



## 2024 3Q The Book of Mark Lesson 7 Teaching Disciples: Part I

by Tim Jennings

### SABBATH

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What does it mean to be a disciple? A disciple is a student, but not merely studying a subject, a disciple is one who follows the methods, principles, practices of their mentor. A disciple of Jesus would be someone who is a follower of Jesus, who wants to emulate and practice the teachings, principles, methods, modes of Jesus—a person actively engaged in being like Jesus and carrying out Jesus' purposes in their lives.

Could a person be a student of the Bible and not be a disciple of Jesus?

Could a person get a degree in New Testament studies and not be a disciple of Jesus?

Could a person identify themselves as a Christian and not be a disciple of Jesus?

Jesus said,

- “Not everyone who **says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’** will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will **say to me** on that day, **‘Lord, Lord,** did we not prophesy in **your name,** and in **your name** drive out demons and perform many miracles?’ Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!’ (Matthew 7:21-23 NIV84, emphasis mine).

In whose name were these ministers and missionaries doing their ministry? Jesus! They be considered by most people to be Christians, but Jesus said they are not His disciples!

So how can one tell if they are actually a disciple of Jesus?

What do you think of this quotation,

- There may be marked defects in the character of an individual, yet when he becomes a true disciple of Jesus, the power of divine grace makes him a new creature. Christ's love transforms, sanctifies him. But when persons profess to be Christians, **and their religion does not make them better men and better women in all the relations of life**—living representatives of Christ in disposition and character—they are none of His. (EG White, *The Sanctified Life* 55)

Do you agree with the quote?

Does it say never makes a mistake, never has a shortcoming, never stumbles and sins? No, it is about growth in godliness, development, advancement, overcoming because one is walking with Jesus.

And this will be manifest in **all relations of life**, so the pastor who has a wonderful public reputation but beats his wife at home is not a follower of Jesus. Do you know domestic problem is a real problem in so called Christian homes—that there is no difference in the rate of domestic violence in Christian and non-Christian homes. Why? Because as Paul wrote to Timothy at this time in human history, there is a form of godliness without power. The penal/legal form of Christianity is a fraud, it is based on the lie that God’s law functions like human law and it makes the god being worshiped like Satan in character, the source of pain, suffering, and death, and that justice is inflicting just punishments. So people become like the god they worship, they become legalistic, rule-keeping, authoritarian, judges of others—all the while calling themselves Christian and thereby misrepresenting Christ and doing harm to God’s kingdom.

Will all the true disciples of Jesus belong to the same denomination?

Will the true disciples of Jesus believe all the same doctrines?

What will the true disciples of Jesus have in common?

## **SUNDAY**

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The lesson focuses our attention on Jesus healing a blind man in which Jesus touches the man’s eyes with spit and then the man can see but what he sees is blurry, so Jesus touches his eyes a second time and then the man can see clearly.

The lesson makes the point that this is the only occasion in Scripture in which a miracle took two actions on the part of Jesus.

First, while the Scripture reports Jesus took two actions, it is unclear if the miracle took two actions,

Let’s read the text, and we will read two versions—and consider do they read the same? These are translations, legitimate interpretations of the meaning of the Greek:

- They came to Bethsaida, and some people brought a blind man and begged Jesus to touch him. He took the blind man by the hand and led him outside the village. When he had spit on the man’s eyes and put his hands on him, Jesus asked, “Do you see anything?”

He looked up and said, “I see people; they look like trees walking around.”

Once more Jesus put his hands on the man’s eyes. **Then his eyes were opened, his sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly.** Jesus sent him home, saying, “Don’t go into the village.” (Mark 8:22-26 NIV84, emphasis mine).

- Then they came to Bethsaida. They brought a blind man to Jesus and asked him to touch him. He took the blind man by the hand and brought him outside of the village. Then he spit on his eyes, placed his hands on his eyes and asked, “Do you see anything?” **Regaining his sight** he said, “I see people, but they look like trees walking.” Then Jesus placed his hands on the man’s eyes again. **And he opened his eyes, his sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly.** Jesus sent him home, saying, “Do not even go into the village.” (Mark 8:22–26 NET, emphasis mine).

