

Mark 9

Written by K B Napier
Tuesday, 24 August 2010 08:40

In this chapter we come across serious life lessons. One of those lessons is that we must withstand trials in a godly way. Too many Christians fail miserably nowadays, because they fear pain and suffering. Because they 'bale out' when troubles begin, they show lack of faith, and a reliance on sin. So, they become weak and miserable. They find no solutions in scripture and hear no guidance in prayer. This is because they have failed because of their own unwillingness to learn from God. Seek Him first – let everything else come second, including your own comfort.

Verse 1

1.

And he said unto them, Verily I say unto you, That there be some of them that stand here, which shall not taste of death, till they have seen the kingdom of God come with power.

Jesus told His apostles, and possibly other disciples with them, that some of them would not die until they had seen the “kingdom of God come with power.” Does this mean some would not die until He came the second time, to gather together His elect? No, it does not mean that, even though His second coming will be in power. Note the text talks about the “kingdom” of God.

The kingdom refers to the rule of God; the root, basileus, has the meaning of ‘the King’. The power came by the triumph of Christ/the Messiah over death, underpinning the fact that Christ rules. The words “of God” can equally be put as “of the Messiah”, because both are co-equal. ‘God’ can also refer to the Godhead – the Trinity.

So, some apostles and/or other disciples would die before Christ’s power was shown in and after the resurrection... the actual time-scale is not given. We may assume that some of the people with Jesus at the time He spoke did die beforehand. James is just one example; he was beheaded in 44AD, just a few years after Christ was crucified.

Verses 2-4

1.

And after six days Jesus taketh with him Peter, and James, and John, and leadeth them up into

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an high mountain apart by themselves: and he was transfigured before them.

2.

And his raiment became shining, exceeding white as snow; so as no fuller on earth can white them.

3.

And there appeared unto them Elias with Moses: and they were talking with Jesus.

We do not know what Jesus did for six days*, but at the end of the week He took three apostles with Him up a nearby mountain. The three were Peter, James and John. We can speculate about why He took those three, but it would just be guesswork! (* It is worth remembering that scripture only gives us a very small amount of information on what Christ did. We are told that He said and did so much that it would take many books to include them!)

When they stopped on the mountain, the apostles saw an amazing sight – Jesus was transfigured before their very eyes. It is where we get our word ‘metamorphosis’ from, and it means to transform, or to change into another form. Jesus literally altered His appearance and He shone with incredible brightness. What the apostles saw was Jesus displaying what He already had – deity. His clothing shone brightly, becoming ultra-white, whiter than any man could make them on earth.

The instruction to believers to “be ye transformed” is the same word, meaning that EVERY believer MUST change from his former self, to be more like Christ, in character, personality, conduct, etc. This is an obligation, not a choice! Many Christians today refuse to change to be like Christ, preferring their human sinful selves, desires and fears, so they incur God’s anger and lack spiritual growth in their lives. This transformation is an ongoing process, but it MUST begin nevertheless, from the very start of salvation. There is no excuse and no pardon from God for those who refuse to change. There is no special dispensation given to some and not others, for transformation of self is expected by God and is a sign of the believer’s changed, and always changing, spiritual state before God.

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Therefore, those who claim salvation MUST show it in a changed life, not superficial acceptance of what God says. The Christian who continually does wrong, then, is suspect, and we may rightly question that person's salvation. If, after several cautions and challenges, he continues to display sin, then we may – indeed, we MUST – reject him as a fellow believer and treat him as an unbeliever.

At the same time that Jesus' person and clothing changed, He was accompanied by two other persons who simply appeared before the three apostles' astonished eyes. "And there appeared unto them Elias (Elijah) with Moses: and they were talking with Jesus."

They were not mere images; they were the real persons. No man may come back from the dead until he is raised again by Christ on the last day, with a new body. Before that time, the saved dead remain in Paradise, fully aware and alive in a newer sense. It is from this realm that the two prophets and patriarchs came, to talk with their Master. Only God can cause those who have died to come back. No man can do this feat and no Christian should even contemplate it being done, except as a fraud, because God condemned those (witches) who tried, saying they must be put to death.

