



Rev. Frank Wang
Mark 9:30-50

April 26, 2020
English Standard Version

First and Last

The 28th Sermon in a Series on The Gospel of Mark entitled

“The King and His Cross”

1. Welcome¹

- a. Good morning! I hope that this sermon finds you well as the distributed church worships together this Sunday morning. If you don't know who I am, I'm Frank Wang. I'm the assistant pastor here at Potomac Hills Presbyterian Church. If you're new to the church, are just checking us out on the internet, or have simply stumbled across this sermon in your YouTube browsing, welcome! I hope that you'll watch the entirety of this sermon and then drop me an email at fwang@potomachills.org. I'd love to get to know you and to pray with you.
- b. This week, we're continuing our series in the Gospel of Mark. We'll be in Mark 9:30-50. If you would turn there in your Bibles with me, you can follow along. I'll be reading the passage as we go along to save time. But first, let's start our time in God's Word with prayer.

2. Pray

- a. Father in heaven, we need to hear from You today. These verses call us to examine our lives for sin and to be ruthless in dealing with it. And to be honest, the sins that these verses point out often don't feel like sin to us, and yet they are. I ask that You would enable me to see my own sinfulness clearly. That You would remind me of the implications of the Gospel that I put hope in, and that I would be changed. Would Your Word reveal to us today our sinfulness and the grace that You give us to address that particular sinfulness. Make us more like You we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

¹ The background and exposition of this text is adapted from the commentaries Mark by R. Kent Hughes, pp. 217-230; The Gospel of Mark by William L. Lane, pp. 336-350; Mark by R.C. Sproul, pp. 227-240; The Message of Mark by Donald English, pp. 168-172.

The conclusion was adapted from The Gospel of Mark by William L. Lane, p. 350

3. Introduction – Chinese Food Every Day

- a. So I want to start this morning by talking about a realization that I came to early on in my marriage to Sarah. It has to deal with food. Now you've got to understand, I can eat Chinese food every day for every meal and be totally happy. It's my comfort food because that's what I grew up on. And since I do most of the cooking in the family, early on, I happily made Chinese food every...single...night. It didn't even cross my mind to make anything else.
 - b. But I hope you see the problem already. When Sarah and I got married, I wasn't supposed to simply continue to live as I had always lived, eating a ton of Chinese food. Rather, I was supposed to lay down my life for my wife and serve her as best I could. Which, in this case, meant making **her** comfort food.
 - c. The problem was that I was living like the old, single Frank, not the new, married Frank. While I should have been thinking about and considering the needs of and desires of my wife, I wasn't. Simply, I was acting selfishly. At my core, I wanted to eat Chinese food, and so I made Chinese food. I was so wrapped up in what I wanted that it didn't even occur to me to think any differently. And it took me quite a bit of time to realize what I was doing. And thank goodness Sarah is an incredibly loving, patient, and supportive wife.
 - d. And I think that that dynamic, living with almost two identities is a great illustration of our spiritual lives. There are so many times we're living in the way of our old, sinful selves rather than our new, redeemed-in-Christ selves, and we don't even realize it. The old, sinful self is so comfortable, so natural, it's like breathing. We don't even think about it. And then Christ comes in to reveal the broken sinfulness that we've been living in and to call us into new life.
4. **Roadmap:** The disciples were no different. Throughout our passage this morning, the disciples consistently show that while they are following Jesus, they are still living out of their old self-centered, sinful identities. As we work our way through the passage, we'll hopefully see how Jesus took that old way of doing things and transformed it through the Gospel into godly living. If you have an ESV Bible, we'll be dividing our passage along the subheadings. So let's dive right in.

Jesus Again Foretells Death, Resurrection

5. For a bit of context, Jesus had just revealed His glory on the mountaintop at the beginning of chapter 9. And it's important to note that the Transfiguration is a turning point in the book of Mark. After He came down off the mountain, Jesus set His path toward Jerusalem, the Passion Week, and the Cross. It is on the road to Jerusalem that we come to verses 30-32.
 - a. *³⁰They went on from there and passed through Galilee. And he did not want anyone to know, ³¹for he was teaching his disciples, saying to them, "The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill him. And when he is killed, after three days he will rise." ³²But they did not understand the saying, and were afraid to ask him.*
6. At this point, Jesus focused on teaching the disciples. The disciples had proven to be remarkably dense throughout Jesus's ministry, and Jesus knew that time was running out. And so, where did Jesus start his final teaching on the way to Jerusalem and the Cross?
7. Well, He reached back to Mark 8 and the teaching that He would be delivered into the hands of men to be killed and then rise again on the third day. For Christians, this is pretty basic. Sounds good. But we miss a lot if we simply receive it as a basic Christian teaching about

the Cross. This teaching was most certainly **not** basic to the disciples. Our text spells that out. Verse 32 says, “*But they did not understand the saying, and were afraid to ask Him.*”

