

“WHOSE SIDE ARE THEY ON?”

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Scripture Texts: Mark 9:38-41

Introduction.

The kingdom of God is bigger than we see or think.

Football is on lots of people's minds today and no doubt a number of us will be racing home to see how the Seahawks are doing against the Atlanta Falcons. Imagine what it would be like if we were watching a football game in which half of the players were invisible. All of a sudden a guy would fall down but we couldn't see why. The ball would go flying but for no visible reason. Imagine how confusing it would be and hard to figure out or explain.

As Christians we have to have a worldview that understands that in history and in our own lives some of the players are invisible. We have to understand that the dominate force in history and in our lives is God and that there are other invisible spiritual forces at work as well.

We live too many of our days as practical atheists, never considering that there are invisible forces at work, that God is up to things we can't see or imagine. We just see the earthly or human, the visible side of things. We see the politics, we see the business decisions, we see the cultural forces and the natural phenomena, but what we don't see is how God is moving and directing and causing and effecting.

Jesus' incarnation should wake us up to the vast possibilities of how the divine is intertwined with humanity, of how the invisible can invade the visible. There are things going on that are way beyond our finite minds.

The followers of Jesus then and today must learn this lesson that the Kingdom of God is far bigger than our own little experience of it and God is doing things and using means, even outsiders, for His purposes and His glory.

If we are going to be wise Christians we have to become more mindful of the kind of world we live in. Presumptuousness, jealousy, narrow-mindedness will blind us to much bigger possibilities. If you think you have God's ways or reasons figured out, you are in for a surprise.

Mark 9:38-41.

We are in a section of Mark's gospel which relates several stories sandwiched between three foretelling's of Jesus' death and resurrection. These stories come out of a time of private teaching that Jesus gives the disciples before He turns His face toward Jerusalem for the last time.

Bless Mark for including these stories because they are not at all flattering about the disciples. But the inclusion of these stories by the gospel writers also tells us that years later as they are writing they actually learned the lessons of these stories and took them to heart and are not ashamed to tell these stories on themselves and for our benefit.

As I said last week these stories reveal serious remaining deficiencies in the disciples' understanding of who Jesus is and what He has come to do, and serious deficiencies in their understanding of what a disciple is and what discipleship is all about.

When they couldn't cast out the demon in the young boy their lack of faith and prayer were exposed. Last week when they were arguing about who was the greatest, their pride was exposed and their lack of understanding of true greatness and of servant-leadership.

This week we see further deficiencies exposed, misunderstandings and sins that lie in the hearts of all of Christ's followers.

Mark 9:38, Not One of Us.

John and the other disciples saw someone casting out demons in the name of Jesus and they tried to stop him because he was not part of their band of brothers, not part of the in crowd.

Do you wonder if they completely missed the irony of the situation? Just a little earlier they had not been able to cast out a demon, and now they are trying to stop someone who is. Maybe that was what was so galling to them.

What does this expose about the disciples?

First, presumptuousness. They did not first inquire of the Lord about this and about what they should do. They only inquired after the fact. They were reckless, rash, ***presumptuous.***

Have any of us rushed into a situation, thrashed about a bit, ended up in a worse mess and then decided to read the Bible or pray about the situation or get godly counsel?

Maybe you are in the middle of one of those situations right now. Have you talked to Jesus about it? Have you waited for wisdom and counsel from the Holy Spirit through the Word?

Acting in the flesh rather than the Spirit they showed themselves to be presumptuous.

Second, jealousy. It appears the disciple's may have been self-motivated and selfish. They are trying to protect their turf or honor. "This is our privilege and you can't have it. You aren't one of us."

Why are they forbidding this stranger, except that they are trying to reserve this right for themselves? They are showing a form of prejudice and ***jealousy***, maybe even bigotry.

John may be the youngest of the disciples and too much may be going to his head. After all Jesus has singled him out as one of the three, Peter, James and John. There may be an elitist mindset growing in John and others.

John doesn't say the man isn't following Jesus, he says he isn't following us.

Have you ever cared about who gets the credit for something? Have you ever wanted to make sure that your name is on some good deed?

Have you ever been jealous, prejudiced, considered yourself better than someone else? Next Monday is Martin Luther King Jr. day. That might be a good time for some soul searching and heart examination for any prejudice or partiality or pride that may be harboring in our hearts.

Jealousy is a terrible sin. It steals our joy and our ability to have joy in another's gifts or success. Jealousy makes our hearts shrivel up and become small and hard. Jealousy is a kind of pride that creates exclusivity. It pushes others away.

What is the attitude of your heart toward others? Toward others in your circle of friends? Toward outsiders? Toward those different from us?

Third, it appears the disciples may be too *narrow-minded*, too parochial, too zealous for their own path. It's an immature faith that can't see or think outside of the box. Life is more dynamic and rich and full than they first imagined.

Joshua had a similar problem back in the OT with Moses. He found two men, Eldad and Medad, prophesying in the camp even though didn't belong to the group of seventy elders designated by Moses. Joshua insisted Moses stop them (Numbers 11:26-30).

Numbers 11:29 But Moses said to him, "Are you jealous for my sake? Would that all the Lord's people were prophets, that the Lord would put his Spirit on them!"

This was one of those watershed moments in Joshua's life and a moment that would prepare him for future ministry and leadership, just as it was a key lesson for the disciples. If Joshua had gone unchecked here selfish jealousy might take root.

