

# WELCOME A LITTLE CHILD IN JESUS' NAME

Mark 9:30-50

Key Verse: 9:37

**“Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me does not welcome me but the one who sent me.”**

In Mark's gospel Jesus predicts his suffering, death and resurrection three times to his twelve disciples (8:31-32; 9:31-32; 10:32-34). These predictions were revealed progressively. They comprise an important theme of Jesus' teaching because they deal with the main work the Messiah would do. Each time Jesus predicted this, his disciples reacted strongly against it. They seemed to be following Jesus at a distance, as in a parallel line. But Jesus never compromised with them. Each time they reacted, Jesus took the opportunity with them, both personally and as a community, to teach them his mindset. In chapter 8 Jesus' emphasis seems to be on following him personally. In chapters 9 and 10, the emphasis is more on following him in community life. In today's passage Jesus teaches them how to overcome conflict, rooted in self-centeredness, and have peace among them, rooted in Christ-centeredness.

Every community has conflict, strife, competition, arguments, dissension, jealousy, and the like. There may be many reasons, but the main cause is self-centeredness. This is the essence of what sin is. Each one claims that the universe revolves around them. Each one insists on their own rights, privileges and ways, regardless of the effect on others. This is revealed through the symptomatic use of “I,” “my,” and “me” in conversation. Each one is consumed by their own thoughts and activity and talk a lot about what they are doing, and what their children are doing and what their company or school is doing and so on. They have no room to consider others. There is a saying, “Each one's cold is more serious than another's cancer.” This is evident to some extent in Christian communities as well. We also have the tendency to talk about “my struggle,” “my family,” “my Bible student,” “my campus,” “my church,” and so on. Because of this self-centered mindset, there is conflict and disharmony, and no peace. This kind of atmosphere makes newcomers and young people very uncomfortable. They expect that Christians will love one another deeply from their hearts—understand one another, yield to one another, forgive one another, and embrace one another. They long for this kind of loving community. But they often find the same kinds of conflicts in the church that they experience in the world. They are sick and tired of living in that kind of environment. That is one reason why some of them do not remain in the church. So

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it is extremely important that we form a loving community. With this problem awareness let's listen to Jesus' words.

**First, welcome a little child in Jesus' name (30-37).** After Jesus and his disciples left the mount of transfiguration, they headed for Jerusalem, passing through Galilee (30a). Though Jesus was popular in Galilee, he did not want anyone to know he was there, because he was focusing on teaching his disciples (30b-31a). Jesus' teaching was not instructional—to do or not do something; it was to plant in their hearts and minds what the Messiah would do for people. He said to them, **“The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men. They will kill him, and after three days he will rise”** (31b). This is the second prediction of Jesus' suffering, death and resurrection. It does not have as much detail as the first, but it includes progressive revelation that was more difficult to accept. This time Jesus indicated that he would be **“delivered into the hands of men.”** This comes from the Greek word, “*παραδίδομι*,” (*paradidomi*), which can be understood as **“betrayed,”** as other versions translate. This implicates Judas Iscariot, Jesus' beloved disciple. Betrayal by a beloved one is the most difficult pain a person can experience. Once, a Bible student I served with all my heart got together with a girl in our fellowship and left the ministry. I felt betrayed and prayed for God's justice upon him. I cannot imagine the pain Jesus felt over Judas' betrayal, whom he had loved and trusted. Usually, if we know that betrayal will happen, we take steps to deal with it beforehand. But Jesus did not expose Judas. Jesus must have been brokenhearted. Yet Jesus loved Judas unconditionally, bore all his weaknesses, and even washed his dirty feet. Jesus went to the cross and died in great shame and pain to take up all our dirty and despicable sins. From the cross Jesus forgave all terrible sinners who accept him. Then God raised Jesus from the dead and made him Savior and King, triumphant over all the injustice and evil, who reigns with the Father in the kingdom of God forever.

How did the disciples respond to Jesus' prediction? They did not understand what he meant and were afraid to ask him about it (32). Here we can see that the disciples had made some progress. After Jesus' first prediction, they flatly rejected his teaching and Peter even rebuked Jesus. But this time they were not so upset. Rather, they were afraid to speak up. Perhaps they were afraid to be rebuked by Jesus. But more than that, they did not want him to suffer and die. They tried to forget about it and just go on their way. As they walked along the road, they tried to avoid Jesus and talked among themselves. Inevitably each one began to brag about himself and it escalated into an argument about who was the greatest among them. They came to Capernaum. When Jesus was in the house, he felt that the atmosphere had become tense. So he asked them, **“What were you arguing about**

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**on the road?"** (33) They suddenly became very quiet, realizing that they were wrong (34). They expected Jesus to be upset, but he was patient.

