

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

Mark 9: 41-50

Brothers and sisters, peace be with you; this is Hwa-Chi. Thank the Lord, it's time to read the Bible again. We'll continue to read Mark Chapter 9, verses 41 to 50.

Yesterday, we read at the end of Jesus' discipleship training, Jesus gave the first half of His instructions to His disciples, which was about the relationship among the serving ones. There are two points here: first, whoever wants to be the leader in the group must be the servant of all. That is, in God's team, to be a leader means to be a servant first; it's the concept of servant leadership. The second point is, in different groups, whoever is not against us is for us, meaning we should respect those who are advancing the kingdom of God. Now, from verse 41 to 50, Jesus continues with the second half of His instructions, which is about the relationship between serving ones and those being served.

Verse 41: "For whoever gives you a cup of water to drink in My name, because you belong to Christ, assuredly, I say to you, he will by no means lose his reward."

"You" here refers to the twelve disciples. It means that when disciples go out to serve and others recognize them as belonging to Christ and offer them just a cup of water, God will surely reward them for even this small act of kindness. Dear brothers and sisters, we must respect those who serve God willingly, even if it's just offering them a cup of water. God will remember. These servants of God may be missionaries sent by God, full-time ministers, or fellow brothers and sisters among us. They serve the church for the sake of God, preaching, leading worship, serving children, providing meals, hospitality, or multimedia. Their motives are pure, not for personal gain, fame, or status, but solely out of love for the Lord and a

willingness to serve the church. We should respect them, and God will surely remember what we offer for them.

From another perspective, as we receive the supply of life from others, our own lives gradually grow. At this point, we should look around and see if there are opportunities for us to serve. We must not become spiritually obese, consuming but not contributing, which is unhealthy. As long as we have burdens and with pure motives, we should seek opportunities to serve. When someone you serve pours you a cup of water, the joy far surpasses that of drinking the finest ginseng tea, and what's more, what you offer can be remembered by God. How wonderful that is!

Verse 42: "But whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were thrown into the sea."

Here, "these little ones who believe in Me" probably refers to new believers, as their spiritual lives are still tender and easily stumbled. Therefore, we must handle them with extra care. For example, in Romans 14:14-15, Paul teaches us that all things are clean and can be eaten, but if some new believers, due to their weak faith, believe certain things should not be eaten, then we should abstain from eating those things to avoid causing them to stumble. If someone causes a new believer to stumble, Jesus says it would be better for them to have a large millstone hung around their neck and be thrown into the sea; this kind of death is indeed very uncommon.

A millstone is a tool used to grind food. When there's a baby at home who cannot eat solid food, the millstone is used to grind food into a liquid form, mixed with water, to feed the baby. When there's a baby at home, everyone takes great care, but then comes along someone with a stiff neck attitude, causing new believers who are still spiritually young to stumble while they're still nursing. This is truly despicable. Jesus vividly suggests putting a large millstone around their necks

because of their stubbornness, and then throwing them into the sea to prevent them from harming other new believers again.

If you look deeper, why use a millstone? Wouldn't any large stone suffice? This indicates that the stumbling block is using a tool meant for nurturing food to trip people, which is quite common in today's church. Some people, after studying theology for a few years, like to play the role of teacher, flaunting their theological knowledge, often using theological jargon to make simple and clear truths very obscure, even seeming paradoxical, and repeatedly teaching people not to interpret the Bible according to their own understanding, ultimately causing new believers to lose interest and willingness to study the Bible.

The theological works by the brothers before us were originally meant for us as tools to prepare food for nourishing, but in their hands, they became toys that corrupt people's faith. Therefore, Jesus angrily says to put a millstone around their necks and throw them into the sea, which is to taste of their own medicine. Next, in verses 43 to 48, the "you" mentioned can be interpreted on different levels. Let's start with the simplest interpretation, assuming that this "you" refers to someone who has not yet believed. These people may be the target audience of those who serve as ministers, and in this context, Jesus' words are very direct.

Verse 43-44: "If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter into life maimed, rather than having two hands, to go to hell, into the fire that shall never be quenched—where 'Their worm does not die, And the fire is not quenched.'"

