

Have Salt in Yourselves; Mark 9:49-50
0505-0507

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Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him if a great millstone were hung around his neck and he were thrown into the sea. And if your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life crippled than with two hands to go to hell, to the unquenchable fire.

And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life lame. Then with two feet to be thrown into hell. And if your eye causes you to sin, tear it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into hell where their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched for everyone will be salted with fire.

Salt is good, but if the salt has lost its saltiness, how will you make it salty again? Have salt in yourselves and be at peace with one another. Universally recognized as a very difficult text that is before us. It's difficult for us to understand. In at least four ways. It's difficult, first of all, because of the brevity of the text, we recognize that in this section, it's almost certain to be clear to us that this is a con a condensed section of a larger portion of Jesus's teaching.

As we read through the gospels, we should be careful not to read the gospels from the perspective that we're reading some sort of. Complete transcript of everything that Jesus said that the disciples were following Jesus around with pencil and paper Writing down every word. He said that was not the case and so oftentimes when we read the things that Jesus is recorded to say in the Gospels We remind ourself that we're not getting a complete word for word rendering of everything they said, particularly in longer teachings.

So this passage reads for us as something that would represent a smaller section of a larger teaching. It's concise in nature, and it is employing imagery that is foreign to us, difficult for us to understand. In particular, Jesus is employing two types of images. That don't seem to go together, the image of salt and fire, which we'll look at in just a few moments.

But these two images would have meant something to Jesus's original hearers that perhaps don't mean the same thing to us. And in addition to that, these two images are put together in such a way that just doesn't seem to be natural for us. It seems rather unnatural. In addition to those two reasons, it's also difficult because of the subject matter.

We talked about this last week that Jesus is talking about the subject of eternal death. We'll of eternal torment, and that is a difficult subject in nature for us to relate to. So the difficulty of the content also makes it difficult for us. But lastly, it's also a difficult text because of what we call textual variants.

Textual variants are just that, they are phrases, sometimes words, sometimes entire sentences in which there is some variation from manuscript to manuscript. So if you're following along with me this morning in the King James or the New King James, then it was quite obvious to you that verses 44 and verse 46 were not there.

If you are following along with a modern translation, such as our English Standard, then it may have been more difficult for you to notice unless you were following along closely with the numbers, the little verse numbers, and you noticed that the sequence was out of sequence. There was a 46, there was a 40, there was no 44, and there was no 46.

In addition to that, your Bible might have a footnote, At the end of verse 49, which says that some manuscripts will have a longer reading of verse 49, which includes this. Not only will everyone be salted with fire, but it also goes on to say, and all your sacrifices will also be salted with fire. So we have a number of what's called textual variants in this passage before us.

Mark, as we have said before, is the book of the New Testament that has the most of these textual variants for us to deal with. So what I thought that we would do at the outset here was just spend just a short amount of time, maybe 10, 12 minutes, I hope to keep it under 15 minutes, just to spend a few moments, because what I want to do is I want to help all of us to understand that when we talk about something like a textual variant, We are not talking about something that erodes our confidence in the scriptures.

Instead, it strengthens our confidence in the scriptures. So when we hear someone like a expositor of the word stand up and say, we have a textual variant in this. Ma, in this particular passage, there are some manuscripts. The older and the better manuscripts tend to read this way. And then the O, the younger manuscripts tend to read another way.

We hear that and our minds immediately want to think this, oh, we've got an unreliable passage, we've got an unreliable text. We've got disagreement between some of the ancient manuscripts, and that is what I wish to address head on. And so for the next few minutes, it might sound a little bit technical.

And a little bit unspiritual. However, it is in my estimation of the greatest importance that God's people always maintain the highest confidence and the highest regard for what you have right here in your lap. And so we'll spend just a few minutes to just address the issue of textual variance. So, we have at our disposal, as we know, we don't have the original manuscript that Mark wrote.

Instead, we have hand copies of not only what Mark wrote, but also of what all the other New Testament writers wrote. And those handwritten copies Sometimes there will be some variance in some of those. In particular, when we, most of us, grew up with the King James Version or the New King James Version, we will be reading from a translation of the original Greek manuscripts that was translated from manuscripts that are younger.

Now, today, living here in the 21st century, we have at our disposal manuscripts that are stunningly We read about particular manuscripts such as, for example, there is the very famous manuscript known as Papyrus 52, P52. If you pick up a commentary and that commentary is worth its salt, it will talk often about manuscripts such as, for example, P52.

P52 is a partial manuscript of John's gospel that dates to between 100 and 150 A. D. That is stunning. Because that puts that portion of John's manuscript to within anywhere between 30 and 80 years from the original writing. That may not be something that grabs you right now, something that's shocking and stunning, but it will in just a few moments.

