

The real problem with jealousy

Text: Mark 9:38-50 for 9/30/2018 by Pastor Bolwerk

You may have heard it described as a monster. And once this monster gets hold of you it is very hard to break it's grasp. It controls you and twists you into doing things you may have thought you would never do. It is a toxic combination of envy and anger that turns even the most mild-mannered, logical, and rational people into ... green eyed monsters! You have probably figured out by now that I am speaking of jealousy.

Of all of the emotions that we humans deal with, jealousy is by far one of the most dangerous. It is dangerous because it is not just one emotion, but a mixture of emotions, each with their own effect both on our minds and our bodies. As this concoction of emotions takes hold of us, as I mentioned earlier, it can be very hard to break its grasp.

But the problem with jealousy isn't that we are having an emotional response to something. Jealousy, like all human emotion, is not bad or sinful in and of itself. God even describes himself as a jealous God. No, the problem with jealousy goes so much deeper. It is a problem rooted in our sinful nature, and it is a problem Jesus addresses in this portion of God's word. There is a lot going on in this text, so it is easy to miss ...

Theme: The real problem with jealousy

I. It turns friends into enemies.

II. It requires a serious response.

Our text starts out with John speaking to Jesus about something the disciples did. There was a man whose faith in Jesus gave him the ability to drive a demon out of someone, but the disciples stopped him! Driving out demons sounds like a good thing. So why would the disciples stop this man? According to John, "**because he was not one of us**" (v. 38).

They said the man was doing this in Jesus' name (v. 38) so they stopped him. It's good that the disciples are concerned about Jesus' good name. Yet, are they really concerned about Jesus reputation? No, they were more concerned about their own reputations as Jesus' disciples. It seems the disciples were jealous of this man who was able to do something that they had not been able to recently do.

Jesus had sent out the Twelve with power to heal and drive out demons (Mark 6:8-13), but right before our text the disciples tried to drive a demon out of a young boy, but they were not able to. Jesus had to come and drive the demon out. Now this man comes along and does something they were not able to do. He drives out a demon in Jesus' name, and he was not even one of the Twelve.

So, in some twisted sense of self-righteousness, the disciples try to make themselves look good by letting Jesus know that they stopped this man. They kept him from doing what they thought only they should be doing.

Jesus, of course, addresses this sinful jealousy: "**Do not stop him,**" Jesus said. "**No one who does a miracle in my name can in the next moment say anything bad about me, for whoever is not against us is for us**" (vs. 39-40). Jesus tells his disciples to allow this fellow believer to display his faith. Someone who does a good work in Jesus' name is not a threat but is showing his unity both with Jesus and with his disciples. This man, by faith, was the disciple's friend, but in their jealousy the disciples had tried to turn him into an enemy.

Jesus wants his disciples to understand just how serious this sin of jealousy is. If Jesus wanted this man to drive out that demon, then the disciples caused this man to not do

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something Jesus wanted. To not do what God wants you to do is a sin. Jesus told his disciples, **“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”** (v. 42). Jesus makes his point in a rather shocking way. He says it would be better for someone to give up their own life than to cause another believer to sin.

So, how does this apply to us? The disciples treated someone as an enemy because they were jealous of another believer's God given gifts. What gifts do our fellow believers have that we are jealous of? Perhaps the more important question is what might we be doing to stop them from using those gifts? While we might not be physically stopping them, there are other ways to stop a person from doing something.

For instance, take ridicule. How easy it is to put someone down behind their back and then let the gossip work its way into their ears. We speak out against those who use their gifts to enhance our worship, or beautify our church, or who help run our congregation. Perhaps we think the way they are doing things is not appropriate in God's church then. So, like the disciples, we will do what is necessary to protect our Lord's name. This person certainly cannot give glory to God the way we would give glory to God. So we try to stop our fellow Christians from using their gifts.

