

“Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. ¹But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it. . . Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them.

“And every task you undertake. Becomes a piece of cake. A lark! A spree! It’s very clear to see. That a spoonful of sugar helps the medicine go down. The medicine go down. The medicine go down. Just a spoonful of sugar helps the medicine go down in a most delightful day.” That song drives me crazy to this day because my mom used to sing it to me before I took my medicine. It never made the medicine go down any easier. There are many times in my preparation that I look for a spoonful of sugar to help the medicine of the Word of God go down easier. When preaching on the difficulty of forgiving as the Lord forgives, I use the spoonful of sugar of my struggles to let go of bitterness that tends to accumulate in my spirit. When preaching about the sin of pride, I use the spoonful of sugar of letting everyone know that I am the king of the sin of pride. When preaching about lack of faith and unbelief, I use the spoonful of sugar that comes in the form of verse from the Gospel of Mark that we’ve recently studied: “Lord I believe. Help my unbelief.”

But friends, there is one subject in the Bible where no spoonful of sugar will help the medicine of the Word of God go down any easier. It isn’t the subject of forgiveness, or pride, or unbelief. It is the subject matter of the other side of heaven; the other side of the Gospel; and the other side of an atoning sacrifice for sin. It is the subject matter of hell, the place where worms do not die. There is no spoonful of sugar to help that subject matter go down any easier. The truth is when don’t like to talk about hell any more than we like to read Jesus’ words about hell. We like to talk about love, mercy, and heaven because we like it when Jesus talked about love, mercy, and heaven. But, friends, I want to tell you today – without a spoonful of sugar – that Jesus talked more about hell – the place where worms do not die – than he did about heaven. And when he did, those on the receiving end of his classroom discussion were not who you might expect. They were priests. They were preachers. They were leaders. And they were disciples who just two chapters ago believed and confessed that Jesus was the Messiah, the Son of the Living God.

Here is why he chose to reveal that information to them: there is another side of the Gospel. There is another side of heaven. There is another side of atonement. And that side is the place where worms do not die. And the reality of the existence of that place is one of the reasons we preach the Gospel in the first place. But Jesus talked about hell with his disciples not just to mobilize them to preach repentance and faith in the Lord Jesus. He talked about hell with his disciples when they had forgotten what was at stake. He talked about hell with his disciples when they stopped living for the Gospel and started living for themselves. And the place where worms do not die is a place for stumbling blocks in this life who were glad to be stumbling blocks. It’s a place for sinners in this life who were glad to be sinners. It’s a place for those who lost their saltiness in this life who were glad to lose their saltiness. And it’s a place for those who sowed discord in this life who were glad to so discord. It wasn’t a threat. It was a warning to stop living like you belong in hell. And start living like you belong in heaven. And there was no spoonful of sugar for that. There is much at stake. It’s why we confess Jesus as Savior, Messiah, and Lord. And because there is much at stake, the time for those who say they are Christians to live like residents of heaven rather than residents of hell is right now. But to do that we must heed the same warnings as the disciples did. And we must receive the Word of God – without the spoonful of sugar – the same way the disciples did. And the first step to do that is to turn with me to Mark 9:42-50 and see those warnings for yourself.

⁴² “If anyone causes one of these little ones—those who believe in me—to stumble, it would be better for them if a large millstone were hung around their neck and they were thrown into the sea. ⁴³ If your hand causes you to stumble, 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. [⁴⁴] ⁴⁵ And if your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life crippled than to have two feet and be thrown into hell. [⁴⁶] ⁴⁷ And if your eye causes you to stumble, 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, ⁴⁸ where “the worms that eat them do not die, and the fire is not quenched.” ⁴⁹ Everyone will be salted with fire. ⁵⁰ “Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can you make it salty again? Have salt among yourselves, and be at peace with each other.”

1. A Warning about Stumbling Blocks (42)

- **The True Definition of Courage:** (1) A couple of weeks ago I saw the true definition of courage when I noticed a blind man walking unassisted through Walmart with nothing but his white cane. (2) But I also noticed there could have been trouble ahead in the food section with a grocery card in the middle of the aisle. (3) Fortunately, some kind lady foresaw this also and moved it before it could cause him any trouble. (4) Could you imagine what would have happened if she did the opposite? If she willingly put it in his way to impede his path to cause danger? That’s what Jesus says we do when we make those who believe in the Lord Jesus stumble in their faith.
- **Main Idea of the Point:** It is a very serious matter in Jesus’ eyes when we cause a child of God to fall into sin.
- **A Shocking Illustration** (1) To show how serious he considers making a child of God stumble, he uses a shocking illustration: the Millstone. It was called a “donkey stone” in the ancient world because it was a stone used to grind grain that was so heavy that a donkey was tied to it to turn it. (2) If a stone like that was tied to our neck and we were thrown into the sea, we would sink right to the bottom. (3) And from Jesus’ perspective, sinking right to the bottom of the sea with a millstone around your neck is more preferable than making a child of God stumble.