The NIV interpretation makes it sound like the second touch is what brought healing, but the NET allows for another interpretation, which is my preference. And that is that Jesus healed him with the first touch, but the text tells us Jesus used spittle, and how do you see things if you get water, or excessive tears, or spit in your eye? Blurrily, so the second action after healing the man, as he was seeing things blurrily, was to wipe the man’s eyes clean like a good physician and the man then opened his eyes and everything was clear.

The lesson points out that this two-step process until the man could see clearly, is an acted-out parable for spiritual discernment. That spiritual discernment takes time to unfold. That we must be reborn, have the miracle of a new heart, where we can see/discern spiritual truths, but as babes in Christ we see/discern imprecisely and thus need further help to wipe old beliefs, preconceived ideas, and other biases out of our mind’s eye before we can see clearly—the most important being the lie about God’s law functioning like human law.

## MONDAY

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Read Mark 8:31-38:

- He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again. He spoke plainly about this, and Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. But when Jesus turned and looked at his disciples, he rebuked Peter. “Get behind me, Satan!” he said. “You do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men.” Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it. What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul? If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his Father’s glory with the holy angels.” (Mark 8:31–38 NIV84).

Let’s unpack this in sections.

Here is one of the places that the Bible tells us that Jesus explained His future, His rejection by the leaders and His crucifixion and resurrection to His disciples. And the Bible says He told them this **plainly**—then why didn't the disciples know this was going happened? Why were they not prepared?

Could it be that they were so deeply convinced of their traditions of a god-king savior who would use power to destroy their enemies that Jesus' description did not compute, did not meet with expectations, and therefore they, His own disciples, rejected what Jesus was telling them? Could it be that they heard His words and then interpreted them to mean something different—like He is just being modest and humble—because they did not want the truth because the truth was too upsetting?

Do you find this happens today, that there are people who reinterpret truth to fit what they want to believe? I think that many people who claim to be Christian are going to be caught by surprise as end-time events unfold because they have believed a traditional interpretation of Scripture and things just don't turn out that way.

What did Peter do? He tried to set Jesus straight, to correct the Son of God—wow, what about today when people hear the truth sent by God, whether in a book, from a program, a friend, a sermon? Have you seen people rather than examining the evidence for themselves, they deny the truth and seek to redirect the person bearing the truth?

Did anyone see my blog for this week? [Dr. Jennings Examines The Arguments and Methods of a Critic](#)? If you didn't I recommend it as I unpack the methods and tactics of those who do not have the truth and also are not seeking the truth and how they will attack those with the truth.

Why did Jesus say to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan!" Was Peter demon possessed like the demoniacs?

Was Jesus saying that one can advance Satan's agenda, Satan's message, Satan's principles and kingdom without being demon possessed?

But how? Wasn't Peter a follower of Jesus? How could a follower of Jesus advance Satan's kingdom? What made Peter's actions and words satanic?

- Lack of trust in Jesus?
- Opposition to God's will?
- Was Peter trying to be disloyal, or do you think at that moment he thought he was trying to help and protect Jesus?
- Was Peter seeking to oppose God's will or do you think at that moment he thought he was advocating for Jesus and God?
- So what was the problem?
- His motivation was not love and trust but fear and selfishness—Peter didn't respond to Jesus with love and trust, but with fear, anxiety, and insecurity, with survival instinct, with what will make him feel safe. Do we have evidence of this when Peter later denied Jesus with cursing?

- And this is why Jesus said to him, “when you are converted feed my sheep” and why Jesus goes on to say what He says next, because Peter hadn’t yet died to fear and selfishness.

How does one die to live? Doesn’t that seem like foolishness? And thus the wisdom of God is foolishness to the world. The world teaches that to live you must kill others, not die yourself.

So, what is Jesus describing? How would you explain the idea of dying in order to live to a non-believer?

Where does our life come from? From our parents back to Adam who received life from God. God breathed into Adam the breath of life and Adam became a living being. The breath is the same word as spirit. Did something happen to the life, the spirit, given to Adam and Eve?

Yes, they contaminated their life, their spirit, their animating energy with fear and selfishness. We all receive the life, the spirit, passed down from Adam and Eve, which is corrupted, infected, fearful and selfish.

The Bible says that are born in sin conceived in iniquity (Psalm 51:5). We are born with a life, a spirit, of fear and selfishness—and that life is terminal; we are born dead in trespass and sin. This is not a condition we chose and we are not guilty for it. But we still have this terminal condition that without remedy results in symptoms and death.