That is incredibly close, in time wise, to the original writing of John's Gospel. So we have P52. We also have other manuscripts that have been discovered. Such as, for example, P30, P137, which is a manuscript of Mark's gospel that dates to somewhere between 150 AD and 250 AD. So placing it within about a hundred to 175 or so years, to the original writing of Mark's gospel, which is incredible.

We have also 2nd century manuscripts of 2 of John's gospel, 2 of Matthew's gospel. We have Hebrews, we have 5 of Paul's letters, we have Paul's letter to Titus, and we have the book of Acts. All dating to the 2nd century. That is stunning in its closeness to the original document of antiquity. So those All of those manuscripts that date to the second century have been discovered in the 19th and 20th century, most of them in the 19th century.

So what we have available to us are manuscripts that are far, far older and closer to the original writing of those. But in addition to that, we also have a wealth of manuscript evidence today. Does anybody want to take a guess? What do you think? How many ancient manuscripts of scripture do you think are in existent today?

Anybody want to take a guess? Would you say a hundred? A hundred ancient manuscripts of scripture? Who wants to go with a hundred? Two hundred? Anybody for five hundred?

We have more than 25,000 ancient manuscripts of scripture in our possession today. The vast majority of which were discovered since the translation of the King James in 1611. So we have a vast amount of manuscript evidence. In addition to that, we have old manuscript evidence. We have, in 1844, there was the discovery of something called Codex Sinaiticus.

Codex is just a word that scholars use that means book. And so what that means is this is a, a copy of the scriptures that was bound in book form, as opposed to a scroll form, or a leaf form. So we have this codex that dates to the fourth century, and this codex is a complete New Testament. We have today a complete New Testament dating to the fourth century, which is incredible in its, once again, its completeness and its closeness to the original.

And so what scholars do, they're, they're literally, this is no exaggeration, they're going to Scholars have spent millions, and that's not just a number I pull out of the sky, millions of hours comparing all of these manuscripts, looking for differences, notating all the differences, reconciling the differences.

So we have, scholars tell us, that we have absolute certainty of more than 99 percent of the words in your New Testament. Less than 1 percent of the words in your New Testament. Have any question revolving around them and the ones that do have some question revolving around them We have vast manuscript evidence to help us to get as close to the authentic and authoritative Original as possible.

So what I'm trying to communicate to you is a sense of great confidence That what you have is the reliable trustable Word of God so as we talk about 25,000 ancient manuscripts and we talk about manuscripts that are as old as anywhere from 30, maybe 30 years removed from the original writing. We need something to relate that to because, because most of us will say, well, that doesn't, that sounds kind of impressive, but that doesn't mean a lot to us.

So let's compare that a little bit to some extra biblical ancient documents, just to kind of get a feel for the degree of certainty that we have for this with the scriptures as compared to other ancient documents. So for example, let's take some well-known ancient writings, such as the writings of Aristotle.

We're all familiar with Aristotle. Aristotle wrote in about the 4th century B. C. His most popular work was a work known as Poetics. Anybody want to take a guess as to how many manuscripts we have of Aristotle's Poetics? 5. And the oldest one dates to about 1,400 years after the original writing in the 4th century B.

C. Now that is a pretty much standard, that's an average, and that gives us just a good feel for what scholars consider to be well documented ancient documents. Nobody, Have you ever heard anybody question, did Aristotle really live? Was there really a guy named Aristotle? Did Aristotle really say what we think he said?

Nobody questions that. And they don't question it based on five manuscripts removed by fourteen hundred years from the original writings. We have more than 25,000 manuscripts, some dating to within 30 to 50 years of the original writing, all of which agree with one another on more than 99 percent of the words.

So, what I want you to grasp right now is a strong sense Whatever's in your hand, what you're holding in your hand, except for your notepad right there, what you're holding in your hand, if you are holding a King James version of the Scriptures, or a New King James translation of the Scriptures, what you are holding in your hand is the absolute trustworthy Word of God.

If you are holding in your hands a modern translation of the Scriptures, what you are holding is the absolute authentic Word of God, to which even the one or less than 1 percent of questionable words have been made less questionable, almost to a complete questionless degree. So, it is absolute demonstrable nonsense.

This thing that we hear about, well, we don't even know what the original scriptures were. They've been translated and copied so many times, we don't even know what the original scriptures said. That is absolute nonsense, and anyone who says that either has no clue what they're talking about, or they've heard somebody else say that, and they want it to be true, so they repeat it.

So when you hear that passed around on social media, or when you hear that among your friends, we don't really even know what the original scripture says. It is complete nonsense that is utterly demonstrably false. There is nothing that is true. More confident than what we have in our scriptures. Our scriptures, they are worthy of all of the confidence to place in them that you are reading the actual words to a degree of certainty and to a degree of accuracy to which we can say we can place complete confidence in what we have.

So when we talk about textual variance, again, we're in a book of the New Testament that has a higher percentage than any other book. So we come across this from time to time as we talk about this. Don't let that sink into your mind as something that detracts from our confidence of the scriptures.

