

5.3.B(36).Kingdom Unity: Focusing on Lord and not Man. Mark 9:38- 50.

Read Mark 8:38-50.

38 John said to him, “**Teacher**, we saw someone casting out demons **in your name**,^[f] and we tried to stop him, because he was **not following us.**”³⁹ But Jesus said, “Do not stop him, for no one who does a mighty work **in my name** will be able soon afterward to speak evil of me.”⁴⁰ For the one who is **not against us is for us.**⁴¹ For truly, I say to you, whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because^[g] you **belong to Christ** will by no means lose his reward. Mark 8:38-41

Background:



Belonging: Us vs. Them.

The Kingdom of God grows in the unseen realm of the Spirit, as human hearts *bow* and turn to the Lord Jesus Mashiach by faith, coming under the Lordship of his Kingdom and forsaking the Kingdom of Darkness. In the same way that the Kingdom's true *glory* is hidden to fleshly eyes, the Kingdom's *growth* is also hidden.

As this story shows, the Kingdom reached many who were acting "in the name" of Jesus Mashiach but were not *following* this group of disciples. So, the Lord Jeus commands his disciples who want to

stop them, “Do not stop them” (9:38). What can we learn from this exchange about the Kingdom?

Unifying Name of Jesus Mashiach:

If these *workers of mighty signs* were only using the name of Jesus as a talisman, they would not have been successful at performing these “mighty works” (9:40). For, even when the seven sons of Sceva attempted to use the name of Jesus to cast out the evil spirits, their lack of any real connection to Jesus led to their defeat (Acts 19:11).

In this way, the Kingdom and its Gospel will reach many people who may not “follow” any set group of disciples or any proven *traditions*. Jesus implies that the Kingdom and its work is *too great* to control, for many will be included and do works “in my name” (40) which may or may not be known.

However, the disciples’ need to track, to regulate, and to define who is with “us” and who

are “those” different from us may be a *fleshly* need to control and to manage growth. But, the “name” of Jesus and affiliation with him is the real Kingdom distinctive.

Kingdoms at War.

The reason Jesus seems comfortable letting the Kingdom grow naturally and without having a need to oversee all aspects of its growth is the stark difference between those “against us” and those who are not.

For, the greater spiritual reality is that the Kingdom of God, marked by those who live and speak “in my (Jesus’s) name,” faces fierce opposition from the Kingdom of Darkness and those who *are against* the name of Jesus as Mashiach.

In times of war, it becomes very clear which force one is supporting or opposing. This clarity due to the heat of battle will increase, until in the last days when open warfare breaks out between

the two kingdoms, those who belong to Jesus and those who seek to persecute, imprison, or kill them will become unmistakable.

The dividing line of sin:

When the clash of the Kingdoms breaks out into open conflict, even small but risky acts of kindness shown to the children of the Kingdom will cover people in the Kingdom's shelter and eventual reward.

For, in the Last Days when the Antichrist imposes his global rule of tyranny on all people, those who belong to Jesus Mashiach will indeed be openly hunted, persecuted, and eventually, martyred. With their property and possessions confiscated and having no access to the *world's financial system*, these "little children" who belong to Jesus and represent him in the world will wander and seek shelter and food from the people of the earth.

Those people who show mercy to the followers of Jesus Mashiach in that last day's tribulation, who give them food, drink, or shelter, will be spared from the Lord's judgment and rewarded, as if they had shown mercy to the Lord Himself! (Matthew 25:35-40).

As a disciple of Jesus Mashiach, *be satisfied with the Kingdom grows around you.* There will come a day when the name of Jesus will be proclaimed, invoked, and called on. Rejoice as the Kingdom grows, without having to manage or control all this growth. For, in the coming days, the Kingdom will spread exponentially to permeate all nations, peoples, and languages. With the *rule of darkness* embodied in the wicked tyranny of the Antichrist, there will be many who are not "against" you—consider them for you.

Final Kingdom Distinction: Sin and Sacrifice.

The Lord Jesus realizes that until the Kingdom comes in its true power and glory, his disciples are

weak and powerless in a hostile world. He calls them “these little ones who believe in me” (9:41).

As a disciple of Jesus Mashiach, especially as you find yourself taking responsibility in the Kingdom as a *Sacrificial Servant* given charge over the flock, realize what the real dangers of this Kingdom conflict.