This is as good a place as any to warn Christians against the activities of spiritists, who assume many guises and names... necromancers, mediums, spiritualists, spiritual healers, clairvoyants, fortune-tellers, and so on. To God they all practice witchcraft and are to be condemned as wicked. All kinds of witches are acting on behalf of Satan, so what they do is satanic, no matter how 'modern' they might appear to be. ALL occult activities are sinful and against God. This extends, too, to occult presentations in film, on TV and in books, etc. it includes so-called 'games', such as Ouija boards. They are all evil and they all provide demons an entrance into the person's soul. If you are unsure whether or not an activity is occult, just ask a Christian with knowledge.

Verses 5-8

1.

And Peter answered and said to Jesus, Master, it is good for us to be here: and let us make three tabernacles; one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias.

2.

For he wist not what to say; for they were sore afraid.

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3.

And there was a cloud that overshadowed them: and a voice came out of the cloud, saying, This is my beloved Son: hear him.

4.

And suddenly, when they had looked round about, they saw no man any more, save Jesus only with themselves.

As usual, Peter spoke first! Like so many of us who are anxious, afraid, or non-plussed, he just blurted out the first thing he could think of! We know this because the text says “For he wist not what to say”.

He said it was good for the three apostles to witness what just happened. Perhaps, he suggested, they should build three tabernacles or memorials to Jesus, Moses and Elijah? None of the apostles present knew what to say, because they were afraid. Many today think they must always talk or chatter, or give an answer. This is not so – one of the deepest ways to show we are at ease with someone is that we can sit quietly with them without uttering a word! We need not always speak or blurt something out.

They then experienced what no man had known since Moses climbed the mountain to obtain the tablets of the law: God caused a cloud to surround them, and then spoke to the apostles: “This is my beloved Son: hear him.” They were thus personally instructed by God the Father to learn from Jesus! The cloud then vanished suddenly and only Jesus was there, looking His usual self. God need not prove His presence by a special light or special activities. He comes mainly in ordinariness... just as Jesus appeared ordinary to the people. Yet, though ‘ordinary’ in appearance, He was the Son of God, God Himself, walking amongst men!!

Likewise, do not insist on seeing signs and wonders. The Holy Spirit is within every person who is saved. Surely this is sufficient for us to get on with? At times God will reveal Himself in special ways to some Christians, for a special purpose, but do not hanker after the same things, for God gives each one of us blessings tailored to our lives. Only seek those things the Spirit has prompted you to seek after. There is also a fact most do not realise – that those who are given

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special blessings often have special responsibilities and have been given special characteristics.

For example, as a pastor and teacher I am in an isolated position (which is why prayer support is much needed). Only others in a similar office can know what I mean; we are alone in what we do, often misunderstood and often vilified. It is an essential isolation that maintains God's plan. Yet, God gives us many blessings as a counter to these human deficits, which give us strength and insights beyond human means. As the saying goes: Be careful what you wish for, for you might get it!

Verses 9-13

1.

And as they came down from the mountain, he charged them that they should tell no man what things they had seen, till the Son of man were risen from the dead.

2.

And they kept that saying with themselves, questioning one with another what the rising from the dead should mean.

3.

And they asked him, saying, Why say the scribes that Elias must first come?

4.

And he answered and told them, Elias verily cometh first, and restoreth all things; and how it is written of the Son of man, that he must suffer many things, and be set at nought.

5.

But I say unto you, That Elias is indeed come, and they have done unto him whatsoever they listed, as it is written of him.

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As the group walked back down the mountain, once again Jesus commanded that his small 'audience' should tell no-one what they had seen until He had risen from the dead. So, they could not even tell the other apostles. Even so, they asked each other what "rising from the dead" really meant. Today, with nearly two thousand years since the writing of the New Testament, and many more thousands since the first Old Testament texts, Christians have questions. The problem is, they never admit to them! So, they go along in ignorance, or worse, making up their own interpretations, so as not to appear 'foolish' before their peers. If only they could understand it is foolish NOT to ask the questions! Indeed, they would do their fellows a favour, because they, too, are probably asking the same questions!