In order to live we must surrender that life, that spirit; we must let go of our fear, let go of our drive to survive and receive a new spirit, the spirit of power and love (2 Timothy 1:7). We must receive a new heart and right spirit (Ezekiel 11:19; 18:31); we must receive the Holy Spirit who recreates the life of Christ, we become partakers of the divine nature (2 Peter 1:4) so it is no longer our natural, fear-ridden, survival of the fittest life that we live, no that life dies and we live new lives with animating motivating energy of the Spirit of Jesus Christ (Galatians 2:20).

What about Jesus being ashamed of people in heaven who are ashamed of Him on earth? How do you understand that?

Do you think Jesus is embarrassed, humiliated, distressed

Here is my paraphrase of these verses:

- Then Jesus began to explain to them the full extent of his mission: "The Son of Man, in order to provide the Remedy to sin, must suffer the weight of many things, including rejection by the church leaders, and condemnation by the theologians, senior priests, pastors, and church lawyers. He must be killed, and on the third day rise to life again." He didn't hide the truth, but told them plainly what was going to happen. Peter didn't like what he was hearing, so he took Jesus aside and tried to direct him down a different path. Jesus saw all the disciples watching, and turned to Peter and said, "Get Satan's methods of selfishness away from me! You do not have God's methods of love in mind, but are promoting the survival-of-the-fittest ways of

fallen humanity." Then he summoned the crowd to join him and his disciples and said: "If anyone wants to follow me into unity with my Father, they must surrender their life, willingly choose to die to selfishness, and follow me in love. For whoever follows the survival-of-the-fittest principle and seeks to save their life will lose it because the infection of selfishness will not be eliminated; but whoever loses their life in love for me will find eternal life, for they will have been restored back to God's design for life — selfless, other-centered love. What good does it do to selfishly hoard all the treasures of the world only to die eternally? Or how much is one's individuality — their eternal existence — worth to them? If anyone is ashamed of me and my methods of truth and love and chooses unity with this disloyal and selfish generation, the Son of Man will be unable to unite such selfish people into his family when he comes in the fullness of his Father's glory with his holy angels." (Mark 8:31-38 REM).

What is the cost of discipleship—a willingness to learn, to be corrected, to embrace and follow the truth, to be taught to give up on the wrong and embrace what is actually true and right—and what is that known as? Biblical obedience, the Greek word for biblical obedience literally means a humble willingness to listen, learn, and choose to follow and apply the truth. Biblical obedience is not primarily about performance, but about the attitude of the heart toward God and the truth.

So a true disciple is an obedient student, one who is humbly willing to learn what the teacher is teaching.

## **TUESDAY**

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Read Mark 9:1-13:

- And he said to them, "I tell you the truth, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the kingdom of God come with power." After six days Jesus took Peter, James and John with him and led them up a high mountain, where they were all alone. There he was transfigured before them. His clothes became dazzling white, whiter than anyone in the world could bleach them. And there appeared before them Elijah and Moses, who were talking with Jesus. Peter said to Jesus, "Rabbi, it is good for us to be here. Let us put up three shelters—one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah." (He did not know what to say, they were so frightened.) Then a cloud appeared and enveloped them, and a voice came from the cloud: "This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!" Suddenly, when they looked around, they no longer saw anyone with them except Jesus. As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus gave them orders not to tell anyone what they had seen until the Son of Man had risen from the dead. They kept the matter to themselves, discussing what "rising from the dead" meant. And they asked him, "Why do the teachers of the law say that Elijah must come first?" Jesus replied, "To be sure, Elijah does come first, and restores all things. Why then is it written that the Son of Man must suffer much and be rejected? But I tell you, Elijah has come, and they have done to him everything they wished, just as it is written about him." (Mark 9:1–13 NIV84).

What do we learn from this?

Matthew adds the following:

- There he was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light. (Matthew 17:2, NIV84).

What do we learn from the Transfiguration?