Worldly hardship: Opportunities for Grace. Jesus realizes that the hardships, persecutions, and losses which his disciples face in this world are really an opportunity for the Kingdom to expand its territory. Yes, his people will be tested, but the Lord of the Kingdom is able to provide for them through times of testing on the Earth, and these times of test will bring God’s Kingdom to those who receive and help them.

The Sin Trap: Tempting the Little Ones:

The real attack leveled against the children of God threatens not body but soul, for the people of this world can “cause” these disciples to “sin” and so

threaten them with hell itself (42). Those in the world who *seek to ensnare* the disciples in sin are the deadliest of foes. As a sacrificial servant, be vigilant and on guard for these *great enemies*. Remember the Enemy's original strategy to entice the people of God:

- Promoting Unbelief:
 - **Cast doubt** or **undermine** God's Word (Genesis 3:1)
 - **Contradict** or **void** God's Word (4);
 - **Cease/ Usurp God's Place:** with Self-Rule/ Self-Understanding/ Will etc. "be like God"
 - **Claim Self-Rights: Unbelief & Self-Righteousness:** Rely on Self-Understanding to reason *apart from God*.
 - **Create Self-justifying rationale** (good reasons) to sin: "I have the right to sin and reasons to do so."

- Benefit in this life;
- Pleasurable
- Wisdom apart from God.

As a *sacrificial servant* of the Lord, the enemy will find no foothold to lure you away from the Lord your God. However, for those disciples under your watch and care, as you see above, there are many insidious ways that fleshly people entice the unsuspecting and *lure them away into sin*. The Enemy's first and most effective strategy is to propagate the lie that *we are "free moral agents"* with the "free will" to decide morality for ourselves. More dangerously, to decide "what the Bible means" for ourselves.

Maintaining the Word of God's Efficacy:

As the notes above indicate, the enemy assaults the faith of disciples by attacking the Word of God itself, the very life-blood of the disciple.

Mainly, the enemy will create "dead zones" in the Word of God in which unbelief renders many

of the claims of the Word unfruitful. Here is a quick review of how the Word of God should be read and how it has been largely rendered ineffective in the Last Days.

Bible Reading Tips: Proverbs 3:5-6; Job 1:8

1. **Revelatory**: receive by faith. Beginning with the account of creation in Genesis 1:1, God-*Elohim* reveals to us truths and realities which far exceed our capacity to know. For, the *fleshly mind* is *empirical*, gathering experiences and reasoning from the details. But, humans have no experience with much of the Bible's talk about God, about heaven, and about the unseen realities that exist but are beyond our experience.

So, the human mind has two choices. First, to humbly receive what is revealed to it without question. Or, it can filter, alter, and diminish the infinite revelation into manageable ideas that will

fit into very human ways of thinking, assumptions, and traditions.

Case Study: the Folly of Theology.

As a form of *religious capital*, theology does not simply seek to uncover the original Biblical thought and purposes. Rather, it uses the Biblical material conveniently and profitably—sifting the revelation of God through filters of tradition, lifestyle, and agendas.

Man-centered Salvation: In response to the arguments of his adversary, Arminius, John Calvin formulated a man-centered, salvation theology which has evolved into the Reform theology we see today. Unfortunately, focusing on “the salvation of man” as its central focus misses entirely what the actual Word of God focuses on, the Son of God as the Heir of all things and his coming Kingdom Rule.

Europe-centered Future: Because Luther could not conceive a future in which God indeed chooses and *honors* Israel over the nations,

Luther and other *replacement* theologians altered the message of Scripture to replace Israel with the Church in God's plan for the future. The Church, especially as it took root in Europe through its major phases, was seen by the theologians as eternal and at the center of God's plan. Rather than submitting to the revealed truth of God's Word, theologians re-wrote it to match their existing biases and assumptions of European supremacy.

Kingdom-less future: Amillennialism: When Pilate heard of Jesus's claims of another Kingdom, he was struck by fear. How hardened by unbelief must modern interpreters be to have less *fear* of Mashiach's words of the Kingdom than agnostic Pilate himself! For, entire committees and traditions proudly embrace their unbelief that there will be no earthly rule of Mashiach in the Last Days, though both testaments are replete with promises of the nations streaming to Jerusalem and the earth

being filled with the knowledge of God as waters cover the seas.

Yet, those who hold such blatant unbelief are not shunned nor chastened but rewarded in this age of blindness. When I was serving as a pastor in the years approaching the great *taking of the Church*, I was disciplined for talking to congregants about the imminent coming of the Lord. The two higher-ranking pastors who threatened me both took *amillennial positions* with shameless impunity.

In fact, a champion of such theological unbelief hid behind a Reformed Theology to claim that the entire book of Revelation was fulfilled in the first century. Such bold unbelief, which even Revelation cautions against, did not deter this man's multi-million dollar empire. In the Last Days, *preaching* the revelatory truth was sanctioned and propagating unbelief was greatly rewarded! But, what will R.C. Sproul say to the One whose coming Kingdom he proudly denied?

2. **Relational:** the Lord speaks to us by his Word. Also, we must never forget that the Bible does not present to us *abstractions or mere ideas* of deified ideals or holy ideas. Rather, the Bible refers to, talks about, and introduces you to the real people of the Godhead, and when you invoke the name “Jesus” or “God” or “Spirit,” you are referring to people who hear you and will hold you accountable for what you say about them or to them.

3. **Sanctifying:** offering to Lord/ surrendered. Because anchored to this world and its depravity through our *fleshly selves*, it is the Word that convicts, frees, and sanctifies us. So, we must come before the Lord as we read his Word, offering our full Selve to him and surrendering our lives that he might sanctify the areas of our lives still broken or enslaved by the flesh.

Any other “defensive” reading will create “dead zones” of hardness and unbelief in our

hearts, impervious to the Word and its life-giving touch.

4. **Spiritual:** bi-reality. As we have been seeing in this Discipleship pathway, the Word of God prepares us as disciples to inherit the realities of both “earth” and “heaven” (Genesis 2:4). We have also seen that the *flesh* seeks to “set its mind” entirely on this world, for the flesh cannot control what is unseen and in the realm of the Spirit. The Bible calls us to live with our minds set in the Kingdom realities that will lead us to sacrifice, persevere, and lose in this world that the *unseen Kingdom* may advance.

5. **Accountable:** requires action. Because the Word of God conveys the life and commanding authority of God, it requires that those who read and talk about it be held responsible, to be brought to account for how it is responded to. If it is ignored or transgressed, it has the power to

bring those into judgment those who treat it carelessly or ignore it.

So, as a *sacrificial servant* of the Lord Jesus, know that your ministry involving the Word of God will be judged. So, always sanctify yourself as you *seek to handle* the Word of God, speaking and administering it faithfully. Crucify your self-interests and fleshly advantages you may gain in bringing the Word. Instead, seek to accomplish the purposes for which the Lord himself has spoken and sent it out.

Fleshly Bible Cautions:

1. **Objectified:** interpreted by Self-understanding. The humanistic ideal seeks itself to take the “objective,” all-seeing and knowing perspective of God himself. So, exalting human-understanding as pre-eminent, the fleshly mind detaches the Word from the original anchor of God’s authority that it might be “objectively handled.” Yet, it is this same

“objective” position which Satan himself took at the *tree of temptation*, assuming as if there is no God *biasing* the outcomes of interpretation. Thus, to take an “objective” stance to read the scriptures is necessarily unbelieving, for it assumes “as if God is not relevant” to bias the interpretive outcome. To allow God *into* the interpretive process is to “bias” reading as “devotional” and to abandon one’s “objective” and fair stance.

Of course, in the spiritual reality of this dark world, true “objectivity” is not possible, for the whole world is under the control of the evil one. To claim to be “impartial” in one’s reading is already an admission of betrayal and denying the Lord.

2. **Moral Ideas:** The *flesh recoils* at the Lordship of God but loves religious morality, for it can control the latter but must be subjugated by the former. For this reason, those guided by the *flesh* will always be offended by true “discipleship” and

its call to grow up spiritually as servants of the Lord Jesus Mashiach. For, disciples serving the Lord Jesus are free from the *service* and control of fleshly religion and traditions, being devoted to the Kingdom of God rather than human institutions.

3. **Rules for living:** Take how the words of Jesus to his disciples: “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself, take up his cross daily, and follow me” (Luke 9:23-25) are unacceptable to the flesh, which would rather be given “rules” which I can choose to obey or neglect, such as, “Be sure to live responsibly in this life.”

4. **Practical Living:** Because the flesh cannot “see” the Kingdom nor derives very few benefits from a realm which is unseen, there are few incentives to focus on the Kingdom. Instead, the fleshly man would rather use the Word to extract whatever might apply to his practical life to improve it.

