

Scripture: Mark 9:42-50

Text: Mark 9:42-48

Treasuring Your Life in Christ

Beloved in Christ, do you treasure your life in Christ? How much do you treasure your life in Him? Usually, the thing you cherish most or prize most, you will guard at any cost, whatever the cost may be!

In light of Mark 9:30-50, Jesus takes His disciples aside to talk with them. They are now in Galilee for the final time. Jesus is about to go to Jerusalem to lay down His life for the sins of His people, His special treasure, so that they may have life through faith in Him. How God cherishes His possession! Look at His cost – the shed blood, the torn body of His only beloved Son on the cross – to save us and to guard us from the devil, from sin and from hell.

Jesus loves His disciples. That's why He spends the time with them and warns them three times about the reality of hell in verses 42-48. "Let us regard His words" says JC Ryle, "as the advice of a wise physician, the counsel of a tender father, the warning of faithful friend." Jesus exhorts His disciples, and all believers: treasure your life in Christ in two ways:

1. By not causing other believers to stumble [v.42]
2. By not causing yourself to stumble [vv.43-48]

1. By not causing others to stumble [v. 42]

Let us pay attention to the strong yet sober warning of Jesus, our Savior and Lord, in **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 fire.*"

So who are these "*little ones*"? The 'little ones' here do not refer to children, but rather to "*these little ones who believe in Me.*" They are little ones in the faith. Jesus may be referring to verse 37 where He uses a child as an example of the 'little' and insignificant ones whom followers of Jesus are to receive in His name. They may be new believers but also common and ordinary believers.

"Whoever causes one of these . . . to stumble" refers to fellow members in the church. There are always those who would lead Christ's 'little ones' astray. The word for 'stumble' means 'to cause to sin.' It refers to causing a believer to fall away from Christ or destroying the faith of a fellow believer.

Jesus is saying that it is better to have a gruesome death than to cause one who is "precious in His sight" to stumble in his or her faith and fall away from Christ. Christ bought her with His blood. He put His stamp on her in baptism. She belongs to Christ.

The punishment for such an offense is frightful. Jesus says it this way: *"it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were thrown into the fire."* So what's a millstone? It is a large, heavy, round shaped stone with a hole in the middle used for grinding grain to make flour. One stone is used as a base. The other stone is on top of it. Grain is fed through the middle hole. A donkey pulls that top stone round and round which grinds the grain between the stones. For the person who causes one to stumble, it is better if that millstone was hung around his neck and then be thrown into the sea. Of course, the mill stone will drag that person right to the bottom of the sea and he will drown.

So what are some examples of causing little ones in the faith to fall away from Christ? Telling a new believer that his or her Christian baptism is lacking or not good enough and that he needs another. It may be causing new believers to trust in the special power of oils, holy water, certain healers rather than Christ. Some fall away from Christ because of these superstitions. Some cause believers to stumble by suggesting they lie and deceive if they are in a rut, confusing them, "May Christians do this?" Not so! This is especially serious when it causes one to fall away from Christ! Others shame new believers by reminding them of their past as if they are not good Christians. We need to be careful with our words to one another, not injuring the faith of another in the family of Christ.

Some cause believers to stumble by saying that they can have Christ and their other gods too and continue in their old lifestyle. But the Bible is clear, *"what agreement has the temple of God with idols"* [2 Corinthians 6:16]. Some cause others to fall away from Christ by teaching that Genesis chapters 1-11 is not real history. Hymenaeus and Alexander were of this sort and we read in 1 Timothy 1:19 that that the faith of some was shipwrecked because of it.

To cause one of these precious ones in the sight of God to stumble is asking Jesus to put a millstone around your neck. But even here, God's promise of forgiveness is to all who repent of this sin and turn to Christ in faith.

Verse 42 is a sober warning against injuring or destroying the faith of simple and ordinary followers of Jesus. If you treasure your life in Christ, you will guard your fellow members in the family of Christ, encourage them in their life in Christ, and not cause them to stumble in their faith. But Jesus also exhorts you to treasure your life in Christ.

2. By not causing yourselves to stumble [vv.43-48]

In these verses, Christ warns each one of us personally. We hear i] the call to guard our life in Christ, and also ii] the gravity of His warning.

First, we hear the call to guard our life in Christ. Cherish it, prize it, treasure it. This eternal life, the life of His kingdom you have by God's grace alone. Jesus paid for it. He fought for you, overcoming sin, death and hell. He bought you with His blood, giving you faith, and bringing you into His family. Treasuring your life in Him means you guard this life, the life of the kingdom, He has won for you. You do this by fighting hard against sin and the devil which want to cut you off from your life in Christ.

