

## Gospel of Mark Chapter 9 – John Karmelich

1. Chapter 9 is best summarized as the concept of "Don't let this happen to you", which of course is my lesson title. In other words, the chapter is full of examples and illustrations of how to live the Christian life, with a heavy emphasis on "Don't do that, but do this instead".
  - a) We have a number of illustrations in this chapter where Jesus is focusing on the behavior of the believer (through His disciples). Jesus is teaching them (and us) how to change that behavior to be more like the type of person that God wants us to be.
  - b) Therefore, consider Chapter 9 a lesson on what does God desire for our lives.
2. This chapter opens with the story of Jesus being "transfigured" before three of the 12 disciples. Jesus somehow physically changes (I believe) so that the disciples could get a visual idea of what "Jesus as God" is like. The purpose of this demonstration is to get us to understand that Jesus is not just some sort of "miracle worker", but is God and needs to be worshipped as God.
  - a) Next comes a story of a boy possessed by a demon. Some of the disciples tried to cast out this demon but could not. Jesus not only casts out the demon, but also says that this type of demon can only come out by prayer. The point here for us as believers is that to have power over demons, we need to have a consistent and regular prayer life before God.
  - b) Next Jesus explains His upcoming death and resurrection to again, help the disciples understand Jesus' purpose for coming to earth. Even though that message did not sink in at this moment, it is recorded so that we as believers do let it "sink in".
  - c) Finally, Jesus gives a handful of illustrations about what it takes to be a great Christian. Jesus teaches that to be "great" means we must have the attitude of "the lowest servant" and having the same sort of trust in God that a little child has in his or her parents.
  - d) In the last section, Jesus also says we are to be like salt. The idea is that salt was used to preserve foods (to prevent them from spoiling). What Jesus is trying to get across is just as salt was used to "preserve", so we must persevere in our desire to stick close to Jesus.
  - e) In summary, this chapter is a list of illustrations about how to live the type of life that God desires us to live. If it is our goal and desire to be pleasing to God with our lives, then we need to follow Jesus' advice given in these various stories in this chapter. With that convicting introduction completed, ☺ we can start the lesson.
3. Chapter 9, Verse 1: And he said to them, "I tell you the truth, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the kingdom of God come with power."
  - a) When we left Chapter 8, Jesus was giving a speech to His disciples. The main purpose of that speech was to get the disciples to understand what is His role as the Messiah. That is, to teach them that His purpose was to die so that people could have eternal life.
    - i) Know that this speech did not sink in until after Jesus rose from the dead.
    - ii) So, if that speech didn't sink in, why mention it? I believe for the same reason that we as people need to hear a message over and over again before it sinks in.
    - iii) In a sense, "Verse 1" goes best with Chapter 8 as it continues that same speech.
  - b) Whoever made the chapter breaks (many centuries after it was written) decided to break the chapters at a point where the last story of Chapter 8 continues into Chapter 9.
  - c) With that said, Verse 1 states that Jesus is announcing that some of the disciples would not die until they see the kingdom of God come with power. So what does that mean?
    - i) The most likely interpretation is that it is describing what is about to happen here in Chapter 9. That is, Jesus appearing "all white" along with Moses and Elijah standing next to Jesus. We'll explain that concept more coming up.
    - ii) Know that "seeing the kingdom of God with power", can also refer to the beginning of the church age. Not all 12 disciples will get to see the church being born. In that case, Verse 1 is a subtle reference to Judas' betrayal and death.

