

Mark 9:38-50 **Don't Lose Your Saltiness**

When you hear this selection of the Bible read, how do you get anything practical out of it? You say to yourself, Pastor says, "I should thoughtfully read the Bible everyday in order to keep from losing my faith, but all I come up with are questions but no answers. What is this passage in the Bible for any way? What is God saying to me?"

Casting out demons in Jesus' name, I've never seen it done. I've never seen a demon possessed person. Jesus did it but those were different times.

Why would John and the disciples want to stop someone from doing that?

What is this about someone **not** losing his **reward** because of giving a cup of cold water?

Why does Jesus say that a person who causes a little one to sin would be better off being drowned in the sea? How can being drowned be better than anything?

I haven't seen or heard of any Christian cutting off his hand or foot, or plucking out his eye to keep from giving into a temptation! So If Jesus didn't really want us to harm ourselves, what **does** He want us to do?

He sounds like he wants us to be careful not to sin or we will end up in hell.

What **is** hell according to Jesus? Unquenchable fire that won't stop burning you?

Is it the **opposite** of eternal life? Is hell getting chewed on by worms that never stop?

Jesus says "Everyone will be **salted** with **fire**." I know what salt is. It's a seasoning to add flavor, and a preservative to prevent meat from rotting, but what does it mean to be "salted with fire?"

Jesus warns against salt losing its saltiness and not being able to get it back again. I don't know of salt losing its saltiness. What is Jesus talking about?

He says "Have salt in yourselves and be at peace with one another." By connecting "having salt" together with "being at peace with others," Jesus probably isn't talking about **physical** salt. But what **is** the "salt" that makes people able to be at peace with one another?

If you set aside 10 minutes for daily Bible study, would that be enough time to figure out what Jesus is saying to you in this Scripture? Could you figure it out in 20 or 30 minutes? -- Probably not. This passage is a good illustration for your need to go to church and Bible study. My guess is most Christians get to this passage and many others like it and say to themselves. Well I read my Bible, but I feel like it was a waste of time. And if they have this experience a few days in a row, they say, "I'm not going to waste my time. I don't get any help out of doing this." And some are not going to pick up a Bible for years, or not at all. But the Bible **teaches** that true Faith comes **only** from listening to the **word** of Christ (Ro. 10:17, 2nd reading today)

Most of you solve the problem of not being able to understand the Bible by turning to the daily Bible passage and explanation in the little booklet called Portals of Prayer, and **then** coming here on Sundays to have **me** explain these passages. Some of you want to grow more quickly in understanding the Bible by yourself so you join one of our Bible classes, and buy a Bible with explanations of each verse like the Lutheran Study Bible. Many of you bought children's bible story books to help you teach **your** children as today's **first reading** commands you to do. Those are helpful for **adults too**. The Story Bible is really good for giving an easy to understand survey of the whole Bible. Your search for resources to help you understand and teach the Bible is **proof** that you have a **hunger** to know God better. Jesus taught, "Blessed are those who **hunger** and **thirst** for righteousness for they shall be satisfied. Matt. 5:6!

Are you here now because you are hungry and thirsty for Jesus' help? I'm here to be Jesus' mouth piece to you. So, let's try to understand this passage:

Jesus warns us that hell is real. It is unending pain and agony that is far worse than cutting off your hand or foot or tearing out your eye. It is unending burning. It is unending chewing on you by worms. In other places Jesus teaches that it is being separated completely from even the comforts God gives non-believers everyday here on earth. Hell's agony is not joke. It is real. You can't escape it by not believing there is a real hell. Jesus is telling you here that it is beyond your worst imagination.

When Jesus calls for such excruciating action as cutting off your foot or hand, or gouging out your eye, or even being tossed into the sea with a 300 lbs. stone tied to your neck as a way of avoiding the suffering of hell, **COULD YOU DO ANY OF THOSE THINGS?** There are people I suppose who might try to escape hell this way, but Jesus is teaching you that you can't escape God's consequences for all the times and ways you have rejected Him with your hands, feet, and eyes! You can't escape!

The problem is the cause or stumbling block that sends you to hell is not your eye, hand, or foot but your self-serving, god-forsaking **nature** which you can't change. You were conceived and born with it. Some churches don't teach about this because people don't want to hear it. But Jesus gave up the comforts of heaven to rescue every person including you, so he's teaching you that eternal suffering after death is a true fact that you can't escape. But it can be escaped!