But, it is not that simple, as so many find out. One young Christian I know asked relevant and genuine questions at his church. The result was that they banned him from speaking openly! After abortive attempts to find a solution, the young man has sadly (but rightly) decided not to go back to what is a very restrictive and unbiblical situation. I am always delighted when people ask questions! It is a sign of an independent and genuine mind! But, few churches and pastors see it that way, and generally react badly to questions they cannot, or will not, answer.

Perhaps you have not yet come across this, but it exists, and runs deep. Just ask the 'wrong' question and you may experience the wrath of mankind as it pretends to be holy! Dare to say something they teach is not scriptural and the wrath will explode, with gritted teeth and steely eyes. Such folks prefer tradition and centuries of 'this is how we do it', to amazing grace.

In this case, though, the apostles probably stayed quiet *not* because they were afraid to ask, but because they knew that if Jesus wanted them to know, He would have said so. In our own lives we are sometimes perplexed by this or that situation. But, if God does not wish to give us an answer at that time, He will remain silent. We must just accept that in good faith, because He really does know best.

The apostles asked a question: "Why say the scribes that Elias must come first?" Why must Elijah come before the end of time? The Elijah they saw was the 'original' Elijah. Jesus answered, saying that Elijah must indeed come back to put things right, and the Son of man (the Messiah) must also come to suffer and be treated with contempt.

Then, Jesus said something remarkable: that Elijah had ALREADY come back, and, as written, he was badly treated and put to death. He was referring to John the Baptist (see relevant chapter for an explanation), who came as the very personification of Elijah. Prophecies were

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coming together in a speedy and incredible way! Today, we are seeing prophecies coming together, about the activities preceding the very last days... political groupings leading to world government, the rise of all manner of wickedness, wars, the laxity and apostasy of the churches, the rapid rise of liars in churches, and so on.

Verses 14-22

1.

And when he came to his disciples, he saw a great multitude about them, and the scribes questioning with them.

2.

And straightway all the people, when they beheld him, were greatly amazed, and running to him saluted him.

3.

And he asked the scribes, What question ye with them?

4.

And one of the multitude answered and said, Master, I have brought unto thee my son, which hath a dumb spirit;

5.

And wheresoever he taketh him, he teareth him: and he foameth, and gnasheth with his teeth, and pineth away: and I spake to thy disciples that they should cast him out; and they could not.

6.

He answereth him, and saith, O faithless generation, how long shall I be with you? how long shall I suffer you? bring him unto me.

7.

And they brought him unto him: and when he saw him, straightway the spirit tare him; and he fell on the ground, and wallowed foaming.

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8.

And he asked his father, How long is it ago since this came unto him? And he said, Of a child.

9.

And oftentimes it hath cast him into the fire, and into the waters, to destroy him: but if thou canst do any thing, have compassion on us, and help us.

At last, Jesus and the three apostles reached the other disciples, who were surrounded by a massive crowd, and, of course, the inevitable scribes, who were grilling them with questions. Were they trying to get answers to accuse Jesus with? I do not doubt it, for the aim was clear – to charge Jesus with whatever it took to put Him to death!

When the crowd saw Jesus coming they excitedly ran to greet Him. Jesus carried on walking until He reached the scribes and, protectively, demanded to know what questions they were asking the disciples. But, before they could answer, a man in the crowd called out: 'I've brought my son to you, Master, because he is deaf and dumb with a demon. Wherever he goes the demon tears him apart, causes him to grind his teeth, and not eat. I asked your disciples to cast out the demon but they could not.'

As an aside, beware of those (usually charismatic) who claim to be able to cast out demons left, right and centre! Even Jesus' disciples could not, at times, cast out a demon. (I can suggest reasons for this but they are not apt at this moment). Those who claim to be great demon-casting warriors are usually nothing of the sort, and delude themselves; they see demons where none are, and pretend they are there because of their delusion. Satan loves these deceived people, for they do his job perfectly, by misconceiving who Satan is and how he works, and misleading the people.

