

## 52 Mark 9:38-41

### Inclusive Exclusivity

#### Text

John said to him, “Teacher, we saw someone casting out demons in your name, and we tried to stop him, because he was not following us.” 39 But Jesus said, “Do not stop him, for no one who does a mighty work in my name will be able soon afterward to speak evil of me. 40 For the one who is not against us is for us. 41 For truly, I say to you, whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because you belong to Christ will by no means lose his reward.

#### Introduction

Jesus came down from the mount of transfiguration to find a faithless generation. The disciples unable to cast out a demon. The father was unsure if Jesus had the power to do it. The Scribes as always were contending with him. Moving on his disciple argue about who was the greatest. Jesus explains that if you want to be first you must be last. If you want to be great you must be a servant of all. He illustrates this teaching by taking a child into his arms. They must be willing to receive the lowly of society.

That basic point is repeated this week in verse 41 with the reference to small acts of kindness. We focused last week on the individual acts of service. This week I want to briefly address the corporate aspect of that. Often in church growth methodologies we are told to identify our target audience. Almost without exception that target audience is the upper middle class. Is this biblical? We are told that you cannot be all things to all people and so we need to narrow our demographic focus. I think that that is a cop-out. I do not believe that we are to pick a target audience. God picks our target audience by placing us in the country and city in which we are located. He providentially determines our target audience. The people we work with, the neighbors we live next to, those that God brings into our life, they are our target audience. When we pick the upper/middle-class as our target audience, then we are not welcoming the children into our arms. We are not welcoming the lower-class. We are not ministering to receiving in the name of Christ those that our society casts aside.

*John said to him, “Teacher, we saw someone casting out demons in your name, and we tried to stop him, because he was not following us.”*

This has a bit of irony to it. The disciples had just come from a failed attempt to cast out demons. They find this man who is doing it successfully, and they try to stop him. Now it seems that the disciples are playing the part of the Pharisees.

When the disciples tried to cast out the demons and failed, did the Pharisees, in all their righteousness, cast the demon out? No. They had no concern for this man and his boy. All they cared about was this Jesus who was too popular for their liking. They had to stop him.

So now, the disciples show remarkably little concern for the people who are being freed from demonic possession. All they care about is this man is not following them. The Pharisees would have been perfectly happy if Jesus was one of them. If he stayed in the good ol' boy club all would be fine. And if this fellow was part of the group of disciples, all would be well. But he is not so he must be stopped.

The text says, "We tried to stop him." It indicates that they were unsuccessful in their attempts. This, to me, makes it a good story. Tragedies can be good stories, but we all like the happily-ever-after stories. I was reading this, and as a minister my heart immediately went out to this man. There are precious few workers in ministries. Please don't stop him! I have had this feeling a couple of times before when some people will attack a genuine minister of the gospel. I may not agree with him 100%, but if he is real, let him minister! So I was quite pleased to see that they tried.

*39 But Jesus said, "Do not stop him, for no one who does a mighty work in my name will be able soon afterward to speak evil of me.*

Jesus forbids them to stop this man. His response to John includes three "fors." Why should he not be stopped?

**for** no one who does a mighty work in my name will be able soon afterward to speak evil of me.

**For** the one who is not against us is for us.

**For** truly, I say to you, whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because you belong to Christ will by no means lose his reward.

Here is the first "for." He will not even be able to speak ill of Jesus soon after. This makes sense when we think of the apostles and the prophets. They could do great signs and wonders.

However, they were not infallible. Their writings that ended up in scripture were, but the rest of their life was not necessarily marked by infallibility. They could write a birthday card and misspell something. They could walk and stub their toes. They could still sin. They were not infallible. Nonetheless, they were still considered to be men of God. So as a general rule you could trust what they said just like you could trust any righteous man today.

Their ability to speak right things about God was especially heightened in the presence of miracles. You'll recall that one of the reasons for miracles was to serve as a stamp of validation for God's spokespersons. This was not a permanent stamp of approval. Thus God could even use evil men as prophets. He could inspire Balaam such that Balaam could not curse Israel but only bless her. This would not last forever, and in due time Balaam could once again speak wrong things. I don't know how all of this works since God has not revealed that to us. But it appears that for some time after the Spirit works in a person he would not be able to speak ill of Christ. Thus, even if the man was wicked, the disciples were to leave him alone because God was sovereignly using that person.

## **The Inclusiveness of Christians**

*40 For the one who is not against us is for us. 41 For truly, I say to you, whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because you belong to Christ will by no means lose his reward.*

Here is the second and third "for." There is a continual struggle to  
Back in Num 11:26-29 there was this same fear.

Now two men remained in the camp, one named Eldad, and the other named Medad, and the Spirit rested on them. They were among those registered, but they had not gone out to the tent, and so they prophesied in the camp. 27 And a young man ran and told Moses, "Eldad and Medad are prophesying in the camp." 28 And Joshua the son of Nun, the assistant of Moses from his youth, said, "My lord Moses, stop them." 29 But Moses said to him, "Are you jealous for my sake? Would that all the Lord's people were prophets, that the Lord would put his Spirit on them!"

