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Sermon Notes

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Radical Warfare Against Sin

Mark 9:42-50

A Complex and Powerful Passage

Context: Jesus is addressing his contentious and prideful disciples.

They have been sinfully and pridefully arguing with each other about which of them is the greatest. (Mark 9:34) Jesus needs to refocus their hearts on what is really vital in the Kingdom of Heaven.

First, he tells them that if anyone wants to be first, he must be the very last and the servant of all. It is only by humble servanthood that the Kingdom of Heaven is established and advances through a world of prideful rebellion against God the King. So the greater the disciple is, the more humble and submissive to God's kingly reign he will be. Jesus himself, the King of all, is the lowest of slaves on earth... he will humble himself to the utmost by dying on the cross!

Matthew 20:26-28 whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, ²⁷ and whoever wants to be first must be your slave--²⁸ just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

Then he takes a little child and has him stand among them as an object lesson of discipleship. He takes the little child in his arms and teaches them the gentleness and meekness and tenderness that should characterize their relationships with each other:

Mark 9:37 "Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me does not welcome me but the one who sent me."

The fundamental concept here is that Christ is fiercely protective of all of his children from any that would harm them in any way. Jesus says effectively: "I will WAGE WAR against anyone who harms my children; just as I will ETERNALLY REWARD anyone who helps my children in any way"

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.

This goes back to God's fiercely protective stance toward the nation of Israel from its inception throughout its history. He said when calling Abraham and promising to build a nation from him:

Genesis 12:3 I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse

So again and again, God warns everyone on earth not to harm his people:

Deuteronomy 32:9-11 the LORD's portion is his people, Jacob his allotted inheritance. ¹⁰ In a desert land he found him, in a barren and howling waste. He shielded him and cared for him; he guarded him as the apple of his eye, ¹¹ like an eagle that stirs up its nest and hovers over its young, that spreads its wings to catch them and carries them on its pinions.

God has chosen his people from all the nations of the earth to be his portion, his prized possession. He shields his people, protects them, cares for them, leads them, and hovers over them like an eagle protecting his nest.

The "apple of his eye" does not refer to something beautiful that God likes to look at... but the center/core of his eyeball. That means if you hurt God's people, it's like you are jabbing God in the eye. He will lash out against you violently.

Now Jesus is extending that same fiercely protective love to all his people, his disciples, from every tribe, nation, people, language all over the world... his chosen children. If anyone harms them, Christ will wage war against them. If anyone blesses them, God will reward them eternally. He is directly linked with his people.

Now, when it comes to danger to his children, there is no danger greater than their own sin. Therefore, he addresses in this passage a **RADICAL COMMITMENT** to warfare against sin. He warns the world not to tempt his little children, and he warns his children not to tempt themselves. The deadly danger of **TEMPTATION** and **SIN** is the real issue here.

The language is so extreme that it arrests our attention, as Jesus extends our understanding of **HELL** as eternal conscious torment... the just punishment for all unforgiven sin.

Yet at the end of this passage, he gives a sweet and mild call to peaceful unity within themselves... **STOP ARGUING** about which is the greatest! Be at peace with each other and help each other to be pure from sin!

That is what this passage is about. It is a call to **RADICAL WARFARE** against temptation and sin.

What do I mean by the word "radical"? There are two senses of the word "radical"

The word "radical" comes from the Latin word "radix" meaning **ROOT**... like the **ROOT** of a plant

- 1) Having to do with the basic, foundational principles... what is essential and elementary and intrinsic to the thing itself. The purest essence of the thing. **RADICAL** means the original basic nature of discipleship
- 2) Radical also means "Extreme, intense, fanatical, revolutionary"

Here, it is BOTH... something that is both fundamental AND fanatical, intrinsic as well as intense, elemental as well as extreme

Jesus is taking the purest basic aspects of discipleship and extending them to their logical conclusions when it comes to SIN

What is the call to discipleship? It is this:

Mark 8:34-37 "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. ³⁵ For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it. ³⁶ What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul? ³⁷ Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul?"

And what is the greatest threat against the soul? It is SIN.
Temptations to sin "wage war against" your souls,

1 Peter 2:11 Dear friends, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul.

So, this radical call to warfare against temptation and sin is of the essence of Christian discipleship.