Jesus again sighed in grief for the state of the Jews, calling them a "faithless generation". The same condemnation applies to many Christians today! Jesus said He would not be with them long, but had to suffer their faithlessness until then. He then told the man to bring the boy/young man to him.

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As soon as the demon saw Who was standing there, he tore at the boy, who fell on the floor with a fit, foaming at the mouth. (Note: This is why so many who have epilepsy were once thought to be demon-possessed. It is always possible that someone today is demon-possessed and is thus fitting. But, ordinary medical tests can decide if the condition is caused by a brain problem. They cannot, however, decide if there is a demon... there are many other possible indications).

Jesus asked how long the son had had the demon. It is obvious that the son was a teenager, or older, for the father said he had been possessed since he was a boy. Do not think that children cannot be affected by demons. They certainly can. Sometimes they come upon children who do things that are proscribed, such as occult games, or through watching horror films. Others, because possibly the parents are indulging in occult practices. We see many who may be possessed today, in our streets – drug-addicts, drunks, violent youths. They have been fuelled by the most horrific of things, from pornography to crime, from mindless violence to wicked rebellion.

The worried father said that his son was even thrown into fires or into the river by the demon, who was only too happy to destroy him. This is the real intention of any demon – to destroy the person. No occult practice is 'good' and there are no such things as 'good' demons. This means no faith healer, or spiritualist bringing 'good' messages from the dead, is 'good' – he or she is evil, for they act on behalf of demons, who are ALWAYS wicked and condemned by God. Listen to these people, even if only to be told your fortune, and you invite these demons into your life. And they *will* come. Be warned and warn others who may be tempted by the occult in all its forms.

The father begged Jesus to intervene, to save his son. This is all we can do in our day – plead with God to help us. In particular if demons are wrecking our lives or the lives of those we love. Only God can deal with them, for demons are greater than ourselves. We can seek help from God because, as believers, we belong to Him.

Verses 23-27

1.

Jesus said unto him, If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth.

2.

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And straightway the father of the child cried out, and said with tears, Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief.

3.

When Jesus saw that the people came running together, he rebuked the foul spirit, saying unto him, Thou dumb and deaf spirit, I charge thee, come out of him, and enter no more into him.

4.

And the spirit cried, and rent him sore, and came out of him: and he was as one dead; insomuch that many said, He is dead.

5.

But Jesus took him by the hand, and lifted him up; and he arose.

Jesus now repeats something He told His disciples: if you believe, then all things are possible. Ask without doubt, with faith, and whatever you ask for will be given! Though to modern men this is an incredible claim, it is nevertheless true... but many Christians *disbelieve* it, so few see results of prayer.

The father immediately cried out "I believe!" He also added "help thou mine unbelief". We are all failures in the matter of faith! There are times when we have utter faith, and though we might see and experience God's help at one time, we tend to forget it at other times, so our faith is then weak. We all need God's grace and mercy to keep and practice faith, because faith is a gift of God.

The people came running to see what was happening, and Jesus commanded the "foul spirit" (all demon angels are foul). Jesus commanded the demon to come out, never to return. Remember that if a demon is cast out, he *will* return, probably with many others, if the person does not live according to God and holiness. Christians, who cannot be possessed but can certainly fall under the influence of demons if they do not live right, must put their lives totally in God's hands, or forfeit their peace with God.

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When it left the young man the demon caused havoc, trying to tear him apart with much violence. When it left, the youngster lay quietly, and was so lifeless the crowd thought he was dead. This can happen because the violence of the demon is so strong the person just collapses with exhaustion. Jesus simply caught hold of his hand and the young man stood up, well and of sound mind.

Do not underestimate the presence or activities of demons. On the other hand do not go looking for them, which is a very dangerous thing to do. Also, bear in mind that the many things that are evil and violent in our society today may well be the result of a growth in demon possession and influence, even in our churches.