- Why did Jesus and Elijah and Moses look like the sun? What was the cause of this brightness?
- Was it similar but stronger and more intense than what Moses face when he came down off Sinai in the Old Testament?
- Did it look like fire? Was it the fire of combustion?
- Did Jesus have at the transfiguration His resurrected immortal body, or His mortal body that was going to die on the cross?
- What does it tell us that Jesus was bathed in heavenly fire in a body that was subject to death but He was not harmed?
- That Jesus had no sin—was sinless
- But also that the fire is harmless, that death does not come out from the fire of God's presence, death comes out from sin. The fires of God's presence are the life-giving fires of God that Daniel describes when rivers of fire come out from God and billions stand in it.
- What does this mean for the teachings about hell and fire and God's role in the death of the wicked in the end? If we have time we will explore this in detail in Thursday's lesson.

Why do you think the Father sent Moses and Elijah to talk to Jesus? Was it only as an object lesson of the future restoration in glory, with Moses representing the resurrected saved and Elijah representing the translated saved? Or do you think Moses and Elijah had something to say to Jesus?

What was Jesus soon to face? The rejection by His people, the abandonment by His followers, the false allegations, the unjust trial, the phony conviction, the abuse, mocking, and crucifixion, and the letting go of His Father's protection and connection. Would these events tempt Jesus? Did Moses and Elijah face similar experiences and collapse under the pressure for brief moments?

Might Moses have said to Jesus, "Oh, my dearest friend, be ready. These people we love, they are not going to see You for who You really are. They are not going to accept You. They are going to choose fear and selfishness rather than love and trust, and they are going to reject You, accuse You falsely, abuse You, and crucify You. They will mock You, and You will feel hurt and frustrated and disappointed, and You will be tempted in every way just like I was, but don't take Your eyes off the Father, don't give in to your feelings—don't do like I did and allow frustration to take control. I have faith in You, Jesus. I know you can do better than I did. And when You have won the day, when You have resisted every temptation, overcome every assault, and loved all the way to death and thereby destroyed "death and brought life and immortality to light," I will be waiting at the gates of heaven for Your return. I love You, my friend. You can do it!"

Might Elijah have said, “Jesus, I am so sorry that our sin requires this of You. I know you are doing this because of who You are, because You love us, because it is the only way to win the war and save us sinful humans. But I hate it for You. I know Your faith in the Father is so much stronger than the faith I had at Mount Carmel, and it is going to need to be. Be ready; Satan is going to hit You with every dirty trick, every underhanded attack, every abuse and hardship that he can. And You will feel completely alone, just like I did. But You reminded me way back then that there were seven thousand who had not bowed to Baal, and I want to remind You that there are many more than that throughout history who have stayed faithful to You. When You feel alone, remember that You are not alone. And when Your soul is weighted down with grief and heartache and You feel like I did, that You just want to die, don’t give in like I did and grumble. Learn from my mistake and trust Your Father, for no matter what Your human feelings tempt You to do, Your Father loves You and is with You and is carrying out His purpose to save humanity through You. I know You can do it, my friend; I love You and trust You.”

What about the discussion about Elijah coming before the Messiah returns—what do you make of their question and Jesus’ answer?

Elijah’s name means, “My God is Yahweh.” Elijah the prophet was a real historical figure whose God was Yahweh and who faithfully stood up to the lies about God that infected the hearts and minds of the people, including the church leadership.

Elijah confronted the prophets of Baal at Mount Carmel—Baal, the false god that Israel had repeatedly been seduced into worshiping, the one who seemed so successful in getting people to accept him instead of our Creator God. How was this possible? Because Baal was a very close counterfeit to the true God of heaven, but kept an attribute of his character that sinful humans prefer to the character of our Creator God. Notice the similarities to the true and then notice the attribute of evil Baal retains that God does not have:

Baal was ...

- The son of El (i.e., El-ohim or El-Shaddai)
- A god who was often called “Almighty” and “Lord of the Earth”
- A god who brought rain, thunder, and lightning and who fertilized the earth, controlled the sun, and brought the harvest
- A god who fought the great serpent Leviathan, as well as battled against Mot, the god of death. Most amazing of all, it was taught that in his battle with Mot, Baal died and was resurrected to bring life to Earth.

Now, what is wrong with worshiping “God the Son” who is the “Creator” who brings life, controls the weather, fights the great serpent, fights against death, dies for us, and rises again to bring life to the land?



