

Mark 9:38-50 NIV **"Balancing fire and salt"**

"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. (42) And if anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to be thrown into the sea with a large millstone tied around his neck.

"(43) If your hand causes you to sin, 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. (45) And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life crippled than to have two feet and be thrown into hell. (47) And if your eye causes you to sin, 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, (48) where "their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched."

"(49) Everyone will be salted with fire. (50) Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can you make it

salty again? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with each other."

Do you ever feel that things are coming apart in your life?

One thing after another goes wrong.



As the old saying goes,

"The whole world is going to hell in a hand basket?"

Have you noticed this pattern?

Down turns frequently follow high points.

Maybe you received an award.

Aced an exam.

Received praise.

Been on an emotional high.

You hardly have a chance to savor your high.

Faster than grandpa can catch 40 winks, things go topsy-turvy.

Forty doors from hell open wide.

Life events occur that way, don't they?

As coyotes trail a lone calf, testing seems to follow emotional highs.

Our Mark text relates to this challenge.

"Everyone will be salted with fire," **said Jesus.**
"Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can you make it salty again? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another."

What did Jesus mean when he said this?

Some scholars throw up their hands:

"No way to know for sure," they say.

This text does contain a few difficult parts, but its plain words should absolutely sober us.

Suppose you and some friends walk leisurely around a scenic lake.

Near the shore, you see an empty rowboat.

Someone in your group climbs into the boat and discovers some things they can't identify.

But then under a seat, your friend pulls out two sticks of dynamite with fuses already burning.

Certain items in our text should seize our attention faster than burning fuses on dynamite.

A simple key called context helps us understand most of the Bible's difficult sayings.

It helps to read what's just occurred or said.

What is the context of Mark 9?

Jesus was revered and exalted on a tall mountain.

Peter, James, and John had accompanied Jesus.

At the top, the three disciples saw two great heroes of the Jews: Moses, who parted the sea and gave the 10 Commandments; and Elijah the great prophet.

Moses had been dead about 1400 years;

Elijah, around eight hundred years.

Those two great men stood talking with Jesus.

At the same time, Jesus' appearance changed; he was transfigured.

That sight scared the three disciples.

Some people talk when they're nervous.

Others, of course, talk all of the time and make everyone else nervous.

Peter talked like a nervous dervish, but the voice from heaven stopped him saying:

"This is my son, whom I love.

Listen to him," (Mark 9:7 NIV).

In addition to telling Peter to quit talking, God had informed the disciples:

"In their day, Moses and Elijah did well. But Jesus my Son is my main guy. Listen to him."

When a loved one publicly praises you, that is special, isn't it?

God gave Jesus honor greater than a Congressional Medal of Honor and far exceeding a Nobel Prize.

In comparison, Oscars, Emmys, and Presidential awards look like rusty pig iron.

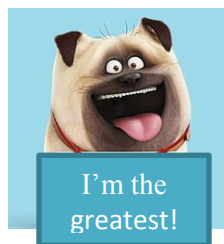
Nothing equals the honor God gave Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration.

The all-Powerful Creator of this vast Universe praised and honored his Son Jesus.



Fresh from that cosmic award ceremony, Jesus walked down the mountain with Peter, James, and John and got to the other nine disciples.

Guess what was happening?



A boy suffering demonic effects lay on the ground, foaming at the mouth, gnashing his teeth.

The disciples who didn't go up the mountain stood arguing with a bunch of lawyers and professors.

Why?

The nine had tried to cast the demon from the boy, but didn't succeed, probably because they hadn't followed Jesus' instructions.

Their failure led to the big to-do with those lawyers.

The nine disciples hugely disappointed Jesus.

Jesus' next test came as the disciples walked on with him.

As they went to Capernaum, the disciples talked with one another.

Try imagining the conversation.

Peter, James and John possibly bragged about being up on the mountain with Jesus.

Do you think they might have called the guys Jesus left behind as "losers"?

The nine had publicly humiliated Jesus:



(Mark 9:17, 18 NIV).

We don't know why the banter started, but it centered on which disciple was the greatest.

Perhaps one of the nine retorted to Peter:

"Hey, Pete. I hear the Almighty had to order you to stop talking so much."

Maybe to change the subject, the disciples talked about a fellow who'd been doing good things in Jesus' name.

