

Mark 9: 33-41

“Do you know who is on your side?”

(Mark 9:33-41 NIV)

“They came to Capernaum. When he was in the house, he asked them (the disciples), ‘What were you arguing about on the road?’

34 But they kept quiet because on the way they had argued about who was the greatest.

35 Sitting down, Jesus called the Twelve and said, ‘Anyone who wants to be first must be the very last, and the servant of all.’ **36** He took a little child whom he placed among them. Taking the child in his arms, he said to them, **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.’

“‘Teacher,’ said John, ‘we saw a man driving out demons in your name and we told him to stop, because he was not one of us.’

(39) ‘Do not stop him,’ Jesus said. ‘No one who does a miracle in my name can in the next moment say anything bad about me, **(40)** for whoever is not against us is for us.

(41) I tell you the truth, anyone who gives you a cup of water in my name because you belong to Christ will certainly not lose his reward.”

“Do not overlook the importance of small deeds,” people say.

Jesus affirmed it in our text:

“I tell you the truth, anyone who gives you a cup of water in my name because you belong to Christ will certainly not lose his reward.”

Some mysteries cloud what Jesus here.

Both Matthew and Mark include the statement in their gospels.

But they put it in different contexts.

Matthew used the saying in this setting:

Jesus had sent the twelve Apostles on a preaching mission, but only to the Jews not to Samaritans or Gentiles.¹

Jesus gave the Twelve this info about the reception they would get:

“He who receives you receives me, and he who receives me receives the one who sent me. **(41) Anyone who receives a prophet because he is a prophet will receive a prophet's reward, and anyone who receives a righteous man because he is a righteous man will receive a righteous man's reward.**

¹ Some call this assignment: the *limited commission*.

“(42) And if anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones because he is my disciple, I tell you the truth, he will certainly not lose his reward.”²

In other words, “When I send you fellows on a mission, people will accept you, as they would accept me, and accept me as they would the Father.”

What did Jesus mean when he made this statement?

When I was young, friends sometimes asked me to go and play with them at their houses.

When I asked my mother, she often said, “Bob, you can stay a half-hour.”

I don't know what it was about a half-hour, but that's the limit my mother usually set.

Suppose I overstayed my half-hour and my mother sent one of my siblings to say,

“Mom says it's time to get your little breeches home (My mother often warned me that I was getting too big for my breeches).”

Imagine my younger brother, Gary, arriving with mom's order to get home and I reply, “Buzz off, geek!”

I do not know if geek had been coined when I was young, but you get the idea.³

If I told Gary to “get lost” when he was relaying her message, I was not just snubbing Gary; I would have been rejecting my mother, too.

I cannot specifically recall telling Gary that, but it certainly could have happened.

When Jesus sent out the twelve to the Jews, he was saying to Israel,

“You have wandered from God. It is time to come home. The Lord wants you to enjoy a heavenly home with him.”

That was the objective of their mission.

Let's go back to Gary bearing mom's order.

Imagine a 100 degree day.

Gary has walked several blocks in the hot sun in order to deliver the message.

When he gets there, my friend and I are enjoying our favorite flavor of Kool Aid.

And I say, “Gary, thank you for coming to tell me. Have a quick glass of Kool Aid before we go home.”

² Matthew 10:40-42 NIV

³ Geezer was, but I doubt geek was.

Gary likely would have difficulty imagining that I was ever that kind. He would recall that I was that kind of guy but not often kind.

If I had accepted his message though, I would have shown respect for my mother, for her message, and for her messenger.

That seems the context of giving a cup of cold water in Matthew's gospel.

Mark's context is not the same.

Mark's setting is different.

In Mark's gospel, Jesus just came from the Mt. of Transfiguration with Peter, James, and John.

- Afterward He tutored all of the Apostles.
- The group walked to Capernaum.
- The twelve walked together and visited with one another.
- **Jesus apparently walked by himself.**
- When Jesus and the Apostles got to the house where they were staying, Jesus asked the Twelve an embarrassing question.

No one wanted to answer Jesus.

Can you imagine asking twelve preachers a question and not one wants to answer?

Not even chatty Peter opened his mouth.

What caused the sudden silence?

“What were you arguing about on the road?”

Jesus asked them.

Because on the way there, they had argued about who was the greatest, all twelve were tongue-tied.

Few of us brag that openly, but we church people often try to intimate that we are better than other folks.

The Apostles glibly boasted.

We tend to be more subtle.

Yet when we comment on the failures and misdeeds of others, we are artfully hinting that we are better than they are:

“I would never do what he/she did.”

Human pride usually takes one of three courses:

1. **“I do more than anyone else.”**
2. **“I know more than anyone else.”**
3. **“More people respect me than they do the others.”**

If Jesus confronted us the way he did the Apostles, would we be dumbfounded, too?

That is when Jesus gave a lesson on our need to serve others.

As if to change the subject, the Apostle John said: “We saw a man driving out demons in your name and we told him to stop, because he was not one of us.’

(39) "‘Do not stop him,’ Jesus said. ‘No one who does a miracle in my name can in the next moment say anything bad about me, (40) for whoever is not against us is for us. (41) I tell you the truth, anyone who gives you a cup of water in my name because you belong to Christ will certainly not lose his reward.’"

