one of these little ones. And it's possible that he's still got that child on his lap while he's saying this. So he's like even a little child like this.

But by implication, anybody, including and down to even a little child, anyone who would cause a little one like this and certainly anyone more important than that to stumble and to stop believing me, that person would be better off if you're thrown into the sea with a millstone around his neck. Now, thrown into the sea with a millstone around that is a pretty awful way to go. I would think I've always thought drowning would be a rather

unpleasant way to die.

I'm not afraid to die, but there are ways to die that would be more unpleasant than others. And it seems to me like breathing in water and gasping for air and getting only water in your lungs would be a real scary way to go for a brief moment or two. The prospect of it is terrifying and being thrown into the sea with a huge millstone, a big rock tied around your neck, a guarantee you're going to drown.

He says that treatment would be more desirable than what these people will face. So he didn't say that those who cause a little one to stumble will be thrown into the sea with a millstone around their neck. He said, no, they'll wish they had been.

Being thrown into the sea with a millstone around their neck is better, more desirable treatment than what they will face. Well, what will they face? They will face Gehenna. That's what the word hell is here in verse 43 and verse 45 and verse 47.

Verse 43, 45 and 47 all mention hell in the New King James. And in each case, it is the word Gehenna. Now, you'll notice also that verses 44, 46 and 48 are all identical to each other.

They all say where their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched as a description of Gehenna. Now, you may notice in the New King James, verse 44, 46 and 48 are in italics. And the reason is because they are quotations from the Old Testament.

That's something the New King James does when it gives a quotation from the Old Testament that's in italics. So you'll see it. That's in addition to setting it certain words in a sentence in italics for the same reason all translations do.

And that is to show that they're not in the Greek. But in this case, the italicized verses, the italics are not there to tell you that this is not in the Greek, but rather it's the way the New King James sets off Old Testament quotations in the New Testament. What is that Old Testament quotation? It is the final verse, essentially, or next to the final verse of Isaiah.

It is actually the final verse of Isaiah, chapter 66 and verse 24. And Isaiah 66, 24 does not mention Gehenna by name, but it says, and they shall go forth and look upon the corpses of the men who have transgressed against me for their worm does not die and their fire is not quenched. And they should be an abhorrence to all flesh.

Now, here there is a judgment on persons whose corpses are continually eaten with worms and burned in fires that are never put out. The image is poetic. Because it is a poem.

And it is not literal, because worms, of course, do die. There's no such thing as worms that have eternal life. But to say the worm doesn't die and the fire is not quenched is to

say that there is a continual, ongoing, perpetual decay that is taking place here.

Bodies are eaten by worms. This is an ongoing consumption of their corpse that is described. Now, is this a conscious state? Probably not, because it says their corpses, corpses, by definition, are not conscious.

Corpses are dead bodies. If it had said their souls, that'd be another thing or their spirits, then we might have to assume that we're talking about conscious beings here. This is a description of the fate of certain people who've died and their corpses are disposed in such a way that they're in flames that keep burning.

Now, Isaiah does not identify this with Gehenna, but Jesus does. Jesus quotes this line where the worm does not die and the fire does not quench, does not quench. And he quotes it as being about Gehenna.

Now, what is Gehenna? Well, Gehenna is the Valley of Hinnom, at least that's what the word Gehenna means. It's a strange choice on the part of the King James translators, which was followed by almost all translations for a long time afterward, that Gehenna was translated in the King James as hell. Now, what is hell? Hell is obviously a word that we use for the place of judgment after death.

And even perhaps after the judgment day for those who are lost, so that we think of hell as the place where after a person has died, they end up their souls in hell. And if we think of hell as the ultimate eternal fate of the lost, then we're thinking even not of what happens after they die, but after the judgment day. Because what happens to people after they die is different than what happens after the day of judgment.

The Bible indicates when people die, they are in Hades. But after the judgment day, even Hades itself is thrown into the lake of fire and all whose names are not found written in the Lamb's Book of Life are cast into the lake of fire, we're told in the final verses of Revelation 20. So the word hell in English is very inexact as to what it's referring to.

But certainly most people, if they say, well, Christians go to heaven and non-Christians go to hell, they're usually thinking about eternal fates. They're usually thinking about what happens at the end when all the dead are judged and consigned to whatever their eternal fate is going to be. Heaven for some, hell for others.

