

“Fire or Salt?”

-Mark 9:49-50 & Luke 9:51-56

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at JF Believers Church
in Menomonie, Wisc
on January 8th, 2017



Mark 9: 49-50 *"For everyone will be*

seasoned with fire, and every sacrifice will be seasoned with salt. (50) "Salt is good, but if the salt loses its flavor, how will you season it? Have salt in yourselves, and have peace with one another."

Luke 9:51-56 *Now it came to pass, when the time had come for Him to be received up, that He steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem, (52) and sent messengers before His face. And as they went, they entered a village of the Samaritans, to prepare for Him. (53) But they did not receive Him, because His face was set for the journey to Jerusalem. (54) And when His disciples James and John saw this, they said, "Lord, do You want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them, just as Elijah did?" (55) But He turned and rebuked them, and said, "You do not know what manner of spirit you are of. (56) "For the Son of Man did not come to destroy men's lives but to save them." And they went to another village.*

It's an angry world out there.

I wish the greater church was innocent of all such venting and shameful displays, but sadly we are every bit keeping pace with the world on this matter. But then...*we're justified in OUR anger* of course, and we have an obligation to "clean things up for Jesus" in this world, and frankly sometimes that just means we have to get in there and 'kick some behind', *right?* Well...*doesn't it?* Uhhh...*no*.

Over the years of this church's history, we have endured hate-filled letters, numerous fiery phone calls including threats of physical violence upon the pastors, (that one nearly generated a restraining order), online hateful spewing, yelling at church members in department store parking lots, loud verbal abuse in area restaurants, and 'in-the-dark' property destruction ... all from people that believe themselves today to be absolute born again and heaven bound believers. God will of course, give them a house right next door to me in heaven, because our God is the king of irony and the actual inventor of humor! "*Vengeance is mine sayeth the Lord!*"

All of us have endured one or more national elections, and have likely experienced the shame and embarrassment at what verbally spewed forth from the mouths of what is commonly referred to as the "Christian right." Hate-filled attempts to legislate moral agenda and religious values: "*You all are going to act like Christians whether you like it or not!*" There has been horrible statements of bigotry, self-righteousness, elitism and prejudice! We've all seen church splits and power grabs. Run-away pride and jealous back-alley gossip.

But is this ok now? Is this the new Christian paradigm? Are we really alright with presenting such a face of Christ to a lost world, all the while chanting "*we're not gonna take it...*" Should not the church rather be the leader in love? If the Bible tells us they will 'know we are Christians by our love' (John 13:35), does such mean then they...the world...in light of our current behavior, quite frankly know no such thing as far as Christendom is concerned? But then again: *what exactly IS Christ-love and how are we to manifest it?*

Of course, *in the world*, we expect nothing less than frustrated anger, and we get it! Road rage, social media scathing, racial violence on both sides, and of course, the inevitable retaliation. We ‘lawyer up’ and sue for damages to our frail ego’s, and ‘tit-for-tat’ wreak havoc in a modern day version of the ‘Hatfields and McCoys.’ And to make it worse, we seem to all be armed these days, and what we get for that is Chicago’s 1,862 shootings in 2016, and their 762 homicides. We don’t punch you in your offending nose anymore, we just shoot you!

This heart and tendency is not a new one...for as scripture tells us in Ecc 1:9, there really is “*nothing new under the sun.*” As far back as Cain and Abel, men have been doing violence to one another. Yet Romans 12:2 and other scriptures tell us that we are to be *different* than the world! But again...**what does that really look like?** When Jesus touched the leper in Matthew 8, He didn't get leprosy -- **He changed the leper.** The question is: “*Today, when Christians touch the world, does the world get Christianity, or do we get spiritual leprosy?*” Such should go without saying, for after all, if salvation fails to change me from what I was, than really what is the point?

Are Christians innately different from other people? Meaning, not only are they supposed to *act* different, but are they inherently different naturally as new believers? God's word states in 2 Corinthians 5: 17: “*If any man is found in Christ, he is a new creation. Old things are passed away, behold, all things are become new.*”

The day before this event in Luke, James and John...the so-called “Son’s of Thunder” had experienced the Mount of Transfiguration with Christ. No doubt they were feeling pretty good about themselves having been ‘chosen’ to accompany Jesus to such an event. But as often was the case, these fellas were operating in the realm of “zeal without knowledge.” Anyone can operate in a feet-first gung-ho method, but without real knowledge and spiritual leading we do so without God’s blessing and become like “bulls in a china shop.” It matters little to the bottom line that we are sincere and mean well. Once the village is set afire, there really is no putting it out!

