

The Gospel According to Mark - The Inner Life

May 5th, 2019

The Inner Life Mark 9:41-50

“One final breath He gave as Heaven looked away. The Son of God was laid in darkness, A battle in the grave, the war on death was waged, The power of hell forever broken”

How powerful is that? More powerful than you and I can even imagine. When it says Heaven looked away, that in no way means God turned His back on Jesus in the way most people think of turning your back on someone. No, God couldn't bear to look at His perfect Son, who at that moment would become sin for you and me, taking the punishment we deserved, so we could be saved and set free! Folks, that's not something we can earn, it's something we are given! That's why we call it amazing grace! This morning we're going to continue to learn what it means to be a part of the Kingdom of God, which simply means “the place God rules!” Let's pray and ask God to teach us today! Pray!

Okay, speaking of the Kingdom of God, we know from the Bible, God is not worried about earthly kingdoms and all the trappings of an earthly kingship and kingdom. God's Kingdom is a Kingdom of the heart! In fact, before we read our text in Mark, listen to this from Luke's gospel...

Luke 17:20 Once, having been asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, Jesus replied, "The kingdom of God does not come with your careful observation,
Luke 17:21 nor will people say, 'Here it is,' or 'There it is,' because the kingdom of God is within you."

You see, God wants to set up His Kingdom in your heart, but never forget, He will not invade your life and take over forcefully. You must ask Him to set up His Kingdom in your heart. You must allow the love, the forgiveness, the mercy, the peace, the power, and the purpose of God's Kingdom to be a part of your life! Today we're going to explore this concept as we continue our study of the Gospel According to Mark!

Our text is found in Mark 9:41-50. You'll notice that verse 44 and 46 are omitted from most modern translations. They are not found in the earliest manuscripts we have! However, both of these verses are word for word identical to verse 48, so you're not missing anything. Some believe a Scribe maybe thought it would be good to repeat the phrase more than once. When there are issues like this in Scripture it is rarely anything of significance because God has protected the transmission of His Word down through the ages! Let's read together Mark 9:41-50...

Mark 9:41 I tell you the truth, anyone who gives you a cup of water in my name because you belong to Christ will certainly not lose his reward.

Mark 9:42 "And if anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to be thrown into the sea with a large millstone tied around his neck.

Mark 9:43 If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life maimed than with two hands to go into hell, where the fire never goes out.

Mark 9:44

Mark 9:45 And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life crippled than to have two feet and be thrown into hell.

Mark 9:46

Mark 9:47 And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into hell,

Mark 9:48 where "'their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched.'

Mark 9:49 Everyone will be salted with fire.

Mark 9:50 "Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can you make it salty again? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with each other."

Jesus was teaching His disciples lessons on the importance of being right on the inside. I'm going to explain this in just a moment. But before we do I need to address something in this passage because if I don't some of you will be distracted. The main lesson of this passage is not about hell, but because Jesus uses it as a part of His teaching, I need to share a couple of things with you. First of all, I believe heaven is where Jesus is and Hell is where Jesus is not! You see the most wonderful thing about heaven will not be the streets of gold or a mansion on the hill top, but the fact that the One who sacrificed His life for me will be there! And