- iii) Understand that the "kingdom of God" is not a kingdom with a physical set of boundaries on earth. It is a reference to all people who see Jesus not only as God, but also as their king over their (our) lives.
    - a) After Jesus died and rose again, the church age began. It is amazing to consider the multitudes of people who were willing to give up their previous religious beliefs and turn to Jesus. The belief in Jesus spread rapidly over the Roman Empire in the first century.
    - b) That is how the "kingdom of God" comes with power in that God gave the church the power to lead others to Christ and join that church.
  - d) So, is this verse, about what is about to happen next, which is the appearance of Jesus with Moses and Elijah, or does it refer to the early church growth?
    - i) The correct answer is both. It is true that only three of the disciples got to actually witness Jesus appear with Moses and Elijah. It is also true that 11 of the 12 disciples got to witness the early growth of the church. Remember that Jesus said in effect that not all of 12 disciples would see the "kingdom of God" begin.
    - ii) So why did Jesus make this proclamation? I believe so that the disciples would remember this fact after 1) the event coming up in the next few verses and 2) after the eleven disciples see the rise of the early church after the resurrection.
  - e) Meanwhile, its time for us to move on to the big event of the moment, which is Jesus being "transfigured", and appearing with Elijah and Moses.
4. Verse 2: After six days Jesus took Peter, James and John with him and led them up a high mountain, where they were all alone. There he was transfigured before them. <sup>3</sup> His clothes became dazzling white, whiter than anyone in the world could bleach them. <sup>4</sup> And there appeared before them Elijah and Moses, who were talking with Jesus.
- a) Six days after Jesus' little speech, Jesus took Peter, James and John up to a high mountain. There is speculation over which mountain this was, but if God wanted us to know which mountain, it would have been mentioned in the bible.
  - b) So why did Jesus pick these three disciples to go with Him? Why not take all 12?
    - i) One possible answer is that Peter and John were the only two apostles that wrote part of the New Testament after the Gospels. James was the first church martyr.
      - a) The problem with that argument is that Jesus excluded Matthew, who wrote one of the four gospels.
      - b) Some say that these three apostles were the ones Jesus was closest to.
      - c) The truth is we don't know for sure why Jesus only picked these three.
    - ii) I've also wondered how the other apostles felt about being excluded. Coming up in this chapter is a discussion among the twelve of who was the greatest. I'm guessing that argument is due to the fact these three were chosen here.
  - c) Now for the important question, why did Jesus get "transformed" before the disciples?
    - i) The actual Greek word describing how Jesus changed is the same word we used as "metamorphosis". I believe Jesus somehow changed from the "inside out" and it appeared as if all of Jesus clothes were pure white.
    - ii) Part of the reason for these three disciples to see Jesus like this is I believe is that is how we will see Jesus after our death and resurrection. In other words, the way Jesus changed isn't the equivalent of putting on very-white clothing. There was an actual physical change of Jesus, and He was transformed into an "immortal being".
    - iii) The "why" answer is simply that so the disciples would know that Jesus was (is and always will be) God and He had the power to change so that three of the disciples could see Jesus as God.
    - iv) In other words, the disciples were going to see Jesus die and rise again, it might help them in their courage if they saw Jesus as God before their very eyes.

- d) Standing with Jesus for an unspecified time period was Moses and Elijah.
  - i) Moses lived roughly fifteen hundred years before Jesus and Elijah lived roughly six centuries after Moses. One thing I have always wondered is, "How did the disciples recognize who was who? Were they wearing nametags? ☺
  - ii) Let's focus on what we do know: Moses was considered the most important Jewish person in their history as the law was given through him. Elijah was considered the greatest of all the Old Testament prophets. He not only performed great miracles and predicted future events, but also he never died. The bible records that Elijah was taken up to heaven alive. (See 2nd Kings 2:11.) The bible also says that Elijah would return prior to the appearance of the Messiah. (See Malachi 4:6). That is why the text said that Moses appeared with Elijah.
  - iii) I also believe the reason these two men are here with Jesus is that both will appear again to the whole world in the future. Revelation 11:3 teaches of two unnamed people coming to testify about Jesus. That chapter in Revelation teaches that these two men have the power to do mighty signs and miracles including turning water into blood. That sounds very "Moses like" to me ☺ .
  - iv) Again, the book of Malachi (4:6) predicts Elijah will return before the "great day of the Lord", which is why I believe he is the other person named of Revelation 11. Again, these two men are not named by name in Revelation, so there is debate whether or not it is the same two guys.
    - a) That term "the great day of the Lord" refers to the time era where all the "bad stuff" happens as described in the book of Revelation and then, at the end of that time frame, the "Messiah" comes.

5. Verse 5: Peter said to Jesus, "Rabbi, it is good for us to be here. Let us put up three shelters--one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah." <sup>6</sup> (He did not know what to say, they were so frightened.) Then a cloud appeared and enveloped them, and a voice came from the cloud: "This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!" <sup>8</sup> Suddenly, when they looked around, they no longer saw anyone with them except Jesus.

- a) Again, the only three witnesses to this event are Peter, James and John. Not knowing what to say, Peter makes the statement that we (these three disciples) should build three booths, one for each "entity". The idea of a booth is in effect, a special place to worship each one of the three. Remember that all three "glowed white". Some speculate that Moses and Elijah were white from being in the presence of Jesus.
- b) Peter's great mistake of course was to put Moses and Elijah on equal grounds with Jesus. That is when God the Father steps in and says in effect, "Listen to My Son and that's it".
  - i) The point is to show the disciples (and us) that Jesus is not just some great biblical figure like Elijah or Moses, but that Jesus is God Himself, incarnate as man.
  - ii) The related point is to teach these Jewish disciples that Jesus is greater than anyone and everyone that has come in human history so far. That is why Moses and Elijah appear in the first place and that is also why these two guys disappear once God the Father begins to speak.
- c) These verses also mention a cloud. Why is that? First of all, note that if you study Old Testament references of God the Father making an appearance is often within a cloud. This was true when God spoke to Moses. If Peter had a typical Jewish-upbringing, he would know that God in times past spoke from within a cloud.
  - i) John, as you like to say, this book is written for a non-Jewish audience. If that is true, why mention the clouds? The idea is for all of us (Jews and non-Jews) to understand that when God the Father speaks, it is "cloudy" in the sense that we as humans cannot fully comprehend God. The idea of our lack of an ability to fully comprehend God is best represented by clouds. That is because clouds make our vision "foggy" as when we are inside a cloud that is at ground level.