Rather, we have great confidence in them. So that's what I wanted to address about the textual variance. Secondly, I do want to say a word or two about. We're going to talk about just how we

interpret difficult passages because this is, as I said before, this is universally recognized as one of the most difficult passages in Scripture, largely because of the imagery that's used, the context that it appears in.

And so as we seek to arrive at a good interpretation of this passage in just a few moments, we should just be aware of a couple of things. As we approach difficult passages, we are approaching. What's known of is the science of hermeneutics when we attempt to interpret the meaning of God's Word.

This is not something mystical or magical that happens and I really feel like that a lot of God's people kind of have the sense as You sit in the in the pew and you listen to someone exposit the word If you have ever had that feeling that where somebody explains or exposes the word and the Holy Spirit within you says, I resonate with that, that is true.

And then you say, well, how did that person arrive at such an understanding such as that? I feel like many Christians think that. Think that that's just something mystical that happened, like something almost magical that happened, like here's an expositor that's particularly gifted and particularly talented and maybe just a little bit of imagination in there as well.

I don't know how he came up with that, but that's great. And there's just sort of this Area of unknown this mysticism. I want to debunk that right away because as we talk about the science of hermeneutics There are clear set forth principles for the responsible handling of God's Word that we must always follow on passages that are Easy to understand and passages that are not so easy to understand.

Paul writes to Timothy, and he says to Timothy, Study to show yourself approved a worker rightly handling the word of truth. So Paul says to Timothy, Study so that you will rightly handle the word. Even Timothy, in his day, had to follow established principles for interpreting and understanding the scriptures.

And so, how much more must we do so today? So what I want to put forth as we begin this difficult passage are just three of the principles of interpreting scripture that are particularly helpful for us as we look at this passage here today. As we look at this passage, we want to keep in mind, number one. As we approach a difficult passage, we never want to adopt an interpretation of a difficult passage that contradicts the teaching in a clearer passage.

So we want to let the clear passages help us understand the difficult passages. Oftentimes you hear that put this way, let scripture interpret itself, or scripture is the best interpretation, or the best interpreter of scripture. So what that means is, We don't want to take an obscure, a difficult or a seemingly ambiguous passage and adopt some interpretation that contradicts a clear teaching.

So let me just show how this might work in the passage that's before us that we read just a few minutes earlier, Jesus, right after warning about an eternal fire, about how you don't want to go into eternal death where the, where the fires never quenched. Then he speaks of being salted with fire. So some have interpreted this passage.

to mean that Jesus is speaking here of something called the Doctrine of Purgatory, which is not found in scripture anywhere. But the Doctrine of Purgatory teaches this, this idea that after death,

there is a place of torment in which the soul goes to be purged from remaining sin. They see that in the passage because they relate.

the fire that Jesus is talking with here with the fire of hell. And they say clearly Jesus is talking about a time of, of fire cleansing. And so Jesus is talking about purgatory here. Nevermind that that contradicts the clear teaching that scripture shows us elsewhere, such as Hebrews 9 and verse 27. It is appointed unto man once to die and then the judgment.

So at the end of this life's existence, We face a judgment, and after that judgment, we enter into an eternal state that cannot be changed. That's what the scriptures teach abundantly elsewhere, and they teach clearly elsewhere. The parable of Lazarus and the rich man. Jesus has Abraham saying to the rich man, there's a great chasm between you and I, and there's no passing forth between these two chasms.

Or Jesus will say, depart from me those on the right into eternal life, and those on my left into eternal death. And we see it in many other occasions. So those are clear passages of Scripture that we do not let an obscure passage of Scripture contradict. The second thing that we want to keep in mind is that as we approach, as we approach a difficult passage like this that is full of imagery that is difficult for us and difficult to understand, we of course want to let the Holy Spirit guide us in that, but we also want to hold to whatever doctrine, whatever interpretation we may arrive at, we want to hold that with grace.

Amen. Understanding that we're dealing with a passage that is somewhat difficult and there are other interpretations. We don't want to make this a hill, a hill to die on, in other words. So we want to let scripture be its own interpreter. We want to hold whatever interpretation we may find with grace. And we also, lastly, want to make sure that we don't unnaturally start.

So we don't want to constrain the text that we don't stretch or twist or force like a, like a square peg into a round hole. We don't want to force the text into some unnatural understanding. This is what Peter warns of in second Peter chapter three, verse 16, when he says that some of the writings of Paul are difficult to understand, which wicked men twist to their own destruction.

So Paul, so Peter says that the difficult things that Paul writes. The wicked take those difficult things and they twist them or they force them into something that leads to their own destruction. We want to avoid that. This is why we want to spend abundant time Understanding the words, the original meaning of the words, the context, the flow of the context, the imagery, so that properly understanding the words and phrases The meaning or the interpretation will then fit naturally.