**Baal required sacrifice to be offered to him in order for him to provide blessings.** To Baal, sin was an offense that had to be paid by sacrifices or offerings, or legal payments. In other words, Baal was the god of imposed law that required imposed punishment a legal payments. Elijah confronted this and exposed it as false.

The Jews in Jesus' day were worshipping Baal while falsely believing they were worshipping Yahweh, thus John the Baptist brought the message of repentance to turn away from the false legal views of a god who makes up rules, inflicts punishments, and requires appeasement with sacrifice. This is how the Jews came to view the Temple service.

The following commentary is regarding the Jews thinking of John the Baptist's preaching that Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, from the book *The Desire of Ages*:

- Many of them regarded the sacrificial offerings much **as the heathen looked upon their sacrifices,—as gifts by which they themselves might propitiate the Deity.** God desired to teach them that from His own love comes the gift which reconciles them to Himself. (The Desire of Ages 112, emphasis mine).

The message of John was the message of Elijah, calling people back to Creator worship and away from the worship of the god-king, imposer of law, imposer of punishments who required legal payment and sacrifice to pay for sins.

Baal, was also known in the Bible as Rimmon, the god of Aram whom Naaman asked permission to kneel in front of when his king did. Baal eventually became Zeus to the Greeks, Jupiter to the Romans, Thor to the Norse people—and he became Jesus Christ to all Christians who worship a god who makes up rules, uses his power to punish rule-breakers and requires the blood of a human sacrifice be offered to him in order for him to provide blessings.

This is why the Bible prophesied through Malachi that:

- Before the great and terrible day of the LORD comes, I will send you the prophet Elijah. He will bring fathers and children together again (Malachi 4:5, 6).

Today, God is waiting for His people to stop worshipping Baal—to, like Elijah, take the message of Yahweh, of Creator worship whose laws are design laws to the world!

## **WEDNESDAY**

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Read Mark 9:33-35:

- They came to Capernaum. When he was in the house, he asked them, “What were you arguing about on the road?” But they kept quiet because on the way they had argued about who was the

greatest. Sitting down, Jesus called the Twelve and said, “If anyone wants to be first, he must be the very last, and the servant of all.” (Mark 9:33-35 NIV84).

What does this passage mean to you?

What does it mean for who has the highest place in the church organization?

Why didn't Jesus establish a church hierarchy with a pope or General Conference president, an executive committee or college or cardinals to rule over others—or do you think He did do that with the Apostles?

Did Jesus set up a hierarchical organization with rulers to rule over, or a living organism with divergent individuals blessed with different abilities all to work in coordinated harmony serving each other for the benefit of all?

Consider this commentary on this passage, note carefully how this writer explains the true focus of Jesus' words, on the deeply hidden motives behind the actions of the disciples and Jesus' goal in eliminating those:

- The Saviour gathered His disciples about Him, and said to them, “If any man desire to be first, the same shall be last of all, and servant of all.” There was in these words a solemnity and impressiveness which the **disciples were far from comprehending**. [Why? Jesus is speaking plainly, what prevented them from understanding? Was it their preconceived ideas of how law and order works, of the ruling class rising up and ruling over others? In other words, had they accepted the kingdoms of this world as a template for understanding God's kingdom? And who is the ruler of the kingdoms of this world?] That which Christ discerned they could not see. They did not understand **the nature of Christ's kingdom**, and this ignorance was the apparent cause of their contention. [What is the nature of Christ's kingdom? It is reality itself built upon design laws, how reality functions, founded upon truth, love, and freedom. But the disciples were conditioned by their culture, their religious upbringing to think God's kingdom functions like human kingdoms, on made up rules and coercive enforcement. Thus, their biases in regard to God's law and God's kingdom prevented them from comprehending reality. In other words, their minds were trapped in a fantasy world of make-believe penal legal religion, just like many Christians and church leaders today.] But the **real cause lay deeper**. [The real cause, the deeper cause, is what creates and sustains the false legal law philosophy that the sinful prefer—and we have this same deeper cause infecting humanity today, and infecting our church today.] By explaining the **nature of the kingdom**, Christ might for the time have quelled their strife; but this would not have touched the **underlying cause**. Even after they had received the fullest knowledge, any **question of precedence** might have renewed the trouble. Thus disaster would have been brought to the church after Christ's departure. **The strife for the highest place was the outworking of that same spirit which was the beginning of the great controversy in the worlds above**, and which had brought Christ from heaven to die. [The deeper issue, the root cause is the sin-sick spirit of selfishness, a desire to exalt self, a seeking to elevate self above others. It is the fear-driven life we inherited from Adam, the survival drive, the need to