Do you treasure your life in Him? Well then, Jesus says, *"If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off . . . And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off . . . and if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out"* [vv. 43,45,47]. Hands, feet, eyes; that is, what we do, where we go, what we view? Is it luring us into sin? Jesus says that it's better to hack it off or pluck it out than to go to hell with two hands, two feet and two eyes.

These words should not be taken literally. But Jesus deliberately uses strong language to stress that sin must be opposed at all costs. The lesson is this. As one commentator says, "sin, being a destructive force, must not be pampered. It must be 'put to death'" [Colossians 3:5]. Temptation must be dealt with right away and firmly. No wavering. No waiting till tomorrow. No half-way measures. Make the cut, like cutting off the hand or the foot or gouging out the eye.

Why so drastic? Sin is so inviting, attractive, and powerful. But it injures; it hurts; it finally destroys. It may be viewing pornography on internet. Get help. Make the cut. It might be an affair with another man or woman. Repentance is your way out and Christ your restoration. Make the cut. It may be hate, greed, or jealousy. God to Christ. Make the cut. Or it may be that party, stay away.

We see a vivid example in Acts 19. Remember how the Lord Jesus was magnified in Ephesus through the preaching of the gospel? Many believed confessing and telling their deeds. And we read that "many of those who had practiced magic brought their books together and burned them in the sight of all." The value totalled fifty thousand pieces of silver.

The cut was immediate and decisive. How were they able to do that? The same way we are able to do so – through the power of the risen Lord Jesus. Not our own strength. Our own strength will fail us. But by the powerful working of His Spirit in our hearts and lives. A new life in Christ is everything – treasure it, cherish it!

As important as hands, eyes and feet are to us, they are not life. The kingdom of God is life. The choice is literally between God's kingdom and *"the fire that shall never be quenched."* This is why the church exercises discipline according to Christ's command. If a brother or sister refuses to repent of wilful sin, the elders lovingly warn [turn!] , and if the warning is not heeded, he/she is to be cut off from the family of Christ so that his sin may not be a cause of stumbling for others. *"Do you not know a little leaven leavens the whole lump"* [1 Corinthians 5:6]? In this way, Christ wants us to apply His warning.

Notice the gravity [weight] in Jesus' warning, *"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 --- . it is better for you to enter life lame, rather than have two feet, to be cast into hell, into the fire that shall never be quenched --; it is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye rather than have two eyes, to be cast into hell fire --- [verses 43,45,47].*

It's not easy to preach on hell. It's not often done. Many preachers avoid it. JC Ryle says it this way, "it's not possible to say too much about Christ. But it is possible to say too little about hell." Three times in verses 43-48, Jesus speaks of hell. Three times He describes hell as *"the fire that shall never be quenched."* And three times He describes hell as the place where *"their worm does not die"* [verses 44,46,48].

Hell is a real place, not just a state, reserved for the unbelieving. It's a place where the fire shall never be quenched. This means that the punishment for those who enter there is never-ending. It is everlasting. The fire, the worm is a picture of the wicked who will have to endure consuming painful torment forever. Hell is a place where they experience God's wrath forever, never His love. Hell is fair and just. It is the just punishment for sin [for all outside of Christ.]

Treasure your life in Christ. Cherish it. It's God's gift of grace to all who repent and believe. Treasure your life in Christ by not causing yourself to stumble. By God's grace, Christ's life sustains.

Three times Jesus says, *'better for you to enter into life /better for you to enter into the kingdom of God'* [vv. 43,45,47]. Entering life is entering His kingdom. There is the promise of the new heaven and the new earth and all the glory related to it. "...As it is written: *"Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him"* [1 Corinthians 2:9].

Glory forever. Fellowship forever. Joy forever! No more sadness, no more pain. He will make all things new. Your life in Christ will even become fuller: a fuller enjoyment of God's presence, a deeper experience "of the peace that passes all understanding" [Philippians 4:7], a "joy inexpressible and full of glory..." [1 Peter 1:8], and "the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" [2 Corinthians 4:6]. Behold, what Christ has gained for us by His resurrection from the dead!

All that Christ has done for us on the cross, giving His life for you, for your salvation, -- may this be your incentive, your motivation to show eternal thanks to Him. It's His life in us that motivates you to give thanks and to treasure your life in Him. Glorious days are coming.

Treasure your life in Him by not causing others to stumble in their faith and by not causing yourself to stumble in your faith. The life He gained is worth it all! It's worth every hard fight against sin. By Him we overcome. Amen!