

'...Have Salt in Yourselves, and Have Peace With One another.' Mar 9:50 B

by G. Campbell Morgan

Jesus teaches that true greatness is found in serving others and that the salt of holiness and purification must be present in our lives to produce peace and unity among believers.

Scripture: Matthew 5:13, Mark 9:35-37, Mark 9:39-40, Mark 9:42, Mark 9:50, Romans 12:18, Philippians 2:3-4, Hebrews 12:14, James 3:18

Topics: "Humility", "Service"

Description

G. Campbell Morgan emphasizes the teachings of Jesus regarding humility and service, as illustrated by the disciples' disputes over greatness. He explains that true greatness in the Kingdom of God is found in being a servant to all, and that the 'salt' Jesus refers to symbolizes the inner purity and passion for holiness that prevents corruption and fosters peace among believers. Morgan highlights the importance of recognizing the value of every individual, especially the 'little ones,' and the need for a community that prioritizes service over ambition. Ultimately, he calls for a personal commitment to purity, which is essential for achieving genuine peace with one another.

Transcript

Mar 9:30-50.

IN our last meditation we considered the events which followed immediately upon the experiences of the holy mount. In the valley we saw the demonized boy, the distracted father, the defeated disciples, and the disputing scribes; and our Lord's dealing with all. He cast out the demon, gave the boy back to his father, instructed His disciples as to the secret of their failure, and silenced the disputing scribes.

The first paragraph in our present meditation tells what immediately followed. Jesus and His disciples left the neighbourhood of Caesarea Philippi. He led them through Galilee, evidently along by-paths, and the less frequented roads, for the express purpose of giving them further teaching concerning all that lay before Him of suffering, death, and resurrection. They listened to Him, but did not understand, and were evidently afraid to ask Him.

The measure of their failure is illustrated in the story which follows. It is evident therefrom that in the intervals of His teaching they had been disputing among themselves as to their respective greatness. This

is one instance of many in the Gospel stories, recording the doings of these last days in the mission of Christ, revealing the unutterably sad fact, that when their Lord attempted to draw these men into sympathy with Himself, as He walked the *via dolorosa*-His face steadfastly set toward Jerusalem, His passion baptism, and the consummation of His mission-they broke in sooner or later upon His conversation, either by asking a similar question, or by their own disputes concerning which should be counted the greatest. One can almost imagine that the fact that Peter, James, and John had been with Him on the holy mount, had given rise to the dispute. It may be that when they came back to the nine who had been left in the valley, they assumed some air of spiritual superiority, because they had been with Him on the mount. Be this as it may, we are told that they disputed amongst themselves which should be the greater; and at last, when they came to Capernaum, the Lord Himself raised the subject. All that follows in this paragraph is related with this subject, and all finds culmination in the text: "Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace one with another." In it then, we have His final words in this relation.

In order that we may better understand their value, we must take time to set this story clearly before our minds beginning with the Lord's inquiry when they came to Capernaum. In the early days of His Galilean ministry He made Capernaum the base of His operations, and there is every reason to believe that the house where He sojourned was that of Simon Peter. When they were in the house He asked them, "What were ye reasoning on the way?" They were silent, and did not answer Him, for they had disputed one with another in the way who was the greatest. Immediately that He asked the question, they knew that their disputing had been unworthy, and so they were silent. Then, accepting the shame that was evidenced in their silence, the Lord proceeded to teach them, and first of all stated the whole fact as to respective greatness within the ranks of His disciples, and in His Kingdom in this word: "If any man would be first he shall be last of all, and minister of all." This was not a suggestion on our Lord's part that if a man were ambitious he should be relegated to some place of obscurity, but it was a revelation of the true secret of greatness in His Kingdom. Not the man who masters others, but the man whom every one masters, and is thereby compelled to serve, is the greatest within the Kingdom.

Having so said, He gave them the beautiful illustration that we all so much admire. He took a little child and put him in the midst of them; and then taking him in His arms He continued His conversation. He took a little child not specially prepared for the occasion, not a catechumen who was prepared for the hour but an ordinary boy, perchance the boy of Simon Peter, and then continued, "Whosoever shall receive one of such little children in My name, receiveth Me: and whosoever receiveth Me, receiveth not Me," but God, "Him that sent Me."