Sitting down, Jesus called the Twelve to him. He used this opportunity to teach them who is truly great, saying, **"Anyone who wants to be first must be the very last, and the servant of all"** (35). What does it mean to be "the very last" and "the servant of all"? Jesus explained through a demonstration by taking a child in his arms and saying to them, **"Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me does not welcome me but the one who sent me"** (36-37). Here we need to understand the significance of Jesus' act in the context of those times. In America today children have many rights. It is almost illegal for parents to spank their children and some children have even sued their parents. But in Jesus' day children were marginalized. Children, along with women, were not included in number counts. The social status of children was similar to that of a servant. To welcome a little child meant to welcome the marginalized.

Who is marginalized in our times? In his book, "Searching for God Knows What," Donald Miller presents an example from circus life. In the past, people with grotesque deformities, such as a man with three legs, or a woman with a long beard, were put on display in the circus. As they traveled from town to town, local people paid to look at them closely. All of the people with deformities had been marginalized in society at large. But as they developed their own circus society, they formed a hierarchy. Since the man with three legs was more interesting to people than a woman with a beard, he was paid more and gained prestige. In the same way, whenever human beings form some kind of society, they make a hierarchy. In this hierarchy people on the bottom are marginalized. They are disregarded and ignored as useless burdens to society. In the Old Testament God always showed his compassion upon the marginalized, such as the poor, widows, orphans and foreigners (Ex 22:22-27; Dt 14:29). Jesus spent most of his time caring for the marginalized. Once Jesus was asked, **"Who is my neighbor?"** He responded with the parable of the good Samaritan. A man was beaten by robbers and left along the road to die. Both a priest and a Levite, who were most respected in their society, passed by him on the way to worship service. They both ignored him with good reasons. But a Samaritan stopped and helped the dying person with great compassion. In this parable, Jesus taught that we should help anyone who is in need physically, mentally or spiritually. Those who pursue top positions in a hierarchy easily ignore the marginalized. But Jesus teaches that the truly great person is the one who is considerate of the marginalized and serves them out of compassion. With this mindset, Jesus had called his disciples from Galilee, an area

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that was despised. Among the disciples, Jesus called Levi, a marginalized tax collector, and bore all of his sinsickness and raised him as the light of the world. Jesus became the friend of tax collectors and sinners. The prophet Isaiah described the Messiah with the words, **“A bruised reed he will not break, a smoldering wick he will not snuff out, till he has brought justice to victory”** (Mt 12:20). Jesus wanted his disciples to have this kind of mindset in welcoming the marginalized. This is the meaning of welcoming a little child in Jesus' name. It is a mystery, but those who welcome the marginalized welcome Jesus and the Father (Mt 25:40). Jesus wants us to have his mind. Let's pray for this.

**Second, welcome other Christian workers in Jesus' name (38-41).** In this part Jesus dealt with the issue of group exclusivism. John came to Jesus and said, **“Teacher, we saw someone driving out demons in your name and we told him to stop, because he was not one of us”** (38). Maybe John was sensitive because some disciples had recently failed to drive out a demon, while this man seemed very successful. John should have been happy to see others driving out demons in Jesus' name. From the perspective of God's kingdom, it was a victory over Satan's work. Our enemies are not flesh and blood, but the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms (Eph 6:12). Jesus taught us to pray, **“Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven”** (Mt 6:9b-10). Jesus teaches us our foremost prayer topic: it is for God's honor and his kingdom. If God is honored and his kingdom advanced in every area of our lives we should be happy. That should be the deep desire and mindset of God's children. John's problem was that he was not God-centered, but group-centered. John was very proud of being in Jesus' group. He thought other groups had no right to do what his group was doing. He thought his group was the best and all others were second-class. So he looked down on other groups and thought he had authority to stop them. In doing so, he actually hindered the advance of God's kingdom. We call this kind of narrow group mentality exclusivism. Those in the group are often blind to the fact that what they are doing is wrong. But in fact it is sin, rooted in self-centeredness. Just as those who are self-centered wound others, so exclusive groups wound other groups.