- **Stumbling Blocks in the Bible Came in a Lot of Varieties:** (1) Some tempted others directly to sin. Look no further than Jeroboam. He made two golden calves and intentionally called people to worship those false representations. (2) Some tempted others by setting a wicked example: like Hophni and Phineas, the wicked sons of the priest Eli. (3) Some did it indirectly: like Laodicea, who left their first love. Even though their sin was indirect, the Lord Jesus still threatened to remove their lampstand.
- **App:** The world says You are free in Christ. But you are not free to cause someone else to want to turn their back on Jesus by your actions, your words, and your decisions. May we all heed his warning. And may we encourage our brothers and sisters in Christ as it is still called today.

2. A Warning about Sin (43-48)

- **The Hands, Feet, and the Eyes:** (1) The hands, feet, and eyes are so important to our everyday existence that they are in our advertising slogans. (2) You are in good hands with Allstate (Allstate); Quit yelling. We're gelling. Because we heart feet (Dr. Scholls). Eye drops for dry, red, itchy, and watery eyes (Visine)
- **Main Idea of the Point:** The hands, feet, and eyes are our most valuable tools. They are also our most deadly ones. And according to Jesus, neither the hands, nor the feet, nor the eyes are worth going to hell over.
- **In Jewish Culture:** The right hand, the right foot, and the right eye represents a person's best and most precious faculties. The right hand = best skills and the things we do. Right foot = one's best walk and the places we go. The right eye = best vision and the things we see or desire to have.
- **Hyperbole for the Seriousness of Sin:** A hyperbole is an exaggeration to make a serious point. That's what Jesus is doing here. He's not instructing you to mutilate your body. The things we do; the places we go; and the things we see, want, and desire are not worth going to hell over. Jesus warns of hell because he doesn't want people to go there. Sin that unatoned for by the blood of Jesus takes people straight to hell. Consequently, that makes sin something to be avoided at all cost.
- **App:** Whatever is causing you to sin, take drastic measures to get that thing out of your life.

3. A Warning about Saltlessness (49-50)

- **Sodium Chloride:** (1) I think I got one question right in Chemistry in High School: What is another name for table salt. The answer is sodium chloride. (2) Sodium chloride is an interesting chemical compound. By itself, sodium is poisonous, especially in large doses. By itself, chloride is a poisonous gas, even in small amounts. It's what gives bleach its offensive odor. (3) But put them together and you have preservative, full of flavor. Separate them and you have poison.
- **Main Idea of the Point:** If we have salt among ourselves, we will be the preservative and the flavor of the Gospel in the world. But if we lose our saltiness, we will be poison for the world according to Jesus.
- **Salt in the Ancient World:** (1) A Valuable Commodity – In ancient Rome, soldiers were paid their wages in salt. They called it a "salrium," where we get the word "salary." And they traded it for gold. (2) A Flavoring – Salt today is pure and doesn't lose its flavor. In their day, it was often contaminated for other minerals and would taste terrible. (3) An Antiseptic – it was often rubbed into wounds to help them heal and stop infection. (4) A Preservative – it was put on meat to keep from spoiling
- **Have Salt in Yourselves:** You are the commodity to the world; you are the flavoring; you are the preservative; and you have the antiseptic. As a result, don't cause others to stumble and avoid sin in your lives. That's what Jesus means with this warning.
- **App:** We can be the flavor or the poison.

4. A Warning about Sowing Discord (50)

- **Makers of the Curtains:** (1) When God gave Israel instructions to sow curtains for tabernacle, he told them to use threads of gold, purple, and scarlet: threads and colors of royalty for a royal God. Threads that represent peace with God and peace with each other. (2) At no point in his instructions to Israel did he include the thread of discord. That was an abomination unto the Lord.
- **Main Idea of the Point:** Oh, what a tangle web Sowers of discord weave when first they practice creating conflict. But oh, what a beautiful curtain of royalty we weave when first we sow to be at peace with God and each other.
- **Problems with Being at Peace With One Another:** (1) The last warning is subtle. Jesus told them to be at peace with one another because they were not. This has been the secondary theme for chs 8-9. And with every conflict, seeds of discord get sewn. (2) First there is Peter's confession followed by taking Jesus aside to rebuke him for predicting his death: threads of discord. (3) Then there's the puffing up of James, John, and Peter for witnessing the Transfiguration while others didn't: threads of discord. (4) Then there's the argument about who's the greatest: threads of discord. (5) Then there's the rebuke of a man driving out demons for not being one of them: threads of discord.
- **Solution for Being at Peace with One Another:** Is right here in the subtle warning: "be at peace with each other." It's in the perfect tense. That's very important because in Hebrew culture when you wished "peace" on someone you said "shalom." But to wish perfect peace on someone you said, "shalom shalom." That is in view here.
- **App:** Shalom Shalom happens when we live like residents of heaven, not hell. Will we heed Jesus' warnings the way the disciples did?