The twelve disciples ordered him to stop because he wasn't part of their little group.

The outing was a supposed to be a learning seminar for the disciples.

Yet all of Jesus' disciples were failing-big time. On the mountain, Jesus had soared on eagle's wings. Now he's with unbelieving, back-biting, buzzards, so full of themselves, they can't get off the ground.

That was quite a test for Jesus, wasn't it?

Then came Jesus' salt lessons.

Until we learn the salt lesson, we'll be tossing and turning, stumbling, and groping.

Bitterness might overwhelm us.

Everyone will be salted with fire, said Jesus.

Do you feel as though you're being tested?

When trials come, we tend to complain:

"Why do I have to go through this?"

Testing is part of growing and life.

The Father tested Jesus often and in many ways.

Mark Chapter nine gives examples of both Jesus and his disciples being tested.

Jesus faced testing and overcame it.

Now, he's forming his kingdom team.

Our lives resemble qualifying trials.

Are we ready for Jesus' team?

He tests us to see if we make the grade.

Everyone faces fires of testing.

"Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can you make it salty again?"

A Hollywood church member was a chemical engineer, who worked for a major food company.

Of low salt, sea salt, etc., Fred often commented:

"Salt is salt—it's sodium chloride."

In Jesus day, salt was extremely valuable.

The Romans sometimes paid soldiers with salt.

As you know, salt preserves and flavors food.

Bacon, ham, and eggs seem tasteless without salt.

In ancient times, folks couldn't buy pure, granulated salt as we can; pure salt was rare.

At times they extracted and bleached salt from sea water and often mined salt from veins of soil.

If you exposed a vein of salt to sunlight or other elements for long, you might have nothing left but a few grains of sand.

Gritty sand is just what you want in your potato salad, oyster stew, or dental fixtures.

Because what they had wasn't pure salt, that salty substance in Jesus' time often lost its saltiness.

Only sand or useless compounds remained.

Those substances couldn't preserve anything.

Farmers couldn't even put them on manure piles.

Pure salt worked and was valuable

Jesus' expects us to actively work "as salt" for his kingdom—to help save people.

"Bob, are you sure? Isn't that the preacher's job?"

I see no distinctions in Jesus' language, do you?

He wants us all to share His Good News.

Help people find life.

Stop all of the misery and putrefaction.

In blunt English:

"If we're not out in the world acting as change agents (salt), we're not fit even for a latrine."

If we're not lighting the world with Christ's love, we're dead, non-rechargeable, batteries.

Twice used paper plates.

Dried cans of paint.

"Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is fit neither for the soil nor for the manure pile; it is thrown out."¹



¹ Luke 14:34, 35 NIV

First, our text tells us this life is a qualifying test for God's Kingdom and the Lord puts us through trials to prove us.

Second, he expects us to be the "salt of the earth." He wants us to be agents of change by telling His message of life.

Here's our final point:

"Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with each other."

In Scripture, salt represents harmony and peace.

Jewish rabbis in Jesus time understood and rabbis still know: "It was sign of friendship to eat salt together. It typified an everlasting covenant."²

When you see a packet of salt, salt shaker, or container of salt, regard it as a sign of your job to have "salt in yourself."

How can we tell whether we are active salt?

All phone conversations, tweets, text messages, and talk at meals and coffee are tests.

Our words will have one of the three effects:

They will be nonsense and thus of no positive good.

Words can be harsh gossip or conversations that run others down.

We can build up and strengthen one another.

If we strengthen and encourage one another, we create peace.

We'll, "Have salt in (ourselves), and be at peace with one another."

If our talk dispirits, discourages, and disparages others, we're not fit even for the dung heap.

Hebrews 10 explains how church members should handle the challenges of life and act (as salt):

"So let's do it—full of belief, confident that we're presentable inside and out, let's keep a firm grip on the promises that keep us going. He always keeps his word.

Let's see how inventive we can be in encouraging love and helping out, not avoiding worshipping together as some do but spurring each other one, especially as we see the big day approaching."³

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² Chief Rabbi Dr. J H Hertz, *Ed Pentateuch & Haftorahs* p 415. See Numbers 18:19

³ *The Message*, Eugene Peterson, translator *Hebrews* 10:22-25: