

Mark 9:38-50 *"Teacher," said John, "we saw someone driving out demons in your name and we told him to stop, because he was not one of us."* ³⁹ *"Do not stop him," Jesus said. "For no one who does a miracle in my name can in the next moment say anything bad about me,* ⁴⁰ *for whoever is not against us is for us. ⁴¹ Truly I tell you, anyone who gives you a cup of water in my name because you belong to the Messiah will certainly not lose their reward.* ⁴² *"If anyone causes one of these little ones—those who believe in me—to stumble, it would be better for them if a large millstone were hung around their neck and they were thrown into the sea. ⁴³ If your hand causes you to stumble, 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. ⁴⁵ And if your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life crippled than to have two feet and be thrown into hell. ⁴⁷ And if your eye causes you to stumble, 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 "the worms that eat them do not die, and the fire is not quenched." ⁴⁹ Everyone will be salted with fire. ⁵⁰ "Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can you make it salty again? Have salt among yourselves, and be at peace with each other."*

Beware the Scandal

1. Don't drive a wedge between a believer and his faith
2. Be salt in the world

From politico.com: "Pruitt resigns amid torrent of ethics woes." "Puerto Rico's governor to resign." From Foxnews.com: "Chris Cuomo's wild ride: 18 months of rough headlines for CNN's star anchor." And these are just the latest. There is no end of scandals in politics, sports and the entertainment industry. They happen so much that we don't even bat an eye anymore. But are they truly scandals? Jesus talks about scandals in our lesson today but what he means by the word and what the media means are totally different things. The Greek word from which we get the English word, scandal, really means a deadly trap. The scandal was the trigger on a bird trap that would cause the trap to fall and kill the bird. So, to scandalize someone, as Jesus uses it here, is to cause death to someone's faith or, at least, to do harm to someone's faith by leading them into sin or doubt. The NIV translation is *causes you to stumble*. Jesus' warning for us today is: Beware the Scandal.

"Teacher," said John, "we saw someone driving out demons in your name and we told him to stop, because he was not one of us." ³⁹ *"Do not stop him," Jesus said. "For no one who does a miracle in my name can in the next moment say anything bad about me,* ⁴⁰ *for whoever is not against us is for us. ⁴¹ Truly I tell you, anyone who gives you a cup of water in my name because you belong to the Messiah will certainly not lose their reward. Let me state it right up front: WELS Christians won't be the only ones in heaven. Now, having said that, we still recognize the dangers to faith of false teachings in other churches. But because of the gospel, there are believers in other churches. We don't question motives or judge hearts. We rejoice that the gospel is proclaimed in other places.*

What Jesus is stressing here is that we should worry less about others who call on Jesus' name and be more concerned about our own lives of faith. He calls on us to confront our own sinfulness and strive to amend our own lives as disciples of Christ. We should beware the scandal. *"If anyone causes one of these little ones—those who believe in me—to stumble, it would be better for them if a large millstone were hung around their neck and they were thrown into the sea.*

We've all seen old-fashioned mousetraps. It's just a piece of wood and some twisted metal. But how deadly for a curious mouse! With the trigger set, it only takes a nudge and snap! That's the end of the mouse. It's a death trap. Anything or anyone that causes someone, including your own self, to stumble into sin or to lose his or her faith is a death trap, a scandal.

What would you consider a horrible crime? Multiple murder? Rape? Child molestation? These are horrible crimes. But to Jesus the most horrible crime would be to cause someone to fall into sin with the result that they fall from faith.

Do we treat God's Word as an inconvenience in our lives? Do we fail to love our spouse? Do we criticize church leaders? Do we watch entertainment that glorifies immoral living? Do we live selfish lives? Do we join in prayer and communion with false teachers? These are little things that harm the weak in faith. And what is really sad is that the weak Christians we are harming the most often our own children.