8. I think it’ll be helpful for us to dig in here and try to put ourselves in the disciples’ shoes. When Christians think about a savior, we tend to think about Jesus on the Cross. But when we usually think about saviors in other contexts, it’s almost always a powerful deliverer who comes in total victory and bathed in glory. So it’s understandable that the disciples didn’t get it back on chapter 8 and still don’t get it here in chapter 9. After all, how can you be a savior if you get killed?! It just doesn’t make sense...usually. But the fact that they don’t get it isn’t what I want to look at this morning. I want to focus on **why they didn’t ask for clarification**.
9. You see, the teaching was clearly important because Jesus had now repeated this saying twice. But, the text said that they were afraid to ask. **What that really means is that the disciples had decided that understanding Jesus’s teaching wasn’t worth the risk of looking dense or getting chewed out for not understanding.** And **that** right there is how they’re living according to their old selves.
10. They obviously don’t trust Jesus to take care of them. But the Gospel turns that on its head. What they’re missing is that Jesus is headed to the Cross **for them**. Jesus’s death wasn’t just going to be atonement for sin, which they don’t see either, but it was going to be the definitive declaration of God’s love for them, for you, and for me. God the Father and Jesus are saying, “This is how much I love you. I’m willing to die, to give everything for you. Don’t be afraid because this is how far I’m willing to go to make sure that you’re **safe**.” And so the Gospel removes the fear of asking. We won’t be chewed out by God because Jesus has already paid for our sin. He’s not up there thinking, “Ugh, how could you do that again!?”. No, the Gospel tells us that we are to come to Him **in our sin** for grace. We are to come to the Father knowing that the judgment has already been taken, and confident that we will receive His grace and help.
11. **Transition:** Unfortunately, the disciples didn’t continue to ponder Jesus’s teachings or discuss it amongst themselves to try to come to comprehension. They instead get into an argument over which of them was the greatest. Let’s read verses 33-37.

Who is the Greatest?

³³And they came to Capernaum. And when he was in the house he asked them, “What were you discussing on the way?” ³⁴But they kept silent, for on the way they had argued with one another about who was the greatest. ³⁵And he sat down and called the twelve. And he said to them, “If anyone would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all.” ³⁶And he took a child and put him in the midst of them, and taking him in his arms, he said to them, ³⁷“Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me, and whoever receives me, receives not me but him who sent me.”

12. Well that was embarrassing for the disciples. They compounded their sinful decision to place looking good over understanding by arguing which one of them was the best disciple. And you can imagine the arguments. “I’m the greatest because I got to see Jesus transfigured. Clearly I’m closer to the Lord than you because He didn’t pick you to go with Him up the mountainside.” “Well, while you were up there, doing nothing, I was down here doing the Lord’s ministry, trying to cast out that demon.” “Oh yeah? Well you’re both wrong, because I’m the disciple that Jesus loved.” And on and on. And what’s a the heart of this argument? Self-seeking glory. This sinfulness was a little bit more obvious than the last.

Even the disciples realized that their little debate probably wasn't good which resulted in the embarrassed silence that met Jesus's question.