James and John must have felt that whatever they lacked in knowledge that they would make up in zeal. However, you can have a great heart for God, but if **you** are doing the leading and not God’s Word then you're setting yourself up for a lot of worldly trouble and correction from the Master. It’s not that passion has no value because on the other hand you could have a doctorate in theology, but if you don't have a heart for God, what good is that? God wants your heart and your mind. He says in Jeremiah 17:10 “*I, the LORD, search the heart, I test the mind...*” And He does so with a purpose and an ‘end goal.’ For in that passage He goes on to say “*...to give every man according to his ways, According to the fruit of his doings.*” It’s a mistake to believe that grace covers our lack of knowledge on the practical realm. Deut 11:22 reminds us that we are to “*...love the LORD your God, (and) walk in all his ways.*”

In Matthew 22:37 Jesus called upon us to “*...love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.*” James and John had the heart, maybe a little soul, but they were severely lacking in the mind category. They had zeal but not maturity. They had the power to make stuff happen, but not the futuristic thoughtful reach that must be present in a leader of men.

In Luke 10 the apostles, having been out ministering, returned to the presence of Jesus very excited saying, “*Lord, even the demons are subject to us in Your name.*” According to that passage, they had the ‘*authority to trample on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing could hurt them.*’ But Jesus told them such manifest strength was not what they should be rejoicing in but rather “*because your names*

are written in heaven.” (vs 20) In that verbal exchange, Jesus said one other thing which may have seemed out of context. He said in verse 18 *"I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven."* The reason that was there in the discussion was that Jesus was reminding them that Satan was tossed out of heaven because of his pride and ‘panache.’ He had the stuff of angels and still he lost in the end.

The apostles too had the power but lacked understanding. Jesus warned them that they failed to understand *“...what kind of spirit (they were) of.”* What kind of Spirit are we “of” today? One of hatred and hurt, or one of love and blessings...*even in the midst of persecution and trial?*

Writer Jerry Adler had an article in *Newsweek* a number of years ago, and in it described the popularity of a new book that had just been published at that time. This is what he wrote:

*“You’d think that the last thing that Americans need is more excuses for self absorption and acquisitiveness, but our inexhaustible appetite for affirmation, inspiration, and motivation has finally outstripped the combined efforts of Wayne Dyer, Anthony Robbins, Dr. Phil, and Mitch Albom. We have actually begun importing self help from Australia of all places, that citadel of tough minded individualism where just a couple of years ago Rhonda Burn, a divorced mother in her fifties who had hit a rocky patch in her business and personal life, in a moment of despair wept and wept and wept and discovered a long neglected book dating from 1910 called, *The Science of Getting Rich*. And in it she found how to let your thoughts and feelings get you everything you want and determine to share it with the world. And she called it *The Secret*.”*

Adler goes on to say this,

*“And it was a stroke of marketing genius that turned what might have been a blip on the Times’ Advice How-To Miscellaneous Best Seller List into a publishing phenomenon that Sarah Nelson, the editor of *Publisher’s Weekly*, says is this decades *Tuesdays With Morrie*. ‘Nobody,’ Mrs. Nelson says, ‘Nobody ever went broke overestimating the desperate unhappiness of the American public.’ Self help books roll off the presses with the regularity of politicians biographies and sell much better. Wayne Dyer has all by himself written twenty nine of them with sales estimates over 50 million books. But Rhonda Burn has something else going for her. ‘It was an incredibly savvy move to call this book *The Secret*’ says Donavin Beenes, a buyer who specializes in metaphysics for *Borders Books*.”*

Now, what's the secret? According to Mrs. Burn, it is this; — *“The earth turns on its orbit for you. The oceans ebb and flow for you. The birds sing for you. The sun rises and sets for you. The stars come out for you. Every beautiful thing you see, every wondrous thing you experience, is all there for you. Take a look around. None of it can exist without you. No matter who you thought you were, now you know the truth of who you really are. You are the master of the universe. You are the heir to the kingdom. You are the perfection of life.”*

