

**Daily Bread with Brother Hwa-Chi (Not reviewed by the speaker, for personal use only)**

**Mark 9: 33-40**

Peace be with you, brothers and sisters, this is Hwa-Chi. Thank the Lord, it's time to read the Bible again. We will continue to read Mark chapter 9, verses 33-40.

In the Gospel of Mark, from Chapter 3:13-19, it is recorded that after Jesus appointed the 12 apostles, He began His discipleship training with them. Mark chapters 4 thru 9 recorded Jesus' three travelling missionary journeys with His disciples. We can see them as the 3 stages of their discipleship training.

The first stage is foundational training, which includes preaching, casting out demons, and healing. The second stage is expanding breadth, where Jesus led the disciples through areas inhabited by Gentiles, indicating that the Gospel is meant for all nations. The third stage is increasing depth. Initially, at the foot of Mount Hermon, the disciples received revelations about Christ and the church. It was then that Jesus first told them, "The Son of Man must suffer many things... and be killed, and after three days rise again." Subsequently, Jesus took a few disciples up to a high mountain, where they witnessed His transfiguration, seeing the glory inherent to Him as the Son of God. Later, they came down the mountain to help cast out demons, illustrating that the revelations on the mountain were meant for service in the valleys. Revelation is never for accumulating theoretical knowledge or establishing theological schools of thought or spiritual authority; it's always to assist disciples in serving those in need more effectively. This concluded the third missionary journey.

On the journey back, Jesus reiterated to His disciples for the second time, "The Son of Man must suffer many things.... and be killed, and after three days rise again." Jesus repeated this statement because the disciples simply did not comprehend it; their hearts were not focused on Him.

**Verse 33: "Then He came to Capernaum. And when He was in the house He asked them, 'What was it you disputed among yourselves on the road?'"**

Now they had returned to Capernaum; Capernaum served as the hub of Jesus' ministry in Galilee and also marked the beginning and end of the three missionary journeys. The disciples' training across these three stages has now concluded. Beginning from Mark chapter 10, Jesus is set to lead His disciples towards Jerusalem, where six months later, He will be crucified. Hence, the verses from chapter 9:33-50, can be seen as the teacher's parting words before the disciples' graduation from their training. We understand that graduation does not signify the end but rather the commencement of another phase. The subsequent stage entails accompanying their Master, Jesus, on the journey to the cross. Prior to that, Jesus' final discourse no longer focuses on the vision or capability of service but rather on the mindset one must possess when serving.

What we read today from verse 33 to verse 40 emphasizes the relationship among the servants. As they journeyed from Mount Hermon back to Capernaum, Jesus reiterated to His disciples for the second time that "He will suffer, be killed, and rise again on the third day." Despite the importance of this message, the disciples seemed to have no reaction because their hearts were preoccupied with other matters. Along the way, Jesus didn't address it directly, but He was attentive to what they were discussing. It wasn't until they arrived back in Capernaum, entered the house, and were alone with Jesus, that He asked, "What was it you disputed among yourselves on the road?"

**Verse 34: "But they kept silent, for on the road they had disputed among themselves who would be the greatest."**

Jesus asked them a question, but the disciples remained silent. Why? Because they were embarrassed to answer. It turns out they had been arguing among themselves about who would be the greatest; they knew they shouldn't be arguing about this, so they were too embarrassed to respond. But consider the situation: Peter, James,

and John, these three disciples, had come down from the mountain, where they had seen the glorious transfiguration of Jesus. They unconsciously thought themselves superior, therefore, when looking at people, they always maintain a 45-degree angle of elevation, giving people a sense of superiority. As for the nine disciples who remained at the foot of the mountain, they felt ashamed for failing to cast out the demon from the boy and felt inferior. Yet, inwardly, they were also discontented: they lived together, ate together, and practiced together every day, so why should the three of them be able to go up the mountain while they were left behind?

Dear brothers and sisters, this is a very real test. When serving together and growing together in the church, it's inevitable for coworkers to compare themselves with one another and consequently argue about who is greater. While everyone may appear humble in front of their elders, among peers, the competitive spirit easily arises. In fact, this is quite normal. If you claim to have no sense of comparison at all, perhaps you haven't truly dedicated yourself because you still have other pursuits. If you genuinely devote your time and energy to serving and have no concerns beyond these matters, it's normal to have a sense of comparison in service. This is natural but not necessarily right because we are all fallen beings. It was at this moment that Jesus taught them the correct attitude towards service.