protect self at the expense of others that feels so right and natural. This leads to the rulership of the few elites dominating, controlling, exploiting, governing the masses. This is where the world is heading and this is satanic, it is the way of the selfish and all the kingdoms of the world practice this method and why imposed law seems so right because imposed law and rule enforcement becomes the method to make others comply. But Jesus' kingdom and method is the opposite. It is the method of truth, love, and freedom winning hearts freely. But Jesus' methods, His kingdom is obstructed and replaced when we present a penal legal religion, a theology of imposed law with a punishing god.] There rose up before Him a vision of Lucifer, the "son of the morning," in glory surpassing all the angels that surround the throne, and united in closest ties to the Son of God. Lucifer had said, "I will be like the Most High" (Isaiah 14:12, 14); and **the desire for self-exaltation had brought strife into the heavenly courts**, and had banished a multitude of the hosts of God. **Had Lucifer really desired to be like the Most High, he would never have deserted his appointed place in heaven; for the spirit of the Most High is manifested in unselfish ministry. Lucifer desired God's power, but not His character.** He sought for himself the highest place, and **every being who is actuated by his spirit will do the same.** Thus alienation, discord, and strife will be inevitable. Dominion becomes the prize of the strongest. **The kingdom of Satan is a kingdom of force;** every individual regards every other as an obstacle in the way of his own advancement, or a steppingstone on which he himself may climb to a higher place. (The Desire of Ages 435).

And this is exactly how the beast Revelation will deceive the world, by presenting itself as the powerful sovereign who imposes law and punishes lawbreakers. Doing justice through law and law enforcement.

But the righteous, those who are translated to heaven are described not as ruling over others, but as

- They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death. (Revelation 12:11 NIV84).

## THURSDAY

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Read Mark 9:42-50:

- "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. 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. 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. 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, where 'their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched.' Everyone will be salted with fire. 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." (Mark 9:42-50 NIV84).

What does this text mean? What are the lessons we are to glean?

Who are the little ones Jesus is speaking of here and in other places? Is He referring primarily to actual physiological children, people under the age of 13? Or is He referring to children, babes in Christ, the new converts?

The lesson states,

- Jesus speaks in hyperbole that it would be better to be drowned in the sea than to cause one of these “little ones” to sin. (Adult SS Guide 3rd Q 2024, The Book of Mark p. 61).

Is Jesus speaking in hyperbole—obvious and intentional exaggeration on this? Or is it actually true—it would be better to drown in the sea, than to hurt children, whether actually children or lead babes in Christ away from Christ and be an active agent in the destruction of their souls? What would be worse to drown at sea or to participate in hurting little children? What happens to the person who hurts others, and especially children who are not capable of defending themselves and preventing their own exploitation? What happens in the heart, mind, character of such exploiters? And what will it be like for them when they come into the full unveiled fires of God’s infinite presence of truth and love? What will it be like for them when they can no longer deny what they have done, no longer pretend they were only trying to help, when they have full awareness of the harm, the pain, the torment they have caused others? Which is worse, drowning in the sea, or corrupting one’s own character like that?

Why do you think the lesson authors suggest this is hyperbole, an exaggeration? Could it be because they see sin as a legal problem that requires inflicted punishment and they can’t conceive of something worse than being executed, so a millstone around the neck and drowned in the sea is as bad as beheading, or firing squad, or burning in a fire—the end result is the same.

Is the portion about cutting off a hand or a foot hyperbole, or a metaphor that is actually true?

If someone had a gangrene foot what is better, to cut off the foot and save the body or to let the entire body die? If someone had malignant melanoma in their retina—what is better to pluck out the eye and save the body or to let it spread and die of metastatic melanoma?

Jesus is providing a metaphor of how reality works. If we have a part of us that if not removed will spread and cause the destruction of the whole, it is better to lose that part than to lose our entire selves.

What is the application to our spiritual life? It is about our beliefs, attitudes, habits, and attachments. If we have brought into our hearts and minds anything that if not removed will destroy us, it is better to have that item removed from us than to let it spread and destroy us.

