

## Constructing Unnecessary Walls

The Gospel of Mark Part 2: #4

Mark 9:38-41

*Therefore, my brethren, in your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: Who, being in the very nature of God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped. Rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death – even death on a cross. Therefore, God exalted him to the highest place, and gave him the name that is above every name. That at the name of Jesus every knee will bow, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of the Father.*

Two weeks ago, I walked into house that is home to one of the worst parental decisions in modern history, if not all human history. It wasn't a home without faith. It was full of faith. It wasn't a home without hope. It was full of hope. It wasn't a home without love. It was full of love. It wasn't even a home without discipline. It was full of discipline. But it was a home where the patriarch and matriarch thought it would be a good idea to remove the walls that separate the teenager's rooms to make one big room that they can both share and exist in and live happily ever after. When trying to figure out why happily ever after wasn't going as planned, I came to one conclusion: "there are some walls that are meant to stay up." Some walls are built for perfectly for good reasons. The ancients built them to protect their cities, their citadels, their food, their water, and their people. They built them for shelter. They built them for their animals. And they even built them for their teenagers. Like us, even they knew those walls were meant to stay up. But, church, hear the Word of the Lord of today. Because the message He has for you from Mark 9:38-41 is not a message about the walls that are meant to stay up. It's not even a message about the walls that are meant to be torn down. Instead, it's a message about the walls we tend to build in our lives that are not remotely necessary to construct in the first place. They are the walls that we who confess the name of Christ tend to build the moment we perceive that someone else is not as qualified as we are to perform a particular task, or to serve in an official leadership capacity, or to cast out a demon, or even to give a cup of water to someone else in the name of Jesus. We are not only good in the body of Christ at constructing those kinds of unnecessary walls. We are master carpenters who have perfected the art of that unnecessary trade.

King Solomon said "there is nothing new under the sun. What has been will be again." He was right. Because in the passage you will see today, the disciples were also master carpenters who perfected the art of constructing those unnecessary walls. They erected one of them when they saw someone outside their group casting out demons in the name of Jesus and told that individual to stop. Why did they build it? They perceived this individual as unqualified for the task. What was the problem? They used their special privilege of being an original disciple as a basis to make judgments about the qualifications of other followers of Jesus that they were not qualified to make. May we, people of God, learn from their unnecessary construction project so that we don't make the same mistake. To see the unnecessary wall they constructed, please turn with me to Mark 9:38-41. As we read together, I want you to notice two reasons that we tend to construct unnecessary walls and two reasons we should never construct another one again.

<sup>38</sup> "Teacher," said John, "we saw someone driving out demons in your name and we told him to stop, because he was not one of us." <sup>39</sup> "Do not stop him," Jesus said. "For no one who does a miracle in my name can in the next moment say anything bad about me, <sup>40</sup> for whoever is not against us is for us. <sup>41</sup> Truly I tell you, anyone who gives you a cup of water in my name because you belong to the Messiah will certainly not lose their reward.

### Two Reasons We Tend to Construct Unnecessary Walls

#### 1. The Jealousy Reason

- **A Man Who Catches Fly with Chopstick** – (1) The Karate Kid is one of the greatest movies of all time. (2) One of my favorite scenes is when Danielson witnesses Mr. Miyagi trying to catch a fly with a chopstick. (2) "Why are you doing that?" he says. "Man who catches fly with chopstick can accomplish anything." "Have you caught one?" "Not yet." (3) Then Danielson tries and proceeds to catch one on his first try, causing Mr. Miyagi to respond: "Beginners luck."
- **Main Idea of the Point:** One reason we construct unnecessary walls is because we don't like the thought of those we perceive as less qualified than we are more successful than we are doing at doing something we tried and couldn't do.
- **The Basis for Christian Jealousy:** (1) Is right here in this passage and one before it. (2) The basis for Christian jealousy occurs when we see individuals do something we tried to do and couldn't do. When we see that, we look for a reason to dismiss their actions. The reason we do that is because we can't understand how God used someone else, we perceive as being less spiritually mature than we are, or less qualified. (2) That's what happens here. In Mark 9:17-18, we read: <sup>17</sup> *A man in the crowd answered, "Teacher, I brought you my son, who is possessed by a spirit that has robbed him of speech. <sup>18</sup> Whenever it seizes him, it throws him to the ground. He foams at the mouth, gnashes his teeth, and becomes rigid. I asked your disciples to drive out the spirit, but they could not."* As a result, Jesus called them an unbelieving generation. (3) Here, they were faced with the reality that this man did what they could not. And the unnecessary wall went up.
- **App:** When we have similar experiences, instead of building the unnecessary wall, our first thought should be "thank you, Lord" for using people to do something for your Kingdom and glory that I could not do. When we have that attitude, we can be sure we will be able to do the things in the future that we were not able to accomplish in the moment, just like the disciples were.