**Verse 35: "And He sat down, called the twelve, and said to them, 'If anyone desires to be first, he shall be last of all and servant of all.'"**

Jesus knew exactly what they were discussing, so He didn't inquire further. Instead, He directly called the twelve disciples to gather around Him and then said to them, "If anyone desires to be first, he shall be last of all and servant of all." On earth, masters are greater than servants, and those being served are greater than those serving. However, in the kingdom of God, it's the opposite: the one who serves is greater than the one being served! Therefore, if you want to be a leader, you must first serve everyone, learn to serve each person, only then can you be considered

the greatest. In the church, those willing to humbly serve everyone are the true spiritual leaders.

Bringing the management principles of the world into the church, where leaders sit high on thrones and command the saints, is entirely contrary to the Bible. This is because the church is a community of life, and the order of life comes from serving, or more accurately, from serving and bringing forth provision. The one who provides for you, who helps you, naturally is greater than you; if you do not have the provision of life, you will not have the authority of life. And hierarchical relationships that arise without the authority of life are merely positional, which is a worldly principle, not a spiritual principle that should exist in the church. There are no positional leaders in the church, only spiritual leaders in life.

Dear brothers and sisters, if you are an elder or a deacon in the church, you must be particularly careful not to misuse your authority with saints whom you do not have direct contact with. Instead, stand on the same ground as fellow Christians, communicate together, seek together, and ultimately come to a consensus. Do not readily use the church regulations to oppress others; rather, provide for them in life and help them to follow in life. This also reminds us to respect those saints who serve on the front lines and to allow them to fully participate in arrangements regarding time, space, and resources. Do not let a few leading saints decide everything in the meeting room and then pass it on to the serving ones to execute, as this will restrict the vital functions that the body should have. Therefore, Jesus emphasizes here that leaders should serve others like servants. Jesus wants leaders to provide life for others through service, so that they may have the authority of life to lead others.

**Verse 36: "Then He took a little child and set him in the midst of them. And when He had taken him in His arms, He said to them."**

They are now inside a house in Capernaum, likely Peter's house, and Jesus, known for His using materials at hand in teachings, sees a child nearby. Perhaps this child

is Peter's own or a relative's child; either way, the child is conveniently present. Jesus casually picks up this child, who may be Peter's descendant and therefore younger than the disciples, making him the youngest in the group. Not only does Jesus have him stand in the midst, a position of prominence, but He also personally lifts him up, indicating Jesus values and treasures him.

**Verse 37: "Whoever receives one of these little children in My name receives Me; and whoever receives Me, receives not Me but Him who sent Me."**

When it comes to receiving in the name of the Lord, it emphasizes not for the sake of human relationships, but for the sake of the Lord. The name of the Lord includes who He is and what He does; and receiving means accepting, welcoming, caring for, entertaining, and taking care of. By accepting a child in the church for the sake of the Lord's name, you are receiving the Lord, and not only Him, but also the Father who sent Him. Let's consider again the words of Jesus: by receiving a child in the church, you are receiving the Lord Jesus Christ, and not only that, but you are also receiving the Father. This is truly a revolutionary insight. When we serve in the church, we have no blood relation with other saints, but for the sake of Jesus, we are willing to receive saints. And in such reception, you are receiving Jesus, and you are also receiving God the Father.

Dear brothers and sisters, every newly saved saint is like a little baby in the house of God. Every saint in the church should receive these little babies, and as a result, we are receiving the Lord and the Father God just as we receive them. We must implement this mindset in every aspect of our service, especially for saints involved in children's ministry. Sometimes children can be mischievous and prone to causing disturbances, but as teachers of children, you must understand that your reception of them is receiving the Lord Jesus and the God the Father. This elevates the vision of our service because our service is done unto the Lord and unto God the Father.

If we read the parallel passages in Matthew 18:1-5, Jesus similarly calls a little child to stand among the disciples and says to them, "Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore whoever humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven." Matthew emphasizes Jesus as the King, and Jesus tells the disciples that they must humble themselves like this child to enter the kingdom and that those who humble themselves like the child are the greatest in the kingdom.

Jesus Himself is the best example; as in Philippians 2:6-9, "Who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name." Jesus humbled Himself to the lowest point, and as a result, God exalted Him to the highest and gave Him a name above every name. Matthew focuses on the identity; you must learn humility. In contrast, Mark emphasizes service; one who can humble themselves is one who can truly serve. When faced with the disciples' argument about who is the greatest, Jesus tells them: If you want to be great, you must be a servant to all, and when you serve, you must serve the least in the church. Do not underestimate such service; this kind of service is done unto Jesus and unto the Father.

**Verse 38: "Now John answered Him, saying, 'Teacher, we saw someone who does not follow us casting out demons in Your name, and we forbade him because he does not follow us.'"**

What Jesus was saying earlier among the twelve disciples was that if you want to be the first, you must be the servant of all to serve them. Now John raises another question: what should we do if others are also casting out demons in Jesus' name? John himself says, "We forbade them because they do not follow us." John thought

he had a point because if you're casting out demons in Jesus' name, why not come and follow Jesus like us, twelve disciples? John indeed had reason to believe that they were the legitimate followers. This is somewhat akin to the Chinese saying, "Different paths cannot converge."