the worse thing about Hell is not fire and brimstone, but the fact that the author and giver of life, Jesus, will not be there. The Greek word used for Hell here is the word Gehenna, which refers to the valley of Hinnom at the western edge of Jerusalem which at one time had been used by pagans as a place of child sacrifice. During Jesus' day it was used as a garbage dump where fires were kept burning and where there was always rotting food with worms. When describing eternal separation from God, Jesus used the example of the most horrible place that people could imagine to let people know how sad it would be to live separated from the love of God in eternity. Some people get hung up right here. Let me explain it to you like this... Most people don't have a problem with a judge that is fair and impartial handing down a sentence that brings about justice for a crime committed! For instance some years ago I had a dear friend who was murdered. It was a very heartbreaking thing to so many people. Was it wrong for this lady's friends to want to see Justice done? I know there's some here who would be against the death penalty and others who would be for it, but most people do believe in the rule of law and for some type of justice to be carried out. I knew that that my friend who had been killed would have wanted me and others to forgive the individuals that were responsible and to pray for them that they would find Jesus! And I can tell you that I did forgive and I did pray and that they would find Jesus and turn their lives around! However that doesn't mean that I did not want to see justice served for my friend! I certainly didn't want them roaming the streets or not paying any price for the life they took! So most people would not fault a good and fair judge for handing down a sentence that brings about just punishment! So it is beyond me when I hear people faulting God for bringing about punishment to those who have done horrible evil in this old world and have no sorrow for what they've done! And here's one thing to think about when it comes to God: he's the only judge I know who allowed his son to die on a cross so that those who have done wrong can be forgiven! And they can be, no matter what they have done, if they are truly sorry for their sin and ask to be forgiven! But if they reject and refuse to accept the gift God offers then they have to pay for their own sin. That doesn't make God mean or unfair! I don't know what more God could have done to provide for the salvation of humanity than we see on the cross.

Now let's look at the lessons Jesus was trying to teach us in this passage and how they apply to us today! Jesus was talking about the importance of a person's inner life! The condition of the heart! Zack alluded to this in his message last week. You and I need to examine our hearts and minds in order to discover where we are and where we need to be in regards to our inner life.

And this all ties back in with the Kingdom of God and the lessons we've been learning in Mark's Gospel. Zack did a wonderful job last week of explaining the purpose of the Kingdom of God and how it is about God's Glory. He taught us that God's Glory is displayed through His power, His mission, and His goodness!

God uses His mighty power, which is the greatest of all powers, to bring about His mission, which is to seek and to save that which is lost, and to let us know of His goodness, which is displayed in those who have been radically changed by His power! And when these things happen, God is glorified! Amen? Amen!! Anyway, I'm not as good at summing up sermons as Zach is! In fact, after hearing Zach preach last week, several folks told me I was going to have to step up my game!! That's the kind of comments I wanted to hear! It means our team is getting stronger! Appreciate you brother! I'll refer back to the context of what Zach preached last week because it is a foundation for what we will learn today!

I want to briefly give you five lessons we can glean from our text!

Lesson #1

Proper motivation comes from the inner life and will be rewarded

Mark 9:41 I tell you the truth, anyone who gives you a cup of water in my name because you belong to Christ will certainly not lose his reward.

Why you do what you do is important! Like Zach reminded us last week, God looks at the heart, the why, and the motivation for what we do. Jesus said if you give a cup of water in my name because you belong to Christ, you will certainly not lose your reward! You might remember the context of this verse. Remember, John had been trying to shut down someone casting out demons in Jesus' name who was not one of Jesus' band of disciples. Jesus was quick to tell John not to stop someone especially if they were doing what they were doing from a pure motivation. And in the verse we just read, Jesus says even if what someone is doing is as simple as giving a cup of water to someone who is thirsty, if they are properly motivated, they will be rewarded! I love the way commentator Henry Turlington put it...

"One who does even the smallest act of kindness toward God's people will find that God honors and values that token of faith and Christlike character!"

John's attitude of exclusiveness was not a good sign for the condition of his inner life! Jesus had warned the disciples in Matthew's Gospel of the importance of motivation...

Mat 6:1 "Be careful not to do your 'acts of righteousness' before men, to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven.

Mat 6:2 "So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full.

Mat 6:3 But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing,
Mat 6:4 so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

Does this mean you should live your Christian life in secret? No! He said don't do your 'acts of righteousness' before men, to be seen by them. When properly motivated, it is not a bad thing for people to witness your good life. In fact Jesus had previously said this to the disciples in chapter 5 of Matthew's Gospel...

Mat 5:14 "You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden.

Mat 5:15 Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house.

Mat 5:16 In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.

Lesson #2

Improper motivation also comes from the inner life and carries grave consequences.

Mark 9:42 "And if anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to be thrown into the sea with a large millstone tied around his neck.