If you ever hear an expositor explain a text, and you're left thinking, that just, that just doesn't feel natural, it feels forced, then be suspicious of that interpretation. Upon understanding the words and the context, The interpretation should feel like it naturally flows from that. So we want to take those things in mind and keep those in mind as we approach this passage.

So let's, let's now begin the passage and let's now begin with verse 49. So once again, for everyone will be salted with fire. Salt is good, but if the salt has lost its saltiness, how will you make it salty again? Have salt in yourselves and be at peace with one another. So as we begin, we recognize that the passage is one that is full of imagery.

In fact, the imagery of the passage, it's not really possible to understand the meaning without understanding the imagery behind the images or the word pictures that Jesus is using. He's going to use in particular, two word pictures or two images here, the picture of salt and the picture of fire. So the first one that he uses, everyone will be salted with fire.

Let's first of all, remind herself of the context. The context is this on the way to Jerusalem, there was this incident in which the disciples were arguing with one another. Who's, who's going to be the best in the kingdom? Who's going to be number one in the kingdom? I think I will. I don't know. I think I probably will.

I've got pretty good dibs on number one from that. Then Jesus gives this teaching the one who will be first must be last. And then we find the teaching in which John says, wait, wait, wait. I seem to remember I've sinned, Lord, I've sinned. I understand what you're saying now. I need to confess that we saw this one casting out demons and we told him to stop because he was not following with us.

And from that, we go into the teaching in which Jesus says, Woe to those from whom would come the occasion to sin, the temptation to sin. There will be those, the world will bring temptation. The world will bring sophisticated, as we talked about last week, sophisticated temptation. Woe to those. It's better that you would suffer this most gruesome death of being thrown into the sea with this millstone around you.

That would be better than for you to continue, continue leading people into sin. And then it goes into. He says it's better to cut off your hand if that would lead into life instead of eternal death. It's better to go into life having one hand than death with two hands. It's better to pluck out an eye.

It's better to cut off a foot if that means that you enter into life. For if you enter into death, the worm does not die. The fire is never quenched. OK, so on the heels of that is now where we have this particular teaching here. This is not necessarily to say that Jesus died. Jesus went from that teaching to this one, perhaps Mark as the inspired writer, perhaps the Holy Spirit inspired him to put these two teachings together, or perhaps Jesus did go from one to the other.

Either way, that's the context, is the context of this whole teaching. Radical pursuit of holiness, the necessity of the disciple to earnestly and radically pursue holiness at whatever cost, whatever comfort or delight, earthly pleasure that holiness requires for you to put away, put it away, for eternal life is better.

On the heels of that, we hear everyone for everyone will be salted with fire. So when we hear that first image, the image of salted, Salt is a verb. Salted, what we would think of would not be what Jesus' hearers would have thought of. When we think of salt, in terms of salting as a verb, we would think primarily, I think, first of flavoring our food, of seasoning some food.

However, Jesus' hearers would, their first thought would not have gone to seasoning of food. Their first thought would have gone to seasoning. to preservation of food. Because remember, we're talking about the ancient world. There's no refrigeration. There's no means of keeping meat fresh other than to salt it.

So what would happen, especially Jesus fishermen hearers, the ones who are the fishermen, Peter and his brother Andrew, they would have heard, as Jesus talks about salting, they would have

heard something about the process that they do. To the fish that they catch as they catch these fish, they clean them.

And then they take the salt and they apply the salt to the meat. And the salt is a drying agent. And as a drying agent, it removes the moisture, thus, preventing or at least inhibiting the growth of bacteria. That's how the salting would preserve the meat of that day. Some of us, me in particular, I remember one of my earliest childhood memories.

I remember my grandfather's smokehouse and I remember you'd go in there and there'd be hams hanging. And what I remember most about that was every time you open the door, you were, you were hit in the nostrils with the most Pungent salt smell the most pungent sodium chloride smell. It would just sting your nose.

It was so sharp because that salt rubbed on the meat took a great quantity of salt and it smelled very sharp and very pungent, but as a drying agent, it prevented the moisture which created a habitat for the bacteria to grow. So, by preventing that moisture, it prevented the growth of bacteria, and so that's how the salt preserved.

So when Jesus speaks of salting, his hearers would have thought immediately of the process of preserving, preserving the freshness of a food. So have, I'm sorry, for everyone will be salted, and what will they be salted with? We would expect Jesus to have said, with fire. I'm sorry, with salt. We've expected Jesus to say with salt, right?

Because you salt. with salt. However, Jesus surprises us by saying salted not with salt, but salted with fire. So here comes our mixing together of metaphors, our mixing of word pictures that makes us pause and say, wait a minute, that, that sort of throws everything off. If Jesus was to just say everyone will be salted and then go on from there, then we would have less difficulty, I think, but he mixes together the metaphor of fire.

