

## “Salted with Fire”

Scripture: Mark 9:38-50

Graphics: salt, fire, body parts

Big Truth: The people of the Panama UMC will face trials, in relationships, in work and family life, and in the church. Jesus calls us welcome others into the ministry and to not be a barrier for people coming to Him and serving Him, requiring us to grow in holiness and righteousness through weeding out sin in our own lives. Together, we can go through trials, stronger and resilient so the world can see it and Him in us.

Focus Phrase: Jesus calls me to be refined through fire and become a preserver of peace.

### 1. Introduction

- A. Let's **PRAY!!!**
- B. So, is salt **GOOD** for you or **BAD** for you? That's the age old question. I think in some ways salt is essential. In others ways, too much salt in the wrong ways leads to high blood pressure. One thing's for sure: salt is salt. NaCl - sodium chloride.
- C. Same thing with fire. Good? Lots of times. Bad? Also, yes. Fire can cook, heat, and purify. Fire can destroy, devour, and change.
- D. Today, we're going to hear Jesus talk about salt and fire...and what those two elements can teach us about becoming better disciples...some good, some bad.
- E. So far, in our journey through the middle of the gospel of Mark we've heard Jesus say these things:
  - i. "...it is from within, from the human heart, that evil intentions come..." (Mark 7:21) Tradition is OK, but faith in Jesus is the critical.
  - ii. In Mark 8:34, Jesus said, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me." It's not about you or me, but about Jesus.
  - iii. After hearing an honest plea for faith from a man whose son was possessed, Jesus said, "All things can be done for the one who believes." (Mark 9:23) And the boy was healed and the man came to faith, despite his doubts.
  - iv. Then, Jesus said in Mark 9:37, "Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me." Get little in His name, church.
- F. Have faith. Be humble. Give up your status. Welcome the least and last. Are we starting to see a pattern of the blueprint of a disciple - the making of disciples? I think so...
- G. But did the original twelve disciples see it? I'm not so sure.

- H. Thankfully, we have the gospel and thousands of years of learning from it. Yet, even with that run-up to the gospels, we can still find ourselves, like the disciples, not fully clear on Jesus' mission and vision for the Kingdom He was ushering into the world.
- I. As we get to the end of chapter 9, the disciples were once again confused about what Jesus was asking of them. I mean, they couldn't heal the possessed boy. They were arguing about who was greatest. They've had a hard time understanding Jesus' parables. They were still unclear about Jesus' talk of death and resurrection.
- J. In all this, two things were happening: (1) the disciples were struggling to learn the mission, and (2) the disciples were slowly growing in faith and knowledge of Jesus. In fact, it was through the trials and struggles to understand that they would become confident in the mission. And THEY would be the ones to change the world.
- K. As modern-day disciples, we're called to persevere...to keep learning and growing to be Jesus' followers, to grow in faith, and change the world.
- L. That's our calling...and that's why we're journeying through Mark's gospel.
- M. We've called this sermon Salted with Fire...two things that prepare us.
- N. So, let's turn to Mark 9, in verse 38...probably still in the house in Capernaum, with a small child still in their midst.
- O. Grab that bible and let's go...

## 2. Scripture

### A. READ Mark 9:38-41

- i. Let's stop there for a moment.
- ii. I sense that this opening statement from John grew out of the disciples' confusion about not being able to cast out the demon from the boy earlier in Mark 9. Maybe it even had something to do with who was the greatest among them.
- iii. (swagger) John said, "We saw someone casting out demons IN YOUR NAME, and we tried to stop him because he wasn't following us."
- iv. We don't know if John was trying to brag to Jesus, if John was trying to win points, or if he was trying to figure out what Jesus wanted from them. I mean, 9 of the CHOSEN Twelve couldn't cast out ONE demon, and there was someone (some no-name) casting out demons (multiple demons) in Jesus' name, and he was not one of the Twelve. What gives?
- v. Can't you just hear John saying, "Don't worry, Jesus, we stopped him. We're all good now. Crisis averted."