In the Revised Version at this point, correctly, there is a new paragraph. The new paragraph, however, does not mean that the subject is changed. "John said unto Teacher, we saw one casting out demons in Thy and we forbade him, because he followed not us." John was not making a boast in something he had done. He confessed to failure. John, in many regards the most wonderful of the apostles, the man of keenest insight, quickest intuition, recognized here immediately that he had been doing something wrong. If indeed it be true that to receive a little child, an ordinary everyday child, is to receive Christ, and to receive God, said John within himself, What did I do when I forbade that man who in the Name was casting out a demon? Verily the light, had broken in upon him.

Our Lord first answered the confession of John: "Forbid him not: for there is no man who shall do a mighty work in My name, and be able quickly to speak evil of Me. For he that is not against us is for us. For whosoever shall give you a cup of water to drink, because ye are Christ's, verily I say unto you, he shall in no wise lose his reward." Then, resuming the discourse where it had been interrupted, He said, "And

whosoever shall cause one of these little ones that believe on Me to stumble, it were better for him if a great millstone were hanged about his neck, and he were cast into the sea." Continuing in most solemn and searching teaching, He enforced this principle, until at last He reached the words, "Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace one with another."

In the light of the context then, let us consider this injunction, observing the two things: "Have salt in yourselves," and "Be at peace one with another." The instruction is the revelation of a sequence. First then, the salt that produces peace; and secondly, the peace that is produced by salt.

We recognize at once, that we are in the presence of one of the paragraphs of the New Testament which has caused difficulty and perplexity to expositors. This is specially so with regard to the previous verse to our text: "For every one shall be salted with fire. Salt is good; but if the salt have lost its saltiness, wherewith will ye season it?" The injunction, "Have salt in yourselves" grows out of this declaration and this inquiry. We may get nearer the heart of our Lord's meaning as we allow the text to be interpreted by the things already said, even though at first it seems as though there was little connection. "Have salt in yourselves." A little while before He said, "Every one shall be salted with fire." That was not a new beginning, but something that followed upon words such as these, "unquenchable fire," "Gehenna."

The explanation of the meaning of our Lord's use of the figure of salt may be derived from the previous statement, "Every one shall be salted with fire." The term "fire" interprets the term "salt" for this particular occasion. There are other occasions where the term "salt" may be used with another signification, though in the last analysis I should hardly be prepared to admit that; for I believe at its heart it is always allied to the meaning it has here. Fire destroys the perishable, and perfects that which is imperishable. Our Lord in the previous teaching had referred to Gehenna. Let us remember that He was speaking in the hearing of men to whom that connoted one particular idea. They knew perfectly well that He was using a most drastic figure of speech, one that was terrific in its suggestiveness. The valley of Gehenna, a gorge outside Jerusalem, was historic. In the valley of Tophet, Solomon had first erected an altar to the worship of Moloch. At a later and more depraved period in the history of the kingdom of Judah, Ahaz and Manasseh had offered human sacrifices to Moloch in that very valley, until the reformation period came under king Josiah. One thing which Josiah did in the course of his reformation was to defile the valley where Moloch had been worshipped, casting refuse there, making it from that time through all the successive years the place where all the evil things of the city were cast out for destruction. The purpose of Gehenna then, was the purification of the life of the city. Those smouldering fires, destroying vulgarity and obscenity, were in themselves witnesses of the necessity for the sanitation of Jerusalem.

This was a drastic figure, and our Lord was not the first who made use of it. When this began cannot be said, but Tophet, Gehenna, was the perpetual figure employed for the place of punishment beyond this life, the strange and mysterious realm in the universe of God, made necessary for the purification of that universe; hell itself, with all the old meaning of the word delivered from its base and corrupt materialism; hell, as Jesus said, where "their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched." That was the reference, first of all to a place geographical and actual, as a civic necessity, and secondly and consequently, to a place and state moral and spiritual, and as equally a necessity in the Divine economy. In other words, fire as our Lord used it here, was the symbol of the principle that makes no peace with evil. The fire of Gehenna is the holiness of God. Said Jesus at last to these disciples, Have that fire burning within yourselves, and so be at peace one with another. "Every, one shall be salted with fire." Fire destroys the perishable, but perfects that which is imperishable.