Now you might remember that Jesus had used a little child as an example already in this context to show how important that we care for those most vulnerable. This could be a child in the physical sense, but could also be applied to a person who is young and immature in their faith! A millstone was a heavy stone used for grinding things and the example Jesus used was evidently a form of capital punishment used by the Romans. Jesus used this very strong imagery because, when a person intentionally misleads or tempts someone to go astray from God's principles and truth, they have crossed a moral line that carries serious consequences!

Paul warned Timothy to beware of people who were improperly motivated.

2 Tim 3:6 They are the kind who worm their way into homes and gain control over weak-willed women, who are loaded down with sins and are swayed by all kinds of evil desires,

2 Tim 3:7 always learning but never able to acknowledge the truth.

Always learning but never able to acknowledge the truth! Why? Their inner life was corrupt! These kind of people hear the truth but refuse it because their inner lives are controlled by other priorities. They have no use for the truth.

Paul puts it this way to the Romans

Rom 1:28 Furthermore, since they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, he gave them over to a depraved mind, to do what ought not to be done.

Rom 1:29 They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice. They are gossips,

Rom 1:30 slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents;

Rom 1:31 they are senseless, faithless, heartless, ruthless.

Rom 1:32 Although they know God's righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them.

I read something the other day, that impressed me. President Harry Truman said this in an address before the Attorney General's conference on Law Enforcement Problems February 15, 1950...

"The fundamental basis of this Nation's law was given to Moses on the Mount. The fundamental basis of our Bill of Rights comes from the teachings which we get from Exodus and St. Matthew, from Isaiah and St.

Paul. I don't think we emphasize that enough these days. If we don't have the proper fundamental moral background, we will finally wind up with a totalitarian government which does not believe in rights for anybody except the state."

The writer of Proverbs gave this advice . . .

Prov 4:20-23 My son, pay attention to what I say; listen closely to my words. Do not let them out of your sight, keep them within your heart; for they are life to those who find them and health to a man's whole body. Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life.

Lesson #3

A. If you can fix the root problem by simply treating the symptoms, do it!

B. The truth is you can't! You must go deeper and fix the inner life.

Mark 9:43 If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off...

Mark 9:45 And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off...

Mark 9:47 And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out...

Did you notice that really big, important word at the beginning of each of Jesus' statements? It's not a long word, but it has a big meaning! If! If your hand causes you to sin! If your foot causes you to sin! If your eye causes you to sin! You see, the problem is not your hand. If you sin with your right hand and cut it off, you still have...that's right, your left hand! And the same with your eyes. And if you were to become blind, that would not remove the images from your brain that you were allowing to cause you to sin! It's not the hand, foot or eye that causes the sin! The cause is an improper inner life. The heart and mind are corrupted and there's only one way to get that fixed and physical surgery is not the answer! To get the inner life where it needs to be you're going to have to have spiritual surgery and only the Great Physician can perform that kind of surgery!

So what's the holdup? The patient must give his or her consent for the surgery to be done. Once again, God will not force His kingdom, His rule, His Lordship, on you! You must allow it. And this is not only true for a lost person who must make the decision to allow Jesus to become his or her Savior, it is also true for the one who knows Jesus as Savior. You too must make the daily decision on whether or not you will allow Jesus to be Lord of that day and allow God's Kingdom to be established in your life! There is a beautiful Old Testament passages that speak to this.

Ezek 11:19 I will give them an undivided heart and put a new spirit in them; I will remove from them their heart of stone and give them a heart of flesh.

Ezek 11:20 Then they will follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws. They will be my people, and I will be their God.

Lesson #4

We will all be tested in life. The way you react will reveal the condition of your inner life.

Jesus went on to say...

Mark 9:49 Everyone will be salted with fire.

Jesus was upfront about life's difficulties!

John 16:33 "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."