Or perhaps someone we are jealous of tries to use their skills to solve a problem our congregation has. If they need help from us we may simply not give them the information, or help, or support they need. Maybe we feel what this person is doing is our job, and this person shouldn't be meddling in something that is our responsibility. They should mind their own business. Jealousy causes us to treat these people as if they are the enemy when they are our Christian friends. We keep them from doing what God has granted them the ability to do all because we are jealous. Jealous, perhaps, that they can do a better job than we can.

Remember what Jesus said about this sin of jealousy? It's so serious that to keep from committing that sin a person would be better off tying a huge millstone around their neck and jumping into the deepest part of the sea, letting that stone drag them to the bottom. Uncontrolled jealousy is a sin that can drag one's soul to the bottom of hell.

How serious is Jesus about the sin of jealousy? So serious that he went to the cross for it. Jesus is so serious about this sin that he allowed himself to be tortured and executed by men who were jealous of him and wanted to stop him. Jesus shed his blood and gave up his life for them and for us, to free us from the death our jealousy deserves. Christ's death and resurrection prove that your sin of jealousy is forgiven. Jesus has taken your sin and its punishment away.

It's true; the problem with jealousy is that it often causes us to turn our Christian friends into enemies. When we feel jealousy starting to burn within us we should not treat that feeling lightly. Jesus has shown us how serious he is about that sin. When it comes to us dealing with our jealousy, we need to realize it is a sin that requires a serious response on our part.

How serious? Jesus tells us to cut off whatever causes us to sin. He said, **“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. 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.**

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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” (vs. 43-47).

That sounds simple enough, doesn't it? When I'm jealous of what my neighbor has, and I reach out to take it, to stop myself all I have to do is cut off my hand, then I can't take it. Or if I'm jealous that my friends are going to a movie where very 'un-Christian' things will be seen, and I'm tempted to walk into that movie, then to stop myself from sinning all I have to do is cut my feet off. Or if I am jealous of a relationships two people are in, and I'm tempted to stare at that attractive person of the opposite sex knowing they're in a relationship, to stop myself from sinning all I have to do is gouge my eyes out. Problem solved, right?

Not really. Doing these things does not stop the sin. The sin comes from our 'heart' the place where that jealous emotion begins. The sin comes from our head, the place where our jealous thoughts start. So if we're supposed to cut off that which is causes the sin does that mean Jesus wants us to cut out our hearts and cut off our heads?!

No, Jesus wants us to realize, this problem is so severe that we are not going to be able to fix it with our own strength or by our own will power. Our Lord wants us to recognize that this problem is so serious that to truly deal with it we need to completely rely on Jesus.

When that sin of uncontrolled jealousy rears its ugly head in our lives we need to turn to our Lord and admit that we have this problem. We need to turn to him and ask him to forgive us this sin which we have allowed it to take over our heads and our hearts. Then trusting in Christ's forgiveness we ask him for his help to overcome this problem.

We know he can help us. Jesus has shown us his power as true God by the miracles he performed while living on this earth. Christ has shown us he knows how to deal with jealousy as he deals with the jealousy of his disciples. Jesus has proven to us his victory over sin is ours. He proved it by treating us the opposite of how we jealously treat others: Jesus has treated us, his enemies, as friends. Our Lord has defeated sin and Satan by his victory on the cross. Now he fills us with his victorious power. In Christ's forgiveness we not only find hope and peace with God, but we find the strength to fight our sinful jealousy. Jesus gives us the power to respond to those sinful temptations in God pleasing ways.

This sin of jealousy certainly requires a serious response. It requires us to daily sacrifice our human emotions and reason to Jesus' teachings. It requires us turn to our Lord in repentance and prayer, asking for his help, and trusting in his power to help us. This problem requires us to rely on Jesus and not on ourselves. This sin requires the most serious of all responses: It requires the blood of Christ to wash us clean. It requires the word of Christ to make us alive in faith.

Don't let jealousy cause you to turn your friends into enemies. Instead, respond to jealousy with the faith that God has given you: A faith that trusts Jesus for the forgiveness. A faith that gives you the strength you need to deal with that serious sin. Let your faith be moved by Christ's love for you, so you can live at peace with your Christian friends, and so you can be at peace with the God who now calls you his friends. Amen.