

## 53 Mark 9:42-50

### Text & Transmission

#### Text

“Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him if a great millstone were hung around his neck and he were thrown into the sea. 43 And if your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life crippled than with two hands to go to hell, to the unquenchable fire. 45 And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life lame than with two feet to be thrown into hell. 47 And if your eye causes you to sin, tear it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into hell, 48 ‘where their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched.’ 49 For everyone will be salted with fire. 50 Salt is good, but if the salt has lost its saltiness, how will you make it salty again? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another.”

#### Introduction

There is so much to do in this passage that I do not have time to fit it all in one message. There is a textual issue that I want to make you aware of. Seeing that part of my task is to equip the saints for the work of ministry, I would be remiss if I did not spend at least some time in apologetics in this passage.

Secondly, I want to exegete the meaning of the text itself. This is always our goal. We always want to know what God has to say to us. Apologetics is only to clear away the objections so that the text can speak clearly.

Third, I want to look doctrinally at the concept of hell. It is a subject that is so neglected that were I to simply skim the subject we may come away with a distorted view. If a certain doctrine has been neglected in preaching and Bible studies and devotionals, then we lack the background necessary to understand what is being said. Or, perhaps more problematic, because we have been left to develop our own concept of hell, we may need to dwell longer in the text than we normally would.

Thus you see that biblical exposition is both the goal of apologetics and the foundation for systematic theology. Again, in brief, first, I want to give a defense for the text we have before us, second, I want to exegete the text, and third, I want to expound on the doctrine of hell.

#### Textual Transmission

Teabing cleared his throat and declared, "The Bible did not arrive by fax from heaven."

"I beg your pardon?" "The Bible is a product of man, my dear. Not of God. The Bible did not fall magically from the clouds. Man created it as a historical record of tumultuous times, and it has evolved through countless translations, additions, and revisions. History has never had a definitive version of the book. (231)"

"Aha!" Teabing burst in with enthusiasm. "The fundamental irony of Christianity! The Bible, as we know it today, was collated by the pagan Roman emperor Constantine the Great." (231) - Dan Brown

A Blogger mocks, "How often do we hear people "explaining" religious beliefs by stating "The Bible says so," as if the Bible fell out of the sky, pre-translated to English by God Himself? "

If [God] wanted his people to have his words, surely he would have given them to them. . . . The fact that we don't have the words surely must show, I reasoned, that he did not preserve them for us. And if he didn't perform that miracle, there seemed to be no reason to think that he performed the earlier miracle of inspiring the words. (p. 11) - Ehrman

First, my defense of the text. If you are an observant reader, you may notice that verse 44 and verse 46 are not there. This provides a good opportunity to give just the briefest overview of textual transmission. I will try not to get too in depth, or be too boring, but I think it is important to understand how we came to have this book we call the Bible.

You may have head critics of Christianity say things like, "You can't trust the Bible because it was just copied and recopied, told and retold. It is just a 2000 year old telephone game." You may also have heard some people try to defend the King James Bible as the only true Bible. What both of these groups skip over, or refuse to do, is look at how texts are transmitted through time.

I debated with myself for some time on how to approach this. Should I go from where we are at and work backwards, or should I begin at the beginning and work forward? I ended up winning the debate, and so we will begin at the beginning and work forward. Paul, Mark, John, Peter, James, and others wrote these books. We call these the originals. Write "originals" on your notes. These originals would get passed around from church to church. The church would make a copy and then pass the original along. All of these copies we call copies. So write the word "copies" under "originals." These copies are also known as manuscripts. There are various classifications of manuscripts that I will not get into this morning, but you should know that they exist.

Ok, we have the originals, and we have the manuscripts or copies. But not all of these copies agree with one another. Eventually, someone (or some group of people) come along and combine all these manuscripts into one single Greek text. Thus all the copies are examined, and if there are variations, a decision is made as to which reading was the original. So if 2 copies say "Christ Jesus" and 347 of them say "Jesus Christ," a decision is made on which reading reflects the original. The result is one Greek text of the NT. This new Greek text is called and "eclectic text." Go ahead and write "eclectic text" in your notes under "copies."

Finally, someone, or a group of people, will come along and translate that eclectic text into English (or whatever other language). Now write "translation" in your notes under "eclectic

text." That is where we get our Bibles. You can get into much greater detail on all of this, but this should suffice for our purposes.

Just for the sake of clarity, the "translation" that we use in this church is the ESV. The ESV is based on the eclectic text called "Nestle-Anland."

## **Manuscript Evidence**

The first thing we should point out in answering the critic is the massive amount of manuscript evidence. When we look at works of antiquity, no other book comes even close to having the number of supporting manuscripts that scripture has.