Notice, too, those who call themselves 'Christian' but who will not hand over their lives to God, or who continually act wrongly. They are suspect and it is possible their lives are being hampered and controlled by a demon, though the Holy Spirit dwells within! This is because the Christian must assent to the prominence of the Spirit, which does not allow demons to have any kind of influence.

If there is no assent, the Christian is showing contempt for the Lord and so his life will be badly affected by demons, who will use every power they have to wreck what should be an holy and righteous existence.

Also remember that the Christian must assent to the activities of demons! Shocking though this statement is, it is evident that some Christians prefer satanic interference to acting wisely and taking time and effort to grow in God's grace. Horrible though demonic influence is to a Christian, even if he suffers, the demon can only act that way if he is allowed to by the Christian. Think on that fact.

Verses 28&29

1.

And when he was come into the house, his disciples asked him privately, Why could not we cast him out?

2.

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And he said unto them, This kind can come forth by nothing, but by prayer and fasting.

After Jesus had cast out the demon from the young man, He and the disciples went indoors, where the disciples immediately asked why they could not cast out the demon themselves. Jesus gave them some advice: "This kind can come forth by nothing, but by prayer and fasting."

The disciples were enabled to do everything Jesus did. Yet, they could not cast out this particular demon. We are not told why it presented such a problem; we are only told that "this kind" required more than a straightforward command to leave. It also needed the person casting it out to fast and pray. Usually, demons were cast out by simple command. What can we learn from this? We can know that dealing in the spiritual realm is not a matter of applying rules or formulae.

Christians and pseudo-Christians today think they can do whatever they wish. They look at what Jesus and the disciples did and believe they can copy them slavishly. Nothing is farther from the truth! God calls people to act on His behalf; it is He Who prompts them to act, and it is He Who tells them how to do it. And each case can be different.

What we can see in this text is that certain problems require more than ordinary God-given sense and reason. If they are hard problems, then we must pray and fast. Why? I do not know, but it is what God speaks of, and that is sufficient. What kinds of problems need prayer and fasting? We only know when we come across them! It would seem that any problem that does not respond to normal Christian activity and approaches may need prayer and fasting. The reason could just be that God is showing us that we can do nothing of our own volition or power, and always need Him.

By prayer is meant God-given prayer. Merely 'praying' because it seems a good idea will not do the job. And by 'fasting' is meant cessation of food and fluids during the prayer period. Some Christians are very foolish about fasting and I have heard of some who have fasted for 28 days or more. The result will be hallucinations, delusions, and a real danger of collapse or death! Fasting means not to eat for no more than about two days. One may take small amounts of fluid.

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So, those who are foolish, fasting for longer (because they think it is somehow more holy), are likely to experience odd symptoms, light-headedness and 'visions'... not of God but from the mind. Many charismatics try fasting for long periods and are deluded into thinking their 'visions' and 'prophecies' are from God. Not so – they are manufactured by imbalance in brain chemicals. These people do it because theirs is a 'faith' of works, not of genuine faith, which is a gift of God.

Verses 30-32

1.

And they departed thence, and passed through Galilee; and he would not that any man should know it.

2.

For he taught his disciples, and said unto them, The Son of man is delivered into the hands of men, and they shall kill him; and after that he is killed, he shall rise the third day.

3.

But they understood not that saying, and were afraid to ask him.

Jesus kept on moving and the group travelled through the region of Galilee; Jesus insisted they went alone, so that no-one knew where they were. This was because He wanted time to teach the disciples. In particular, He told them He would be betrayed ('delivered') and taken by wicked men, who would kill Him. But, He would "rise the third day". So, after horror would come hope. Though He said these things plainly, and said them more than once, they did not understand.

I suppose it is hard to accept that the living, breathing person next to you, with so much awesome power, the very Son of God - God Himself - would be killed. As for rising again, that was probably too much to comprehend! Be honest. if YOU were a disciple with Jesus, would you understand any more than the others? Just as before, the disciples were too afraid to ask what Jesus meant, because they realised they were inadequate in their thinking.

Verses 33-35

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1.

And he came to Capernaum: and being in the house he asked them, What was it that ye disputed among yourselves by the way?

2.