- d) After God the Father spoke, Moses and Elijah instantly disappeared. The words God the Father spoke from the clouds, were (Verse 7) "This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!" The point has nothing to do with which parts of the bible we are to read and which parts we are to ignore. It means Jesus is on a "higher plain" than either Moses or Elijah.
- i) In other words, God the Father is saying Jesus is My Son, but Moses and Elijah are not God's sons. These other two are great men, but not God's sons.
- e) The classic question to ponder is "How exactly is Jesus, the son of God the Father? Was there a mother involved in this deity relationship? The simple truth is the concept of the "Trinity" is a mystery that Christians are required to accept as fact although we cannot comprehend how such a relationship always existed.
- i) We can "sort of comprehend" how God the Father created new "male sperm" to be implanted in Mary to produce Jesus. What we cannot fully grasp is how Jesus was always the Son of God the Father and was always part of the deity of what we as Christians call "The Trinity".
- ii) Know that the word "trinity" is not in the bible. It is a term coined by the early church to explain the relationship of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit each being "one" and each being separate. It is equally as important to understand that just because the specific word "trinity" is not in the bible, that does not mean the concept does not exist. One can go through some bible verse studies and prove the existence of the trinity.
- a) My favorite proof comes from Matthew 28:19. Jesus says to go out in the world and make disciples in the name (note that) of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The text does not say "names", but "name", implying unity between these three entities.
- f) Getting back to the text, the important thing for us to remember about this event is not so much that Jesus turned white (however that happened) or the fact that Moses and Elijah were somehow there for a time and then were gone. The important part is that God the Father said, "This is my son, listen to Him".
- i) In other words, we are to seek and study Jesus as God the Son. It means that in order to be pleasing to God the Father, we respect and honor God the Son. One cannot do an end run around Jesus to get to God the Father.
- ii) As Peter said many years later, "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved." (Acts 4:12.)
- iii) The reason we as Christians pray "In Jesus name" is that we petition God the Father through God the Son! Therefore if we listen and obey what "God the Son" wants for our lives, (which of course, is the real trick), then we can have assurance that we are pleasing to God the Father.
- a) The essential idea is that we are forgiven of sins so therefore we can pray to God the Father as He sees us as "sin-free" (or 100% forgiven of sins).
- iv) God wants us to live a life pleasing to Him in all that we do. Not so we can be more "perfect" in His eyes, but so that we can live the type of life on earth that God desires for us. Therefore obedience to God must be practiced in order to live the type of life that He desires for us.
- v) Meanwhile, I've wandered off topic, so let's get back to the Gospel of Mark.
6. Verse 9: As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus gave them orders not to tell anyone what they had seen until the Son of Man had risen from the dead.<sup>10</sup> They kept the matter to themselves, discussing what "rising from the dead" meant.
- a) To understand this passage, one must understand what the disciples thought of the Messiah (or "The Christ" from the Greek, or "king" from the English). The disciples thought the Messiah would set up a great kingdom like that of King David and rule over the world from Israel. Therefore, they didn't get "rising from the dead" at this point.

- b) The disciples were probably asking questions like, "Does Jesus have to rise from the dead in order to rule over Israel? Does the world wide kingdom start right after Jesus dies and rises again?" In other words, this whole concept is still confusing to the disciples.
  - c) The other point of this verse is that Jesus tells these three disciples to keep quiet about this event until after He rose from the dead.
    - i) It must have been hard for these three disciples to keep quiet about this event (Jesus "shining") to the other disciples. The other disciples would naturally ask questions about what happened when they were alone with Jesus.
    - ii) At the least, I bet these three disciples thought they were more special than other disciples because they got to witness the event. That, I believe leads to the argument over who is the greatest disciple as described later in this chapter.
7. Verse 11: And they asked him, "Why do the teachers of the law say that Elijah must come first?"
- a) Remember that Jesus and these three disciples went by themselves up to a mountaintop. Therefore, the three disciples had time to talk to Jesus on the walk back down the mountain. That is when this discussion took place.
  - b) As a side note, remember that most scholars believe that Mark's source for this gospel was Peter. That would also make sense in that Peter was one of disciples on this mountaintop.
  - c) Back to the verse, the disciples ask Jesus why the teachers of the law say that Elijah must come before the "Messiah" appears. The only people in possession of bible scrolls were Jewish teachers of their law. Therefore, these three disciples have heard teachers speak that Elijah must come first, but these three have not (in all likelihood) ever read the verses themselves.
  - d) Therefore, the three disciples are asking in effect, "Is it true, Elijah comes first, and what does that mean, given the fact that You, Jesus are already here?" Does Elijah come before You or not? The answer is given in the next two verses.
8. Verse 12: Jesus replied, "To be sure, Elijah does come first, and restores all things. Why then is it written that the Son of Man must suffer much and be rejected? <sup>13</sup> But I tell you, Elijah has come, and they have done to him everything they wished, just as it is written about him."
- a) First of all, Jesus does not deny the biblical scripture that says that Elijah will come before "that great and dreadful Day of the Lord". (Malachi 4:5). That scripture in Malachi is a reference to the future event (to us) of Jesus' Second Coming. The real question is what does that mean and what should the disciples know about Elijah?
    - i) Jesus answers that question with a question. Jesus says in Verse 12 (second sentence) that the Son of Man (another title of Jesus) must suffer and be rejected.
    - ii) In Verse 13 Jesus says Elijah has come, so therefore the disciples were confused.
  - b) So, is Elijah's appearance past tense or future tense? The answer is both.
    - i) It is important to grasp the idea that John the Baptist came in the "power and style" of Elijah, (see Luke 1:17) but John the Baptist was not Elijah himself.
    - ii) In fact, when John was asked whether or not he was Elijah, he replied no. (See John 1:21). Still, Jesus is teaching the disciples that John was "in effect" Elijah in that John was "the" messenger sent to prepare the way for Jesus.
    - iii) This surprisingly, leads us back to Revelation Chapter 11, Verse 3, which states that there will be two "witnesses" to the return of the Messiah in the "last days". Since Malachi 4, Verse 5 predicts that Elijah returns prior to Jesus second coming, and Revelation Chapter 11 says that there will be two witnesses, most scholars assume one of those two will people will be Elijah.
      - a) Since Moses appeared with Elijah here in Mark Chapter 9 that leads many scholars to conjecture that the two witnesses in Revelation Chapter 11 are in fact Elijah and Moses.

- c) All of this talk about Elijah, Moses and John the Baptist is interesting. What does any of it have to do with my life and my understanding of Jesus?
- i) For starters, it helps us to understand the role of John the Baptist as the forerunner of Jesus and that John the Baptist was "like" (but not was) Elijah.
  - ii) It also helps us to understand that before Jesus returns (that is a future date to them and to us), Elijah himself comes.
  - iii) OK, so other than keeping my eye out for Elijah, what does this have to do with my life today? There is a Christian saying that to live the Christian life, one must always be living with the possibility that Jesus could return at any time. Therefore, while we should watch our behavior as Christians, one of our motivating factors is to remember that Jesus can return to earth at any time.
  - iv) So, if Elijah returns before Jesus' second coming, should we watch for Elijah or should we watch for Jesus? It depends upon one's view of the "end times". If one believes the church is raptured (i.e., the end of the church age with all remaining Christians going to heaven) prior to all of the "bad stuff" of Revelation, then one believes that Christians are "out of here" prior to Elijah actually showing up.
    - a) If one believes the church is taken to heaven after all of the "bad stuff of Revelation" then Christians living at that time, will see Elijah coming first.
  - v) So which view is correct? I personally hold the view that that we are out of here prior to the "bad stuff" of Revelation. However, evangelical Christians are divided on this issue. I hold my view with some consideration that my view could be wrong, even though I don't think so.
  - vi) Again, what does this have to do with my life right now? If we as Christians are living to please God in all that we do, then we have to live with the concept our lives as Christians could end any day. In other words, there is no guarantee we will live to a certain age. We can die at any time or Jesus can come back at any time. In other words, all of this knowledge about Jesus' return and Elijah is a reminder that we have to "keep on our toes" and live the life God desires for us, as our lives on earth can end at any time.
9. Verse 14: When they came to the other disciples, they saw a large crowd around them and the teachers of the law arguing with them.<sup>15</sup> As soon as all the people saw Jesus, they were overwhelmed with wonder and ran to greet him.
- a) This is the moment where Jesus and three of the disciples were down from the mountain and now they meet the other nine disciples. The other nine were busy arguing with Jewish teachers. The argument pauses for a moment as Jesus is now on the scene.
10. Verse 16: "What are you arguing with them about?" he asked.
- a) At this point, Jesus interrupts the greetings and asks the other disciples what exactly are they arguing about with the Jewish law teachers?
11. Verse 17: A man in the crowd answered, "Teacher, I brought you my son, who is possessed by a spirit that has robbed him of speech."<sup>18</sup> Whenever it seizes him, it throws him to the ground. He foams at the mouth, gnashes his teeth and becomes rigid. I asked your disciples to drive out the spirit, but they could not."
- a) Notice the disciples did not answer the question, but a man in the crowd did. This man stated that he has a son that is demon possessed. This demon takes away his son's ability to speak. The father asked the disciples to cast out the demon but they couldn't.
  - b) The text also gives some details how his son foams at the mouth and gnashes his teeth from being possessed by a demon. I've talked about this in the earlier chapters, but essentially when one is demon possessed, there are physical signs one can see from such a possession. The demons and the possessed person will struggle with each other over control of the body. I also strongly believe that one cannot be possessed by both the Holy Spirit and demons. In other words, Christians are safe from such a possession occurring.

