

Peace, War, & Hell. (Mark 9.38-50).

Ego aside, child at the centre

## **1. Peace (v.38-41). Christianity is the most diverse faith on earth.**

### **Guidelines**

- A. Where do we draw the line between zeal vs tolerance?
- B. Avoid the pitfalls: Perfectionism, or tolerance with evil.
  - A. There is no friendly fire in Heaven's team. (character)
  - B. There is no neutrality in Heaven's team. (commitment)
- C. Heaven pays well. (service)

## **2. War & Hell (42-48) "If God is good, why does hell exist?"**

- A. Universal belief.
  - B. Hierarchy issue.
  - C. Self-righteousness.
- (v.42) Wrong war. (Against the brother)
- Who's worst: Hitler or Dawkins?
- (v.43-48) Right war. (Against sin)
- Plastic surgery: transformative or restorative?

## **3. Peace (49-50) A hard verse to interpret...**

- A. Living Sacrifice.
- B. Fire purifies.
- C. Salt preserves.

## **Conclusion - The Grace of Christ.**

Last Sunday we talked about ego: It is a universal issue; it looks like a balloon, either too inflated or too deflated; and the world doesn't have a solution for the problem.

What's the gospel solution for the ego issue? Put it aside, put a child in the middle.

The figure of the child is emblematic, we live in a world where people are defined by achievements, money, and degrees. The baby has no achievements, but only one trait: he/she is made in the image and likeness of God.

### **1. Peace, unity, and diversity (vv. 38–41). Christianity is the most diverse faith in the world!**

**(v. 38) Guidelines.** John reacted to the teaching! You can tell that Jesus' teaching resonated with John, because he confessed something: "We have prohibited someone who was exorcising demons by your name, because he wasn't one of us."

Jesus replied, "No, don't stop him!" Clearly, in light of the whole "who's the greatest" debate (vv. 33–38), the Rabbi knows there is an issue of sectarianism among the disciples. They said, "We stopped him because he doesn't follow us..." — that's right! People are not supposed to follow us; they are supposed to follow Jesus.

If God makes another ministry prosper instead of mine/ours, will I/we rejoice?!

#### **A. Where do we draw the line between zeal vs. tolerance?**

There's not a one-size-fits-all answer; it takes wisdom and discernment. However, we could establish some helpful principles:

#### **B. Avoid the pitfalls: perfectionism, or tolerance of evil.**

- Perfectionism — avoid that. None of us have perfect theology; none of us are perfect.

- Tolerance of evil — avoid that. Tozer says, "Tolerance is a problem if you tolerate sin."

**(vv. 39–41) Guidelines.** Aside from the things we should avoid, Jesus gives more insight on the subject — peace, diversity, and unity. It is imperative to understand that we are on the same team, not competing nor fighting against each other.

**A. There is no friendly fire in heaven’s team. (v. 39)** If someone speaks in the name of Jesus, let him do it — that’s assuming he is preaching Christ, not “about” Christ. Some preachers don’t preach Christ; they are preaching about “something” they want to get and Christ is used just as a means to get something.

**B. There is no neutrality in heaven’s team. (v. 40)** The myth of neutrality is dangerous! You know the old story: there was a man on the fence; Jesus, from one side of the fence, was calling him desperately to jump to his side. In the meantime, the devil was on the other side of the fence, and he was quiet. So, the man on the fence got curious and asked the devil: “Jesus keeps insisting that I cross to his side; why won’t you insist I cross to your side?” The devil replied, “The fence is mine — you are already on my side.”

**C. Heaven pays well. (v. 41)** Even if you give a cup of water to one of these little ones. Obviously, water is not water, and little ones are not little ones. Jesus is talking about discipleship — one disciple spiritually nourishing another, helping the new believer grow in faith and maturity in his walk with Christ.

Basically, Jesus is pointing to key characteristics of a Christian: Honesty, commitment, and service. The wrong “zeal” for Christ argues about ideas, that separates, instead of uniting.

## **2. War & Hell (vv. 42–48) If God is good, why does hell exist?**

There are two words translated as hell, but the Greek original gives you a better picture:

- *Hades* means death, the coffin, the grave — the “world of the dead.”
- *Gehenna* is literally the expression used by Jesus to refer to the fire and torment of hell — the lake of fire.

Out of the 12 times the Bible mentions the word *Gehenna*, 11 were spoken by our Lord Jesus himself. Our Lord talks more about hell than heaven in his ministry. Hell is real! No one likes to talk about hell, but it's better to talk about it than to go there. Our Lord knows that; that's why he is quite graphic in this section.