But if it is, then hell is the lake of fire. OK. Now, there's quite a bit of inconsistency in the English translations because the word hell, sometimes there's an English word used to translate the word Hades or Sheol.

Sometimes, at least one occasion, it translates the word Tartarus. And then many times the English translations use the word hell to translate Gehenna. But these are not all the same thing.

Tartarus, we're told in 2 Peter 2, is where the angels who fell are being kept waiting for the judgment day. Hades is apparently where people are kept waiting for the judgment day. But the lake of fire is where the wicked go after the judgment day, not while they're waiting for it, but afterwards.

After the judgment, the wicked are thrown into the lake of fire. Now, if there is some place of all of these places mentioned in the Bible that should be called hell, it seems to me like the lake of fire should be called hell. But is Gehenna the lake of fire? Now, what makes this difficult is there's two ways of deciding this.

The rabbis of Jesus Day actually did use the word Gehenna to speak of the lake of fire. The rabbis believe that after the judgment, the wicked would be thrown into a fiery lake, a fiery judgment, which the rabbis called Gehenna. Why did they call it Gehenna? I don't know why they did, but the word Gehenna doesn't mean lake of fire.

It means Valley of Hinnom, and that's an actual location on earth, southwest of Jerusalem, just outside the walls. I've walked through Gehenna before. It's very green and grassy and nice, beautiful, actually, like a park now.

But in the days of Josiah, the king, the Valley of Hinnom was not green and grassy and nice. In fact, it was a garbage dump and they kept fires burning there perpetually day and night, and they continually threw the city's trash in there. Sometimes they even threw corpses in there of criminals and foreigners who died and didn't have anyone to pay for a burial.

They just throw them in the garbage dump and their corpses would burn there. The fires of Gehenna were kept perpetually burning. They were not quenched.

Now, they weren't unquenchable and they obviously are out now. There's no fires there now, but to say they were not quenched means that they were not put out. People did not put these fires out.

They were kept burning continually. Now, to speak about fires that are not quenched, it does not necessarily mean eternal fires, but fires that are kept burning, at least until all the garbage is burned. And so Gehenna literally means the Valley of Hinnom.

That's what the Greek word Gehenna means, Valley of Hinnom. So what is Gehenna when Jesus uses it? Is he using it by the meaning of the word Valley of Hinnom, or is he using it the way the rabbis use it, of hell, essentially? That is something that different people will answer differently, and I'm not really sure that it can be answered with absolute certainty, given the amount of data we have. But Gehenna, or the Valley of the Sons of Hinnom, as it's called in Jeremiah, is a reference to the place where corpses are going to be thrown, he says, in connection with the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians.

Because Jeremiah indicated that the Babylonians were going to come and they were going to destroy Jerusalem and the Valley of Hinnom, which is also called Toppet, will become a place filled with corpses. You see this in Jeremiah 7, beginning at verse 30. It says, For the children of Judah have done evil in my sight, says Yahweh.

They have set their abominations in the house which is called by my name to pollute it, and they have built the high places of Toppet, which is in the Valley of the Sons of Hinnom. That's the Valley of Hinnom, Gehenna, to burn their sons and their daughters in the fire, which I did not command, nor did it come to my heart. Therefore, behold, the days are coming, says Yahweh, when it will no more be called Toppet or the Valley of the Sons of Hinnom, but the Valley of Slaughter, for they will bury and Toppet until there's no room.

The corpses of this people will be food for the birds of the heaven and for the beasts of the earth, and no one will frighten them away. Now, it says that they're going to call this the Valley of Slaughter over in Jeremiah 19. We have a similar prediction, same prediction, actually.

It says in Jeremiah 19, 6, Therefore, behold, the days are coming, says Yahweh, that this place shall no more be called Toppet or the Valley of the Sons of Hinnom, but the Valley of Slaughter. And so there's going to be a place outside Jerusalem called the Valley of Hinnom. They're going to call it instead the Valley of Slaughter because of the number of people and corpses that are deposited there.

That is a place called Gehenna. And Jeremiah was saying that Jerusalem is going to be destroyed by the Babylonians and the people be slaughtered. And the Valley of Hinnom is going to just be a place where slaughtered corpses are piled up in the fires, in the garbage dump there.