- c) Personally, I pictured the Jewish teachers overjoyed that the disciples could not cast out the demons. I can also picture the disciples trying their best to cast out the demon. I am sure they tried to replicate every method they have seen Jesus do to cast out this demon. I am sure that they prayed in Jesus' name. I am sure that they put spit on the boy's tongue like Jesus did in the previous chapter. I am sure that the disciples' lack of an ability to cast out this demon was not from any lack of trying.
12. Verse 19: "O unbelieving generation," Jesus replied, "how long shall I stay with you? How long shall I put up with you? Bring the boy to me." <sup>20</sup> So they brought him. When the spirit saw Jesus, it immediately threw the boy into a convulsion. He fell to the ground and rolled around, foaming at the mouth.
- a) Notice the demon did not immediately leave when Jesus was there. If anything, when this demon was aware of Jesus' presence, that demon put on "more of a show" and tried to do more harm to the boy. While demons may fear invoking Jesus name to cast them out, they are still not afraid to do damage in the presence of Jesus and that probably means they are not afraid to do damage in the presence of Christians as well.
- b) Let's remember what is the goal of demons: It is to turn as many people away from following Jesus. That would include killing people. In other words, this demon was doing everything it could to kill this boy before Jesus casts the demon out. Notice that demons are limited in their power. They could harm this boy, but could not, say somehow inflict the boy so that he instantly dies.
13. Verse 21: Jesus asked the boy's father, "How long has he been like this?" "From childhood," he answered. <sup>22</sup> "It has often thrown him into fire or water to kill him. But if you can do anything, take pity on us and help us." <sup>23</sup> "If you can?" said Jesus. "Everything is possible for him who believes." <sup>24</sup> Immediately the boy's father exclaimed, "I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!"
- a) Notice that Jesus' first order of business is to ask the father of the boy how long the boy has been like this. Was it necessary for Jesus to ask that question in order for Him to remove the demon from that boy? I would say not. The reason that Jesus asked the question is that Jesus wanted to help the faith of the father of this boy as much as Jesus wanted to help the boy as well.
- b) Remember that the father of the demon-possessed boy was angry at the disciples because they (the nine that didn't go to the mountain with Jesus) could not cast out this demon. Therefore, it is possible that the father of the boy thought, "Well, if Jesus' disciples could not cast out this demon and the Jewish religious leaders could not help, maybe there is nothing Jesus can do." (Maybe that is why Jesus left some of the disciples there.)
- i) That is why the father made the statement of "Help me overcome my belief".
- ii) Notice the father did not say to Jesus, "Forget me, just help my son!" Instead, the father pleaded for his own lack of faith. That father of the boy understood that in order to make his son better, he needed to increase his faith in what Jesus could do to help the boy.
- c) Understand that Jesus is making the situation more complicated than just uttering some specific words and then the demon disappeared. Jesus could have done that, but then the disciples would have wondered what they did wrong and the father of the boy would have never thought about his own faith in relation to his son being healed.
- i) Jesus wanted both the father of the demon possessed boy and his son to both have faith that Jesus was capable of curing this boy. Jesus was interested in both of their salvations, and the father just wanted his son to be better.
- ii) Jesus is teaching the father of that boy that God is more than capable of healing anyone at anytime if it is God's will and if we have the faith that God can do that.
- d) Meanwhile, we still have a demon to cast out. ☺

14. Verse 25: When Jesus saw that a crowd was running to the scene, he rebuked the evil spirit. "You deaf and mute spirit," he said, "I command you, come out of him and never enter him again."
- a) What is interesting is the possible connection between the crowd running to see what all the commotion was all about and the fact that Jesus picked this moment to heal the boy.
  - b) So why would Jesus wait until this moment? Why would Mark the writer, want us to know that a crowd was gathering prior to the actual healing? We don't know. It is possible that Peter, Mark's source simply remembers that fact prior to the healing.
    - i) Maybe Jesus wanted a larger crowd to see the event as Jesus is now getting near the end of His ministry (it is estimated that this event took place about three months prior to the cross) and Jesus wanted more people to verify what Jesus did.
    - ii) I suspect the main reason is that Jesus simply wanted a large crowd to witness the fact that He could eliminate a demon that the disciples could not eliminate.
  - c) What is interesting is that in previous stories of demon healings, the demons pretty much left right after they were ordered to leave by Jesus. In this case, we read that the demon hesitated and then left. So if Jesus is God, doesn't the demon have to obey that command instantly? The answer is yes, but at the same time, this demon didn't want to obey Jesus and the demon showed his displeasure by hurting the kid as he left.
15. Verse 26: The spirit shrieked, convulsed him violently and came out. The boy looked so much like a corpse that many said, "He's dead." <sup>27</sup> But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him to his feet, and he stood up.
- a) What I wondered is, "Why did the demon try to kill this boy before leaving?" I suspect the demon would know that Jesus would save the boy's life. The only reason I could think of is the demon wanted to show the large audience (Verse 25) of what demons are capable of doing and that we as people shouldn't mess with this demon. After all, no one but Jesus alone, it appears, had the power to get rid of the demon. In other words, the demon was leaving his particular statement of "don't mess with me!" In a matter of verses we will read how we as Christians can "mess with" this type of demon.
  - b) Besides the theological discussion about the demon, the important point is that Jesus did heal the boy and even though the crowd thought the boy was dead, Jesus took him by the hand and stood him up.
  - c) Here's something to consider: We don't even know if the healed boy or his father even became a follower of Jesus. My point here is the main purpose of this miracle is for Jesus to teach his disciples (and believers) some points about dealing with demons.
  - d) Now we come to my favorite part of this story:
16. Verse 28: After Jesus had gone indoors, his disciples asked him privately, "Why couldn't we drive it out?" <sup>29</sup> He replied, "This kind can come out only by prayer."
- a) If I were a disciple and Jesus just told me that "this kind" can only come out by prayer, my first reaction would be: "What do you mean this kind of demon? You mean there is more than one kind of demon? How can we tell the difference?"
    - i) The obvious answer is we can't tell the difference. I suppose that if we were trying to cast out a demon and it took a lot longer than we realized that that particular demon might be a higher rank (i.e., more difficult to cast out), but the important point is we can't tell the difference.
  - b) So then, what did Jesus mean by prayer? I believe what Jesus meant is that believing that He is the Son of God and He that died for our sins is "not enough" to have power over demons. We must have a regular prayer life and communication time with God. If anything, these verses encourage us to have a good prayer life if for no other reason, than to have the power to overcome demons if we ever encounter them. (By the way, some translations say "prayer and fasting". Without getting into a big discussion of fasting, it is something that Christians should do on occasion, as a sign that Jesus is more important than eating, but as usual I'm getting way off topic. ☺)

- c) So how much prayer is enough to work in this situation? I don't know. How much do we have to pray to have this power? I don't know. I believe the point is about having a regular commitment to pray to God and simply talking about our lives with Him. All I know is that these two verses encourage us to have a regular prayer life.
  - d) This of course, ties well to this week's lesson title about avoiding the mistakes of living the Christian life. One of those dangers is having an active prayer life.
17. Verse 30: They left that place and passed through Galilee. Jesus did not want anyone to know where they were, <sup>31</sup> because he was teaching his disciples. He said to them, "The Son of Man is going to be betrayed into the hands of men. They will kill him, and after three days he will rise." <sup>32</sup> But they did not understand what he meant and were afraid to ask him about it.
- a) These three verses are another occasion where Jesus explains to the disciples the fact that He was going to be betrayed by men, then be killed and rise again in three days.
  - b) I have two questions to ponder: 1) Why would Jesus make this statement at this exact moment in time and 2) Why tell the disciples if they didn't get it and therefore, why would Mark record this incident that the disciples didn't get it?
  - c) Let's start with the first question: Why did Jesus pick this moment to explain the purpose of His coming? I doubt it is as simple as "He had nothing better to do" or "The time is getting close to the end". I suspect the reason is the disciples were questioning as to why they couldn't cast out demons and they were thinking about just who Jesus was.
    - i) Am I positive that is the answer to that question? No, but it does fit, given the scenario that Mark is stating at this point.
  - d) The second question is in effect why did Jesus tell the disciples about His death and resurrection? If Jesus is God and He knows all things, why explain it now knowing the disciples wouldn't get it?
    - i) For starters, it gives us proof that the disciples were told Jesus' purpose even though they didn't understand it. This supports the idea that one needs the Holy Spirit in order to accept the Gospel message. One can hear a wonderful, well-explained presentation of the Gospel, and still not accept it. Without the Holy Spirit, conversion doesn't happen.
    - ii) It also shows us that just because a person doesn't get it the first time, we should give up on that person. The disciples heard the message on more than one occasion, and still didn't get it.
  - e) Again, this little story teaches us misconceptions about how to witness to people and that the action to preach is up to us, but the results are always up to God.
18. Verse 33: They came to Capernaum. When he was in the house, he asked them, "What were you arguing about on the road?" <sup>34</sup> But they kept quiet because on the way they had argued about who was the greatest.
- a) In case you forgot, Jesus and His disciples are walking to a town called Capernaum. This was Jesus base of operations. The house where Jesus was going to is probably the same house that Jesus stayed in when He first started the ministry.
  - b) While the disciples were walking toward Capernaum, the big debate topic among the disciples was who was the greatest of among them.
    - i) Personally, I find this sort of funny. I could just picture Peter, James and John saying, "If you nine guys think you are so special, you should have seen what we saw up on the mountaintop with Jesus. "
    - ii) I could just hear the other nine disciples saying, "If you three are so special, why couldn't any of you cast that demon out from the boy?" I'm sure that all of them thought they prayed enough to eliminate the demon, but Jesus taught that this type of demon (whatever that means) only comes out by regular prayer.
    - iii) The point is, Jesus never made any sort of statement about which disciple is the greatest so despite this argument, no one can make that claim.

