

Jesus Cuts to the Heart of the Matter

Where does your motivation come from? What pushes you to succeed in life? Is it money? Is it the praise of others? Is it a desire to feel like you've accomplished something in life? Or maybe, are you motivated by fear of losing out, that there might just be someone out there who will take your job because they do it better?

The disciples were clearly pretty ambitious. They had gotten into an argument on the road to Capernaum about who was the greatest. They wanted to know who was the best, who had done the most to earn that title of "greatest." However, in our lesson for today, Jesus cuts to the heart of the matter. He shows us how serious sinful ambition is. He tells us how he has cut the sin out for us. He has changed our hearts, so that we can have salt in our lives.

I. SINFUL AMBITION IS SERIOUS

Right before our lesson for today, Jesus had just addressed the disciples' question of "who was the greatest." His answer? **Anyone who wants to be first must be the very last, and the servant of all.** Immediately after this, John interrupts Jesus, and tells him about a man that the disciples had stopped from driving out demons. That man had not been a part of "the group." And yet, he was able to do amazing things, even miracles! Just a little bit before the disciples were unable to drive out demons, and yet this man was able to?! The miracles this man had performed were a wonderful thing. But John didn't see it for what it was. He was blinded by his prideful, jealous, selfish ambition, which was leading him down the wrong path.

Selfish ambition can lead us astray as well. . It's tempting to think that God loves me because of what I've done, what I've accomplished., "I'm important. I'm special. There's something in me that makes me more deserving of God's love than someone else is." Selfish ambition was leading Jesus' own disciples against him. Jesus showed the disciples the danger they were in. Look how much danger there is for us and others as well!

Think of the damage this sinful ambition can bring to others. When it's all about me, what is the result for others? Who has been hurt because of your own ambitious decisions? Jesus says, **"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."** Jesus words should be setting off little alarm bells in our heads. If we EVER cause any of God's "little ones," anyone who believes in God to "fall into a trap" and lose their faith, it would be better for us to die a horrible death than to have caused them to sin.

Selfish ambition is so incredibly dangerous because it is embedded so deeply into our own hearts. Jesus illustrates this for us so graphically. **If your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life maimed than with two hands to go into hell, where the fire never goes out. [44] 45 And if your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life crippled than to have two feet and be thrown into hell. [46] 47 And if your eye causes you to stumble, pluck it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into hell.** If something in your body cause you to sin, CUT IT OFF! But wait, if I cut off one hand because it caused me to sin, can't I still turn around and do the same thing with my other hand? And if I cut off one foot, can't I do the same with the other foot? By this reasoning, I can keep cutting and cutting away, but there always will be something else that can cause me to sin. So what is it that causes us to sin? After all, our arms and legs and eyes do not operate by themselves. These desires of selfish ambition come from an incurable heart of sin. How can I possibly cut out my own heart and live? It's impossible!

I have failed to cut the sin out of my heart. My sinful, selfish ambition has earned me a place in hell. Two weeks ago, we heard hell is a pit, something that we cannot escape from. Now we see that hell is a terrible place, where **"the worms that eat them do not die, and the fire is not quenched."** This suffering of hell will be intense, and unending, but we are not without hope.

II. JESUS HAS CUT THE SIN OUT FOR US

Jesus cut straight to the heart of the matter. Jesus saw straight through all the excuses and delusions about sin that we convince ourselves of. He looked at our hearts and saw just how badly we needed him. We were born with that sin in our hearts. There was no way that we could cut out that sin on our own. And so, he took up his cross, and followed his Father's plan with a godly ambition. He was on a mission, and nothing was going to stop him. Jesus told his disciples he is **THE GREATEST** because of what he is about to do. He points us back and shows us what he has done. In Mark 9:31. Jesus said, **“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.”**

Jesus was willing to go through the pain and suffering that we deserved in our place. He was maimed, abused, beaten, stabbed, and hung on a cross. All of this he did for us. He died on that cross and rose three days later to pay for the sins that we refused to cut off. He did that, to accomplish forgiveness for us! In the words of the prophet Ezekiel, Jesus removed our hearts of stone and sin, and has replaced it with a heart full of godly ambition, the ambition that seeks to do the Father's will.

As we see Christ's actions, his godly ambition for us, the selfless love that he displayed for you and me on the cross, we can do nothing but fall to our knees before our God, and first of all repent, every single day. He truly is a loving and compassionate God. He did the impossible. He cut out the sin from our hearts and replaced it with faith in him. Even more than this, he creates in us a new ambition that drives us from a different sort of motivation. And that motivation is...salt?

III. WE HAVE SALT IN OUR LIVES

Jesus tells us, **“Salt is good... Have salt among yourselves, and be at peace with one another.”** Salt certainly is good. It flavors our food. It purifies and preserves and sustains our life as a part of our diet. Salt is important. Life would be very different without salt. One might even say it would be impossible!

But what “salt” was Jesus talking about? What sustains us, preserves us, and keeps us alive? The Holy Spirit, working through the Word of God.

Look what the “salt” of God's Word does! It gives us the strength and power that we so desperately need to cut the sin out of our lives. On our own, we cannot cut it out. God has made that clear in his Word. But as forgiven, restored, cleansed Christians, we want to take a closer look at our lives and identify what areas of our life could be causing us to fall into the same traps. When we see these things and realize how dangerous they are to our spiritual well-being, we first repent and thank God for his mercy and forgiveness. We then ask God for the strength to cut whatever that thing is out of our life. It may sting at first. The loss may seem like a lot in the moment. But remember Jesus' words. **“It is better for you to enter life maimed than with two hands to go into hell, where the fire never goes out”** No matter how difficult and paralyzing these losses may seem, they are nothing when compared to the eternal bliss that awaits us with our Savior in heaven.

Why does Jesus want us to do this? Why does he want us to cut the sin out of our lives? It is so that we may have peace with each other, because we are at peace with God through Christ. Jesus has salted our hearts, and done away with our sinful, selfish ambition. In its place is a godly ambition, which seeks to do God's will. And what is the result of this ambition? We are at peace with one another, not squabbling and fighting over who is the greatest among us, but instead eagerly searching for ways to serve each other in the humblest way possible. This humble service doesn't have to be as mind-blowing as driving out demons. It's something as simple as offering someone a cup of water in Jesus' name!

Sinful, selfish ambition is serious – with deadly consequences for everyone. When God salts us, when he replaces that selfish ambition with a godly ambition, look at the blessed results. Peace with one another. Working together in the name of Jesus. Being a blessing not only for little children, but for all who have faith – serving each other in ways great and small. We serve not out of fear, but love. We serve because of what we have in Jesus, both now and forever. May this message always be the source and motivation for all that we do!