13. But before we throw our judgment upon the disciples, I'd like to point out that we do this all...the...time. In fact, throwing our judgment upon the disciples demonstrates that we act just like they do. What are we doing when we judge the disciples? We're comparing ourselves to them. And it doesn't just happen when we study Scripture. How often do we compare ourselves to others? Really no part of life is off-limits. We play the comparison game in *everything*. Sitting in judgment of the disciples is no different than saying, "I'm greater than you. I have a more righteous perspective than you did." Do you feel and see how we're no different?
14. And how does Jesus respond to this? Well Jesus took on a formal teaching posture by sitting down and arraying the disciples at His feet. And when He was ready, He said something really radical. Read with me verse 35. *If anyone would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all.*
15. How does that work? How can you be number #1 and the best if you're dead last? It goes back to Jesus's teaching that they don't get. Jesus was on His way to Jerusalem in order to take on the most humiliating death and to serve as our atonement. He was and is the living fulfillment of this verse. Philippians 2 tells us
 - a. *Though Jesus was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking on the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*
16. What we need to see is the differences in heart. Jesus didn't count equality with God a thing to be grasped and humbled Himself to the point of death. He was the ultimate servant. And why is that glorious? Because He sought only to do the Father's will. He was the ultimate fulfillment of the purpose of man. And because of His service and obedience, the Father exalted Him and gave Him all glory and honor. Seeking your own honor is to grasp at being like God, from whom all glory flows. It's the ultimate rebellion, and rebellion isn't glorious. It's ugly. And so the disciples should seek glory, but they're looking in all the wrong places for it.
17. **Application:** So for us, how does the Gospel enable us to move from seeking our own glory to seeking God's? It starts with realizing that in Christ, we already have all glory. Remember, we have been united to Christ. What is mine is His, and what is His is mine. That means that I have **Jesus's** glory. The Gospel not only makes us new, it gives us more than we could possibly ever want. That newfound security gives us a new perspective too. We don't see people as obstacles to climb over or use in the pursuit of glory. Rather, we are enabled to see everyone as Christ does, in love and service. And this is what Jesus was illustrating in verses 36-37. Not only were children pretty low in the social pecking order in that day and age, not really useful for glory building, but Jesus is also calling to mind the way that we receive children. We don't tend to think in terms of glory or competition when welcoming kids. It's just simple warmth and affection. That is the way we ought to receive everyone, whether they are our "superiors" or "inferiors".

18. Now let's make this specific. What does this mean for us at Potomac Hills, in Leesburg, and in Loudoun County? Where do we refuse to receive others? The classic example within the church is that no one wants to volunteer with the youth. There are usually a host of excuses when it comes to serving with teenagers, but most of them get tossed when we consider Christ's words here. He literally picks up a kid and says, "When you receive this kid, you receive me." The language of "receive" points to a warm welcome and care. Jesus is literally calling us to care for children. But the concept really sort of expands to encompass everyone. Are you ready and willing to serve anyone in the church? Do you actually put that into action? Is there a section of the church, or the community at large, that you are wary of serving? Think about how those feelings of wariness or reluctance point to a deep seated selfishness that is sinful. And don't think that I'm any better. I am right there with you. This has really been convicting this week for me as well.
19. **Transition:** And as we step into the next section, let's look for that selfishness that we've seen in the first two sections in this one. I think we'll find that selfishness isn't found only on an individual level, but a corporate one too.

Anyone Not Against Us Is For Us

20. ³⁸ John said to him, "Teacher, we saw someone casting out demons in your name, and we tried to stop him, because he was not following us." ³⁹ But Jesus said, "Do not stop him, for no one who does a mighty work in my name will be able soon afterward to speak evil of me." ⁴⁰ For the one who is not against us is for us. ⁴¹ For truly, I say to you, whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because you belong to Christ will by no means lose his reward.
21. Did you catch the selfishness? The commentator Donald English notes that verse 38 reveals an ownership attitude to Jesus. He was theirs. Ministry in Jesus's Name was their ministry. The disciples didn't try to stop this exorcist because he was damaging the name of Jesus. The end of verse 38 makes it quite clear that protecting the name of Jesus isn't the reason for the disciples' desire to shut this guy down. The disciples want to stop him **because he wasn't following us**. Essentially, he's not one of our gang. And so their issues are all about them.
22. And sure, there is certainly a place for vetting folks in ministry. There is certainly a place for making sure that the name of Jesus is not stained by false teachers/ministers. But this isn't one of those times. This is simple jealousy.
23. You see, John was asking in a sense, "Who should we be receiving? Who's on our side?". I imagine that he's expecting Jesus to commend him for stopping unauthorized, unvetted ministry in His name. But Jesus doesn't do that. And what's the key to Jesus's response? It's being in Him. Whom should we consider on our side? Everyone who belongs to Jesus. This exorcist might not have had the best theology. I'm sure that the exorcist and the disciples would have had no problems finding differences between them. And yet, they both belong to Christ. And so the implication of the Gospel is one of unity. We are united in Christ to all those who are also united to Christ.
24. **Application:** So if we fast forward to 2020, what does this mean for us? It means that we should maybe take our unity in Christ with other believers a little bit more seriously. Sure, we can't stand with those that differ on the essential truths of the Gospel, but so many of our divisions aren't over essential doctrines. Are we Presbyterians looking down our noses at our Baptist brothers? Are we rejoicing over the ministry success of our brothers serving in non-denominational bible churches? Or are we taking a sort of haughty, elitist view of our circle of believers? Maybe it's not doctrinal differences that cause divisions for you. Maybe

