

Mark 10:35-45

March 21, 2021

Three times in St. Mark's Gospel Jesus tells His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem to suffer, and be killed, and be raised on the third day. All three times His disciples react badly. The first time Peter responds by rebuking Jesus to His face. The second time all the disciples begin to argue about who is the greatest among them. The third time is just before our text for today in which we see James and John coming to Jesus seeking glory for themselves, and the other disciples erupting with anger when they hear of it.

What is wrong with them? The same thing that is wrong with us. The more the pure Gospel of Christ Crucified is preached by Jesus, and by His pastors today, the more the pot is stirred up among those who hear.

If a congregation wants to come together and not be divided, having no anger at the pastor, the elders, or the other members, then that congregation needs to stop immediately the preaching of the Gospel. Because it is the Gospel that sets Satan off to attack.

The evidence is here in Scripture. The disciples become "me-focused," and judgmental of the others in their little congregation when Jesus tells them plainly and explicitly what He will do for them and for their salvation. His disciples divide with anger and turn on each other, not when they are rebuked with the Law, but when Jesus opens His heart of the Gospel to them. The worst thing for a congregation is not a crisis like a pandemic, but the pure preaching of the Gospel.

But without the pure preaching of the Gospel, what is the point of gathering as a congregation? "Woe is me," cries St. Paul, "if I do not preach the Gospel!" Only the preaching of Christ Crucified saves sinners like us from damnation. Only the Gospel truly unites sinners together in Christ. Only the pure Gospel placed into our ears and into our mouths shields us from the evil one, the very one who viciously attacks both the one who preaches the Gospel and those who hear it.

And so, what else can we do here except continue to gather around Christ and Him crucified, even though this is the worst thing we can do for our congregation, from a human perspective that is. For certainly, Satan will continue to divide us, and create anger issues among us, and keep our worship attendance low, and all because we gather here around the pure Gospel of Christ Crucified for the salvation of sinners.

Again, I ask, what is wrong with Jesus' disciples? Have they not been with Jesus for a long time now? Have they not been hearing Him preach and teach throughout this time? Then why do they act so childish? We would think they would be very mature in their faith by this time and not be so petty.

And yet we see James and John having a secret agenda. They plot together behind the backs of the other disciples. They approach Jesus quietly in making their request for glory. And do the others forgive James and John when they get wind of it? No! They become indignant, it says, furious. Had Jesus not intervened here, a fight may have broken out. That little congregation of twelve may have split up. Some staying with Jesus, others leaving. And all to the joy and delight of the devil.

Now what if James and John had first asked each other, “Will Jesus be pleased by our seeking glory for ourselves or will this please the devil instead?” and what if the others would have also asked each other, “Will we please Jesus or Satan by allowing our anger to control us?” Things might have turned out differently.

What about us? Are we mature enough to stop and ponder the consequences of our behavior before we carry it out? If we are, our home life and our congregational life will be greatly blessed.

But we fail, don't we? I know I do. Don't you? Maybe I'm not as mature as I think I am. And maybe the devil is more cunning than I realize.

It actually is good for us to realize such things. We do not want to think we are so pious, so unlike the petty world around us, so mature in our faith, that we can stand up on our own. We need our Lord. We need His strength. We need His rebuke of the Law. But above all, we need His forgiveness. We need the Gospel, even though hearing it and believing it will anger Satan and cause him to stir up the pot in our homes and in our congregation.

But Jesus will handle him. He did for the Twelve. When His disciples were at their worst, He gave them the Gospel. “*The Son of Man,*” He said to them, “*came not to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many.*” “James, John, Peter, Andrew and all the rest of you, are you angry with each other? I will take your sinful anger and go to the cross in your place. I will be the ransom price for you. I do not reject you for being so petty toward each other. Rather, I forgive you.”

Friend, Jesus gives the very same word to you. He became your servant. He got down on His knees to be your slave. A slave who was whipped and crucified. A slave who willingly, yes gladly, suffered hell for you and me. He was the price for your ransom, to redeem you from sin, death, and hell.

He did this for you even before you were born. And He made certain that this salvation would be given to you in your baptism. You are covered with those baptismal waters, my friend, not just when you are pious, but also when you are petty and sinful. This means that you always stand before God as one who is forgiven of everything, because Jesus covers you with His blood shed for you.

God is truly pleased with you, and not because of how you behave. He is not pleased with you one minute, and the next minute angry at you. He is always pleased with you because you are covered with Christ in your baptism. You are baptized with the same baptismal waters as He. A baptism that leaves you open to Satan's attacks, but also a baptism in which Jesus keeps you safe with Him. Always belonging to Him. Forgiven, and assured of a place in heaven with Him.

Friend, this Gospel in your ears means the devil will be at work to stir up the pot. Expect this. But do not worry. He can change nothing. You do not belong to him anymore but to Jesus who ransomed you. Amen.