19. Verse 35: Sitting down, Jesus called the Twelve and said, "If anyone wants to be first, he must be the very last, and the servant of all."
- a) In this verse Jesus teaches that if anyone wants to be "great", they must learn to be "last" and be a servant of all. This is not about putting ourselves down, but about having a commitment to put the needs of others over our own needs. In the next two verses, Jesus uses an illustration to explain what He meant by this statement.
  - b) The important idea here is not about thinking that we are inferior to others, but just that to live the Christian life is to make the needs of others a priority over our needs in life.
20. Verse 36: He took a little child and had him stand among them. Taking him in his arms, he said to them,<sup>37</sup> "Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me does not welcome me but the one who sent me."
- a) First of all, where did this little child come from? At the least it tells us that those who followed Jesus were more than just the 12 disciples. Some suspect that the house Jesus was staying at in Capernaum had children in the house.
  - b) So does that mean Christians should accept little children in His name? Before we write this off as an illustration, I know of children's ministries that use this verse as part of their teaching. Let's face it, there is always the next generation of Christians to teach and that means working with children. Statistics show that most people who accept Jesus do it before (or while) they are teenagers.
    - i) I should also add that there is no perfect formula for raising one's children as Christians. I am convinced that regular prayer is the key to success just as much as how we raise them. We can raise children with great attitudes and great Christian teaching and it is still natural for children to rebel. The secret to me is regular prayer for our children, raise them with good Christian values and hopefully, eventually, it will sink in.
  - c) Now, let's get back to comparing the disciples to children: Remember that the purpose of these two verses is because the disciples were arguing about who is the greatest. Jesus responds to that question in affect by saying whoever welcomes one of these children, welcomes Jesus as well.
    - i) Children rebel, but they also understand that they are fully dependant upon their parents or guardians for their own survival. That sense of "I need my parents in order to survive" is the type of attitude that Jesus wants for all believers.
    - ii) The idea for any believer of any age is that we are to regularly pray and regularly trust in God for every aspect of our lives just like a little child is trusting in their parents for their own survival. The child may not express that thought in words, but they comprehend the necessity of their parents (or guardians).
  - d) This also ties to the idea of being a "servant of all". If you think about it, a little child has no interest in being anyone's servant. Children always ask (in effect), "what's in it for me?" The point of this illustration is not to act like a child; the point is how much we are to trust in God. We need (big emphasis on need) to have the attitude that we are the "lowest of slaves" in order to be considered great in God's eyes.
    - i) This has nothing to do with salvation. The concept of being "great" in God's eyes is to constantly have the attitude of being the "lowest of servants" when we deal with others around us. It is not about never getting a promotion at work, or focusing on being successful in life. It is about our attitude in life.
    - ii) Jesus' one new command is to "Love one another". (See John 13:34.) The idea behind that command is we put the needs of others as priority over our own needs. That is also the idea of being a "servant of all". It also relates to being "child like" in that we are fully dependant upon God for our lives. It does not mean we don't take the necessary steps that we need to do, it means that we are fully trusting in God for the results and are seeking His will for our lives.

21. Verse 38: "Teacher," said John, "we saw a man driving out demons in your name and we told him to stop, because he was not one of us." <sup>39</sup> "Do not stop him," Jesus said. "No one who does a miracle in my name can in the next moment say anything bad about me," <sup>40</sup> for whoever is not against us is for us. <sup>41</sup> I tell you the truth, anyone who gives you a cup of water in my name because you belong to Christ will certainly not lose his reward.
- a) The next few verses describe someone who is not one of the 12 apostles doing a good work in Jesus name. Jesus response is in effect, "whoever is not against us is for us".
    - i) This teaches at the least, an argument against there being only one denomination.
  - b) The more important idea is that Jesus is dividing the world into two groups at the moment: Those who follow Jesus and those who don't. Those who do, do not have to be united under one particular group or denomination, but must have the desire to follow Jesus with all of their hearts.
  - c) It also teaches us that we are not to stop people who are sincerely trying to follow Jesus, even if some of their views on the bible are different from ours. In other words, there is the key doctrinal issues (of which there is no compromise) and "debate".
    - i) The older I get, the less I care about debatable issues. Don't get me wrong I still have opinions on all the controversial issues within the church. Still, I am more interested in whether or not someone is truly seeking God with all of their heart and believes that Jesus lived in the flesh, died and is God, and is also seated at the right hand of God. All the other issues are "debate".
    - ii) I've also learned that it is not my job to fix people. It is one thing if someone asks my opinion, but it is another to offer it without asking. Jesus told us to "love one another", not to try to sway other's opinions on non-essential biblical debates.
    - iii) Trying to live the Christian life is hard enough as it is. Adding to that by trying to change people is an impossible task that God does not ask us to do. If a person truly believes in God, why try to fix them? Why not just let God work in their lives? If God is big enough to handle our lives, He can handle theirs as well. As far as the non-saved, do what we can to witness to them, but remember that the results are up to God and not us.
  - d) One more thing: Verse 41 mentions offering a "cold cup of water in Jesus' name". The point of that sentence is again, being willing to be the lowest of servants to those around us. That is the attitude Jesus is looking for in His followers.
    - i) Let's say we failed today at that. Welcome to the club. ☺ Confess it as sin and then make the effort to do better next time and trust that God is working it out.
22. Verse 42: "And if anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to be thrown into the sea with a large millstone tied around his neck.
- a) I've always called this the "Mafia-style killing verse". ☺ For those who don't get that reference, the idea is to kill someone by tying them to a very large object and tossing that person into the sea.
  - b) Jesus is not being literal about killing non-believers. His point is that a person who would get a child to turn from God is an example of someone who is not saved. It doesn't mean that adult cannot repent, but it just means that such an act is an obvious sign that the adult is not saved. Once again, it is proof that God calls on us to judge behavior.
23. Verse 43: If your hand causes you to sin, 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. <sup>45</sup> And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life crippled than to have two feet and be thrown into hell. <sup>47</sup> 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 than to have two eyes and be thrown into hell, '
- a) To explain these verses, first picture a person who doesn't have an arm or a leg. Is such a person automatically admitted into heaven, or is it still a matter of that person making a decision for or against Jesus with their lives?