John may have expected Jesus to commend him. What did Jesus say? **“Do not stop him. For no one who does a miracle in my name can in the next moment say anything bad about me, for whoever is not against us is for us”** (39-40). Jesus did not stop those who were working in his name. But he stopped John's exclusivism. In ancient times, loyalty to the king was the basis of unity among members regardless of their human distinctives. For example, the Roman Empire embraced all kinds of ethnic groups, cultures and religions as long as they

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pledged loyalty to the emperor. But if they were against the emperor, they would be destroyed mercilessly. That is why they persecuted Christians who were loyal to King Jesus. In God's kingdom, Jesus is the King. Anyone who confesses Jesus as Lord and works in his name should be respected and accepted on the basis of Jesus' name regardless of any other distinctives. This is a Christ-centered mindset. John's main problem is that in his self-centeredness, he did not know how precious he was to Jesus. Jesus said, **"Truly I tell you, anyone who gives you a cup of water in my name because you belong to the Messiah will certainly not lose their reward"** (41). Jesus' disciples belonged to the Messiah. Jesus loved them dearly and was aware of everything that was done to them. If even a cup of water was given to them in their time of need, Jesus knew about it and would reward the person who gave it to them. Jesus' disciples need to know how loved and precious they are to Jesus. In this they can find their identity. Jesus wants us to overcome ourselves, and have a Christ-centered mindset.

**Third, have salt among yourselves (42-50).** Thus far Jesus has taught how one can be truly great in his kingdom. It is by having Jesus' mindset to welcome the marginalized in his name and recognize other groups who work in his name. Now Jesus teaches that those who pursue greatness should be very considerate of young believers in regards to their influence. Jesus said in verse 42, **"If anyone causes one of these little ones—those who believe in me—to stumble, it would be better for them if a large millstone were hung around their neck and they were thrown into the sea."** This tells us how much Jesus values each of his little ones. Just as he is aware of every act of kindness done to one of them, he is also aware of every stumbling block that comes upon one of them. Just as Jesus rewards acts of kindness, he will punish those who cause little ones to sin. Young believers are vulnerable to temptation, impressionable and easily wounded. So they should be protected in a proper environment so they can grow strong enough to stand by themselves. Christian leaders should make every effort to form such environments. Some attitudes in leaders can cause young believers to stumble, such as a judgmental or complaining spirit, indifference, sinful indulgence, the tendency to gossip or slander, and so on. If we have these attitudes we need to repent. We should guard our hearts against such attitudes. Causing little ones to stumble is serious; it is better to be drowned in the sea with a large millstone on one's neck. Why is it so serious?

In verses 43-48 Jesus introduces the eternal consequences of sin. Jesus said that if one's hand, foot or eye causes us to sin, we should cut them off or pluck them out. It is better for us to enter eternal life with deformed bodies than to go to hell with a whole body. Someone said, "Even if I had fifty eyes, I would have to

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pluck them all out.” One person firmly decided not to sin by gambling. So he cut off his hands. Then he learned to gamble with his feet. Maybe, if he cut off his feet, he would still gamble with his lips. Solving our sin problem is not a matter of cutting off body parts, but of a change in heart. If we take Jesus’ words literally, we might imagine that the kingdom of God is filled with people who are missing eyes, hands and feet. But it is not. We should understand that Jesus is using hyperbole to make his point. Jesus wants us to be aware of the consequences of sin. Jesus explained what hell is like. Those in hell are eaten by worms that do not die and burned by fire that is never quenched (48). Many people take hell lightly and say, “Well, all my friends will be there. We will have fun.” But Jesus plainly teaches us that hell is a place of eternal suffering and condemnation. Jesus described hell in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus in Luke 16. The rich man was in agony in fire. He aware of who he was, and the spiritual condition of his unsaved family members. He knew he was justly punished. He longed for Lazarus to come to him to put water on his tongue. But it was impossible due to the great chasm between heaven and hell that no one can cross. C.S. Lewis, in “The Great Divorce,” describes the complete and eternal separation of those in hell, which causes unbearable loneliness.

After talking about the serious consequences of sin, Jesus began to explain how God works to purify believers in this lifetime. Jesus said, **“Everyone will be salted with fire”** (49). Here “fire” refers to God’s purifying work, through all kinds of trials and hardships, which come to everyone. For those who believe, it refines them like pure gold (1 Pe 1:7). But for those who do not believe, this fire is judgment. Being salted with fire is good, for it refines our faith and preserves our purity. It makes us spicy, as influential people of God in a corrupted world. But if we lose saltiness, we become useless (50a). Jesus finished with these words, **“Have salt among yourselves and be at peace with each other”** (50b). This gives his disciples clear direction to resolve conflict and strife among them and form a loving and peaceful community. To have salt is to treasure Jesus most and to be loyal to him and the gospel at any cost. As each person seeks to put Christ at the center and to learn his mindset, Christ reigns in their fellowship. When Christ is at the center, conflict and strife are resolved and a loving and peaceful community can be established. It is most essential for each person to strive to learn the mind of Christ. Then the community can be a good and healthy environment for young believers, and a good influence to the society. Let’s overcome our self-centeredness by having Jesus’ mindset.