- vi. But instead of saying, “Hey, thanks, John! You’re the best!” Jesus said, “Don’t DO that, guys!” Wait, what?
- vii. See, John was just trying to find the boundaries of the disciple job description. I can’t even imagine how frustrating it must’ve been to be one of the Twelve and try to figure out what your job was supposed to be.
- viii. Jesus, though, once again, used this discussion as a teaching moment.
- ix. He said, “Do not stop him (or anyone else) from casting out demons (Jesus called them **deeds of power**) in my name...because, “...no one who does those deeds of power **in my name** will then be able to turn around speak evil of me.” They’re on our team. Whoever is for us can’t be against us.
- x. See, the disciples were trying to figure out who was IN the Kingdom and called to do Kingdom work...and who wasn’t. They knew the Pharisees and scribes weren’t on the team. They knew the demons were out.
- xi. John thought, incorrectly, that it was about being one of the Twelve with Jesus. Jesus said it was not about THAT, but about HIM - about Jesus.
- xii. And it wasn’t just about casting out demons or feeding thousands or walking on water (deeds of power). Those things are great and amazing! But the deeds of power in the Kingdom also include someone giving a thirsty person a cup of cold water in Jesus’ name - because of Christ. Or someone who welcomes a child warmly in Jesus’ name. That person, no matter who they are, is IN the Kingdom...is serving and welcoming and loving, just like welcoming a child.
- xiii. And don’t miss that Jesus twice mentioned that those things must be done IN MY NAME. Because Jesus has saved them and changed their life, then...(fill in the blank). It’s not about WHAT but about WHO - Jesus.
- xiv. We don’t hear from John again in this section...I’m pretty sure he got small before Jesus and lost all the bravado he was trying to show to win points.
- xv. Jesus was teaching them that they aren’t the ones to say who’s in and who’s out, and what gifts are to be used and when. THAT is God’s job and is empowered by faith in Jesus alone.
- xvi. But, Jesus wasn’t done...not only were the disciples to welcome and encourage all those who were coming in faith to Jesus, but they were ALSO to not be a barrier to anyone because of their sin...verse 42...

**B. READ Mark 9:42-50**

- i. When we hear Jesus talking about amputation and gouging out eyes and stuff, we get a little uncomfortable. Is this a horror film? I don’t even like getting a brush burn, for crying out loud. How could one chop off a foot?
- ii. The disciples were probably shocked speechless!

- iii. But, Jesus wasn't talking about the disciples ACTUALLY harming themselves, though, right?
- iv. Usually when Jesus uses these unbelievable metaphors, he's getting at something more subtle and yet SO IMPORTANT. The bigger the magnification of reality, the more important the point with Jesus.
- v. In this case, He's talking about sin in their lives that would damage someone else's faith. Sin is a subject that Jesus takes seriously. He's dead serious about it...and would DIE, literally, and DID, so that sin and its evil effects could be eradicated from the disciples' lives and from the world.
- vi. He just got done saying to John, "Don't stand in the way of someone acting in my name." But then he turned up the heat...AND (AND!) if you intentionally or unknowingly put up a stumbling block before one of these little ones who believes in me...it would be better if you were executed by drowning. Jesus was probably pointing to the little one standing with them...but he was also talking about those who were new to faith or just hearing about him.
- vii. How serious is Jesus about this? I'd say he's dead serious.
- viii. If your hand or foot or eye causes you to stumble, cut it off, gouge it out... it's better to only have ONE (hand, foot, eye) and live eternally in the Kingdom than to have both and perish in the unquenchable fire.
- ix. A few points for context here:
  - a. First, the Greek word used for "to stumble" has the implication that the person that stumbled would lose their faith. Its root word in Greek is to *scandalize*. Jesus was warning the disciples that if they did anything that would scandalize or cause someone to lose their faith, even their own, then the consequences were severe. This was a matter of disciplining themselves to learn to welcome and not be a barrier.
  - b. Second, Jesus' reference to the unquenchable fire was a general reference to hell. Jewish people - including the disciples - understood hell to be like the garbage dump fires that burned outside the gates of Jerusalem. It was at that site in the OT that pagans used to sacrifice children...and where in the first century all the garbage from the city went to be burned...and those fires never went out, and it reeked and choked and was filled with maggots and gross things. THAT's the picture Jesus wanted them to see in their mind's eye.
- x. Then Jesus simply said, "For everyone will be salted with fire. Salt is good; but if salt has lost its saltiness, how can you season it? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another."