Now, Jesus seems to be saying something similar. Interestingly enough, Jesus is speaking in a similar situation. Jeremiah was speaking in view of the fact that Jerusalem was soon going to be destroyed by the Babylonians and there'd be this general slaughter of the Jews.

Jesus in his ministry predicted the same thing was going to happen in the next generation, that Rome was going to come and destroy Jerusalem. And I believe that Jesus, when he's speaking to the people of his day about the risk of their going to Gehenna, is using the same threats that Jeremiah was using. That is that if you don't become part of Christ's kingdom, you're going to be left in Jerusalem to suffer the fate of Jerusalem and your corpses will be thrown in Gehenna.

Now, I pointed out that in Isaiah chapter 66, which Jesus is alluding to actually quoting in Mark chapter nine, it does not say anything about hell. In fact, if hell is the place of conscious torment, it's certainly not talking about that because there are other corpses.

Corpses are not conscious.

They are dead bodies. It is the corpses that are being eaten by the worms is the corpses are thrown into these perpetual fires and they are in a place where they can be observed. Because it says in Isaiah 66, 24, they, meaning the righteous, shall go forth and look upon the corpses of the men who have been transgressed against me.

For their worm does not die and their fire is not quenched. They shall be in abhorrence to all flesh. There is a distinction made here between the righteous and the wicked and the righteous observe the fate of the wicked, and they see their corpses there in the valley of being burned and eaten by worms.

Now, is this in Isaiah talking about the end of the world? Is it time of the judgment of the of the last day? I don't believe there's any evidence that it is. In fact, in Isaiah chapter 60 through 66, it's kind of an unbroken section that has the whole section is talking about how God's going to judge the old system and raise up a new system. He's going to judge the old Israel and call his servants by a new name.

And there are many passages in this section of Isaiah that are quoted in the New Testament. And they're always quoted as being about the first century, the time when God was putting away the old system and bringing in the new system. And I believe that this section of Isaiah is not talking about the world.

It's talking about the age that was inaugurated in the first century where God was judging Israel and establishing his church. And if you go through that section of Isaiah and look at all the times that it has verses that are quoted in the New Testament, I believe you'll find that they're always quoted as being about that transitional period in the first century, when the new order was coming in and the old order was going out and the corpses thrown in Gehenna at the end of Isaiah, I believe is the corpses reference to the corpses of the people who die in that Holocaust when Jerusalem was destroyed. And this was then fulfilled in 70 AD.

I believe that could be deduced from Isaiah alone. But the fact that Jesus quotes Isaiah here makes me think that Jesus is here not talking about what the fate of people in hell is, but the fate of people who are in Jerusalem at the time when the Romans conquer them. And it's like a hell on earth.

And if you read the story of the siege of Jerusalem and its downfall in 70 AD, you will certainly find in Josephus a description of a calamity that is as bad as we can imagine any calamity being. Jesus said, then shall be great tribulations. Such has never been from the beginning of time till now and nor shall ever be.

And that is the situation Jesus is saying that people would do well to avoid. And he says in Mark chapter nine, whether it's your hand. In verse 43, or your foot in verse 45, or

your eye in verse 47, those are valuable things, but not as valuable as your life and your soul.

And therefore, if they if these items could prevent you from coming into Christ's kingdom, by the way, in verse 43, he said, it's better to enter into life. Name in verse 45, he says the same thing. It's better to enter into life lame.

And in verse 47, he says, it's better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye entering into life, entering into the kingdom of God. This has to do with becoming a Christian, following Jesus, receiving eternal life. It's better to come to Christ and stay in Christ.

Even if you lose body parts. Or, of course, he's not really talking literally about losing body parts. He's not saying anyone should pluck their eye out or cut off their hand.

What he's saying is there are things to you that you would not. They'd be the last thing you'd want to give up your eye, your hand, your foot. And there may be other things in your life that are the last thing you'd like to give up certain possessions, certain relationships, certain dreams that you've had.

You just don't want to give them up. But if those relationships, if those friendships, if those possessions, if those dreams, if even if they're as precious to you as your eye or your hand, your foot, you'd still be better getting rid of them if they're going to prevent you from entering into the kingdom. That is from following Jesus.