That's what this text is about.

Now, a word about the manuscripts.

You will notice in most of your Bibles that verses 44 and 46 aren't even there. The editors of most of the modern English versions we use have thought it best to eliminate them from the translation or put them in brackets. That's because the best and earliest manuscripts did not have these extra additions – they just say the same thing two more times ("where the word does not die and the fire is not quenched.")

The monks who were copying the New Testament manuscripts sometimes took it upon themselves to "double down" on a concept or explain it, and would add some words to help the reader. That's what happened here. The omissions do not lose

anything meaningful in the text, however, because the original does contain Jesus' dire warning about hell as a place of eternal conscious torment. We will discuss all that in due time.

I. Jesus Warns About Temptation

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."

A. This is a Universal Warning to Anyone Who Would Tempt His Children

1. As we noted, this is in the spirit of God's fierce protection of his chosen people as the apple of his eye
2. This is Jesus like an eagle fiercely protecting his nest and his young
3. This is in line with his statement

Mark 8:36 What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul?

4. The greatest danger against our souls is SIN... that is the way a person would forfeit his soul
5. SO... Jesus continues his concept of his disciples as his little children, and his words that how you treat his little children is how you will treat him

B. Who Does He Have in Mind?

1. Immediately, he wants his arguing, prideful, bickering disciples to stop tempting each other to sin

C. But the Real Enemy is Outside the Gates!

1. Jesus makes this plain by the parallel passage

***Matthew 18:6-7 But if anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a large millstone hung around his neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea.
⁷ "Woe to the world because of the things that cause people to sin!***

Such things must come, but woe to the man through whom they come!

2. The “world” is the alluring system of enticements and assaults on our souls
 - a. Temptations to sexual sin by internet images and porn sites and illicit services designed to connect people with sex workers
 - b. Temptations to greed and materialism by constant ads and appeals to our base nature of restless discontentment, yearning to satisfy by OWNING something, relentlessly greedy for more
 - c. Temptations to power, temptations to rage, temptations to blasphemy, temptations to worldly entertainment
 - d. The “lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh, the pride of life”
3. Satan runs the world’s system of temptations... but here Jesus’ focus is on the HUMAN AGENTS of temptations
 - a. Some person is behind these websites and enticements
 - b. Someone is writing algorithms that are designed to feed you what you want and constantly ensnare you into addictions
 - c. Someone is plotting and planning and executing this system of temptations... its not accidental; men and women are using their marketing skills and their psychological knowledge, and their programming acumen and their scientific knowledge to entrap other people and make them do what they want
 - d. I watched a documentary about the tobacco industries lies about the chemical research they did to make their products MAXIMALLY ADDICTIVE
 - e. Programmers of video games and other websites do the same thing—how can we make this maximally enticing, maximally addictive? How can we make sure our thing GOES VIRAL?
 - f. These are the human agents of temptation

- g. And what about the opioid epidemic, especially fentanyl, that is ravaging communities and killing thousands of people? Some chemists worked on their recipes, some drug cartels are using the open borders and fighting the authorities to deliver these deadly and addictive drugs to human beings
 - h. The drug epidemic is a picture of sin in general; all sin is in some way ADDICTIVE
4. Jesus says it would be better for human beings who craft temptations for others to have a huge millstone tied around their necks and be drowned in the depths of the sea
 5. Drowning is a terrible death... one of the worst ways to die
 6. A millstone would weigh several tons; if it were tied around your neck and you were thrown into the deepest part of the ocean, you would be dragged down, down, down with your lungs screaming for oxygen
 7. Jesus is going to judge the world because of this system of temptations

But he also wants his little children to deal with their own corruptions... their own addictions... and not blame the world

Mark 9:43-47 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. ⁴⁴ 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. ⁴⁶ 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

D. Radical Warfare Against Our Own Lusts

1. Jesus is using hyperbole... “If EVEN YOUR OWN HAND causes you to sin...”
2. It should be obvious he is not speaking literally
3. For earlier, he made it plain where our evil comes from

Mark 7:18 nothing that enters a man from the outside can make him 'unclean'

Mark 7:20-23 "What comes out of a man is what makes him 'unclean.' ²¹ For from within, out of men's hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, ²² greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. ²³ All these evils come from inside and make a man 'unclean.'"