A key lesson in life is the danger of glorifying man, and of self-promotion and self-importance. Joshua cares too much about who gets the credit.

Moses would not let Joshua glorify him. The meekness of Moses is a sign of his maturity and an example for his apprentice.

Joshua and the disciple had to learn not to bind God with their own rules of how He must do things.

[John the Baptist's disciples tried to stir up the same emotion in John. They came to John and said to him, "Rabbi, he who was with you across the Jordan, to whom you bore witness—look, he is baptizing, and all are going to him" (John 3:26). Do something!

John 3:27-30 John answered, "A person cannot receive even one thing unless it is given him from heaven. 28 You yourselves bear me witness, that I said, 'I am not the Christ, but I have been sent before him.' 29 The one who has the bride is the bridegroom. The friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly at the bridegroom's voice. Therefore this joy of mine is now complete. 30 He must increase, but I must decrease."

What a gracious, generous, humble spirit that has killed jealousy and envy and glory seeking. He wouldn't let jealousy or envy steal his joy or his ability to rejoice in Jesus' success.

Mark 9:39-40, Not Against Us.

Jesus said don't stop him.

Why not? Is it because He approved? Not necessarily. Jesus neither praises the man or condemns him. He simply says do not forbid him.

Notice Jesus' reason. Even if it started out negative, there would be a good result. Afterwards he would not be able to speak evil of Christ. God would be glorified in the end. Jesus said those who are not open enemies are friends.

If they are warring against Satan and working to destroy the works of the devil and save souls, then don't hinder the work, regardless of who is doing it or who gets the credit for it. In fact, give thanks to God for it and rejoice that it's being done.

If sin is being opposed and Satan's work undone and the devil's kingdom destroyed and the Gospel is being preached, though in a different manner, then we can rejoice.

If a different Gospel is being preached, then that is another matter altogether. That Gospel must be opposed. This text is not license to ignore sound doctrine or to say doctrine doesn't matter.

In another place Jesus says, "Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters" (Luke 11:23).

This isn't license to open the gates to every possible form of ministry and be silent about unbiblical things done in Jesus' name. We are to be discerning and use good judgment. We are to inspect the fruit, by their fruit you will know them.

But if it is the same Gospel, just in a different manner, then we don't oppose. The man in this text is doing apostolic work, he is pulling down the kingdom of Satan while building up the kingdom of Christ, in His name and by His Gospel.

Paul said something similar in Philippians about not approving of the greedy motives of some who proclaimed the gospel for personal gain, but nevertheless he rejoiced that the gospel was being proclaimed. He was free to leave the motives in God's hands.

Mark 9:41, will not lose his reward.

Jesus has one more point to make. Casting out a demon is a fairly impressive miracle. Not everyone can do that. But hear what Jesus says.

The smallest act, the cheapest service, the humblest offering doesn't go unnoticed in heaven and it will be rewarded by Him who sees all and knows all. Don't think your smallest kindnesses don't matter or don't compare to some great preachers preaching or some great evangelists conversions.

Matthew 25:40 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.'

Don't begrudge the smallest acts of love or kindness. You never know the difference you might be making.

I was truly touched by the number of people from our church that I saw out at TeVelde's farm Wednesday morning, people helping, people caring, people serving, people supporting. A cup of cold water in Jesus' name.

The smallest deed forms a connection between heaven and earth, between God and one human soul. The smallest act lays another stone in the building of God's great kingdom on earth. What you do may be just the glimmer of hope someone needs.

After exposing their sins of pride, presumption, jealousy, glory seeking and small-mindedness, Jesus holds up humility, graciousness and its reward.

If you are in last place and if your gifts or ministry are very small, don't fear, don't fret, don't compare. What you did for the least, the lost, the lowly and the lonely, will be pleasing to your Father in heaven and rewarded by Him.

Application and conclusion.

Jesus is the great physician and He is always doing surgery. He is diagnosing heart problems, and exposing sin and cutting out the diseased parts. Jesus is always doing heart surgery on His followers. Every new situation exposes more heart issues. This is the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit through His Word, through His servants like preachers, through circumstances and situations.

Every time you hear a sermon or receive a teaching or read a spiritual message consider that there are visible players and invisible players. Consider that God is present by His Holy Spirit taking the human words and the divine Word and stirring things up in your heart and mind. He is taking the truth and applying it to your heart.

Every time your life takes a twist or turn, everything something doesn't go your way or the way you think it should, consider that God is invisibly up to something.

And you have a big part to play as to whether that truth will be received fruitfully or unfruitfully. Are you open to what God wants to do? Do you actually want God to do something? Or are you quite content to be complacent and prefer to be left alone.

What happens to you this afternoon and tomorrow morning and later next week is a test of your heart and your faith. It's a test of who you are serving, what you are seeking, what you value.

Philippians 2:3-5 Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. 4 Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. 5 Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus.

Prayer: Holy Father, thank you for your Holy Word that you have preserved and protected by your Holy Spirit. And thank you for opening the eyes and ears of our hearts to understand spiritual things. Apply the truth of your Word to us today. Humble us under your mighty hand that we not lose our reward. Help us to kill pride and jealousy and exclusivity and narrow-mindedness. Help us to be willing to be last and to serve knowing that we will never lose our eternal reward when we do. These things are hard and we ask for your divine assistance for the sake of Jesus and your glory. Amen.