The hand is both a tool for sin and a method of action. If your hand constantly causes you to stumble, preventing you from believing and obtaining eternal life, Jesus says decisively to cut it off. For it is better to enter into eternal life maimed than to have both hands and go to hell. Some manuscripts add verse 48, describing hell as a place where the worm does not die and the fire is not quenched. Those who do not believe will fall into hell, where they will suffer forever. Verse 44 says

that entering into eternal life with a missing limb is better, where "eternal life" in the original Greek is "Zoe," referring to spiritual life, life that comes from God, entering the realm of life. The kingdom of God is a kingdom of life, and one must believe in Jesus to receive life and enter this kingdom; if one does not believe, they will ultimately fall into hell.

The term for hell in the original text is "gehenna," originally referring to the Valley of Hinnom, a ravine south of Jerusalem. During the reign of King Ahaz, he began to worship foreign gods, and in 2 Chronicles 28:3, it is recorded that he burned incense in the Valley of Hinnom, even sacrificing his sons in the fire, following the practices of the nations whom the Lord had cast out before the children of Israel. This act was abominable in the eyes of the Lord. The Valley of Hinnom continued to be a place of idol worship until the time of Josiah. In 2 Kings 23:2-3, it is recorded that Josiah gathered the priests, prophets, and all the people, and read the book of the law in the house of the Lord, where he stood by a pillar and made a covenant before the Lord to follow Him with all his heart and soul, keeping His commandments. During Josiah's reign, the evil practice of sacrificing to foreign gods in the Valley of Hinnom was abolished, and from that time on, it became a garbage incineration center for Jerusalem: filthy and unwanted things were thrown into the Valley of Hinnom to be burned, including the bodies of unclean animals and criminals. In that place, the fire burned continually, and due to the filthy environment, insects thrived; the phrases "their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched" are used to describe the Valley of Hinnom. Similarly, in Isaiah 66:24, the same phrases are used to describe hell.

Therefore, "gehenna", the Valley of Hinnom, is often translated as hell, and we must recognize that this is a metaphorical expression. At the end of time, those whose names are not written in the Book of Life will be cast into the Lake of Fire. Revelation 20:15 refers to it as the Lake of Fire, which is where Satan, his followers, and unbelievers will go. Therefore, Gehenna is a metaphorical expression, and Jesus says here that it is better to enter into eternal life with one hand than to have two hands and enter hell.

Verse 45-46: "And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life lame, rather than having two feet, to be cast into hell, into the fire that shall never be quenched—where 'Their worm does not die, And the fire is not quenched.'"

Similarly, some manuscripts add verse 48 after this, describing hell as a place where the worm does not die and the fire is not quenched. Here it is mentioned that if your foot becomes a tool for sinning, or if the path you walk or the position you stand in causes you to sin, then you must decisively cut off your foot. Entering eternal life lame is better than having two feet and being cast into hell.

Verse 47-48: "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, rather than having two eyes, to be cast into hell fire—where 'Their worm does not die, And the fire is not quenched.'"

The eye refers to our desires or perspectives that lead us to sin. If your desires or perspectives cause you to sin, then you must remove your eye, for it is better to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and be cast into hell. In these verses, we see that for unbelievers, we must help them recognize the reasons for their unbelief: perhaps it is their methods of action that lead them into ultimate inability to extricate themselves; perhaps it is the paths they walk or the positions they take that lead them into sin; or perhaps it is their perspectives and views that prevent them from letting go of sinful things. Once they recognize the reasons they cannot believe, the next step is a matter of decision: whether to enter eternal life with a defect or to preserve oneself and ultimately fall into hell, accepting eternal punishment.

If these verses refer to unbelievers, and if they persist in unbelief, once the time of grace has passed, they will no longer be able to obtain eternal life through belief, and they will only receive eternal punishment without further chance of repentance. Verse 49, 50 are quite challenging verses. Let's try to interpret them first, and then reconsider verses 43 to 48 according to this interpretation.

Verse 49: "For every one shall be salted with fire, and every sacrifice shall be salted with salt."

Here are two sentences, and the second one is easier to explain, every sacrifice shall be salted. We read in Leviticus 2:13, where we see that every grain offering shall be seasoned with salt, meaning it must be added with salt. This salt is the covenant salt of God because salt has the function of long-term preservation, so every grain offering must be seasoned with salt. And the grain offering is a type of Jesus' life and deeds. Jesus' humanity is so gentle and pure. The grain offering symbolizes Jesus' humanity, and believers' lives should also follow the example of Jesus, living a beautiful human life. Jesus told us in Matthew 5:13, "You are the salt of the earth," salt has the function of seasoning, preserving, and sterilizing. In the world, we must live a salty life. Paul also tells us in Colossians 4:6, "Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one." One day, we will become sacrifices to offer to God, and these sacrifices must also be seasoned with salt.

The preceding sentence talks about using fire as salt to season people. The fire mentioned earlier is the fire of hell, which is entirely negative. But in this verse, it talks about using fire as salt to season individuals, this fire is positive, this fire can be not punishment, but rather refinement, just like a person's faith is refined by fire, becoming purer and stronger. Of course, after going through fire, faith increases, salt also increases, so this fire is like using fire as salt to season people.

Because of the statement about using fire as salt to season individuals, let's look back at verses 43 to 48. It turns out that it can also refer to those who serve; if it's those who serve, they already believe, they already have eternal life, but such people still may have weaknesses: perhaps their methods and actions often cause others to stumble, perhaps the paths they walk and the positions they take often cause others to stumble, perhaps their perspectives and opinions often cause others to stumble. Jesus advises these servants to put down their methods, stop their steps, and change their perspectives; in this way, they may suffer damage in this life, they may go through brokenness, but when the Lord comes again, they

will receive rewards, they will enter the Millennium kingdom, where they will receive the reward of life. If they are unwilling to let go and would rather maintain their integrity in this life, then during that period in the Millennium, they will undergo the refining of fire: this refining is not in the fire of hell, where it is eternal punishment; but rather it is through fire. Just like what is described in 1 Corinthians 3:13-15, "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." Verse 15, "If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire." That is when Christ returns, before the judgment seat of Christ, it is the refining fire, to burn up the straw, wood, and hay in their work, they themselves go through the fire but will still be saved, though it is like going through fire.

Verse 50: "Salt is good, but if the salt has lost its flavor, how shall it be seasoned? Have salt in yourselves, and have peace with one another."

Salt is good because salt can season, salt can preserve, salt can sterilize. How could salt lose its flavor? Because at that time, they used rock salt, which is salt contained within a rock. So when they ate, they held food in their right hand and a salt rock in their left hand, seasoning the food with the salt rock. After using the salt rock for a long time, the salt is used up, and it becomes like an ordinary rock, unable to be salty anymore. At this time, they would throw the rock outside to be trampled on. So if salt loses its flavor, it is no longer useful. You ask, "How can it be seasoned again?" It is a good question.

Thank the Lord! Christians are not rock salt, the saltiness of the rock salt will be used up, but inside Christians, there is the indwelling of the Holy Spirit: the Holy Spirit can continually supply us with salt, in our words, actions, through the modulation of salt, allowing us all to be gentle and moderate. However, if saints do not live and act in accordance with the Holy Spirit, they may even lose the supply of salt that comes from the Holy Spirit; sometimes they may also lose their flavor; at this time, they will no longer have the function of seasoning, no longer have the

function of preservation; this will also cause saints to fall into sin. But thank the Lord, God has merciful grace, He will raise up circumstances to help us through suffering, to burn up our flesh and carnal desires. This is the refining of our faith in this life; this can help us reconnect with the Holy Spirit and receive the supply of salt.

How can it be seasoned again? The answer is the indwelling Holy Spirit. So Jesus says, "Have salt in yourselves," and under the modulation of salt, you will all be able to have peace with one another. In the church, brothers and sisters love each other, letting others see that God is truly among us. This is the sweet church life, also a church life with salt. When Jesus finished His disciples' training, He told His disciples the correct attitude of service, to be careful in serving, not to cause others to stumble, and to maintain peace with others at all times.

Let us pray: Lord, thank You! Through the daily reading of these chapters in the Gospel of Mark, we see how Jesus trained His disciples. Let us today also receive the personal training of Jesus Christ in His school, and let us learn to practice in the house of God, to produce a testimony that is in accordance with God's will, where saints in the church love each other, and each person is willing to contribute their share. Remember the church and the church life where I am, praying in the name of Jesus Christ.