4. So, your hand cannot make you sin; neither can your foot or your eye
5. Sadly, in church history there were some individuals that took these statements literally, especially in terms of sexual immorality, and literally made themselves eunuchs for the Kingdom of God
6. These were ascetic monks, dwelling in an extreme pattern of life
7. They believed that the harsh treatment of the body would guarantee holiness
8. But the consistent testimony of these individuals is that the physical amputation did not cleanse their hearts and minds of evil thoughts
9. Jesus is using these parts of the body as symbols of a lifestyle

Hand = what you do; eye = what you look at; feet = where you go

Whatever you touch, whatever you look at, wherever you go, be totally committed to holiness!!

10. You need to study your lifestyle and see how you're living; whenever you fall into temptation and sin, you should study what happened; how did the world and the devil conspire with your sinful nature to make you sin?
11. And if you see that your habits in a certain way consistently lead you into sin, you should do whatever it takes to cut that out of your life
12. Jesus said we should pray "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the Evil One."

13. But here, he is saying “Do not lead yourself into temptation”

E. Application

1. Is there any pattern of your life that the Holy Spirit is testifying with your spirit right now that you need to cut out of your life?
2. Does it have to do with the digital world? Your use of technology? You use of the smartphone? The websites you frequent... the social media you use? Are you addicted to anything that is dragging you again and again into sin?
3. You should be willing to ask hard questions about yourself and your lifestyle and cut out anything leading you to sin.

Psalm 139:23-24 Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. ²⁴ See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting

And why? What is the urgency? Jesus warns us about HELL!

II. Jesus Warns About Hell

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 9:45 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 9:47-48 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, ⁴⁸ where "their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched.'

Mark 9:49 Everyone will be salted with fire.

A. Jesus Truly Means to Terrify Us into Holiness

B. There Are Twelve Mentions of Hell in the New Testament; Eleven are by Jesus

1. He is the loving shepherd of our souls
2. Though there is no clear teaching on the nature of hell in the Old Testament, it was hinted at
3. Jesus quotes the last verse of Isaiah... the final verse of that magnificent book of prophecy

Isaiah 66:24 "And they will go out and look upon the dead bodies of those who rebelled against me; their worm will not die, nor will their fire be quenched, and they will be loathsome to all mankind."

4. The concept there was that the worm represents the decay of the grave... the worm devours the dead corpse; but the worm never ceases its gnawing
5. And the fire of judgment never goes out... it just keeps burning and burning... it is never quenched
6. Isaiah had mentioned the firepit of Tophet earlier

Isaiah 33:14 The sinners in Zion are terrified; trembling grips the godless: "Who of us can dwell with the consuming fire? Who of us can dwell with everlasting burning?"

7. The prophet Daniel also spoke of eternal shame

Daniel 12:2 Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt.

8. But that's it in the Old Testament
9. It was given to Jesus Christ to reveal the terrors of hell
10. And it is reasonable for him to do so, because he is the one who has the power to judge and condemn sinners to hell

Matthew 3:12 His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor, gathering his wheat into the barn and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire.

11. It is also reasonable for him to teach about hell, because he drank hell in our place on the cross

12. So, as the final word from God, Jesus reveals what will happen to the wicked for all eternity

13. Jesus taught a place of eternal conscious torment

Matthew 25:41 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.'

A place of eternal shame and regret and pain

Matthew 8:12 the subjects of the kingdom will be thrown outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Matthew 22:13 'Tie him hand and foot, and throw him outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'

The rich man and Lazarus; the rich man thrown into hell:

Luke 16:23-24 In hell, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side. ²⁴ So he called to him, 'Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire.'

He also has memory of his past life and regret:

Luke 16:25 Abraham replied, 'Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in agony.'

A place from which there is no escape:

Luke 16:26 And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us.

14. Jesus uses a rational evaluation...

Just as your soul is worth more than the entire world, for *“What would it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul”* or *“What would a man give in exchange for his soul?”*, here Jesus extends it and says **“There is nothing too hard for you to cut out of your life to avoid hell. Whatever you can do,**

whatever steps you can take, no matter how radical, to cut sin from your life, you must do it."