If God is good, why does hell exist? Both believers and non-believers ask that question, so we take it as a legitimate question. As a pastor, I take my time to respond to it, but not in this sermon, because it is out of the scope of this sermon. Jesus doesn't address the "why" in today's text – there will be another instance that will be addressed.

Let's analyze the question:

- The Qur'an talks about hell. In Brazil, the native religions have afterlife expectations. In Eastern Asia, the same. The major beliefs of the world believe in rewards or punishment after death.
- The question implies a hierarchy change: the Creator needs to give account for why hell exists, and we sit as the judge, deciding whether we approve it or not.
- The question also implies that our concept of good and bad seems better than God's. We are saying: "God, if I were you, I wouldn't create hell. I am too kind."

These are insightful observations. Such a kind of question comes from a worldview that is secularist and ethnocentric. Now let's see what Jesus says:

### **(v. 42) Wrong war (against the brother).**

#### **A. Echoes two teachings in Scripture:**

In Proverbs chapter 6, the Bible describes seven deadly sins: lying tongue, haughty eyes, hands that shed blood... What's the worst one? The brother who spreads division among others!

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus equates homicide with disseminating bad report among the brothers.

Clearly, to make a brother stumble — which means to disbelieve in Christ — is a grievous sin. Jesus uses a hyperbole to teach about the severe consequences of it: “It would be better to hang a stone (huge!) around the neck, throw it into the sea (abyss), and die (suicide).”

Think of how bad Hitler was in killing the Jews! Men like Richard Dawkins, Nietzsche, Voltaire, and Darwin were worse than him! They spread the belief that God is dead, that he doesn't exist — making many turn away from the truth.

### **(vv. 43–48) Right war (against sin).**

#### **A. Housekeeping — this is not literal; it is a hyperbole.**

When Jesus tells you it's better to “cut off your hands, feet, or eyes,” he is using a hyperbole. Obviously, sin resides in the heart, not in body parts.

#### **B. Plastic surgeries: transformative vs. restorative.**

Nowadays, plastic surgery is transformative: I don't like my belly, I go to the doctor and he chops it off. That was not the case during times of war; plastic surgery was mainly restorative due to the damages of war. The goal was to restore dignity to the frontline soldiers returning from the battlefield.

You have here a good illustration of what it means to fight against sin: sin damages the human being — created in the image and likeness of God — and the fight against it is the daily reminder that we want our dignity back; we want to be conformed to God's will.

Going back to the question, “If God is good, why does hell exist?” Though we are not able to answer the reason behind the question, we have a “Timbit” of the answer: we know what kind of people are going to hell: the ones who love sin — and by the very essence of it, they wage war against God.

### **3. Peace (vv. 49–50) A hard passage to interpret.**

Jesus resumes the theme of peacemaking (v. 50) by concluding his thought with the statement, “Have peace with one another.” Before verse 50, however, verse 49 poses a

hard teaching to understand: What does Jesus mean by “Everyone will be salted with fire”?

**(vv. 49–50) Living sacrifice.**

- a. Fire purifies. Fire can either consume what is rubbish or purify what is precious.
- b. Salt preserves. Nowadays, salt is used as a condiment. In Jesus’ time, it was mainly used as a preservative.
- c. In light of the Old Testament & Romans 12:1... Every sacrifice offering had to be salted. A sacrifice without salt was simply a BBQ meal, not a sacrifice. Romans 12:1 says, “Present yourselves as a living sacrifice to the Lord.”

In sum, Jesus is saying: everyone is tempted; everyone is tried — fire comes to everyone. However, there is a difference between believers and non-believers: Christians have salt in themselves. Salt preserves; for the Christian, fire purifies them — making them grow in Christ. To the unbeliever, fire consumes them.

Have salt in yourselves, and live in peace with each other. The world is consumed with comparison, competitiveness, and ego war. Among yourselves, let peace, diversity, and unity, preserve you like salt preserves food.

**Conclusion — The grace of Christ.**

Every time we talk about hell things get heavy. Nevertheless, I don’t want us to miss the beauty that this passage teaches. Jesus stirs everyone to wage war against sin to the extreme — using the hyperbole of “cut off your hands, eyes, and feet” while waging war against sin.

Even though Jesus used a hyperbole when speaking to us, he applied this hyperbole to himself: he is the only one who fought sin to the extreme — on the cross!

His hands were not cut, but they were pierced; his eyes were not taken away, but a crown of thorns pierced his head; his feet were not cut off, but they were pierced — for our salvation.