Now, Jesus just finished speaking about fire in the preceding verses. And there he was talking about fire in the context of the eternal fire, which is the eternal wrath of God upon those who enter into the next existence with their sins unforgiven. So, our tendency right away is to make this one-to-one correlation, fire to fire, fire in verse 48 to fire in verse 49 means the same thing.

And that's where we can, I think, run off the tracks. So let's talk for just a minute. We need to follow Jesus' symbolism, and this is why I say, by the way, That I don't necessarily think that these two teachings occurred back-to-back. I think perhaps Mark is putting them together in an editing sort of way.

So let's think about the metaphor of fire. And let's think about what Jesus' hearers would have understood when he uses the word picture of fire. What does fire represent in the scriptures? When we search our scriptures, asking the question, what does fire mean when we see fire in scripture? What's the symbolic meaning?

What's the spiritual meaning of fire? What we find is that the scriptures put forth three clear and we might say distinct meanings of fire in the scripture. The first thing that we would come across. Would be that fire represents what we could call the awesome, terrifying, majestic presence of God. As God's presence becomes manifested, oftentimes in the Old Testament in particular, it's pictured as fire.

And that fire is representing something about the terror, or the majesty, or the awe that one feels. When in the presence of God, we see this metaphor begin in Exodus three with the incident at the bush as Moses comes into the presence of God, and there's the bush that burns, but it's not consumed. We see the metaphor amplified in Exodus 19 on Sinai.

And on Sinai, we get a very clear picture of God in his awesome, terrifying, majestic presence as being described as fire. As the mountain shakes and the trumpets are blasting and the smoke covers the mountain, and we're told God came onto the mountain, and then we see the picture continued from there.

There's the pillar of fire that leads the Children and different things such as that. But Exodus 19 really shows us a vivid picture of the terrifying, awe striking presence of a holy God. Then we encounter fire as something that symbolizes perhaps something of a little bit different nature. We also see fire in the scripture, both Old and New Testament as the administering of the wrath of God upon sinners.

That's how it was just used in the previous verse. The administering of the wrath of God upon sinful mankind. This is what we see in the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. What clearer picture could we be given of God's wrath poured out on sinful, unrepentant men than the pouring out of fire and brimstone upon Sodom and Gomorrah?

and Gomorrah. So we see that picture there. Jude is very helpful in Jude verse seven when he even tells us specifically that this Sodom and Gomorrah incident, it serves as an example by undergoing a punishment of eternal fire. So the temporary fire of Sodom and Gomorrah, Jude says, is a picture. It's a snapshot of the eternal fire of God, of God's judgment that will be poured out—Revelation 14.

We looked at this passage last week as we read about those who will be tormented by fire and sulfur in the presence of the Lord forever. And we see that picture very clearly there. We see it in 2 Thessalonians chapter 1. That when we're told that the Lord, when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire.

He's being revealed for the purpose of inflicting, as we read, punishment, the punishment of eternal destruction. So we see very plainly, fire is pictured as the wrath of God. That's probably, I would say, So if you were to ask the average person on the street, what does fire mean in the scriptures, that would probably be the first thing that comes to mind is the fire of judgment.

So we see that picture, but then we also see another picture of fire in the scripture. And this picture really is important to bring everything together for us. We see in scripture, the picture of fire, not as the judgment of God, but as the refining work of God. In the saint or the refining work of God in the believer, and it's often described to us as a refiners.

What fire that does what to the metal? It separates the metal from the dross so that the dross is removed, and the metal is purified in the fire. We see that, for example, in Malachi chapter three, who can endure the day of his coming and who can stand when he appears for he is like a fire that would have spoken to us of the majestic presence of God, the terrifying, majestic presence of God.

But Malachi says more than that, for he is like a fire Refiners fire and a Fuller's soap. He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver. He will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver and what will be the result? They will bring offerings and righteousness to the Lord. You see the purifying effect.

The Lord in his majesty comes and he's like a refiner's fire, and he purifies the gold and the silver, which is symbolic of God's people. He purifies that so that they may offer worship and righteousness. Look at Zechariah 13. Awake, O sword against my shepherd, against the man who stands next to me, declares the Lord of hosts.

Strike the shepherd and the sheep will be scattered. I will turn my hand against the little ones in the whole land declares the Lord. Two thirds shall be cut off and perish. And one third shall be left alive. And I will put this third into the fire and refine them as one refines silver and test them as gold is tested and they will call upon my name and I will answer them.

I will say they are my people. And they will say, the Lord is my God. You see the refining nature of the fire. It separates the worthless dross from the valuable metal. And it does so only by being applied to the fire. And God's purpose is to bring out of that fire, a people who Call him by his name, who call him Lord, who offered him righteous worship.

We also see this picture continued into the New Testament, revelation three, or let's look at the words of John the Baptizer. John the Baptizer. In Matthew three is speaking of course of the one who he was sent to point to the Messiah. Here's what he says of Jesus. I baptize you with water for repentance, but he who is coming after me is mightier than I, who sandals I'm not worthy to carry.

And here it is, He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. So if you're reading in the King James, and you have an italicized King James, it says, He will baptize you in the Holy Spirit and in fire. And you'll notice that second in, I N, is italicized, meaning it's not in the original. You know, it was supplied.

in order to help the reading flow more, smoothly. However, it's important to see that that's not what Matthew wrote, and that's not what John said. John didn't say he will baptize you in the Spirit and in fire. Here's where it's important. John is not speaking of two different baptisms. He's speaking of one baptism, and that baptism is the baptism of the Spirit.

Holy Spirit, also described as fire. So you see the fire of the Spirit. The fire of the Spirit is the fire that comes upon the believer to fill them, to indwell them with God himself who will then Proceed with the work of purifying them as a refiner purifies silver, as a refiner purifies gold to remove the worthless dross, leaving the pure metal so that the purity of that metal will then offer acceptable worship unto God.

So there's three word pictures there of fire. One is the awesome presence of God. One is the wrath of God poured out upon sinners. And one is the purifying work of God. Which of those three-word pictures do you think Jesus is using?

He's using actually all three. Because I'm going to suggest that all three are the same picture of the same God. I'm going to suggest to us that the awesome, terrifying presence of God to the one who is not covered in the righteousness of Christ. That awesome presence of God works as a destructive agent, burning away the worthless chaff, burning away the worthless dross.

But to the one who is covered in the righteousness of Christ, the same God, the same presence is a refiner's fire who doesn't destroy, but refines. This is what I think the passage in Exodus 33 really shines a light for us. Remember, as we sang it earlier, Rock of Ages cleft for me. We remember the passage.

In fact, we read it earlier. In which Moses says, I want to see your glory. I want to see your glory. And God says to Moses, you can't see my glory, for if you see my glory, you'll die. And then God says, I will do this, I will put you in a cleft of a rock, and I will cover you with my hand, and I will pass before you.

And so you will see me without dying. I will protect you. Listen to this. I will protect you from myself because my presence is so consuming. My presence is so white, hot and fire that it will consume you, but I will protect you. And that protecting, that placing of God's hand over Moses in the cleft of the rock, that is one of the Old Testament's most beautiful pictures.

of the penal substitution of Christ and the covering of the righteousness of Christ over the believer as God covers Moses with his hands to protect him from himself so that his presence to Moses is only a refining presence. God is saying, I'm the same presence. I'm the same God. I'm the same fire to one.

I destroy to the other. I refine. What's the difference? My hand covers one. My righteousness covers one. My goodness, my mercy, my grace has Justified the one so that my consuming presence refines And doesn't destroy. And so when we see these three word pictures of God as fire, we understand we're not seeing three different gods.

We're not seeing three different sides of God. We're seeing one God from three perspectives. One God, the same God. As that God is brought into the, brings himself into the presence of the unrighteous sinner, or is that God who comes into the presence of the righteous one, covered in the righteousness of Christ.

So now, we have an idea of the two symbols Jesus is using of the two-word pictures, salt to preserve, everyone will be salted. Let's put it in our, our word. Everyone will be preserved by Jesus.

So who is the everyone? Who do you think the everyone is? You think when Jesus says everyone, he means everyone in the world. You know, some would say, you know, Jesus means what he says. If he said everyone, he means everyone. Jesus uses language just like we use language. And so when we say everyone, we don't always mean every single person in the whole world, don't you often say everyone.

And what you mean is everyone within a certain category of people, we've got this new boss at work and he's just really given everyone fits. You don't mean he's given the whole world fits. You mean he's giving the category of people that work under him fits. Jesus often uses languages, language the same way.

So if Jesus says everyone will be salted by fire, everyone in the whole world, he could mean that, meaning that the fire of God's presence will come to all people and those outside the righteousness of Christ will be burned up like the chaff and those in his righteousness will be preserved. He could mean that, only the metaphor of salt does damage to that.

The metaphor of salt, because the metaphor of salt is telling us that Everyone will be what? Preserved. Preserved. And how will everyone be preserved? By fire. So what Jesus is speaking of here. He's speaking of this reality that he either he or Mark wants to follow up right on the heels of that difficult passage we looked at last week.

What was the difficulty of the passage last week? What did we really struggle with last week? If you left here not struggling with this, then you weren't listening closely. We left here struggling with Jesus is a P. He appears to threaten hell. He appears to make this threat of eternal punishment to those who do not pursue holiness with the vigor that will say, I would cut off a hand before I would sin against the Lord.

If you didn't leave here thinking, I wonder if I really pursue holiness like that. And I wonder what Jesus's words of threatening hell mean to me. If you didn't leave here thinking about that, then you didn't fully take the passage in that was the weight. That was the tension of the passage last week immediately followed by everyone meaning Everyone who follows what I just said Everyone who loves holiness to the point that they will cut off a hand pluck out an eye cut off a foot Rather than sin against the Lord those people Jesus says You They will all be preserved by the refining work of the spirit.

All I'm doing is taking Jesus's words, his word pictures, and I'm putting them into language that we're accustomed to using. Everyone who values holiness like that will be preserved by the refining work of the spirit of fire, the spirit who is the refiner, the spirits whose presence brings the refining power of God.

upon the redeemed sinner to separate that redeemed sinner from the dross of sin to protect the redeemed sinner from the bacteria of sin that will grow into mold and maggots and infestation. The preserving work of the spirit will preserve them. So you see the beauty of what Jesus is saying right on the heels of saying, if you don't pursue holiness like that, You have the eternal fire of hell to be concerned with on the heels of that.

We're told Everyone who does pursue holiness like that. I want to give you the confidence I want to give you the assurance that the God who is the refiner's fire, he will preserve you. To those who would tremble at those words and say, I don't, I don't think I can say that I really pursue holiness like that.

I don't know if I could really say that if, if I'd had this clear choice between keeping my left eye and being holy that I would really choose holiness. God, I want that. I want to have that type of zeal for holiness to that person. God says, never fear for the preserving influence, the salting influence of the Holy Spirit of fire, the one into whom John said Jesus will baptize you that one.

He will refine you as a refiner's fire So that's what he means. Everyone will be salted by fire if salt has lost its saltiness. How will you make it salty again? So now on the heels of that Jesus returns back and again We should understand this as a summary of a lengthier teaching. So it's not like Jesus went right from one right to the other.

But here now Mark goes to the next aspect or the next summary. And the next phrase is, If salt has lost its saltiness, how will you make it salty again? So here he is emphasizing the grave serious

danger of the sin of self-reliance. How will you make it if the salt has lost its flavor how you make it salty again?

So the salt of our day salt is salt has always been sodium chloride, right? That's always been what salt but the salt of our day is a pure salt. It's a salt that's mined from deep underground, and it's pure, you've read on the labels, 99.9 percent sodium chloride. The salt of Jesus day was not. Because the salt of Jesus day, almost always, was harvested from seawater.

Seawater which was let into a thin, large area, and then the work of evaporation left. The salt along with a lot of other things on the bed, and then it was then collected and tried to separate. And so the salt of Jesus day, often it was never pure like Morton's salt, but often it would become mixed with other substances, most commonly gypsum.

And so Jesus point here is simply this, if, if that salt, is not sodium chloride. If it's now been mixed with something else, how are you going to make it salty again? So hear what Jesus is saying. If the salt has lost its saltiness, how will you make it salty again? You hear that? The hearer of what Jesus just said should say, wait a minute, I didn't make it salty to first in the first place.

That's what you should say. How will you make it salty again? We should say, I never made it salty in the first place. What do you mean make it salty again? I wasn't the one who salted it. You just said everyone will be salted by fire. Now you say, well, how am I going to salt myself? So what we should react to, how we should react to that is to say, what Jesus is saying is he's warning against the sin of self-reliance.

The sin of saying, look, you just said to me that holiness is a matter of separating myself from all occasions to sin. I can do that. I can do that. I can separate myself from all occasions to sin. And that would then, of course, open the door into the sin of self-reliance. Into the sin of what Jesus addressed back in chapter 2 when He said, I didn't come for the righteous, I came for the sick.

Meaning, I didn't come for those who are engulfed in their righteous self-reliance. Who think that they are righteous because they've got this long list of sins they avoid. And this long list of good things that they do. And they think that they are holy because they keep the list. Jesus just said, woe to that person.

Don't fall into that. If the salt loses its saltiness, in other words, if the preserving work of the Holy Spirit is not functioning, if the Holy Spirit is not preserving you, then how are you going to suppose that you're going to say, Oh, I'll do the work of the Holy Spirit myself. I'll do my own preserving.

I'll do my own righteous work within myself. Jesus is saying, beware of that grave danger of falling into the sin of self-reliance. Then he says, have salt in yourself. Have salt in yourself. What does Jesus mean by that? Well, Jesus here commands What we just saw previously as the impossible. How are you going to make the salt that is not no longer salty has become mixed in with gypsum?

How are you going to make that salty again? I can't. I didn't make it salty to start with. Then Jesus says, well, have salt in yourself. In other words, have the preserving work of the Spirit within yourself. He says to his listeners, he says, you, I command you to be preserved by the work of the Holy Spirit.

He commands the impossible. Do the scriptures ever do that? Do the scriptures ever command us to do what we can't do? All the time. All the time. When we are told, for example, And Philipians 2 verse 3 to consider others more significant than yourself. Has anybody ever realized just how, how humanly impossible that is?