By way of comparison, Caesar's writings have 10 copies upon which we rest. He wrote in the 1st century BC, but the earliest copy is 900AD. Tacitus, writing about the same time has 20 copies for us to reference. The earliest of these is 1100AD. By far, the best classical, extra-biblical writings that we have available are Homer's. We have 643 copies. The NT, however, has almost 5000 manuscripts to show. Unlike these other ancient texts whose earliest copies are centuries if not a millennium after the originals, the NT's earliest manuscripts are within 1 generation of the originals. Nothing else even comes close.

If the critic wants to do away with scripture on this basis, then he must also do away with Tacitus, Caesar, Philo, Parmenides, Demosthenes, Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Homer, Cicero, Euripides, Josephus, Pliny, and every other piece of classical literature.

Although not a manuscript evidence, it should be noted that there is good evidence that the originals were written by the contemporaries of Jesus, many of them who lived and ministered with him. Further, these originals were written within a decade or two of the events. This leaves very little time for corruption before the accounts were set in writing.

## **Dealing With Variants**

It must be admitted that there are a lot of variants across these manuscripts. So how do we decide what was really written? "Yeah, ok" the skeptic admits, "there is a lot of manuscript evidence for scripture, but if they are all different doesn't that confirm my telephone-game point?" How do we deal with the variants?

There are a few different ways of dealing with them. One way is to simply count up the number of MSS supporting one reading and the number of MSS supporting another reading. The one with the most MSS wins. Do you remember our eclectic text? This is one of those. It is called the majority text (MT) for obvious reasons. Another one is called the textus receptus (TR). The KJV is based on the textus receptus. It is very similar to the MT so they are often confused. But what is the problem with doing a simple count? Suppose we have two copies that are different from one another. If the wrong copy got re-copied lots of times it will be in the majority. So while the reading with the majority of MSS in its favor is something to consider, there must be a better way.

One way that we can determine which one represents the original is to understand how errors occur. For the sake of time I will only give a couple of them. When you are copying something, you will look at the original, and copy it onto the copy sheet. You'll read more of the original and write it on the copy sheet. When you are transcribing something, if the word where your eyes left

the original is repeated on the line just below, it is possible that you will pick up reading on the line below. Thus if you have two manuscripts where one of them contains the whole, and the other is missing a line but picks up at the same word that it left off a line above, then probably the first one is the original.

## Geography and Bias

The geographical spread of a reading is important. There may be some tendency in the scribe to correct a text, or to harmonize a text, or to make some kind of alteration. Certain regions are going to struggle with certain biases more than others. It is unlikely that these different regions are going to produce the same error. And since they have different backgrounds, different biases, different prejudices, they are not likely to deliberately alter the text in the same way. Thus, the more geographically widespread a reading is the more weight is assigned to it.

Related to the geography criterion is the **genealogy** of a text. I mentioned earlier that there are various classifications of manuscripts. I was referring to their family. Texts in a certain family have a certain pedigree, that is, they have descended or have been copied from another text. They are therefore dependent on their parents. If their parents had an error, they probably have the same error. Looking at manuscripts from different families helps to establish independent witnesses for a particular reading. It is not as impressive if a daughter retains the reading of the parent text. It is better if a reading has multiple, independent witnesses.

Another thing to consider is **how old** a manuscript is. In general, the older it is the more weight is attached to it. Archeology has been a wonderful tool in this regard. A manuscript from AD 250 has had less opportunity for corruption than a manuscript from AD 1500.

Preference is going to be given to a reading that better reflects the style of the author. By now we may be able to pick up some of Mark's style. We get a feel for how he writes and we can pick out phrases that are likely to be Markan.

I'll just mention one more. You will assign greater weight to a difficult saying. It is not likely that a scribe would change a text to make it more difficult to swallow, or more embarrassing. This is why the inclusion of all the flaws of the disciples are such a mark of authenticity. These men were pillars of the church! As an early church, you would look up to and revere such men. It is more likely that these flaws would be omitted or glossed over rather than included with as much force as they are. The same is true with some of the difficult sayings of Christ. Our tendency is to make things easier to swallow. We want to make it look soft and inviting rather than harsh and unyielding.

These are just a few of the things that go into textual criticism. The result of such a robust process is that very little of the text is in question.

Our text today does not contain verses 44 and 46, which are found in the KJV. The reason that they are not included in Nestle -Anland (and therefore not included in the NASB, NIV, ESV, and other translations) is as follows. First, those verses are not found in the codex Sinaiticus, Vaticanus, Ephraemi, Beza, or the Family 1 group of minuscules. It is also missing from early translations of the text into Latin, Syriac, and Coptic. This seems to be an example of scribal expansion.

We should praise God who has given us his word and has seen fit to preserve it for us! How great is our God?!