- According to Matthew, Jesus talked about the cup of water when he first sent the twelve out to preach.
- As our text shows, Mark connected Jesus' saying with the stranger who cast out demons in Jesus' name.

Why do Matthew and Mark differ?

Many scholars think that Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John rearranged stories from Jesus' life so they would fit the theme each writer had in mind.

That seems the only way some scholars can explain why, in the gospels, similar sayings appear in differing situations.

When I read explanations like that, I sometimes wonder where those people obtained their life experiences.

Did they have real lives?

Or did they spend their entire lives in libraries or consulting others who live cloistered lives?

Name a minister or a politician.

And I will show you a person who reshapes stories to fit particular audiences.

Ministers and politicians regularly do that.

- In the 1970s, I preached a sermon on the *Parable of the Sower* at the Hollywood church.
- About a year later, I preached on the *Parable of the Sower* again, but to a rural community in Oregon.
- At that time, the Hollywood church was racially diverse, had many single folks, and numerous people in the area struggled with alcoholism, drugs, and fragmented families.
- The Oregon City church was comprised of typical families who faced different issues.

I preached from the same Matthew 13 Parable of the Sower text, but attempted to tailor my comments for each situation.

I do not expect anyone to write about my life, but suppose two different biographers did.

- Imagine one writer reading a transcript of my parable sermon in Hollywood.
- The other; my parable sermon in Oregon.
- Each author references in his/her book my comments about the parable of the Sower.

Years later, if people compared those biographies, they might wonder why the two stories differ.

Is it because one or the other writers was mistaken or had a different agenda?

Of course not.

The two writers would differ because their sources were different situations or settings.

Jesus preached all over Israel; when gospel accounts vary, it is likely that the writers used illustrations Jesus had tailored to separate occasions or locations.

There is a second mystery:

What was Jesus teaching in this Mark text?

First, it's easy to get so wrapped up in our own little group that we think we are the only ones serving God.

Whenever anyone praises Jesus, we should be thankful.

If folks are honoring Jesus, we should be very careful about criticizing them.

Nothing done to honor Christ should be considered insignificant.

We do not always know the meaning of actions; neither can we measure the long term effects of deeds.

One phrase appears 4 times in our text.

Did you catch what that phrase is?

“Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me . . .”

“‘Teacher,’ said John, ‘we saw a man driving out demons in your name and we told him to stop, because he was not one of us.’

(39) “‘Do not stop him,’ Jesus said. ‘No one who does a miracle in my name can in the next moment say anything bad about me, (40) for whoever is not against us is for us.

“(41) I tell you the truth, anyone who gives you a cup of water in my name because you belong to Christ will certainly not lose his reward.’”

Jesus underscored the importance doing things in his name.

Mark’s Gospel shows that vital emphasis.

At last week’s Emmy Awards, I understand that a comedian was trashing Jesus’ name.

The political implications of what he said, I shall leave for comments by others.

But Christians gladly, but humbly wear Jesus' name and we should do everything in his name.

When Paul and the others referred to themselves as Apostles of Jesus they were claiming the Lord's authority at times.

But we should keep in mind that the word Apostle means "one sent."

The Apostles were sent on a mission to tell Jesus' Good News.

Many successful people and even churches set up foundations bearing names other than the name of Jesus to do good works.

Christian do good deeds to honor Christ, not to bring honor to us or to make a name for ourselves or our favorite causes.

Christianity is not just another major religion alongside Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, etc.

Scholar, Hans Bietenhard wrote an excellent treatise on the meaning of Jesus' name.⁴

Consider what Jesus said:

“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of

all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. . .”⁵

We are baptized into the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, but the word “name” is singular.

Whether you identify God as Father, Son or Holy Spirit, He is one God, who Created the heavens and the earth.

The beginnings of Hinduism are lost murky legends.

Buddha and Mohammed are historical figures (Buddha about 600 B.C. and Mohammed about 600 A.D.).

They have both returned to dust from which all human beings have come.

Christ created the heavens and the earth. When he visited this tiny planet that he created, appearing as a human being, fellow humans envied him, resented him, and killed him.

But He returned from the dead.

If Christ is Creator of the Cosmos, and he alone conquered death, it is folly not to do all things for the glory of his name.

“Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. 16 Let the message of Christ dwell

⁴ *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Volume V, pp 271-281.

⁵ Matthew 28:18, 19

among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts. 17 And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.⁶

“At the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the Glory of God the Father.”

Do you recall when authorities arrested the Apostles for doing things in Jesus’ name?

“They had Peter and John brought before them and began to question them: ‘By what power or what name did you do this?’ **8** Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them: ‘Rulers and elders of the people! **9** If we are being called to account today for an act of kindness shown to a man who was lame and are being asked how he was healed, **10** then know this, you and all the people of Israel: It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you

crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed.

11 Jesus is ‘the stone you builders rejected, which has become the cornerstone.’ **12** Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved.”

Acts 4:7-12 NIV

“They called the apostles in and had them flogged. Then they ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. **41** The apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name. **42** Day after day, in the temple courts and from house to house, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Messiah.

Acts 5:40-42 NIV

On whose side are you and in whose name will you be doing things this week?

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⁶ Colossians 3: 15-17 NIV