Or just think of the greatest commandment. Jesus says the greatest commandment is to love the Lord your God with all your heart all your soul, all your mind, all your strength, and to love your neighbor in the same way that you love yourself. So we're, we're commanded to do, to do the impossible all the time, which of course points us to the reality that salvation is all of God.

Nevertheless, we are under the command of God to do that which only he can do. So here, as Jesus says, have salt in yourself. He's giving this command. Make certain it is the duty of the disciple to make certain that you have the preserving work of the Holy Spirit This is the parallel or the equivalent of what Jesus says in John 15 when he says Abide in me.

Apart from me, you can do nothing, but abide in me and my words abide in you. This is the same thing that Jesus is saying. Have salt in yourself. Make it your life's endeavor. Make it your greatest plea. God, salt me with the preserving and the refining work of your spirit. Salt me today. Preserve me today.

Abide in me today. Grant that I abide in you today. Have salt in yourself. And then he says this, Be at peace with one another. So Jesus concludes this section by commanding to us, first of all, the impossible. Have the spirits work in you. Make certain the spirit is in you and working. And he follows that up with the most visible The most outwardly visible fruit of the preserving, salting work of the spirit that the believer ever experiences, which is the unity of the body and the love of the brethren.

I don't know if anybody remembers way back. This will be about, oh, I should have looked up the date, maybe three years ago. Does anybody remember Ephesians chapter one in verse 15, in which the text of that passage is, Paul says, When I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and your love for all the saints, I did not cease to give thanks to God for you.

And we took that passage and what we said was what Paul is saying is he is saying to us the two most foundational, most fundamental evidences of the grace of God in us. Number one, when I heard of your faith, Number two, and your love for all the saints and what we said was that love for the brethren is what the scriptures present to us as the foundational the first fruit of the grace of Christ in us and I said I made the statement I said if that is what this is really showing us something that profound something that fundamental something that Principle then we should find that teaching elsewhere in the scriptures And if you remember, we took some time and we went through every letter of Paul to the church.

And then we went through James's letter. We went through all three of John's letters. We went through both of Peter's letters. And here's what we found. We found that same truth is found in every single letter written to the church. By Paul, John, James, the writer to the Hebrews. We found that truth in various wording and in various forms in everything the New Testament says to the church, everything.

And we said, if that is true, if God is saying to the church, the first fruit of your life, the most basic and necessary outward fruit of your life, If love is love for your fellow Christian, then that should

be prolific in what God says to the church. And we found that it absolutely was in every single book written to the church.

Here Jesus is saying the same thing. Have salt in yourself, be salted with the preserving work of the refining Holy Spirit and be at peace with one another, be at unity with one another, have love for one another. Remember the context. The context is just recently there was this. Disagreement. Who do you think is going to be the best?

Who do you think is going to be number one? Who do you think is going to be top dog in eternity? Followed by a similar incident in which John said, we rebuked a brother and we did it sinfully. We rebuked a fellow brother in Christ. Now, Jesus says, that's the first fruit. Have salt in yourself. Have the refining work of God in yourself and evidence it, first of all, by love for God.

For your Christian brethren, if we do not have true and genuine love for brothers and sisters in Christ, then we have no reason to claim the life of Christ in us. When he says that is the first fruit you will show is genuine love for your brothers and sisters, how can we say, well, I'm not really doing well on that one, but I think the refining fire of the spirit would say to us, nonsense.

When I say that's the first fruit, I mean that's the first fruit. A number of takeaways from this passage. And your notes just sort of conclude with just some takeaways to take with you this week and just ponder how this passage presents to us such a stern warning never to think of ourselves as capable of keeping God's commands on our own.

Have salt in yourself. But it's also a stern warning never to presume upon the grace of God. Have salt in yourselves. For if the salt has grown unsalty, what are you going to do? In other words, never presume upon the grace of God. And the commands here are the present imperative. Literally, have salt in yourselves and continue having salt in yourselves.

In other words, what Jesus is saying to us, do not presume upon the grace of God that was evident in your life a year and a half ago. Don't presume on His grace that you saw working in your life last month. Have salt today. Have salt in yourselves this hour, this minute, this day, this hour. We also see, An encouragement for every true disciple who takes seriously Jesus's preceding words.

The disciple who would take seriously, I must separate myself even from a hand or a foot or an eye. Those things that I would consider to be most dear, most comfortable here in this life, I must be willing to separate myself from all of them if it means holiness. This passage serves as a great encouragement to the disciple who takes those words seriously, which I would also argue is the only true disciple.

The only true disciple is the one who takes those words seriously. This is an encouragement to that disciple to say, everyone will be salted. With fire, everyone will be preserved by the refining work of the spirit. It's also a reminder that salvation is all of God. It's all of God from the beginning to the end, yet it never bypasses the earnest work and effort of the redeemed saint.

Lastly, it's also a reminder that the clearest and most fundamental visible fruit that grace is present is the unity and the peace and the love of the brethren.