Salt has a special meaning as Jesus uses it. In those days it wasn't pure sodium chloride as we know it. It was mixed with other minerals and could be washed away leaving just the sand. Nevertheless salt added flavor to food and preserved it. And here's the **real key** to Jesus' use of the word salt. God's people were commanded to **salt** their offerings or sacrifices before giving them to God as a part of their worship at the temple. **Salt** reminded them God was preserving them as his beloved people.

The saving message however is that Jesus **salted** us when he gave his sinless life up for us on the cross and transmitted it by Baptism, Word, and Supper. For you, He painfully lost the use of his hands, eyes, and feet at the cross! He did it in **mercy** and love to **remove** God's consequences for your god-forsaking self. He salted you with the **fire** of the Holy Spirit & forgiveness so that you can gratefully live your life without fear of hell's fire. He salted you with His Spirit so you can live in deep gratitude and sacrifice your eyes, hands, feet, and your heart -yourself- in serving the people in your life in Jesus' name!

That forgiving and serving of fellow believers-in-Jesus explains **why** Jesus told John not to reject fellow followers of Him (who cast out demons in His name) even if they didn't belong to the 12 disciples of Jesus. Jesus taught them, "The One who is not against us, is for us." Jesus was teaching His disciples that there was no need to **stop** other believers from serving Him. (Neither in-group pride, nor protectiveness of Jesus' reputation could justify stopping outsiders from serving Jesus.) **All** were united in deep gratitude to Jesus, and all were **salted** with His forgiveness and faith in Him. Even the least little service -the cup of cold water to drink - given to one of His disciples in **Jesus'** name showed a **unity with other believers** that would be affirmed by God on judgment day. **All** who trust in Jesus' sacrifice for them will receive what Jesus calls a "reward." He means the reward of paradise that **they** didn't earn but that was **given** to them by **His amazing sacrifice on their behalf**.

That means we are **salted** or enabled and empowered **by Jesus' sacrifice** to treat other believers with love and kindness **even if** they don't believe all the same teachings that we believe. But **saltedness**, love and kindness toward fellow believers **does not** require us to **accept** their teachings or practices that disagree with the Lord's own words. "Beware of false teachers Jesus says in Matt 7."

You can love and respect your Roman Catholic family and friends and even work with them in defending the unborn and feeding the hungry, but never accept their unbiblical beliefs like: praying to Fr. Serra who the Pope has just made a saint; or the unbiblical belief that the Pope has the infallible authority **equal** to the Bible in establishing a teaching for all to believe, such as the teaching that **Mary had no sin** because she was immaculately conceived, or the unbiblical teaching that **she never died**, but was taken to heaven by a **blessed assumption**; or the unbiblical teaching that a priest consecrating the bread and wine is **giving to God an offering or sacrifice of Jesus**, and the unbiblical teaching that Catholics should give money, so a priest can offer up a mass for their departed loved one who is suffering in **purgatory** until enough masses are given to God to **pay for** the loved one to escape to heaven.

You can love and respect your evangelical and protestant family and friends and even work with them by donating to the pregnancy care clinic's ministry, or protesting the supreme court's redefinition of marriage, but never accept their **unbiblical beliefs** like the teaching that Jesus is coming back to take (or **rapture**) all the believers off the earth before he unleashes terrible suffering on earth by means of an evil world ruler called the anti-Christ; or the unbiblical teaching that **if you pray hard enough** and get enough people praying you can get God to heal someone of Cancer, or the unbiblical belief that **infants** don't need to be baptized because they don't know right from wrong and therefore don't sin, or the unbiblical teaching that the Lord's Supper is no more than a **symbolic ceremony** to help you remember that Jesus died for you.

We treat them with kindness, and respect, and love, but we don't allow them to **commune** with us or **become members** as long as they hold unbiblical beliefs. Salted by Jesus' gifts of forgiveness and faith, we always try to learn better ways to show other Christians and non-Christians why we believe what we believe from the Bible. Salted by Jesus, we go to Bible classes; Salted by Jesus we review our catechisms. Salted by Jesus we use the Lutheran Study bible. Salted by Jesus, we listen to IssuesEtc. and the Lutheran Hour Sermons. Salted by Jesus we teach one another and our children and grandchildren in Bible classes. Salted by Jesus we learn from Him through sermons. Salted by Jesus we get and give Christian Education all our lives.

Salt is good, but if the salt has lost its saltiness (the Holy Spirit and trust in Jesus), how will you make it salty again? Have salt in yourselves, and be a peace with one another."