Notice Jesus didn't say "If you have trouble," He said "you will have trouble!" We all face troubles. Some in this room have recently faced troubles that are hard to comprehend. But by the grace and strength of The Lord Jesus Christ, you are going to get through these trials and troubles! I have a very close friend, Hudson, who is a fireman with the Dallas Fire Department. I had the privilege of singing at his wedding. He and his wife Molly are very deeply devoted followers of Jesus, but that has not exempted them from trials. Molly's testimony of one of their very difficult trials has been published in a book on crisis counseling written by her father in law, Dr. John Babler. The subtitle is "Not If, But When!" In her words...

'At three a.m. I awoke with a start when I heard the lightning strike a tree. Never have I heard a strike that close before! It sounded like it was the tree outside my window, so I got up to check it. (I was afraid of it breaking our window if the tree split). I didn't see anything...my husband was awake and headed to the

bathroom as I gazed at the sky from the window. All of the sudden he bounded back and sharply yelled, "get your clothes on!" I obeyed (I had never heard him use such a tone before) and he explained as he dressed that he could smell smoke and was thinking that perhaps a fire had started in our town home's attic space after the strike. I pulled on something in the dark...and I reached my infant daughter's room just as Hudson was opening the door. The sight I saw when the door was thrown open was something I never hope to see again. Fire lashed out at us, and engulfed the entire room. It flashed over the ceiling and licked at us overhead. We stepped back and fell to our knees from the sight. I remember a sound coming out of my husband that was something of a moan and a shriek - it was terrible and I just knew that our sweet baby was gone. We couldn't see her. We couldn't see the crib. All we saw were the flames encircling the room from floor to ceiling. I stood frozen. The heat was tremendous. All of the sudden my husband was gone. Into the flames. Everything was slow motion. I couldn't see my husband or my baby. And then, just as quick as he had gone, there he was -- holding our child in his arms and then he urged me down the stairs and out the door...As we rushed outside, I looked at our baby, afraid of what I might see. I grabbed her into my arms while my husband called 911 and started banging on all our neighbors doors to alert them. What I will never forget is the smell that permeated my daughter that morning - baby soap. My husband and I smelled like soot and cinder...But as I held my sweet twelve-month-old child, the only smell coming from her sweet little head and body was of the baby soap from her bath the night before. She didn't even have soot on her little nightgown. We had her checked out by paramedics, and she was perfect. My daughter had been in the flames that night - and when my husband reached in for her and passed her back through she was not scorched. When we went back in later, after the firemen had put out the flames, we saw her crib. Her bedding was melted to the frame and it was a sooty, scorched mess. But there, in the center of the crib, was a small form, perfectly clean and white where my daughter had lain. I know that the Lord showed us His hand of protection that night - not just for my daughter, but all three of us. We had passed through the flames and we were safe. We lost everything upstairs, and most of our furniture downstairs because of the smoke damage, yet the Lord spared us and we were beyond joyful. This is just one example of how the Lord has passed our family through the flames and brought us safely to the other side. Many of these times have been intangible flames of life that we were struggling through - that we just didn't think we would make it out of. Yet the Lord has always brought this instance back to my heart and I know that day he told me, 'You see, I am here. I am with you. And there will never be a storm that you will go through, that I will not see you safely through.' This has been a balm of peace over my heart since that day. You see, I know that whether I live or die, my Lord will be with me, and will walk with me until I am safely home."

What a powerful story and then for her to say "whether I live or die, my Lord will be with me, and will walk with me until I am safely home." That's a sign of a healthy inner life. What was on the inside came out when they went through this difficulty.

The Sponge Test

How do you tell what a sponge has cleaned? When squeezed, what was put in comes out! What are you soaking up and into your mind and heart? Let's just examine for a minute what's on the menu for your brain each day. Many of you count calories. Many of you wouldn't think of eating unhealthy food on a daily basis. But when it come to brain food, we are junk food junkies. The problem with this is that bad brain food goes directly to the spiritual heart and can cause spiritual heart disease! This will effect the way you live your life! "What should I do? You've got me scarred!" Paul gives us a prescription in Philippians 4...