it's political ideology or a stance on any number of issues. Christ calls us to remember that there is a unity that enables us to love one another in spite of our differences. And in this particularly polarized time in our history, I think that our union in Christ to one another ought to shine forth to give God glory.

25. **Transition:** As we prepare to wrap up by diving into the last section, I'm mindful that some of what I just said is tough to hear. It might have hit you pretty hard. That's intentional. You see, this last section tells us that we need to take sin seriously. The sinfulness that we've seen in the previous sections often goes unnoticed. That's a big problem for us because sin is a terrible thing. Let's read verses 42-50.

Temptations to Sin

⁴² "Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him if a great millstone were hung around his neck and he were thrown into the sea. ⁴³ And if your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life crippled than with two hands to go to hell, to the unquenchable fire. ⁴⁵ And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life lame than with two feet to be thrown into hell. ⁴⁷ And if your eye causes you to sin, tear it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into hell, ⁴⁸ 'where their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched.' ⁴⁹ For everyone will be salted with fire. ⁵⁰ Salt is good, but if the salt has lost its saltiness, how will you make it salty again? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another."

26. Jesus wraps up teaching here by emphasizing the radical nature of discipleship that He has called us to in verses 30-41. The sins that were revealed to the disciples were not only dangerous to them to continue living in, but they were also dangerous to those that looked to them for instruction, parenting, and example. A terrible fate awaits those who lead others astray, especially young Christians (both age-wise and spiritual maturity-wise).
27. The graphic language makes His point painfully clear. Sin is a big deal. Sin leads to hell, and hell is far worse than you think. It is worth it to do just about anything to avoid hell, and so it is worth it to do just about anything to avoid sin. Think cutting off your foot or hand is kind of overkill? To avoid sin, not really. And sure, the language of self-mutilation isn't actually a call to literally cut off your hand or foot, but it certainly emphasizes the ruthless sacrifices that we should make to put to death sin. For instance, it can be terribly inconvenient to have your smartphone charging in your living room instead of your bedroom. But if your smartphone is a gateway to sin, that inconvenience is well worth the removal of temptation.
28. As Christians, we sometimes are a little bit glib about sin. Jesus has paid it all anyway. What's the big deal? And that completely misses the point. Nothing less than the death of our savior can pay for that sin that we think is no big deal. Nothing less than the death of our savior can pay for the sin that we keep on committing secretly.
29. Brothers and sisters, friends, the culturally acceptable sins that we commit without even thinking are sins that we are called to put to death. It will involve sacrifice, inconvenience, and pain, but we will do it because we love the one who took the punishment that we deserve for those sins.

Conclusion: Staying Salty

To wrap up this morning, I want to look at verse 50. ⁵⁰ Salt is good, but if the salt has lost its saltiness, how will you make it salty again? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another." Salt here works as a preservative. And in this context, salt can be nothing other than

our allegiance to Jesus and the Gospel. And so what is to be our defining characteristic? Not distinctions of status, worth, or group. Rather, our defining characteristic is an all-encompassing allegiance to Christ and His Gospel in every facet of life. The fear that we saw in verse 32, the arguments between the disciples in verse 34, and the divisions between ministers in Jesus's name in verse 38 are all resolved when people recognize in each other a common commitment to Jesus, the Gospel, and to the servant's vocation. And when that happens, peace is restored. And so, how salty are we? Let's pray.

30. Pray:

- a. Lord Jesus, we confess that we are not as salty as we ought to be. We are not as committed to righteousness and to you as we ought to be. Help us in our unbelief and in our sinfulness. Sanctify us by revealing our sin to us and drawing us to the Cross. Would we be transformed by the power of your Gospel that we may see your glory and peace. Change us we pray. Amen.