- xi. Let me read Eugene Peterson's paraphrase of those two verses, which I think can help us: "Everyone's going through a refining fire sooner or later, but you'll be well-preserved, protected from the eternal flames. Be preservatives yourselves. Preserve the peace."
- xii. Jesus' message to the disciples was about the mission. It was about what it would take to be fully formed as a disciple: welcome into the fold all those who are seeking Jesus and working for God...and get rid of any sin in your life because sin may cause people to lose their faith, maybe you.
- xiii. When you do THAT, when you go through the purifying fire of God's holiness, then you'll be ready to persevere and preserve peace for Him.
- xiv. Jesus didn't say those two things were easy. He simply commanded them to do them to grow and serve all people.

### 3. Application

- A. Salt is the thing that preserves food. It adds flavor for us. It's basic and common. Yet, salt is the thing that Jesus used as a metaphor for a disciple's life that impacts and changes the world around it.
- B. Fire is another basic element. It adds heat and light. It changes everything it touches. For Jesus, fire is the thing that destroys and yet it refines the life of disciple. It destroys the sin and refines the purity in a disciple's life.
- C. A follower of Jesus who's **salted with fire** is a disciple who is not only changing from the inside out for Him, but is impacting the world for Jesus. Fire and salt...salted with fire.
- D. Being purified and salty are no easier for us than they were for the first disciples. In some ways, we know more about what Jesus expects and how that's all been lived out since He said those words.
- E. But, is the hard work of discipleship worth the promise that Jesus gives us that when we grow, we become more salty for the world?
- F. Our mission here at PUMC is to Make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. Our vision is to lovingly give every person in our community the opportunity to believe in and follow Jesus. That takes the refiner's fire to make us holy and the saltiness of Jesus to impact the world for Him.
- G. The hard questions are:
  - i. Who are we excluding because of our attitudes and concepts of who is in and who is out? Are you willing to let God set the boundaries?
  - ii. What in me needs to change so I'm never a stumbling block to someone else? Is it my pride? My apathy? Our traditions?
  - iii. Am I holding onto something someone said or did in the church? Has that been a stumbling block for me?

- H. The obvious application from Jesus to us is that we're called to be ready to welcome new people into our midst, for the sake of the Kingdom.
- I. And, as followers of Jesus, to work to get rid of all sin in our lives so that it doesn't cause someone us or someone else to abandon their faith.
- J. But Jesus closed by saying that all of us will go through trials on the way to that mission - those refining fires in our lives. And those trials will not only purify us, but will give us Kingdom saltiness that will impact our world for Jesus.
  - i. Whether it's a career crisis or health struggle, working through communication issues in a relationship or discerning God's direction, trials grow us if we give it to God.
  - ii. Trials have the potential to make us bitter. At no other time in our history has something that should have united us against a common enemy caused us to be so painfully divided with this global pandemic. John wanted his way to divide. Jesus wanted the Kingdom to unite them in His name.
  - iii. You have the opportunity to allow the Holy Spirit to burn away everything that divides and become salty for the Kingdom. Don't run from the trials or fight about it, as much as your fight or flight mechanisms want to. Stop and allow God to show you a better way.
  - iv. If there's sin in your life, be honest about it. Share it with your sisters and brothers. Share it with me. Jesus' words of warning are not just for the disciples, but for you and me. It would be better for you and me to lose a limb or eye than to cause someone else to sin. Take a 360-degree view of your life and ask a trusted friend.
  - v. Let the fire purify. Because where the fire purifies, it also intensifies the salt God has given you to make a difference in world for good.
  - vi. Be salty. Have the unique, kingdom characteristics of a follower of Jesus... not the traits of every other random person in this messed-up world. People will see someone different in you...something salty...something fiery... something peaceful and hopeful.
  - vii. Jesus calls us to be refined through fire and become preservers of peace.

#### **4. Conclusion**

- A. Salt and fire. Fire and salt. Two basic elements that can do incredible good and yet also do devastating damage. It's the same for us.
- B. Disciples of Jesus grow when we're salty - taking on the flavor of Jesus - and when we're purified in the fire of life for Jesus. Grow as followers of this Jesus who gave it all so you could be saved for His work...His glory...His kingdom.
- C. Go be salty and fiery for Him.
- D. Let's pray...