But they held their peace: for by the way they had disputed among themselves, who should be the greatest.

3.

And he sat down, and called the twelve, and saith unto them, If any man desire to be first, the same shall be last of all, and servant of all.

There are times when I discern when people are keeping things back from me, or need to say something. Imagine how much more Jesus could discern people's thoughts! The group entered Capernaum ('village of comfort'), in the north of Galilee. When they were in a house willing to host them, Jesus asked the disciples why they were arguing amongst themselves on the road.

The men decided to remain silent, for their arguments were unworthy: they were disputing who would be the greatest disciple. Knowing what was in their hearts, Jesus bid them to sit down with Him. He told them something many today ought to learn, and especially those who would govern and rule – that anyone who wished to be the most important should instead humble himself and be a servant to everyone else. This coincides with the teaching that we should always seek the best for others rather than for ourselves.

How many today can agree to this saying of Jesus? I mean truly, not just in their heads! Are you really humble enough to seek the best for others? Are you genuinely low enough in spirit to let others take the pre-eminence? I see little evidence of this kind of godliness in Christians today! Jesus gave His all – literally. He died for the sake of the elect, and did not try to escape the reason for His birth. He became the lowliest so that others might have eternal life; He became servant of all. Yet, when He arose again, His humility became His best trophy as He sat on the right hand of the Father. Most people like to be noticed and given applause. How different it would be if they did not vaunt their profile and claims.

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Verses 36-40

1.

And he took a child, and set him in the midst of them: and when he had taken him in his arms, he said unto them,

2.

Whosoever shall receive one of such children in my name, receiveth me: and whosoever shall receive me, receiveth not me, but him that sent me.

3.

And John answered him, saying, Master, we saw one casting out devils in thy name, and he followeth not us: and we forbad him, because he followeth not us.

4.

But Jesus said, Forbid him not: for there is no man which shall do a miracle in my name, that can lightly speak evil of me.

5.

For he that is not against us is on our part.

We now come to a very much misused (if not abused) text. Jesus stood a small child in their midst. Having caught their attention, He then picked the child up into His arms and said 'Those who accept such children in my name also accept me. And those who accept me, accept the Father.' Most Christians believe this is a reference to small children, but it is not; it is about young (in the faith) Christians.

As if avoiding Jesus' words, John then said that the disciples had seen someone casting out devils in Jesus' name, but he was not one of the disciples. So, they told the man to stop what he was doing. Jesus then contradicted their thoughts and said "Forbid him not." He said that if anyone did a miracle in His name, he was very unlikely to speak ill of Him. 'He who is not

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against us is for us.' (Most Christian preachers are partisan, and if you do not belong to their local forum you are not welcome!)

Do you understand this? In another place Jesus said that it did not matter that a preacher was unsaved if what he preached was the truth! Many take this to mean that it does not matter what a man preaches. This is folly and it is not the same thing Jesus was talking about. The problem we have is that people who are unsaved, or saved but ignorant, are preaching lies and heresy in Jesus' name. We cannot allow them to continue unchallenged... and Jesus did not mean we must accept anyone who preaches anything! Rather, He was talking about those who preached the truth. There is, then, no freedom for preachers who teach what Jesus did not teach, or who teach heresy. These cannot go unchallenged, because otherwise hearers will think 'anything goes' in Christianity.

Verses 41-50

1.

For whosoever shall give you a cup of water to drink in my name, because ye belong to Christ, verily I say unto you, he shall not lose his reward.

2.

And whosoever shall offend one of these little ones that believe in me, it is better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he were cast into the sea.

3.

And if thy hand offend thee, cut it off: it is better for thee to enter into life maimed, than having two hands to go into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched:

4.

Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched.

5.

And if thy foot offend thee, cut it off: it is better for thee to enter halt into life, than having two feet to be cast into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched:

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6.

Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched.

7.

And if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out: it is better for thee to enter into the kingdom of God with one eye, than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire:

8.

Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched.

1.

For every one shall be salted with fire, and every sacrifice shall be salted with salt.

2.

