

“KILLING SIN BEFORE IT KILLS YOU.”

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Scripture Texts: Mark 9:42-50

Introduction.

There are pros and cons to preaching through whole books of the Bible. One of the cons is that you end up preaching on passages that you would otherwise just skip. One of the pros is that you end up preaching on passages that you would otherwise just skip. We just got finished saying thanks be to God for this is the Word of God, so we let's humble ourselves and submit ourselves to this teaching this morning.

Remember last week when Jesus said giving a cup of cold water has spiritual and eternal connections and consequences? God sees and remembers and rewards. Jesus is saying that the same thing that's true about good deeds and good actions is also true about sinful deeds and actions. They have eternal, spiritual consequences.

Mark 9:42-48.

Immediately we are confronted with some difficult issues here. Is Jesus speaking literally or hyperbolically or metaphorically (symbolically)? We know He is not literally saying start drowning people or start cutting off body parts, self-mutilation is not Biblical.

We know that the sin issues Jesus is talking about are interior issues, issues of the heart. Just like guns aren't the cause of violence, sinful human hearts are. After you gouge out your eye you still have your mind's eye, you still have a sinful heart even though you're now handicapped. It's our hearts that are desperately wicked.

But when we say these passages aren't meant to be taken literally, our tendency then is not to take them seriously.

Some commentators say Jesus is speaking hyperbolically, that is in an exaggerated manner to make a point. In a word, that's wrong. Jesus is not exaggerating about sin or hell. He's not making it sound worse than it is. He's speaking with deadly seriousness. He means to be taken very seriously. He's using graphic imagery to get past our filters and get to our hearts.

Jesus is speaking metaphorically or symbolically. But remember, symbols are always less than the reality they represent. A ring is less than a marriage, a flag is less than a nation, a logo is less than a company and this lake of fire and darkness is less than the real literal hell.

The real hell is far worse and there's no escaping from it, it's eternal. It's a place of unspeakable misery and torment, a place to which will go all who do not believe and do not repent.

This text begins with Jesus' warning about two kinds of sin, the sin we cause others to commit and the sin we are committing.

Mark 9:42, causing someone else.

If a little one, meaning one of God's children, young or old, stumbles or falls or is led astray or away from God because of something we do or say, we are guilty of a great offense, in fact a capital offense.

This should give us a clear sense of how precious in God's eyes are little ones, those who are weak or small or overlooked or insignificant, the least, the lost, the lowly and the lonely, fatherless and widows. Do not despise or reject or insult or offend or cause to sin one whom God loves and prizes.

Is there anything we say or do that is un-Christ-like, that would turn someone away from Christ, that would bring shame on the Gospel?

It can be some sin, some habit, some inconsistency, some lie, some hateful word, some harm; anything that makes Christianity unattractive in the eyes of the world. The world may not understand our beliefs but it understands our actions.

Someone is watching each of us. And often it's those we love the most, spouses, children and grandchildren, girl friends or boy friends. Someone is watching, listening, learning, being influenced. We are making an impression, like a seal on wax. It is for good or for ill.

Jesus is expanding on last week's text, saying not only must we do some good, but we must also seek to do no harm. We are living sermons testifying to the truth about Jesus Christ. The world will judge more by what they see than by what they hear.

The cross of Christ is a big enough offense to the world without the followers of Christ adding to it. Do we ever give occasion to the enemies of God to further resist and deny Him?

I Corinthians 10:31-33 So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. 32 Give no offense to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God, 33 just as I try to please everyone in everything I do, not seeking my own advantage, but that of many, that they may be saved.

We are not free to just live for ourselves and do our own thing and expect the world to ignore us. Let's jealousy guard our lips and our words, our tempers and our tongues. Let's adorn the Gospel with our words and our actions.

Mark 9:43-48, causing yourself to sin.

Jesus shifts from talking about doing grave spiritual injury to others, to doing grave spiritual injury to ourselves.

Jesus again uses very graphic, gruesome images, cutting off hands and cutting off feet and gouging out eyes. He minces no words when He talks about sin and the unquenchable fires of hell. It's meant to heighten our awareness and understanding.

Gouging out an eye is revolting, but sin is even more revolting. Sin should be the most dreadful thing we can imagine.

Jesus declares the incalculable worth of the kingdom of God by saying that there is nothing that you have, not even your own hands and feet and eyes, as important as they are, that is worth keeping or saving compared to heaven. Nothing in this life, nothing, should come between us and the life to come. Why?

Because of the alternative. The alternative is being thrown into hell, into an unquenchable fire, an unimaginable place where “the worm does not die and the fire is not quenched.”

How would you talk about the most serious subject there is to talk about? How would you talk about eternal spiritual destinations and the cost and consequences of sin? How would you talk about the consequences of rebellion against our holy and righteous God and creator?

There really is no human, earthly language adequate to describe the horrors of hell and the torment that’s a consequence of sin against a holy and righteous God.

Jesus’ sayings sound harsh, maybe over the top to us, but never were more loving words spoken. These words of warning are from one who loves us and is willing to do anything for us. Warning people is an act of great love.

Don’t trivialize for a moment what Jesus is talking about. Don’t dismiss this, and by no means don’t misjudge or miscalculate what He is saying.

This is meant to sober us up. This is a call to confess and repent and turn from your sin and to become disciples of Jesus and to pay the price of discipleship, of saying no to ungodliness and worldly passions.

Would you be willing to trade the internet for heaven, or the mall for heaven, or a nicer house or car for heaven, or a lot more money for heaven, or your pride and reputation for heaven?

Rid yourself and your life of every hindrance, or every impediment, or every stumbling block, of every barrier that would impede your progress to heaven and eternal life.

Our hands and feet and eyes are most valuable servants to us, they are channels through which come countless blessings, but they are also channels of much danger and destruction. We must be constantly aware of temptation and how quickly we can be lead into sin.

Heed the loving warnings of the Apostle Paul:

Colossians 3:5-8 Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. 6 On account of these the wrath of God is coming. 7 In these you too once walked, when you were living in them. 8 But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth.

What does Paul mean when he says put to death what is earthly, what is sin? The big word for it is *mortification*, the mortification of the flesh.

It means putting to death or killing sin. With our conversion to Christianity comes a license to kill, a carrying permit. We need to be packing heat all the time, the weapons to attack and kill sin.

Jesus and Paul are calling us not to physical mutilation, but spiritual mortification, a call to cut off harmful practices.

The images of hands and feet and eyes are meant to be all encompassing; there are activities and practices we must stop doing, places we must stop going and things we must stop looking at or watching. You know what is causing you to sin.

Look at us, all of us sitting here, nicely dressed, arriving here in nice cars, living in nice houses in nice respectable Lynden, and yet hidden from everyone else's view, we are hanging on to certain sins, sins we would be mortified if others found out.

These are the sins that must be mortified, killed, put to death, cut off. Whatever sacrifice it takes, whatever self-discipline or self-denial it takes, whatever cost or pain or discomfort or inconvenience.

Steps to killing sin.

Jesus taught us to pray daily, "Forgive us our sins." Sin is a daily battle. It is worse than many of us think or consider. What this means is we can't become complacent in this battle.

This is mortal combat, it is a fight to the death. This is not something we grow out of or become mature and get past. So how can we win this battle? Here are five steps to killing sin.

First, take to heart that you are not on your own in this battle, but that Jesus has decisively killed sin on the cross. By faith His death is our death, the old man is dead, and the victory is in hand. By faith believe this. Christ by His Spirit lives in you and His power is yours for the battle that remains.

Romans 8:13 If you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.

The first thing to be cut out of us is our old, hard heart. This happens when we surrender our lives and our wills to Christ who then gives us a new heart. When we die with Christ, then we receive the Spirit to enable us to fight and kill sin. Take up the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God by faith and fight knowing the battle belongs to the Lord and the victory is His.

Second, learn to recognize sin for what it really is, a rebellious offense against a holy God, and then we must hate sin. You won't kill what you like, you don't kill friends, you kill enemies. Take on God's attitude about sin and hate it. Don't make friends with sin and temptation, don't invite it over to your house or into your heart or mind. Don't make treaties with it or enter into alliances with it. Tolerate no compromises, take no prisoners, kill sin before it kills you.

Romans 6:12-13 Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions. 13 Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness,

Romans 13:14 Put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.

Hate what it does to our souls, hate the spiritual danger it places us in, hate the source which is Satan, hate what it does to our relationship with our Father. Hate it.

Third, fix your mind and heart on what is right and good.

Romans 12:2 Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind.

Romans 8:5 For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit.

Colossians 3:1-2 If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. 2 Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth.

Philippians 4:8 Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.

Fourth, don't try to go it alone, don't do battle by yourself. Get help, ask for help, from a spouse, a close friend, an elder, your pastor, someone. Call in reinforcements, get prayer support and ask for help. I know that sounds impossible, but if you ask me I assure you I will not think less of you but more of you. I will esteem you for your humility and your desire to love God and please God. Would you rather go to hell with your pride intact, or humbly enter heaven.

Finally, when you stumble and fall, and you will, don't stay down there, but repent and repent quickly. Tears of repentance drown sin and quench the just wrath of God. As a gentle answer can turn away wrath, so tears of repentance gain mercy from God. Ask God to quicken your conscience to hate sin quickly and never become hardened to it or give up. Ask for Him to give you a stronger desire for a pure heart.

Confess your sin, repent of it boldly and ask forgiveness humbly and He will forgive. In other words, take sin seriously. In our culture sin is not taken seriously. It's winked at, approved, excused, called an illness or a disease. Or we are just victims to be pitied or encouraged.

I John 1:9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

I Peter 2:24 He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness.

Pursue purity of heart at any cost for the sake of those watching and for the sake of your own souls.

Prayer: Holy and merciful Father, have mercy on us and forgive us for our failures in the continual fight against sin. Forgive us for weak and half-hearted efforts and prayers. By the power of your Holy Spirit in us, grant us new resolve and new power and a greater love and knowledge of you. Grant us the will to say no to every temptation and to resist Satan at every turn. Sever the root of sin in our hearts and replace it with a far greater and purer passion to be like Christ. May your name and the name of Christ which we bear as Christians be so precious to us that we might never defile it. In the pure and holy and mighty name of Jesus we pray, Amen.