#### 2. The Gatekeeper Reason

- **Protecting Jesus' Reputation** — (1) I heard a sermon several years ago entitled “Protecting Jesus Reputation.” (2) I barely made it through the sermon on my best behavior. I wiggled. I squirmed. I cracked my neck twenty times. You name it, I did. (3) Here's why: Jesus doesn't need us to protect his reputation. He's got it covered. He can handle it perfectly. (4) But what he does need us to do is recognize the body of Christ is one body with many members and all of them do not have the same function. But they are all equally as important.
- **Main Idea of the Point:** Another reason we construct unnecessary walls is because we tend to think we are called to protect the name of Jesus and stand against anyone we perceive as unqualified to do something for him.
- **Because He Was Not One of Us:** (1) The last phrase of v38 is the most haunting and the most disappointing phrases in all the NT. The disciples stopped him from doing good simply “because he was not one of us.” By doing so, they used their privilege as the 12 original disciples not as a basis to encourage people as long as it is still called today to stand up for Jesus and not bury their talents in the land. Instead, they used their privilege to exclude people who were not part of their group but equally devoted to the same cause. And that is an unnecessary wall. The wall they constructed because they thought they were gatekeepers who had to protect Jesus' reputation when he was perfectly capable of doing so himself.
- **What Happens When We Build that Unnecessary Wall:** We exclude half of the Great Saints of the Bible. We exclude Naaman, the Syrian leper. We exclude Ruth, the Gentile who married Boaz and became grafted into the line of the Messiah. We exclude the widow at Zarephath whose flower and oil never ran out. We exclude Matthew the Tax Collector and Simon the Zealot. And we exclude the Messiah from Nazareth, the place where Nathanael asked where anything good can come from.
- **App:** It is God who qualifies and calls. Our response should not be “no because that person is not one of us.” It should be “amen.” Here is a cup of water for your journey.

### Two Reasons We Should Never Construct Another One Again

#### 1. Whoever Is Not Against Us is For Us

- **When Pastors Get Interviewed from Visitors:** (1) There is something about pastors that a lot of congregation members don't realize. It is this: we get interviewed, counseled, and redirected as much as anyone on the planet. (2) It always comes via a visitor in church who calls during the week to set up a meeting. (3) You oblige because you know what it means: the interview. (4) They are going to go down their list of questions to make sure you agree with them at every point. If you don't, the next interview is down the street with another pastor at another church. That's an unnecessary wall.
- **Main Idea of the Point:** According to Jesus, someone who agrees with you that the gate to the kingdom is narrow - but isn't part of your group or goes about accomplish the work of the Kingdom differently than you do — is not the enemy. It just means that there is a lot of room inside the sheep pen for the sheep who entered through the narrow gate who are different than we are. That's the way the Kingdom of Heaven works.
- **A Most Interesting Connection:** (1) In the NT, Jesus makes a lot of interesting comments; comments that challenge our understanding of Him: “the last shall be first and the first shall be last; “the greatest among you shall be your servant.” But this one is the most interesting and challenging of all. (2) Here's why: They had just returned from going out 2 by 2 to perform miracles. And now they were faced with challenge of trying to reconcile how a man they didn't even know — who was by himself — could perform miracles in the name of Jesus. We know nothing about this man. He is a mystery. Yet, God tapped him on his shoulder — probably after hearing Jesus publicly — and said, “you go accomplish something for my glory.” (3) And what he was up to the disciples had a problem with because they couldn't understand it or approve it. But what Jesus was doing was far greater than what the disciples could comprehend or approve.
- **App:** “Whoever is not against us is for us” implies that there are many who equally contribute to the Kingdom of God who don't get the NT ink, glory, or recognition. We might not know them. But we don't get the ability to sign off on them. God does that. There will be numerous people in heaven that come via the work and witness of unnoticed and obscure followers of Jesus being faithful to an audience of one.

#### 2. A Cup of Water Counts

- **Make Me A Blessing:** Out in the highways and byways of life, many are weary and sad. So, carry the sunshine where darkness is rife, making the sorrowing glad. Make me a blessing. Make me a blessing. Out of my life may Jesus shine. Make me a blessing, O Savior, I pray. Make me a blessing to someone today.
- **Main Idea of the Point:** Unlike the disciples who told this man to stop, when we bless those who stand for Jesus (i.e., giving them a cup of cold water), we can be sure that we will receive the blessings of God.
- **We've Missed the Point of the Cup of Water:** (1) When we read this verse, we usually think “to the least of these.” The cup of water Jesus references here, functions like the widow's mite or something else miniscule that has significant value in the kingdom. Those things are true, but that's not what Jesus has in mind here. (2) The disciples had just rebuked a man for doing something for Jesus. But instead of rebuking him, they should have given him a cup of water, just as they have received a cup of water numerous times in their ministry. (4) Jesus blesses those who blessed others that stand up for him. Instead of criticizing others for their contributions to the Kingdom of God because they are not like us or don't do it our way, we ought to bless them. The same is true for each of us in our churches and in our families.
- **App:** Make us a blessing, O savior, I pray. Make us a blessing for someone today. The cup of water counts. Amen.