"Little ones must look up. Every Christian ought to realize that at least one person in the family of believers looks up to him or her. . . Jesus is warning us against insensitive disregard of his little ones. . . What if only one such little one is

lost through our thoughtless words or sinful conduct? . . . We must measure our words and actions by the standard of how they might affect one of Christ's little ones." (Richard Balge, Northwestern Lutheran, Oct. 94, p. 3)

Like Eleazer. Eleazer was a scribe in Israel during the reign of the Syrian tyrant, Antiochus IV. Antiochus made every attempt to wipe out every form of worship of the true God. He tried to force Jewish believers to deny their faith with the threat of torture or death. Eleazer refused to renounce his faith. He said, "Lest many of the young should suppose that Eleazer in his 90th year has gone over to an alien religion, and through my pretense, for the sake of living a brief moment longer, they should be led astray because of me." (2 Macc 6:24-25)

We can't say, "'It's my business what I do.' That's irresponsible talk, because we are always on the Father's business and we are responsible for those who look up to us." (Balge) "Any special emphasis on my human rights, my personal identity, my self-esteem end when I enter into the family of God. The kingdom logo is the cross of Jesus. Good Friday is as far as my rights go. No Christian carries any rights beyond it. They are all there, dead, nailed to the cross, along with the rest of my sins." (Meditations, Vol. 37 #4 p. 38)

Beware the scandal. *If your hand causes you to stumble, 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. ⁴⁵ And if your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life crippled than to have two feet and be thrown into hell. ⁴⁷ And if your eye causes you to stumble, 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 "the worms that eat them do not die, and the fire is not quenched.'*

What is it that's causing you to stumble in your faith? Is it your hand or foot? Is that really the problem? Cut off one hand, you still have the other. Pluck out one eye, you still have the other to look at the same sinful things. Is it really the body part that's the problem? No, it's what's in our hearts that the problem.

Is there some big passion in your heart that is coming between you and your Savior? Gambling, TV, sports, overtime at work, fishing? If there is something near and dear to you – as dear to you as your hand or eye – that is getting in the way of your relationship with Christ, cut it off. Get rid of it.

In a word, Jesus is talking about self-denial. Self-denial is painful. It may seem as bad as cutting off a foot. To put Jesus ahead of parents and children can prove very difficult. To put your wants and dreams second to Jesus can be hard. But if we don't, we are endangering our faith. These may seem like minor things to us but they can have eternal consequences. Beware the scandal and be salt in the world.

"Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can you make it salty again? Have salt among yourselves, and be at peace with each other." God made some deep-down changes in us when he created faith in our hearts to believe what Jesus Christ did as our substitute. The perfect life Jesus lived became our perfect life of obedience to God. The innocent death Jesus suffered paid for every one of our sins. And then God sent the Holy Spirit who took us who once had totally self-centered, loveless, and earthly-minded hearts, and gave us hearts that beat with loyalty to him and with love for people. To put it another way, when God looks at us now, he doesn't see a saltshaker that a child has filled with dirty sand from the playground where cats prowl and microbes live. Such a saltshaker will never be welcomed onto the dinner table. No, the filth of our sins has been scrubbed clean with Jesus' blood, and his perfect life has been poured into us so that God sees people filled with pure white righteousness. Like a beautiful crystal shaker that stands ready for service on the table of a king, we now stand in the presence of the King of kings ready to serve him as salty Christians.

So how do we serve God as salty Christians? Well, think of that saltshaker on your dinner table again. If the little white kernels remain inside that shaker, can they do their job as salt? No way! Salt has got to come in contact with your breakfast egg or with your Big Mac and fries before it can do the job God designed salt to do. Do you see how this applies to us as salty Christians? (Daniel Habben) We salt people's lives by serving them in love.

How do we stay salty? Take God's Word into your heart. That's what we pray for often: "May we so hear them, read, learn, and take them to heart." Let that Word be the controlling influence in your life. Don't accept what tickles your ears and reject what pricks your conscience. Instead, let the word burn in your heart with the truth of our sin and the truth of Christ's love.

With every explanation of the commandments, we start out by saying, "We should fear and love God." The fear and love of God will not be there unless you have that salt in yourself – unless you remember each and every day that even when you do seemingly great things in God's kingdom, your hands, eyes, and feet are still sinful – and you still deserve to be thrown in the fire. If it weren't for God's grace and Jesus' sacrifice you would be on your way to hell. It took the tremendous sacrifice of Jesus to take you from God's condemnation. That's the only reason you are here. It's not because you have reformed yourself; it's because the blood of Christ purified you. (Joel Pankow) When you remember that, when you have that salt-stinging truth within you, you will do everything you can to beware the scandal and be salt in the world.