

MARK 9:38-41

A CUP OF COLD WATER

“John said to him, ‘Teacher, we saw someone casting out demons in your name, and we tried to stop him, because he was not following us.’ But Jesus said, ‘Do not stop him, for no one who does a mighty work in my name will be able soon afterward to speak evil of me. For the one who is not against us is for us. For truly, I say to you, whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because you belong to Christ will by no means lose his reward.’”

I am reading this passage with new insight in recent days. Jesus, approaching the cross, discovers His disciples arguing over which of them was the greatest. It is not so very different with disciples today. We take pride in the gifted men God gives us, pride in the facilities God has provided us, pride in the warmth of fellowship we enjoy, pride in all except that which is eternal. Though He displayed exceptional gentleness, the Master nevertheless rebuked His own through instructing them.

Perhaps you will remember the words of **VERSE 37**. In that verse we hear Jesus saying, “Whoever receives one such child in My name receives Me, and whoever receives Me, receives not Me but Him who sent Me.” We have perhaps heard those very words whenever we witness a godly family commit themselves to raising their children in the Faith. Jesus’ words elicited a striking response from John, perhaps the most astute member of the disciple band and perhaps the clearest thinker among them. His words in **VERSE 38** constitute not a boast, but a shamefaced admission of failure. If that is not clear, contrast them again with the preceding words Jesus spoke. John realised that he had failed. In a similar way, we also fail in our drive to build our own little kingdoms. Join me in reviewing these verses so that we may discover something of how to honour Christ, building His Kingdom, refreshing the saints and acting with righteousness.

THE PETTINESS OF THE SAVED [v. 38] — “Teacher, we saw someone casting out demons in your name.” Take special note of the precision of John’s words. He speaks of **THE METHOD** observed in another. It would seem that not all Jesus’ followers in that day were closely allied with Him. Neither were all intimately known to the other disciples. At least this one man appears not to have been known to the Twelve, or at least he was not readily recognised by them.

However, the man John saw clearly did grasp one essential truth: the Name of Jesus was associated with power to set men free. This was what the Master had said in His first sermon [**LUKE 4:16-21**]. “[Jesus] came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up. And as was his custom, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and he stood up to read. And the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written,

‘The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me
to proclaim good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives
and recovering of sight to the blind,
to set at liberty those who are oppressed,
to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour.’

“And he rolled up the scroll and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. And he began to say to them, ‘Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.’”

There is not some magical quality to the Name of the Lord as some perhaps suppose, or as many wish to preach. Rather, it is the One behind the Name lending that Name power. Faith in the Son of God appropriates that divine power for the child of God. Do not suppose you may witness the power of Christ without faith in Him? Perhaps you remember the promise of the Saviour given just before His passion. “Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I am going to the Father. Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it” [JOHN 14:12-14]. These words spoken by the Master should cause us to tremble, not because of the potential for His power to be revealed, but because we so often fail to employ that very power revealed through His Name.

Knowing that the Name of Jesus was associated with power to set men free, this unnamed man whom John had witnessed was seemingly moved with compassion to set demonised people at liberty. This nameless believer in the power of the Son of God dared to rebuke the powers of the wicked one so that those held in bondage might be freed.

John spoke of the method which was obviously disagreeable to the disciples. Certainly, by their silence, even those who did not rebuke the man lent approval to silencing him. However, John also spoke of **THE MESSAGE**. This becomes obvious when we note that he observed that this unnamed man was conducting his ministry in Jesus’ Name. There is a false message that sounds right, and that message is tantamount to death. Others in the Word attempted to appropriate the power by appropriating the message. Perhaps you recall the incident recorded in **ACTS 19:13-16** when seven sons of a man named Sceva, reputed to be Jewish exorcists, attempted to appropriate the Name of Jesus. The incident is so humorous that it practically begs reading again.

“Some of the itinerant Jewish exorcists undertook to invoke the name of the Lord Jesus over those who had evil spirits, saying, ‘I adjure you by the Jesus whom Paul proclaims.’ Seven sons of a Jewish high priest named Sceva were doing this. But the evil spirit answered them, ‘Jesus I know, and Paul I recognise, but who are you?’ And the man in whom was the evil spirit leaped on them, mastered all of them and overpowered them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded” [ACTS 19:13-16].

There seems to have been a decided difference between these two cases. The exorcists were not seeking to honour Jesus and they thus declared a false message. Their message sounded orthodox, but it lacked power because it failed to honour the Lord. The man of whom John spoke, and whom the disciples had rebuked, had faith in Jesus. His message was dependent upon the power of Jesus. The message was orthodox, though his methods were less than orthodox. Because the source of his message was the Son of God that message was powerful.

Let me remind you of an essential truth: **GOD BLESSES FAITH, NOT ORTHODOXY**. Dear people, you may be as straight as a gun barrel theologically, and just as empty. You should not construe this as a plea to become lax in adherence to or pursuit of the truth; rather, this is meant to serve as a caution urging each of us to remember that God is pleased with men and women of faith. Determine to walk in faith and in orthodoxy, knowing that utter dependence upon God is of primary importance.

Then, John shamefacedly admitted **THE MOTIVE** that had prompted the disciples to attempt to hinder the man with a ministry that differed from theirs. They rebuked him **because** he was not one of them—he didn't wear their label, he wasn't part of their group, he was suspect because he was different. Isn't that so very much like us? Convinced that we alone are correct we are suspicious of anyone who fails either to unite with us or to submit to our wise leadership. They fail to meet our tests of orthodoxy and so we refuse to acknowledge them.

I admit I am Baptist. On hospital admission forms I list my blood type as Baptist positive. Someone spoke for me when they said, "I'm Baptist born, and I'm Baptist bred; and when I die, I'll be Baptist dead." However, I was not saved because I am a Baptist, nor am I the recipient of God's grace because I am Baptist. There will be no Baptists in Heaven—only redeemed believers in the Living Son of God. I am saved in the same way every believer is saved—by God's grace through faith in the Risen Son of God. I neither merited God's grace nor have I done anything that would cause God to favour me. Brothers and sisters, check your motives when you inspect the methods and the message of others who are not part of our party. Ensure that you are submitted to the True and Living God, Jesus Christ.

THE POSITION OF THE SAVIOUR [v. 39, 40] — "Do not stop him," said the Master. He then gives two reasons for this pointed rebuke. First, no one who does a miracle in [the Name of Christ] can in the next moment say anything bad about [Him]. The one relying upon and openly acknowledging the power of the Saviour for whatever act he performs, must acknowledge Christ. To minister in the Name of Christ an individual must acknowledge Him as the source of his ministry. So long as the servant ascribes to the Master glory and clearly honours the Living God, let us give thanks and accept that God is at work. The True and Living God transcends our imagination, working in the hearts and lives of men and women throughout the world. We are not the only servants He has.

The second reason our Lord gave for His rebuke to those disciples is found in **VERSE 40**: "The one who is not against us is for us." The teaching can be found in a different form in **MATTHEW 12:30**. "Whoever is not with me is against me." Read these two sayings of the Living Jesus and you will be struck with the absolute position He imposes—*there is no middle ground*. Either we are associated with Christ, or we are opposed to Christ.

Recall those awesome words that probe our hearts and serve as a warning for each one. "No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money" [**MATTHEW 6:24**]. Note this further warning that the Saviour issued. "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness'" [**MATTHEW 7:21-23**]!

We should not be so foolish as to accept that everyone who claims kinship in the Faith is of the Faith; but neither should we attack others who fail to pronounce our shibboleth. Worshippers who do not wear our label must not be despised simply because we differ in some minor matters. Styles of worship can vary so long as the Lord Christ is worshipped; let us be people of discernment. Methods may differ, but the message must always adhere to that which was first delivered and which we have received in the written Word.

THE PRACTISE OF THE SAINTS [v. 41] — Here is the heart of the message found in these words of Jesus. “Truly, I say to you, whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because you belong to Christ will by no means lose his reward.” Our Lord mentions an act that is small. It is insignificant, easily forgotten. Do you remember who last gave you a drink of cool water? Do you remember who last refreshed you through some insignificant act of thoughtfulness? We pass over such commonplace acts. They are not long remembered.

I want to encourage you if you are one who refreshes others. Jesus knows what you have done. The unseen God watches and He takes note of the smallest act of love performed in His Name. Should that surprise us? One of the most beautiful and richly meaningful passages of the Old Testament occurs in the last book of that ancient document. “Those who feared the LORD spoke with one another. The LORD paid attention and heard them, and a book of remembrance was written before him of those who feared the LORD and esteemed his name” [**MALACHI 3:16**].

Think of that! God, the Living God, Creator of Heaven and earth, bends down to catch the faintest whisper of His child’s words. Isn’t that precious! God hears you and takes note of every act that you perform that honours Him. Your acts of compassion did not pass unnoticed in the precincts of Heaven. God saw you when you quietly served Him; and He heard you when you spoke to honour Him. That is rich encouragement for weary saints!

The most refreshing acts are not always the most notable; though we often imagine such great deeds to be the most significant. Rather, little acts of love constantly refresh the weary saint. Some someone stood courageously against an onslaught of evil. Their victory, gained through valiant refusal to quit, encouraged me. Some someone spoke a word of thanks, just when I had determined I could not continue. That word of thanks gave me strength to work another day. Some someone gently reminded me of a forgotten responsibility. That word of thoughtful rebuke placed my feet back on the path from which I had strayed. Some someone gave me a pat on the back—a loving hug. They could not have known how I hurt, but that thoughtful, gentle embrace lifted my heart and reminded me that I was loved. Because of that small gesture, I was refreshed and I was enabled to return to the task that God had assigned to me. Life’s sweetest moments are discovered in the thoughtful little words and gestures.

Jesus illustrated the act with the insignificant, for nothing is ever truly insignificant, and especially is this true when we consider **THE MOTIVE**: “Truly, I say to you, whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because you belong to Christ...” There it is: “Because you belong to Christ!” Especially when we refresh the saints do we honour the Lord who sent them. Especially when we refresh the saints do we honour the Lord who reigns over both the giver and the receiver. There is a truth here that I have often mentioned—a truth that must be noted again: God blesses motives. Were we to purify our motives, godly actions would follow. We imagine that we please God through correct actions, forgetting that actions divorced from motives are meaningless. Yet, motives—attitudes—which are correct will direct our actions in due time. Grasp that truth. Attitude always corrects action; motive always precedes deeds.

There is a final matter witnessed in the Words of the Master that I call to your attention—**THE RECOGNITION**. The act seems perhaps insignificant to the most of mankind, but the motive is pure even though it seems hidden from man. The Master rewards His people not because of the greatness of the act, nor even in commendation of the motive that prompted the act, rather the rewards the Master confers are founded in grace.

We are brought into vital union with Him by grace; we are kept by grace. All we enjoy is due to His grace. On another occasion, Jesus said, “Whoever receives you receives me, and whoever receives me receives him who sent me. The one who receives a prophet because he is a prophet will receive a prophet’s reward, and the one who receives a righteous person because he is a righteous person will receive a righteous person’s reward. And whoever gives one of these little ones even a cup of cold water because he is a disciple, truly, I say to you, he will by no means lose his reward” [MATTHEW 10:40-42]. That's God! That's grace!

The application, then, is simple. As followers of the Risen Son of God, let us determine to practise refreshing one another. The means may be small, but let us determine to trust our Master, knowing that He takes notice. Let us determine to give thanks to God for those who refresh us. But let us likewise remember to let those who have refreshed us be refreshed through our own thanksgiving. Amen.