



THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO MARK

Mark 9:38-end A collection of Jesus' teachings (29 August)

Earlier in the chapter, the disciples failed to drive out a demon (v.17-18); then they talked about their status as Jesus' disciples – who was the greatest (v.33-34)? Now they see someone who isn't one of their disciple group succeeding in driving out demons in Jesus' name. Their noses are doubly put out of joint, and they object; but Jesus tells them not to be cliquish or act as an exclusive sect – they should be ready to welcome and include others, even if they don't seem to belong to our group or match up to what we think they should be.

The phrase "in my name" is significant in v.38-41. To do something in Jesus' name indicates an allegiance to him – acting on Jesus' behalf and with his authority. Someone who has such a relationship with him is unlikely to speak ill of him, and anything they do as a result of that relationship – be it something major like casting out a demon, or something very simple like giving a thirsty person some water – is to be welcomed.

v.42-48 speak of the danger of hindering or even undermining someone's faith: don't trip them up – don't cause them to stumble and fall – because you would bear a very heavy responsibility if someone lost their faith because of something you said or did. Equally, don't do anything that would cause your own faith to stumble; if there is something in your behaviour, tastes or interests that might cause your spiritual downfall (even if it is something good like hands, feet and eyes) then deal with it. Jesus uses hyperbole (v.43-47) to stress that radical measures might be needed because of the danger of causing spiritual hindrance to God's children or even oneself.

Disciples of Jesus should be very distinctive – they should be 'salty' – and Jesus encourages them not to lose that saltiness (v.50).

1. What attitudes do you think lie behind John's words in v.38?
2. What are the dangers of trying to define who is 'in' and who is 'out' of God's people? (Note Phil 1:15-18 for Paul's attitude on this.) Does this mean that we shouldn't oppose anyone, or does Jesus give limits?
3. How can we, the church, be distinctive without being exclusive?
4. Would the way you speak to a disciple with a robust faith be different from the way you speak to a disciple with a young, relatively immature faith?

5. What aspects of behaviour and lifestyle have the potential to cause a Christian to stumble in their faith?
6. How might we seek to live our lives so that they do not cause other believers to stumble?
7. Why do you think Jesus used the sort of language he did in v.43-47? How do his words show the seriousness of not fighting sin in our lives, especially those things which hinder or weaken our faith?
8. If a disciple is 'salty,' might that make them uncomfortable to be with?
9. Read Col 4:2-6. What might it mean for your conversation to be 'full of grace, seasoned with salt'?

WELCOME: The word in Shona means 'You have arrived'.
Take a few minutes reflecting on the picture and bible passage,
then share.