That whole latter section of Luke 9...after the mountain top experience with Jesus, we see issues of pride and power with the boys. They apparently thought that experience equated maturity, and that feelings trumped truth. Once they began to believe that they were special, the ‘gloves came off’ and hurting others was the order of business. But such was not of Christ. Matthew 20:28 Jesus says that *“the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many.”* Jesus washed the feet of the disciples in John 13. He said in John 6:38 *"For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me."* So Jesus...God in flesh...in human form, exercised humility, love and compassion in His interaction with mankind, as well as a linear focus upon His calling and positional duty. He knew what He was here for and what He was here to do. Do **you**?

In the garden before the crucifixion, we are told that *“one of the men with Jesus pulled out his sword and struck the high priest’s slave, slashing off his ear.”* Jesus then said *“Put away your sword... Those who use the sword*

will die by the sword. Don't you realize that I could ask my Father for thousands of angels to protect us, and he would send them instantly?" Jesus could have dropped them all where they stood with merely a word but He did not. On the cross, Jesus uttered those now famous words... *"Father, forgive them, for they don't know what they are doing."* He literally loved them as He hung dying and the soldiers gambled for his clothes by throwing dice. (Luke 23:34)

Today we live in an environment ...even in a **religious** environment, that sanctions a 'rage against the machine.' We have 'gathered an army,' like in the crusades and will through violence if necessary, attempt to force others under our will, even if that will is not the express will of Christ, but rather only our own personal, political and social agendas! Jesus' mission in coming here was not to call down fire upon sinners to consume them, but rather to **be consumed** by God's fire in the place of sinners! It wasn't that He had no opinion, nor am I suggesting today that we 'look the other way' on aspects of sin and social injustice. But Jesus understood that "unless a man be born again..." he will never be like Christ nor will he ever want to!

So what does this mean to us? Is love the 'looking the other way' when it comes to sin, overlooking injustice and corruption, and acquiescing to the rise of evil? No. It means we are not "fire from heaven" but rather "salt." Now just why would Jesus tell us to be salt? Well, what are the natural attributes of salt? One, it is a "preservative." In the old days before the prevalence of refrigeration, salt was used to preserve meat. It kept it from spoiling. Thus our presence here *should*, if we are living it out right, keep the world from rotting out from under us. Salt doesn't generally kill and it doesn't even overtly harm. It's a rather benign mineral really. Except it does have one attribute that is readily discovered if you have ever got into the ocean with even a minor cut somewhere on your body! Salt is an irritant.

Now let me be blunt: *that's us*. Not harmful, not overtly damaging (unless you are a car), but certainly unable to be ignored! When salt is present on an open sore, it's hard to forget that it's there. And is there any question that the world is indeed an 'open sore' today? Salt exerts no effort to be this way, it just ...well, 'be's salt.' It's very natural attributes play into its preserving qualities as well as its mild irritating qualities, and that is frankly to be us the church. If you have unredeemed co-workers and associates, you may already know what I'm talking about. Because most often one doesn't even need to "preach" at them or get up in their face with Jesus in order to garner a level of disdain and animosity. You just have to be there and be you. The "natural-you believer." The one that has experienced Christ and His salvation.

So exercising love...*Christ love*, doesn't mean that we attempt to be invisible as a Christian or to "soothe the wounds of this world." That is "loving" people into hell. Despite all we hear differently today, such is not Christian love, but rather the 'love' of this world, which really is not love at all, unless it is love of self. When I try to 'pacify' the world, and practice worldly 'tolerance'...*which is in fact really just 'agreeing' with their life choices*, such may indeed make things easier for us, but can spell doom for the receiver. That's not love. That's **fire**.

If salt loses its 'flavor'...its power to preserve and 'flavor' the world, we are worthless, and as Matthew 5:13 tells us, good only to be "thrown out and trampled underfoot as worthless." Jesus says "have salt in yourself" believer! Because oddly enough, if one endures the initial shock of salt in a wound, that same salt goes on to have some pretty amazing healing properties! THAT'S Christ love friends! Not the 'love' of this world, but the love that seeks to heal and nurture, even if we cause some discomfort along the way. May we always seek to 'have salt in ourselves' and to reject all temptation to "burn down the village"...