- b) My point here is that Jesus is not saying to literally cut out an eye or cut off an arm to avoid sin. If that were true, why didn't Jesus say to cut out both eyes or both arms?
    - i) The point Jesus is trying to make us understand that hell is such a bad place, we should make every effort to avoid going there in the first place.
  - c) If we sin, isn't it just a matter of confessing that sin is wrong? Yes that is true, but God also wants us to avoid that sin in the first place.
  - d) If we willfully sin knowing that we can just say "magic words" and God forgives us, then we have the wrong attitude about living the Christian life. To live the Christian life is to truly avoid sinning in the first place and also confess when we mess up.
24. Verse 48: where "their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched."
- a) This is a quote of Isaiah 66:24. Jesus is literally describing hell.
  - b) What does "their worm does not die" mean? The idea is that those who go to hell do suffer forever, and there is no end to their suffering. A "worm" is one of the lowest life forms. The idea is that such a worm never dies in the pit of hell.
  - c) Let me quickly talk about the "fairness" of hell. Is it fair of God to make someone suffer for eternity because they have led a bad life? The short answer is that if this is "God's world", then He gets to make the rules.
    - i) Think of it this way: God's standard for right and wrong is "The Law". Even if a person never heard of God's laws, people instinctively know that stealing and murder is wrong. Again, this is God's world so He makes the rules. His rules are eternal punishment for disobedience. We as Christians are not exempt from the law in the sense we accept Jesus full payment for our sins.
  - d) So is hell literally like a big fire pit? I don't know, and hopefully, I never will have to find out. If to "act like a little child" (Verse 36) wasn't enough motivation to get us to stick close to Jesus, this illustration of hell certainly should get us to stick close to Him.
25. Verse 49: Everyone will be salted with fire. <sup>50</sup> "Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can you make it salty again? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with each other."
- a) The chapter ends with a discussion of salt.
  - b) First a word about salt in "those days". Salt was not refined like it is today. Salt could go bad. Also remember that in Jesus' day there was no refrigeration. Salt was used to preserve meats, among other things. To understand the analogy of salt, which all of that world could relate to, is to be a preservative.
  - c) Jesus wants us to have "salt in ourselves". So does that mean we are to get up in the morning and after our morning shower, to sprinkle ourselves with salt? No. ☺
    - i) The idea here is to persevere in our attitude toward worshipping Jesus as God.
  - d) In many ways, this is the perfect way to end the lesson (and not just because it is the last verse). The idea of salt being a preservative is the concept of Christians persevering in our trust in God for every aspect of our lives.
  - e) What Jesus is saying is just as salt preserves food, so we should persevere in our trust in God, and to see ourselves as the lowest of servants of all. That is why the final comment is about "being at peace with one another". It is hard to argue with someone (or think that we are superior) when our attitude should be one of being the "lowest of servants".
  - f) One final question: Is getting saved a "one time deal" or a lifelong commitment to God? The answer is the later. I don't have a problem with evangelical rallies and I have been involved in some myself. The point is when we make such a commitment, that is not the end, but just the beginning of a journey with God. Admission to heaven is not about the Christian being perfect the rest of their lives, but about having the lifelong attitude that there is a God, Jesus died for our sins and He is God and that we should live to be pleasing to God in all that we do. That is simple to write out, but hard to practice!
  - g) Every illustration in this chapter dealt with correcting the proper Christian attitude about who God is and how we should live as Christians. The "salt thing" is no exception.

26. At this point, it is best if I just sum up this chapter through my closing prayer. Let's pray: Father, help us to live a life pleasing to You. Help us to remember that it is only by Your power and Your grace that we are able to live the type of life that is pleasing to You. Help us to see ourselves as the "lowest of servants" in our attitudes with others. Help us to constantly remember that You are in charge of our lives and it is Your desire that every aspect of our lives should be pleasing to You. Help us to love one another daily. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen.