

Meet Jesus and know your future

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[0 : 00] Amen. So we're in Mark's Gospel, Mark chapter 9, and you'll find it in the Bibles on page 845.

Page 845, Mark chapter 9, reading from verse 42. 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 was 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 into 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 than 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 it make it salty again? Have salt in yourselves and be at peace with one another.

[1 : 18] April 2003. And a climber, his name is Aaron Ralston, you might remember it on the news headlines.

He entered Utah's Blue John Canyon, only to become trapped when an 800 pound boulder fell down and trapped his hand.

He struggled there for six days, fighting dehydration and hypothermia. And this article says, Trapped and facing certain death, Ralston chose a final option.

Using a multi-tool, the climber amputated his right hand and escaped to freedom.

Friends, our passage here in Mark's Gospel is about making radical decisions. You know, like a rock falling onto Aaron Ralston's hand, forcing him into a decision.

[2 : 29] Jesus is coming, crashing into our lives and he's putting before us life and death choices. I suppose most of us face choices that might involve temporary discomfort for the greater good.

Am I right? Like going to the dentist, for example. Lying back and opening your mouth and feeling the pain of the anaesthetic and the sound of that drill.

You know, we're all sort of familiar with that sort of thing. And even the pain of opening your wallet or your purse, it works on the same principle. You know, you don't want to part with your money, but what you're going to gain is greater.

So, you make the decision. You buy the product or you pay the council tax or whatever it is. So, I think this lunchtime, Jesus is introducing a principle that we already live by anyway.

Does that make sense? We already live by that in any case. It's just that we're applying it to our eternity. Now, I know it's shocking.

[3 : 44] It's a shocking passage, isn't it? You know, that bucket there with somebody's hand in it and their foot and their eye. So, we'll just cover it over with a towel for the time being and keep it out of the way.

Let's think more, firstly, about the context of Mark's Gospel. Where are we at this stage in Mark's Gospel? Well, up until chapter 8, verse 29, the controlling issue in Mark's Gospel has been what? It's been the identity of Jesus Christ, hasn't it? You know, the sick were healed, the lame walked, the blind could see, and their nature was calmed with a word.

Very much like Genesis chapter 1. A little girl, she rises from the dead and her father beams, Jairus beams with a smile.

He's overcome with amazement and it's like a new day has dawned. Think about this, friends. Scale it all up. Make the local cosmic.

[4 : 45] Extend the duration from a small window of time in 30 AD to all of eternity. And what have we got? It's like the new creation, isn't it?

And Jesus seems to be the integration point, doesn't he? Are you with me? Between this world that we all know and another world that is able to sort of haul in, in brilliant flashes of something promised.

Genesis chapter 3. And Adam sinned. Mark chapter 2. Jesus says, your sins are forgiven.

And in the first century world, there's a chorus floating in the air. A chorus that the prophets had longed to hear. Who is this?

Who is this? Even the wind and waves obey him. Who can forgive sin? But God alone. And like detectives, people are closing in on his identity.

[5 : 49] And in Peter chapter 8, verse 29, Jesus asks a question, doesn't he? And it seems all of heaven is holding its breath, waiting for Peter to bring in the verdict.

And he says, you are the Christ. And after that crescendo, there's a pause in verse 30. And then it's just like the second movement of a concerto.

And Mark picks up his pen again. Just have a look. Chapter 8, verse 31. And Jesus began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be killed.

And after three days, rise again. He began. And friends, that's an expression that introduces a new stage in Mark's Gospel.

You might remember chapter 1, verse 1, the beginning of the Gospel. And here it is. Chapter 8, verse 31. He began. It's Mark's second half.

[6 : 50] And Jesus begins teaching his disciples no longer primarily about his identity, but firstly, about his own mission, which is, as we know, it's heading towards the cross.

And then secondly, about their lives as they follow him. So to recap, to recap, we're in the second half of Mark's Gospel.

And the theme is A, Jesus heading towards the cross and B, how to live as his followers. And the two are closely connected, says Jesus.

Chapter 8, verse 34. And he called to him the crowd with his disciples and he said to them, If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.

For whoever would save his life will lose it. But whoever loses his life for my sake and the Gospels will save it. You know, if you saw someone carrying a cross in the first century Roman world, where were they going?

[7 : 56] They were going to be executed, friends, weren't they? And that's the sort of commitment Jesus is speaking about for his followers.

You know, if we think about that in terms of percentage points, what sort of percentage commitment is Jesus asking for? It's absolute, isn't it?

100%. 100% commitment. Friends, we've managed to tame Christianity, haven't we? In the Western world. Jesus says that we ought to be prepared to die for him.

You know, he's not interested in the small change of our lives. You know, this isn't some sort of hobby, is it? Or weekend pastime. You know, if you ask some brother or sister who's living in, for example, an Islamic country and the church is persecuted, you know, they'll know about the cost. He wants nothing less, think about this, than our whole being, all that we are and all that we own. And we are our friends at a house in Capernaum.

[9 : 09] Chapter 9, verse 33. And they came to Capernaum. And when he was in the house. Now just move on to chapter 10, verse 1. And he left there and went to the region of Judea.

So from chapter 9, verse 33, to chapter 10, verse 1. Jesus and his disciples are in this house in Capernaum. So our passage is indoors.

And Jesus is teaching who? He's teaching his disciples, his followers. Our first point is, don't sleepwalk into hell. So we're in this house.

And I guess it's a bit like Moses teaching Israel. You know, they'd already been rescued from Egypt. And Moses was teaching God's people how they ought to live.

He says in Deuteronomy, chapter 30. I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. Therefore, choose life.

[10 : 11] And verse 45, for example, of our passage. It's choose life. Have a look. And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It's better for you to enter life lame than with two feet to be thrown into hell.

Choose life. Now let's just think about the logic here, friends. Our passage, it's not a tract to be printed. You know, that I could take out onto Buchanan Street on Saturdays and give out. It's not that. It's for Christians, for those already in God's kingdom. If you're a Christian today, this passage is for you.

Here's a man. You'll have to use your imagination. He's not a Christian. But sadly, well, someone went and gave him one of those tracts.

So here he is. He's only got one eye. He's only got one hand. And he's only got one foot. Is it a good deal? Trading standards are onto the case.

[11 : 15] You know, the world's press are all scrambling around him. We ask the Bible, you know, is he going to heaven? And Isaiah says, all your righteous acts are like filthy rags.

And then there's a reporter trying to interview this poor guy. He shoves the microphone into his face and the man says, well, they didn't tell me that my heart would be unchanged.

And the image of self-mutilation that Jesus is using here, think about it, it can't deal with our past sin.

Does that make sense? Are you with me? It can't deal with our past sin, can it? It can't change our heart. So friends, our passage is not a system of salvation.

It simply wouldn't work. It would be like one of the world's made-up religions. Rather, listen, Jesus is reminding a sleepy church about the severity of sin.

[12 : 18] It's like smelling salts. You know, Jesus doesn't want us pussyfooting around when our lives are in danger. You wouldn't want a surgeon like that, would you?

Or if your house was burning and the fire engine turned up outside and the crew were all inside eating their sandwiches as your house burnt down and the roof caved in.

Jesus wants us to see the danger and act upon it. Just listen to this sentence here in this book. It's a graphic description of sin.

in the Christian life. Just listen to this. In short, sin is the dare of God's justice, the rape of his mercy, the jeer of his patience, the slight of his power, the contempt of his love.

And Judas kissed Jesus, didn't he? Chapter 14, Rabbi, he said, as a crowd gathered round with clubs. Demas fell in love with the world, says Paul.

[13 : 38] And listen to what Jesus says. Just listen to this. And others are the ones sown among thorns. They are those who hear the word, but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches and the desires for other things enter in and choke the word and it proves unfruitful.