We really ought to thank John for bringing up this question. Today, there are many different denominations in the church, and each denomination considers itself orthodox. They look down on other denominations, and often even label them as heresy; their actions are even more extreme than John's. Therefore, we need to carefully examine how Jesus responds to John's question.

**Verse 39: "But Jesus said, 'Do not forbid him, for no one who works a miracle in My name can soon afterward speak evil of Me.'"**

Jesus's response was very straightforward: "Do not forbid him, for no one who works a miracle in My name can soon afterward speak evil of Me." We see Jesus truly displaying openness here, emphasizing that salvation ultimately comes from Him. He adopts a very broad-minded attitude towards those who cast out demons in His name without directly following Him. During His ministry, many who believed and accepted His message continued to spread it further, unlike the twelve disciples who remained with Him to learn. Therefore, they might not have the complete revelation, vision, or even the full understanding of the truth. Faced with this question, John's initial reaction was to forbid them, but Jesus advised against it. Because if they are willing to use the Lord's name, it means they still honor the Lord in their hearts, and that should be enough. Though they may have limitations that prevent them from directly following Jesus, it doesn't matter. What Jesus values is not external conformity but the willingness in the heart to use His name. Those who use His name will not speak ill of Him or deliberately do harm to Him. They are willing to serve the Lord and spread the Gospel within their limitations, and that's commendable. If there are deficiencies in their work, they will have the opportunity to improve and strengthen it in the future.

A great example is found in Acts 19:1-7, where it speaks of the disciples of John the Baptist who, even after John's death, continued to preach and baptize people. When Paul encountered them in Ephesus, he clarified to them the salvation in Jesus Christ. Subsequently, they were baptized again, and the Holy Spirit came upon them immediately. This was a beautiful demonstration.

**Verse 40: "For he who is not against us is on our side."**

This is Jesus's conclusion to John's inquiry: "For he who is not against us is on our side." This is the recognition and mindset that every believer should have today. Different churches may have different theological positions, governance styles, preaching, and worship practices, and that's perfectly fine. As long as we are expanding the kingdom of God in our own understanding, without antagonizing each other, we are mutually helping one another. There's no need for formal unity; each church can build according to the commission they have received. Ephesians 2:20 tells us that Jesus Christ Himself is the cornerstone, which connects two walls. People may have biases, but that doesn't hinder them from building according to their understanding and commission. Of course, such construction will one day be tested, as 1 Corinthians 3:13 says, "each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is." What withstands the test will be united through Jesus Christ as the cornerstone. Therefore, when it comes to different churches today, we must have the mindset of Jesus: whoever is not against us is for us.

Some may cite Matthew 12:30, where Jesus says, "He who is not with Me is against Me, and he who does not gather with Me scatters abroad." It may seem contradictory to "whoever is not against us is on our side." But we must read in context. In Mark, it refers to those who are acting in Jesus's name, perhaps with different understandings or practices but still in His name, meaning they are born again believers. Although their visions may not align, it doesn't matter as long as they are not against each other; they are mutually helpful. However, in Matthew 12:30, the context here is the challenge posed by the Pharisees to Jesus, claiming



that He casts out demons by Beelzebub, the ruler of demons. Concerning those who do not believe in Jesus, and even blaspheme Him by saying that He casts out demons by Beelzebub, the Pharisees, who align themselves with Satan, Jesus says, "He who is not with Me is against Me, and he who does not gather with Me scatters abroad."

This is the principle we must adhere to when facing Satan: we cannot compromise, but towards those who act in Jesus's name, we must have an open mind, recognizing that whoever is not against us is helping us. In the end times, many false teachers will arise, spreading misleading teachings. If we are certain that someone is truly from Satan and blasphemes the Holy Spirit, then our principle should be "whoever is not with us is against us." But on the other hand, we must not arrogate ourselves as orthodox, easily branding others as heresy just because they have different practices or perhaps a different understanding of the truth. This is highly offensive to God, Christ, and His body. We must learn the openness of the Lord Jesus Christ: whoever is not against us is for us.

Let's pray: Lord, grant us a humble heart, knowing that to lead in the church is to serve everyone as a servant. Help us to be people who serve others in life; even if it means serving the smallest child in the church, as You have told us, it is serving You and also serving our Father in Heaven, which is of great value. Lord, remember every service I do in the church, and I pray for Your blessing so that all my services can help others receive the supply of life, allowing the saints in the church to grow and be a witness in their locality. I pray this in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.