Change the figure to salt, and see how near we are to the thought. Salt prevents corruption and preserves soundness. Behind the word "soundness" is the thought of sanitation, and involved in the word "sanitation" is the condition of health; and at the heart of the word "health" is the principle of holiness. Salt prevents disintegration, and corruption, and preserves soundness and health. Salt is also of the fire nature; a subtle, penetrative, permeative flame that searches out every element of destruction, and holds it in check, and annihilates it; in order that there may be opportunity for the growth and development and enlargement of that which makes for health. "Have salt in yourselves."

To come nearer to the Lord's meaning when He laid this charge upon His disciples, we must recognize that the moral and spiritual values are revealed in the previous teaching. There is first that which is relative, and then that which lies behind it and is personal, apart from which the relative is impossible of realization.

Notice first the relative teaching. "Whosoever shall cause one of these little ones that believe on Me to stumble, it were better for him if a great millstone were hanged about his neck, and he were cast into the sea." Christ was here calling for such passion for service in order to the perfecting of others, that sudden and violent extinction is counted preferable to causing a little one to stumble. He was holding up before the eyes of His astonished disciples an ideal, that seemed for the moment to have very little application to their disputing by the way. I think as He talked, the boy was still in His arms, and that though spiritually here He may have come to the consideration of the life of the little ones who had but recently believed in Him, He was not far away from the child, nor the child from Him. With that ordinary boy, suddenly arrested, apprehended, caught up in His arms, He said: Rather than make this little child stumble, it were better for a man if a great millstone were hanged about his neck, and he were cast into the sea.

Then He immediately passed from that description of relative passion for service to the individual condition that makes it possible. He declared in effect that such passion is generated by the personal intolerance of evil which prefers maiming, to deflection from the way of truth. The hand, the actual deed; the foot, the approach or direction toward evil; the eye, the sight or desire that inspires the approach, and issues in the deed; all must be dealt with. Our Lord here calls for such passion for purity within the soul, that if necessary it shall be maintained by maiming and mutilation. The supreme thought running through all the teaching is that of the necessity for purity, at all costs. "Have salt in yourselves"; let there be burning within you the very fire which makes conflict with sin and with evil. It is as though the Lord had said: Unless this awful fire of Divine holiness burn within you as a passion that destroys within your lives all evil things, there will be no escape from the ultimate Gehenna, in which that fire is forever consuming. It is as though our Lord had said to those first disciples: The only way to escape the ultimate Gehenna of fire, is for that fire to burn within you, of your own volition, thus purifying the soul. It is Christ's call to resolute and sacrificial purity. When the writer of the letter to the Hebrews wrote "Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin," he did not mean a resistance that makes the blood flow through blows implanted by an enemy. The reference was surely to Gethsemane, when "His sweat became as it were great drops of blood"; the mental pressure and agony being so terrific that all the functions of nature were arrested and revolutionized. Salt! Not some light sentimental word is this, suggesting an application that is merely invigorating and refreshing in some moral sense; but the salt that is fire, of the very fire of hell itself against sin; so that the right hand, the right foot, must be cut off, the right eye be gouged out, in order that the soul may be clean and pure.

Peace among ourselves then is not something that may be arranged for, by taking counsel with one another, in order that we may abandon some conviction that we hold dear. Strong lasting peace, that

knows no ultimate disturbance, must be based upon a purity that is produced by salt which is fire; "first pure, then peaceable." Our Lord by this apparently strange teaching, flashed back upon the disputing by the way 'the light of the Divine estimation of it, and revealed the fact that all such disputing sprang out of the toleration of evil within the soul in some form or another; and that wherever those who name His name, and profess to follow Him, and are walking after Him, dispute among themselves as to greatness, they are revealing some malady far deeper than the symptom would suggest to the casual observer. They are revealing the fact that down beneath the disputation is disease, spiritual and moral, which cannot be treated with rose-water, and needs the fire of salt, terrific in its burning, and destructive of all that is capable of destruction; fire which destroys the perishable, but thank God, gives the soundness of health every opportunity.

Now, glancing back from this word of Jesus to the original cause of the story, to the fact of their disputing, and then to John's confession, and all that it meant, we gather what the peace is, which salt produces. I shall make two suggestions only.

The action of such salt first produces the transmutation of ambition. Wherever there is the action of this salt there is the death of the absorbing passion for greatness, and the birth of the edifying passion for service. Mark the difference between these things. The passion for personal greatness is always a disrupting element anywhere and everywhere, in all human life and society. Wherever that passion burns there is the destruction of peace, and of a true order. These men were troubled about who was the greatest. In the place of that absorbing passion for greatness was born, what for lack of a more striking word I have described as the edifying, passion for service. He who would be greatest, let him be least of all, minister of all. When this salt is in the life, when this fire burns within the soul, it indeed

"Burns up the dross of base desire, And makes the mountains flow."

Wherever this salt is active in the life, there is born a passion not for the exercise of authority, but for the rendering of service. Surely no one can read this carefully without being ashamed. No congregation of Christian souls can consider these ideals, and this teaching of Jesus, without coming to the almost appalling recognition of the fact of how little we know of this experimentally. Yet, thank God there have been and still are multitudes of those in whom this salt burns, producing God's own purity; and in every such case they are those whose one mastering eagerness is to serve; and where there is eagerness to serve, then the little one is received; and where there is eagerness to serve, disputes about greatness finally end. Where there is eagerness to serve there is peace.

But not only does this salt produce the transmutation of ambition. It produces also the enlargement of fellowship. Everywhere this salt operates; there is the death of the sense of the dignity of official privilege. Now this was, the trouble in the case of John. John told the Lord-and the grace of his heart is revealed in the fact that he made confession-that "We saw one," not attempting to cast out demons, but doing it. "We saw one casting out demons"; not by any of the incantations of the heathen, but "in Thy name; and we forbade him, because he followed not us"! He was irregular, he was not in the true order, he was not in the appointed succession, he was outside! Oh! the devilishness of it I am not going to withdraw that word the devilishness of this sense of official privilege and dignity. Quick and sharp and stern, like a crack of thunder following a blaze of lightning, came the Lord's word "Forbid him not: for there is no man which shall do a mighty work in My name, and be able quickly to speak evil of Me. For he that is not against us is for us." Yet I wonder if I have misinterpreted the tone and temper of Jesus by suggesting that He spoke in any such harsh accents! I do not know, for it seems to me after all that if this were a word of thunder,

behind the thunder was all the refreshment and coolness and beauty of a high conception of fellowship. "He followed not us." No, but "he . . . is for us." Jesus here used the plural, putting the twelve back into fellowship with Himself; He is for us, not against us.

Wherever this salt burns in the life, there is not only the enlargement of fellowship that results from the death of the sense of the dignity of official privilege; there is also the birth of the recognition of the supremacy of the name. "He that receiveth one such little child in My name." That is what arrested John, and made him say, "Teacher, we saw one casting out demons in Thy name; and we forbade him." So our Lord immediately responded, taking up exactly the same thought as He said, "No man can do a mighty work in My name, and be able quickly to speak evil of Me." Presently He said another thing, which we have rather lost by our translation. "Whosoever shall give you a cup of water to drink, in the name that ye are Christ's." That is quite literal. We have translated actually as to sense, "Because ye are Christ's"; but we have lost something of the impact. "Shall give you a cup of cold water to drink in the name that ye are Christ's, Verily I say unto you!" The dignity and the supremacy of the name was sealed. That man does not follow Me, but if he, in the name, cast out a demon, then that man is included in the fellowship. So the borders of fellowship are flung back, and the company of the comrades of the Crusade is enlarged; but we shall never be willing to admit that, until this salt, this fire, permeates the life and purifies it.

In conclusion note again the command. "Have salt in yourselves"; that is the personal note. "Be at peace one with another"; that is the relative note. The first is superlative, the second is sequential. If we would have true peace one with another, our first business must be to obey the earlier injunction, "Have salt in yourselves."

Yet look back once more to the statement and question preceding the text, which gives a wider view of the meaning of the experience, on which we can only enter as We go back to the narrowness of the injunction. What then is this statement and this inquiry? "Salt is good; but if the salt have lost its saltness, wherewith will ye season it?" This is a larger word, having a wider application. This is a word that is true to the music of that which Jesus had already said in His manifesto, on an earlier occasion. "Ye are the salt of the earth." In that word of Jesus all the world was taken into account. Then immediately we are reminded that men having salt in themselves, exert an influence of salt in the world; and only as we have salt in ourselves and are at peace one with another can we exert the influence of salt in the world, or become peacemakers.

What do we know of this salt, which is a fire, and oftentimes a pain and an agony, burning with a passion for purity that will make no terms with evil in our lives? It is only upon, the basis of such purity, resulting from such action of the fire of salt and the salt of fire, that we can ever be at peace.

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