The Bible describes this same idea, this same reality of cutting away part of our body to save the whole with the object lesson of circumcision in which a part of the body is cut away, but which is applied to the heart, circumcision of the heart, which is cutting away any attachments we have formed

to unhealthy, destructive, sinful things, attitudes, beliefs, or people—anything that would sever our love/trust relationship with Jesus.

So, we see this in Matthew 10:34-36 from The Remedy:

- "Don't think that I have come to make peace with a selfish world. I have not come to bring peace with selfishness, but a sword to cut selfishness out of the hearts of people. I have come to cut dysfunctional family ties: to free a son from selfish loyalty to his father's ambitions and feuds, to sever a daughter from the control of an oppressive and manipulative mother, to cut through the fear and hostility a daughter-in-law has toward her mother-in-law. A person's worst enemies are often members of their own family. (Matthew 10:34-36 REM)

What about the worm that does not die? It does not represent the soul but represents the infection of sin, rebelliousness, the corruption in the soul that is eating it away and the point is that for the lost they do not die to their rebelliousness, their selfishness but the sinfulness in them remains alive and they cling to it. They do not die to self as the righteous have done. This is not for all eternity, but for as long as they are alive they refuse to surrender to Jesus and be reborn with a new life.

The fire is the fire of God's life-giving glory of truth and love that burns through lies and selfishness and destroys them in the end.

The lesson suggests the fire one day goes out, I believe this is an error, that the fire never goes out, but it is the righteous, not the wicked who spend eternity in that fire:

- "The sinners in Zion are terrified; trembling grips the godless: 'Who of us can dwell with the consuming fire? Who of us can dwell with everlasting burning?'" (Isaiah 33:14).

What is being described? Doesn't it sound like hellfire?

But the question Isaiah poses is: Who can live in this fire? Who will spend eternity in the flames? And the prophet gives a shocking answer:

- "He who walks righteously and speaks what is right, who rejects gain from extortion and keeps his hand from accepting bribes, who stops his ears against plots of murder and shuts his eyes against contemplating evil!" (v. 15).

What? It is the righteous who will live forever in this fire—and not the wicked

And what does Scripture reveal?

- When God spoke to Moses from within the bush, the bush burned but did not get consumed (Exodus 3:2-4, Acts 7:30-36).
- When God came to Mt. Sinai, His presence was described as a "consuming fire," but the elements did not melt (Exodus 24:17).

- When Solomon’s Temple was dedicated, the priests couldn’t enter because the brightness of God’s fiery glory was too great, but the temple did not burn down (2 Chronicles 5:14, 7:1–3).
- Before his fall, Lucifer walked among the “fiery stones” of God’s presence (Ezekiel 28:14, 16).
- God takes His throne and “rivers of fire” come out from Him, yet billions stand in this fire without any harm (Daniel 7:9, 10).
- Prior to his crucifixion, in a body still subject to death, Jesus was bathed in heavenly fire, yet no harm came to Him. His clothes didn’t even get scorched (Matthew 17:2).
- Hebrews plainly tells us that “our God is a consuming fire” (12:29).
- The Song of Solomon states: “Love is as strong as death, its jealousy unyielding as the grave. It burns like blazing fire, like a mighty flame. Many waters cannot quench love; rivers cannot wash it away” (8:6, 7).
- Aaron’s sons Nadab and Abihu took their censers, put fire in them and added incense; and they offered unauthorized fire before the LORD, contrary to his command. **So fire came out from the presence of the LORD and consumed them, and they died before the LORD.** ... Moses summoned Mishael and Elzaphan, sons of Aaron’s uncle Uzziel, and said to them, “Come here; carry your cousins outside the camp, away from the front of the sanctuary.” So they came and carried them, **still in their tunics**, outside the camp, as Moses ordered (Leviticus 10:1–5, emphasis mine).

And the salt is symbolic of purifying and preserving power and that which gives the thirst for living water, thus my paraphrase:

- "Everyone will be purified by the eternal fire of love and truth emanating from the presence of the Father — just as salt purifies a sacrifice. Salt — like love and truth — purifies, but if salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? Likewise, how can a person who loses all desire for love and truth be purified? Have the salt of love and truth in your hearts, and be real friends with each other." (Mark 9:49-50 REM).