Phil 4:6 Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.

Phil 4:7 And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Phil 4:8 Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable--if anything is excellent or praiseworthy--think about such things.

In other words, pay attention to your inner life, your spiritual heart, it really does matter! Okay one last lesson.

Lesson #5

Your inner life flavors everything you do and impacts your relationships with others!

Mark 9:50 "Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can you make it salty again? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with each other."

If salt were to lose it's saltiness, then what would be the purpose of putting it on your food, right? What Jesus is saying here is that we are to be the salt of the earth, but that salt has to first be inside. You can't

flavor the world on the outside if you don't have the flavor of Christ on the inside! Again, if the inside is right, other things will follow! Jesus said this in Matthew 5...

Mat 5:13 "You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men.

And then Jesus said this about our inner life in The Gospel of Luke...

Luke 11:34 Your eye is the lamp of your body. When your eyes are good, your whole body also is full of light. But when they are bad, your body also is full of darkness.

Luke 11:35 See to it, then, that the light within you is not darkness.

Luke 11:36 Therefore, if your whole body is full of light, and no part of it dark, it will be completely lighted, as when the light of a lamp shines on you."

Luke 11:37 When Jesus had finished speaking, a Pharisee invited him to eat with him; so he went in and reclined at the table.

Luke 11:38 But the Pharisee, noticing that Jesus did not first wash before the meal, was surprised.

Luke 11:39 Then the Lord said to him, "Now then, you Pharisees clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside you are full of greed and wickedness.

A lot of marriage and relationship problems stem from inside issues. Like the Pharisees there's greed and wickedness because of selfishness and people building their own little kingdoms rather than living in the Kingdom of God! How can this be fixed? How can we achieve the spiritual health in our inner life we all so desperately need? The first step is letting Jesus become your Savior by asking Him to forgive your sins and to come into your heart and life! The second step is the life-long process of allowing Jesus to be your Lord and to build His kingdom in your heart, your mind and your life! And one of the ways we do this is through exercising the spiritual disciplines. Maybe after this series we will do a study on the spiritual disciplines. Dallas Willard stated that spiritual disciplines are "exercises unto godliness." He compared physical discipline and spiritual discipline in the following way:

"If I train rigorously I can bench press 300 pounds; otherwise not. Such ordinary activities are actually disciplines that aid our physical or natural life. The same thing happens with disciplines for our spiritual life. When through spiritual disciplines I become able heartily to bless those who curse me, pray without ceasing, to be at peace when not given credit for good deeds I've done, or to master the evil that comes my way, it is because my disciplinary activities have inwardly poised me for more and more interaction with the powers of the living God and his Kingdom. Such is the potential we tap into when we use the disciplines."

Based on Dallas Willard's statement, I have some questions for all of us here this morning and they are not meant to put down or discourage anyone in any way, but to encourage us to pay more attention to our inner life. Those who have gone through really tough times can testify to the importance of knowing and trusting God to get you through those times and how the condition of your inner life really matters! Here's the questions...

Do you know what spiritual disciplines are? Can you name any? How many have you exercised this past week? Well, in closing, I'll list them for you...

Solitude - spending time alone with God

Silence - getting rid of distractions so you can hear God

Fasting - skipping a meal sometime so you can take a moment to pray and study

Frugality - living more simply so that others may simply live

Chastity - practicing moral purity

Secrecy - doing something good without being noticed

Sacrifice - giving up something for someone else

Study - Letting God speak to you through His Word, the Bible

Worship - Giving glory to God and loving Him through worship

Celebration - Counting God's blessings and His goodness

Service - Doing good for someone else

Prayer - Talking with God

Fellowship - Connecting with other believers for mutual encouragement

Confession - Being honest with God when you've messed up

Submission - Yielding your will to God's will

Phil 1:9 And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight,

Phil 1:10 so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of

Christ,
Phil 1:11 filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ--to the glory and praise of God.

What you do on the outside is a direct reflection of what you are on the inside! Pay attention to your inner life!

Let's pray!