It's better to follow Jesus and come into his kingdom maimed or blind or partially blind than to remain in good health until the judgment comes on Jerusalem and experience the fires of Gehenna as the result. Verse 49 and 50. This is difficult.

He says, For everyone will be seasoned with fire and every sacrifice will be seasoned with salt. Salt is good, but if the salt loses its flavor, how will you season it? Have salt in yourselves and have peace with one another. Now, verse 50 is not quite as difficult as verse 49, but both are difficult because salt.

It's not entirely clear how he's using salt. Salt had many uses, of course, purpose of seasoning food. Remember when Job said, Can that which is savory be eaten without salt? That which is unsavory can be eaten without salt.

It was used for preserving things from rotting. Perhaps that was the main thing they thought of salt as, but it says everyone will be seasoned with fire and every sacrifice will be seasoned with salt. Now, the statement every sacrifice will be seasoned with salt is actually just one of the laws of the Old Testament in Leviticus 213.

It is actually said that every sacrifice will be offered with salt. And so Jesus may be simply quoting that law and making an application. Every sacrifice that's offered to God

had to be seasoned with salt.

So you expect to be seasoned with salt and maybe maybe salted with fire. The fire of testing the fire of trial. I don't I don't really know.

He's saying everything that's offered to God, every person actually will, in one way or another, be seasoned with fire. Perhaps those who reject Christ will be cast into the fire of Gehenna. Those who receive Christ will have their own fiery ordeals to face, but only like a little bit of salt is added to food to season it.

So the fire in the life of a believer is not consuming fire like in Gehenna, but rather it's just a fire that is a characteristic of our lives. There are trials, there are hardships. It's hard to know.

It's really hard to know what he's talking about here. And commentators are pretty much at a loss to give a good explanation. Also, those they sometimes try.

But his statement in verse 50 is also found in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew, Chapter five. Salt is good. If the salt loses flavor, how will you season it? Salt is no good if it doesn't have its salty properties.

If salt could be made unsalty, it would have nothing else to commend it. It's saline. Salty properties are the only thing that gives it any value.

Jesus said in Matthew five, if you if salt loses flavor, it's good for nothing but to be thrown out and trodden under the feet of men. But here, Jesus says, have salt in yourselves and have peace with one another. Have salt in yourself.

He has not really described what salt represents. And that's what makes it hard. It's as if he expects that to make sense to his disciples somehow.

And maybe, maybe it did, but they were probably as dull as we are. And so it's very possible they didn't make any sense of it either. It's just not really clear at all.

Having salt or saltiness in yourself, probably what if we think of salt as that which is a preservative or that which seasons or even that which is good to rub into wounds, although it stings, it helps promote healing and disinfects all of these uses of salt could be seen as positive uses. And it could be when Jesus said to his disciples, you are the salt of the earth. He may be referring to some of these functions of salt, but he never makes it clear.

One thing that can be said, regardless of what specific thing he's referring to as salt, is that if salt loses that specific thing, it's no good for anything anymore. And it can't easily be replaced, maybe can't be replaced at all. And.

We could say this, that salt has its own. Its own distinctive quality, which is its only

value. If it loses its distinctive quality, it's of no value.

And so Christians also have something about them that is their own distinctive value, their own distinctive qualities that nonbelievers don't have. And if Christians lose that saltiness, then they're not good for anything either. Now, what that quality is, maybe is not specifically brought out here.

It's just that there is something very different about people who are Christians who are real followers of Christ and people who are not. And that difference makes the difference. That difference is that which makes the difference in their value to God and their value to the world.

And so Christians should be distinctly Christian, whatever the specific quality is that's referred to as salt, have salt in yourselves. We can say at least this. If you are salt, don't become unsalty, continue to be salt.

And otherwise, you know, God himself won't be able to find any use for you. And man will not either. So Christians are of value to the world as long as we have something distinctive about us.

If the church imitates the world, it becomes worldly. Then the church has nothing distinctive about it and has no value at all to God or man. Now, why Jesus would say that here? I'm not sure.

This passage has always been difficult to me, and therefore, I've always looked up in commentators, and obviously it's difficult to them, too, because they don't have any real insight into it either. But it may have meant more to the disciples or to people at that time than we understand it to mean. But I can't shed any more light on it, I don't think.

So we'll stop there.