Moses, a man marked by humility, understood that this whole exodus thing was not about him. This is not the nation of Moses. He was not building his own empire.

Paul demonstrates a kingdom attitude in 1 Cor 9:19-22

For though I am free from all, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win more of them. 20 To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though not being myself under the law) that I might win those under the law. 21 To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (not being outside the law of God but under the law of Christ) that I might win those outside the law. 22 To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some.

And in 1 Cor 10:31-33

So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. 32 Give no offense to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God, 33 just as I try to please everyone in everything I do, not seeking my own advantage, but that of many, that they may be saved.

Paul is not about building his own following. He is not interested in a certain clique. Paul is interested, only, in doing the work of God and spreading the gospel wherever he can. This should be our heart as well. How quick we are to condemn others who are not among us but who also follow Christ. It is not about us! that is the point. We need to be careful here in how we exegete this text. It can easily be put to abuse.

## The Exclusiveness of Christ

In Matthew 12:30 Christ says, "Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters." This is a little different from what he says in Mark isn't it? The Markan saying is very inclusive, "He who is not against us is for us." The Matthean saying is very exclusive, "Whoever is not with me is against me."

Here we must navigate the waters between Scylla and Charybdis. At a grammar level, Jesus says in Mark, "the one who is not against *us*." Whereas in Matthew he says, "whoever is not with *me*." Jesus himself seems to be the deciding factor. If you are not with Christ, then you are against him. And if you are with Christ, and if he is with Christ, then no matter whether you are in the same group, if you are with Christ, then you are part of the same body and are, therefore, for each other. Do you see how that works? Everybody who is truly in Christ is part of the body of Christ and is part of the kingdom and is seeking to expand that kingdom. Whether you are part of the same local body is immaterial. You are both seeking to expand the kingdom of God, therefore, you are both for one another.

You are either for Christ or against Christ, no middle ground, very exclusive. But everyone who is in Christ is *in*! There is liberty here; it is very inclusive. J.C. Ryle observes, "They have practically proclaimed to their brethren, 'you shall either follow us, or not work for Christ at all.'"<sup>1</sup>

At a grammar level we noticed the me vs. us difference. And if that seems to be a weak link, we can look at the passages contextually. In Mark we find a man who is doing good deeds. He is freeing those who have been oppressed by demons. Moreover, he is doing it in Jesus name. He recognizes the authority of Jesus. He knows that he has nothing in himself to command these demons. He fully rests in the authority of Jesus as he performs this ministry. In Matthew there is a very different setting. Jesus has just cast out a demon and the Scribes and Pharisees come accusing him of casting out demons by the power of Satan! In Mark the man does good by resting in the authority of Jesus. In Matthew the Pharisees condemn the good work of Jesus and deny his authority. The context of each passage therefore reinforces what was just said about Jesus being the dividing line.

Paul, again, illustrates this well. In Phill 1:14-18 he says:

Some indeed preach Christ from envy and rivalry, but others from good will. 16 The latter do it out of love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel. 17 The former proclaim Christ out of rivalry, not sincerely but thinking to afflict me in my imprisonment. 18 What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed, and in that I rejoice.

The dividing line for Paul was Christ. As long as Christ is being proclaimed, he rejoiced. Even if the motives were less than pure. Christ was proclaimed.

## On Unity

Let me now make one final observation and distinction. I labor this point because of the ideological climate in which we find ourselves. There exists both a hardline, unmoving, "our way is the only way" kind of mentality, along with one of the most tolerant anything goes kind of mentality that the world has ever seen. In this climate we need to be careful thinkers. We must follow scripture closely.

For those who are in Christ, there is acceptance and there is liberty. Should we not, therefore, join together? Must we join together? Does nothing else matter? If we are in Christ, then no matter what other differences we may have, we should set them all aside. Right? I do not think that is correct for the following reasons:

First, Jesus did not insist that this man join with them. Nor did he encourage his disciples to go and join this fellow. Each was fulfilling a calling. Each was serving a purpose. They do not, necessarily, need to join with one another. There will be times when people may not simply choose to be separate, but even split away from what was a previously united body. This happens in a very God-honoring way every time a church plant is done. There may be a deliberate breaking off to start something new.

Second, even if you did want to join together, it doesn't mean you should. There may be times when you deem it unwise to join. Paul refused to join with John Mark on the second missionary

---

1. J.C. Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on Mark*, 9:38-50.

journey because he felt that he compromised the last mission. Yet, both parties, Paul with Silas, and Mark with Peter, were used mightily by God.

Third, real biblical unity requires people to be of one mind with one another. Paul was writing to local bodies when he gave his exhortations toward unity. Just because they were in the same local body did not mean that they had unity. Ephesians 4 requires nothing less than 100% unity in the faith. In heaven, there will be no denominations, there will be no theological divisions. To be genuinely unified, you must be unified in the faith, meaning the doctrines of Christianity. It is more than that, but it is not less than that. The issue in today's text is whether the disciples should stop another man from ministering. That is clearly different from the more nuanced question of unity within a local body.