So Jesus, it's like Jesus is putting the periscope up, isn't he, in our lives and he's showing us where sin heads, where it's going to, the direction of it all. Didn't look like that to us, did it?

But Jesus is shocking us. He wants to arrest our attention. It's why he came, isn't it? It's why he came to deal with our sin. So up goes that periscope and images of hell reach our eyes, verse 48, where their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched.

Jesus is crystal clear, isn't he here? Unquenchable fire. That means an unending environment of suffering.

The worm does not die. That's now not external suffering, but internal. And again, it's eternal.

[14 : 55] No end in sight. Of course, friends, we could tear this passage out of the Bible, couldn't we? But that wouldn't work, would it? We'd be like King Canute, you know, sat there in his throne as the tide came in and enveloped him.

So that was our first point, friends. Don't sleepwalk into hell. And our second point is take radical action. Back to that rock climber.

And you know, his life was more important, wasn't it, than his hand. And friend, when we take eternity into account, any cost is a good deal.

Do you agree? Any cost is a good deal. So we look into that bucket, the eye, the hand, and the foot. And though Jesus might not want self-mutilation in most cases, he certainly wants us to live a radical life, doesn't he?

Live a radical life to avoid sin. He wants us to break connections, to burn bridges. So, think about Jesus himself when he's tempted to avoid the cross.

[16 : 06] What does he say? He says, get behind me, Satan. Doesn't he? Get behind me. And then Joseph, in the Old Testament, he flees Potiphar's wife.

He breaks the link, think about it, between him and adultery. But here's King David. He noticed a naked Bathsheba.

And soon he begins not to break, but to build connections. And soon it's not just his eyes, it's his whole body and soul. Give the devil an inch, friend, and he'll take a mile.

Just listen to this. This is John Owen. It's a little oldie worldie, the language. Dost thou find thy corruption to begin to entangle thy thoughts?

Rise up with all thy strength against it, with no less indignation than if it had fully accomplished what it aims at. Consider what an unclean thought would have.

[17 : 12] It would have thee roll thyself in folly and filth. Ask envy what it would have. Murder and destruction are at the end of it.

Set thyself against it with no less vigour than if it had utterly debased thee to wickedness. Without this course thou wilt not prevail.

A sin gets ground in the affections to delight in it also upon the understanding to slight to slight it. So friend here's a thought what might be your Achilles heel? I don't know your life what might be your Achilles heel? What might be the thin end of the wedge just now?

What have you been watching? What might Jesus draw your attention to? What up until now think about this have you tolerated you know because it would have been too costly or socially too awkward to deal with?

[18 : 21] Friends this lunch time Jesus is asking each one of us here for radical action don't put it off any longer you see you can become desensitised the Bible tells us we can harden our hearts so here's Jesus yes he wants our lives doesn't he but he gave us his life so this day we can seek forgiveness because of that and we can ask for strength to deal with our own personal temptation Nathan confronted King David didn't he with the enormity of what he'd done David had sort of managed to pull the wool over most people's eyes up until that point you know he looked the same on the outside but on the inside he'd become a slave to sin Nathan said you are the man and so it was a crisis point in David's life and friend each time when we come to

God's word there's a crisis point David knelt before God Psalm 51 asking for forgiveness asking for a new heart and on the cross Jesus absorbed what otherwise would have David's name on it Jesus was thrown into hell where their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched and this is God's love friends for you and for me he gave us his very life from a house in Capernaum to a room in Glasgow choose life shall we pray dear heavenly father we hear the writer to the Hebrews for we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathise with our weakness but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are yet without sin let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need dear father we pray that you would fill us through your spirit and help us we pray to better thwart the temptation of the evil one and through your son

Jesus Christ we ask that you would mercifully forgive our sin and cleanse us from all unrighteousness and in his name we pray amen