C. Some Christians Balk at this Concept

1. They teach that it is unjust for God to punish someone eternally for sins they did in time, in this world
2. Some, like John Stott, an otherwise faithful teacher of the Word, took refuge in annihilationism... the idea that the soul is destroyed by God fiery judgment; there is no eternal conscious torment
3. BUT the quote here, "Where the worm does not die and the fire is not quenched" clearly asserts eternal torment
4. So also the final statement made in Matthew 25, the "Sheep and the Goats" passage:

Matthew 25:46 Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.

5. Hell is as eternal as heaven

D. Application: What must you do to be holy? What sin patterns in your life are growing in you like a tumor?

III. Jesus Warns About Worldliness

Mark 9:50 "Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can you make it salty again? Have salt in yourselves

A. This Connects with Jesus' Statement About Us in the World

Matthew 5:13-14 "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. ¹⁴ "You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden.

The concept is one of a preservative... a desiccant, retarding the spread of evil and corruption in the world

B. How Does the "Salt Lose its Saltiness?"

1. Chemists will tell you that Sodium Chloride (salt) is one of the most stable molecules on earth
 2. It doesn't lose its saltiness except that it be mixed with other components and gets polluted thereby; like in Jesus' age it could be mixed with gypsum, and thereby become impure
 3. It would look like salt, but its properties were diluted and greatly diminished
 4. It would then become worthless
- C. So... the Image Here is **WORLDLINESS**; whereas Christians were supposed to affect the world, the world had a greater effect on Christians
- D. So, the Remedy

Romans 12:2 Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.

IV. Jesus Pleads for Loving Unity

Mark 9:50 be at peace with each other

- A. Again, the Disciples were Arguing About Which was the Greatest
- B. Jesus Has Taught Them Powerfully About Humility, Servanthood, and Childlikeness
- C. He Has Warned Them About the Real Danger: SIN
- D. Now, he wants them to be at peace with each other

Galatians 5:13-15 do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love. ¹⁴ The entire law is summed up in a single command: "Love your neighbor as yourself." ¹⁵ If you keep on biting and devouring each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other.

- E. Do not be in competition with each other as to who is the greatest
- F. Instead, realize we're all part of one body... and that

1 Corinthians 12:26 if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it.

Ask not “How am I greater than my brother?” but ask “How can I make my brother greater?”

V. Lessons

A. Escape the Terrors of Hell by Trusting in Christ Alone

1. It is right to fear hell
2. It is a valid reason to flee to Christ!
3. Martin Luther said it was the terrors of hell that forced him to learn theology, to learn Christian doctrine:

Martin Luther: “I did not learn my theology all at once, but I had to search deeper for it, where my temptations took me. ... Not understanding, reading, or speculation, but living – nay, dying and being damned – make a theologian.”

As Luther began to realize how terrible it would be to be condemned to an eternity in conscious torment under the just wrath of God, he knew he must find a way to escape. The gospel of Jesus Christ alone is the escape

B. Christians: Fight Sin with Everything You Have!!

Romans 8:13-14 if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live, ¹⁴ because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God

John Owen, on the Mortification of Sin in the Lives of Believers

Be killing sin, or sin will be killing you.

The life, vigor, and comfort of our spiritual life depend much on our mortification of sin.

There is not a day but sin foils or is foiled, prevails or is prevailed upon; and it will be so whilst we live in this world

“Sin always aims at the utmost; every time it rises up to tempt or entice, if allowed to have its own course, it would go out to the utmost sin in that kind. Every unclean thought or glance would be adultery if it could; every covetous desire would be oppression, every thought of unbelief would be atheism... It is like the grave, that is never satisfied. And herein lies no small share of the deceitfulness of sin.”

C. Understand the World’s Wicked Allures... and How Zealous Jesus is to Judge the World for those temptations

1. The millstone statement shows how angry Jesus is at the world because of its system of temptations
2. We should see the world—the evil world system—for what it is
3. Many Christians are way too comfortable with the world, its entertainments, its philosophies, its goals and aspirations, its joys and sorrows... all of them corrupt
4. We need to have the same zeal for holiness that is behind Jesus’ warnings here