5. **Proprietary** and **Commodified**: traditions/community interpretations. Again, to build their vast and profitable communities and traditions, the teachings of the Word must be back by human-recognized authority rather than seen as *teachers speaking with the Lord's authority*. Creating differences in “authorities” allows people to choose teachers who suit them, avoiding any uncomfortable situations where their own lives or practices are challenged.

Case Study: Fruitful Discipleship Banned.

As I already mentioned, Biblical, Jesus-centered discipleship was never fully accepted by the late-stage church. Individual pastors would agree to the *idea* of discipleship, but the demands and life-challenges of the Lord's *calling* made the content too *disruptive* for the churches.

Still, as generations of disciples progressed through the Gospel of Mark, as you are right now, we began to see some *fruit* as people were

called to follow Jesus and learn to minister in the Kingdom's reality. Leaders were raised up, and groups formed. The captives were freed, the lame restored to mobility, and the addicted liberated. More than a dozen Persians were baptized in a year, with several bearing multi-generational fruit. Yet, the Church proved to be an inhospitable place for growth.

For, in this late-stage of the Church, the deadening effects of technology and social media were already smothering the faith of the younger generations and of entire households. Group leaders and I agreed that we needed to take the "fight" into each household, with parents and families discipling their own generations. This could be done if we developed Jesus-centered *devotional* materials.

But, before the project could be launched, the senior pastors of the church stopped it. It did not conform to our church's traditions. In restoring the Gospel of the Kingdom to its

original and “active” form, I had used the language of “family unity” to describe the Trinity as Father, Son, and Spirit. However, this dangerous difference, along with the goal of promoting a non-sectarian disciple *free* of sectarian and religious bondages, was just too disruptive for these leaders, and I was chastened. Who knows, at that point, if it was too late for the church. But, my hope is that these materials, which help *sacrificial disciples learn to minister in the Kingdom Reality*, will bear the fruit that was stifled in the Church Age.

Thus, the main fight of the Kingdoms is the fight for devotion and obedience to the Lord Jesus on the one hand against forces to undermine faith and capture with sin on the other. Those in the Kingdom must gather in the Lord’s name, as a unified people, to fight together to remain obedient and devoted to the Lord.

In the next age, when open warfare breaks out between the Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of

Darkness, there will be no place for *divisions* within the ranks of the Kingdom, for it will take all the resources of the Kingdom to remain faithful in this time of great testing.

In some ways, the clarity of the battle lines will make the fight against sin much more concerted. The people of the world will know that there are only two sides in this conflict. On the one side, the unified forces of the Kingdom of God, with Israel and all those who have come to Jesus Mashiach because of the nation's witness. On the other side, the global resources of the Antichrist marshalled to terrorize the body and defile the soul. These clear battle lines, but especially the unity of the people of the Kingdom, will expand the territory of Mashiach's rule over the whole earth. But, this test will also be a time of sacrifice and sanctification.

Sacrifice and Sanctification:

Finally, in times of open Kingdom warfare, the Unity of the Kingdom will be forged because “everyone will be salted with fire” (9:49).

Recalling that “salt” was added to the sacrifices burned up on the altar with “fire,” we can rephrase what the Lord is saying as: “Everyone will be “sanctified” as the choice parts of their lives are “sacrificed” in the “fire” of testing” when Kingdom warfare breaks out into the open.

So, the normal life of a disciple, especially you who are called into *sacrificial service* of the Lord Jesus Mashiach, should be characterized by *sacrifice*—as the “fire” of trials expose the precious areas of your life which must be “sacrificed”—offered up and given to the Lord for his Kingdom purposes under duress.

Normally, the “sacrifices” (49) of the saints are “good”—they are sanctifying and strengthening opportunities. However, the “sacrifices” of the

disciples will “lose its saltiness” when its underlying purpose—to *offer to God what is pleasing*-- when this purpose is lost and sacrifice just becomes a survival necessity or a simple response to adversity.

So, let disciples, even before the “fire” of tribulation falls upon the Kingdom, learn to “salt” their lives as pleasing offerings to the Lord.

Focus:

1. Kingdom Unity: Name of Mashiach Unites, no other name. 8:38-40
2. Kingdom Children: Pure witness needs to be protected. 8:41-48
3. Kingdom Sacrifice Tested: fire tests offering. 8:49-50

Consider:

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Question:

Further Discovery: