

“Staying on Track” – Pr Jim Sprengle – Pentecost 19 September 29, 2024

- I. **Mark 9:42-50** – previously read
- II. **What would you be willing to give up in order to save your life?**
 - a. A little more than 20 years ago, a young man named Aron Ralston went out into the canyonlands of southern Utah for a solo hike and climb.
 - i. He was a very skilled mountaineer, but tended to push the limits by getting into dangerous situations.
 - ii. In this case, he didn't tell anyone where he was going, and he had no way to communicate with anyone.
 - iii. He descended into a narrow crevice and dislodged an 800-pound rock that fell into the opening... pinning his arm against the rock wall.
 - iv. He tried everything possible to get out of his predicament, but after several days, he was out of food and water... he came to the realization that his arm had to go if he was going to survive.
 - v. Without the gory details, he amputated his right arm with a dull pocket knife... after which he repelled down a 65-foot cliff face, and then hiked more than 7 miles before a family found him and got help.
 - vi. A movie came out in 2010 called “127 Hours” that dramatizes the story... not like it needs a lot more drama.
 - vii. In the end, Aron Ralston had to make a choice that his pinned arm would cause his eventual death... so he cut it off.
 - b. An interesting thing about this story is the risky behavior and pride that got this young man into trouble.
 - i. Even after the arm was removed, he became the first person to climb all of Colorado's 14,000-foot peaks in the winter while climbing solo.
 - ii. Was it a true change that took place after his arm was gone?
 - 1. No, it seems that the arm was part of what got him in trouble, but something much bigger was underneath...
- III. **Our Gospel lesson seems a little scattered today.**
 - a. Jesus is jumping from little children... to cutting off body parts... to hell... then to salt...
 - b. However, this section of the Gospel of Mark is best described as, what it means to be followers or disciples of Jesus.
 - i. What kinds of things go into following Jesus?
 - 1. From last week's reading, it's not pridefully taking leadership positions using worldly wisdom.
 - a. It means being last... and like a child...
 - b. It means setting aside our preconceived ideas about getting ahead, and looking to God for understanding.

2. From this week's reading it means that following Jesus is rejecting sin... even radically excising it from our lives to avoid a fate worse than death... going to hell.
- c. Jesus first explains that whoever causes one of these little ones to sin would have a better result putting a two-ton rock on your neck and jumping into the ocean. (vs 42)
 - i. I would like us to consider that we are all little ones, in other words, Jesus calls us to have the attitude of a child if we follow Him, so this statement includes us – and there will be consequences for those who introduce and encourage sin in our lives.
- d. Then Jesus gets into the causes of stumbling, or sin... by using body parts.
 - i. By the way, the Greek word for causing someone to stumble is skandalidzo (or our word for scandal or scandalized).
 - ii. If your hand causes you to stumble... if your foot causes you to stumble... if your eye causes you to stumble... get rid of it.
 1. Let's get real though... it would be nice to blame stealing something on your hand... "I'm sorry officer, my hand just reached out and stole that money," and he would reply, "okay, I get it, our hands can be very sinful at times."
 2. No, our hands, our feet, our eyes are directed by the sin within.
 3. Just like Aron Ralston, getting rid of our hand does not fix the bigger problem of who we are by nature...
- e. Jesus is dead serious when He says that sin will destroy you... eternally.
 - i. If you are a moth dancing around the flame of sin in your life, you will get burned.
 - ii. His point in saying to cut off things that might cause you to stumble and sin is to say that there are serious consequences for sin!
 - iii. When we use our hands to steal... to harm others... to do nothing at all when we should help or work... when we use our hands to create idols that take all our time... Jesus says it's better to lose your hands than it is to allow these sins to destroy your faith... and end up in hell.
 - iv. When we use our feet to run toward evil (Proverbs 6:18), when we run away from Godly responsibilities (Jonah), or when our feet lead others astray to idols or sin... Jesus says it's better to lose your feet than to allow these sins to destroy your faith... and end up in hell.
 - v. When our eyes are looking at others with lust (Matthew 5:28), or when our eyes see the good things others have and we can't stand their success (coveting), or when we set our eyes on pornography or inappropriate social media posts of any kind... Jesus says it's better to lose your eyes than to allow these sins to destroy your faith... and end up in hell.
- f. Some of you might say, "Pastor Jim, hell is just made up by men in the Church who want to scare us into behaving right."

- i. What do I say to that? Nothing! I let Jesus do the talking... “Hell is... ‘where their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched’” (vs 48) which He quotes from Isaiah 66:24.
- ii. Yes, hell is real – but the worst part about it is not the pain and suffering... it’s the complete lack of God’s presence.... Never again will a person in hell know or feel the presence of God and love.
- iii. Yes, Jesus clearly tells us that hell is real, and as His followers, we are constantly tempted to walk away from our Savior.

IV. **The truth is, without the help of Christ, we cannot overcome sin.**

- a. Our appendages do not make us sin... they are controlled by the sin coming out of our hearts and minds.
- b. The only hope we have is the power of Christ’s forgiveness as it is applied to us by grace.
- c. If hell is real... a real place that people without faith go... then grace is just as real... the forgiveness of sins through faith in Jesus.
- d. Why does Jesus take sin so seriously in today’s Gospel reading?
 - i. Jesus knows that sin causes separation from Him... and so in the greatest act of love the world has ever known, He went to the cross in our place so we would always be with Him.
 - ii. As His hands and feet were pierced, our hands and feet were set free... as His eyes looked out over the pure hatred of the religious leaders and the jeering Roman soldiers, our eyes were opened to life in the power of Christ and His Spirit.
 - iii. God hates sin... and He was even willing to send His very own Son to die a horrible death so that we could live and have forgiveness.

V. **In a final encouragement, Jesus tells His followers to be salt.**

- a. As we have the forgiveness of sins and nothing can separate us from His love (Romans 8:39)... we are salt.
- b. I read this illustration from a pastor named Timothy Keller, so I have to give him credit... but the other night I ate corn on the cob for dinner with Michele, and I poured salt all over it... it was delicious!
 - i. But, you know what I didn’t mean? I didn’t mean that the salt was delicious... the corn on the cob was delicious as long as it had salt.
 - ii. No one eats something with salt and says, “that was great salt!”
 - iii. In the same way, when we help with a Bible study or small group, when we do our part for a church picnic or other event, people walk away saying, “that was event was awesome!” without even realizing all the salt that was there.¹
- c. But there is another thing salt does... it preserves.
 - i. When we share Jesus with others and people come to faith... when we as Jesus’ followers bring the Gospel to people who come to believe... we are preserving their lives eternally – they will never die.
- d. Finally, salt makes us thirsty.

- i. Those who have salt need to quench their thirst with the water of life that only God can provide through Jesus.
- e. So, we always remember the love that God has shown us as we stay on track... as we reject the sin that Jesus paid for... and bring the salt to every place in the strong and powerful name of Jesus! Amen.

¹ Source: Timothy Keller, *The Journal of Biblical Counseling* (Volume 19, Winter 2001)