Salt is good: but if the salt have lost his saltness, wherewith will ye season it? Have salt in yourselves, and have peace one with another.

Jesus then continued where He left off, saying that people who support and help Christians will have a reward. Now, do not mistake what is being said. This can be applied to both believer and unbeliever. Their 'reward' must be on this earth, for an unbeliever, once he dies, will only enter hell.

On occasions I have been asked what I would do if I was given a financial gift by someone who is unsaved. My questioner thought I should not accept such a gift, because the person is not of God. But, my response must be what scripture says. If anyone lends support and help to a child of God, then we are to accept it. So long as we are not accepting it as a gift of evil, we do what God wishes. Practically, I suppose it would mean qualifying any 'terms' attached to the gift. If the gift depends on us agreeing to something sinful, then we cannot accept it. But, if the gift is free of any demands, we may take it and thank God for it.

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On the other hand, if anyone tries to harm “one of (these) little ones”, he will himself suffer the punishment of God. But, note the text. It is not referring to children at all, but to “little ones that believe in me”... those who are saved. In another Gospel we come across a similar text, which explicitly explains this fact: in scripture the saved are sometimes referred to as ‘children’ and as ‘little ones’.

Jesus then took His teaching much further, by saying it is better to lose something in this life than to enter hell because of sin. For example, like a few others, I have been attacked mercilessly by wicked men and women; I have lost much in this life. Their aim was to make me bow to their wishes and retract my Christian beliefs. Though I wished to keep my earthly things and my job I refused, so lost just about everything. Yet, it was my privilege and honour to do so, though what followed was horrendous. (This includes attacks from Christians!). Better that, than to give in to sin and thereby keep what I had on this earth. What is the point of keeping what I had, if, when I die, I have to stand before Almighty God and explain my actions?

So, if something we have or something we do offends God, get rid of it, no matter what it costs. Better to enter heaven having destroyed what we love to have or do, than to enter hell because we prefer sin to God. Examples are given of feet and hands, but really the symbolism applies to anything at all we do that offends God. Of course, these verses are rhetorical and making a point, for a Christian cannot lose his salvation.

However, the text is put strongly to show just how important it is for Christians to live holy lives. Though we may not lose our place in heaven, we can certainly lose our peace of mind and usefulness... and many Christians are of this kind; they continue sinning and doing what is wrong in God’s eyes, rather than knuckle down and live righteously. Some sin so much they lose any notion they are sinning, and claim it is others, not they, who are sinning! Beware, Christian, for your life is just a whisper, a mere breeze that will quickly pass. You may not have time on this earth to put yourself right! Do it now, before God calls you and you die. Nothing on earth – and I mean nothing – is worth losing peace with God for.

“Everyone shall be salted with fire”. What does this mean? Salting represents cleansing, making something holy or acceptable to God. This is done by fire – the testing times sent by God. They are the trials of life to be expected by any man or woman who claims salvation. To fail these tests is to admit to sin. To pass them is to succeed in holiness and to please God. The whole point of trials in life is to come through them on God’s side and without sin; they are not ‘problems’ but privileges to be worked-through. They strengthen, though many think a trial

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defeats us and makes matters worse. They only think this if they give in and cannot last the pace. And, every sacrifice will be salted with salt. That is, no matter what we do for the Lord, and no matter how much we think we lose, God will test us to our limit, so that even the salt will be salted!

Remember – trials in our lives are not given to destroy us. They are uncomfortable at the time and even hurtful, but their aim is to purify us and make us better than we were. And when we come through a trial we will know God in a wonderful way. If we fail in the trial we will go back to general failure in Christian life and not experience blessings.

Do not think, then, that Christian life is a 'bed of roses'! Yes, I have known marvellous times... but, mainly, I have known trials and tribulation. My task is to last the course and not to give in to pain, or suffering, or any kind of human interference, but to continue in faith, so that, in the end, God will provide. He never takes us beyond what we can bear, even if we think we can bear no more! He knows our condition and will not give us a trial that will cause us to lack His response. If we fail, it is because we have little faith and we prefer sin to holiness, or we wrongly conclude God is not answering.

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