The Most Serious Warning

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[0:00] This is the First Mustang Pulpit Podcast, a podcast of the weekly preaching and teaching at First Mustang.! Thank you for joining us. We invite you to open your Bible with me to Mark chapter 9.

As we continue in our study through the Gospel of Mark. As I mentioned last week, we have come to what is a very serious and very heavy section in the Gospel of Mark.
It's a section that often would be overlooked, especially in our day-to-day, because of the things that Jesus is addressing here are things that just are completely out of step with what our culture desires and seeks.
We live in a day where people are still willing to talk about heaven, willing to talk about salvation. But the issue becomes, if you're offering someone salvation, what are they being saved from? To talk about the good news of the Gospel demands that we are able to answer the question, if there's good news, what would be the bad news?
[1:29] To talk about someone having faith in Jesus and needing to respond to Him, what would be the consequence of rejecting Christ? And it seems in our world, even among most churches in our world, that as long as you talk about heaven and grace and forgiveness and mercy, you're okay.

But when you share the whole picture, that it's not just about grace and mercy, there is also wrath and justice. And it's not just about heaven, there is also hell.
When you talk about the wrath of God being poured out upon sinners, it becomes a very distasteful message. I'm aware that in our sanctuary, both this service and our next service, there are going to be all kinds of people who are not believers.
It may be even this morning for you that you're brand new to church. Maybe someone's just invited you and you've come today. Or maybe you're not even sure why you've come today.
Something just compelled you to be here. Or maybe you're here most Sundays, but in your heart of hearts, you realize that while you may be familiar with parts of the Bible, you've never truly turned from your sin and trusted Jesus Christ as your Savior.
[2:53] Maybe you've been thinking about it. Maybe you've been putting it off. Maybe you've heard the Gospel and rejected it. Maybe you find yourself feeling respectful of the church, but just interested in the message.

Or maybe you find yourself empty and lonely and today just asking yourself, is there anything for me?
Is there anything that the Lord has to offer that the world does not? Because maybe you've come to the place in your life where you recognize that the world on its own is just empty.
Maybe you've come into the church today and you just are kind of angry, kind of bitter. Maybe the world's been really difficult. Maybe life has been hard. Maybe things in your family or things in your work haven't gone the way that you thought that they would.
Maybe you find yourself today not even really sure what you believe. Maybe you find yourself blessed by the friendships and relationships you have with people in the congregation and that brings you back.
[4:08] Maybe you're not even really sure who you are or where you stand with the Lord. But whatever your situation is and whatever the condition of your soul would be today, I want you to know that I'm glad you're here.

If you love the Lord and you worship the Lord and you believe His Word and you're eager to study His Word, I'm glad you've come. If you're confused and unsure what you believe, I'm glad you've come.

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And even if you don't believe today anything that we believe, and even if you would have a sense of hostility in your heart toward the gospel message, even if that's true for you today, I'm glad you've come.
Because I want you to hear the truth. And I do believe with all of my heart that the power of the Holy Spirit is still very much alive today to convict us of sin and to do the work of taking spiritually dead people and by grace calling them to life.
And the greatest place you could be is a place where a Bible will be opened and the gospel will be explained. And the greatest thing you could do as a response to that is in humility to call upon the name of the Lord with faith and trust in His saving message.
[5:39] And you're going to get to hear that today. Some of the words are hard. Because frankly, when you talk about sin and judgment and hell, it's hard.

But the good news is that God demonstrated His love in this, that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. That's our hope.
Those who are Christians in this room are not Christians because we're better or smarter or stronger. It's simply this, that the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ has saved us and has changed us and has thoroughly transformed us.
And I pray for you that would happen in your life today. We're looking specifically at verses 43 to 50 of Mark 9.
We looked last week at verse 42. As I mentioned a week ago, this paragraph really has two sections. The first is verse 42 that talks about not leading others into sin.
[6:47] And verses 43 to 50 that speaks of guarding your own heart to not fall into sin. And it is a most serious warning.

Verse 42 says, Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him if a great millstone were hung around his neck and he were thrown into the sea.
Now, we devoted our entire morning last week at just that one verse. Let me just remind you that this teaches us how serious sin is to the Lord. Better, he says, to have a large millstone put around your neck.
This would have been a kind of apparatus used for an animal. This would have been something too large for any one person to lift or to carry. The metaphor here is better to have something that would drag you to the bottom of the sea and you drown than it would to lead somebody into sin.
You do not want to go through your life having rejected the gospel, having mocked the things of God, having led others to mock the things of God, and with your words and with your life have belittled the gospel, die, and then stand before a holy God.
[8:06] You do not want that. And while the words of Jesus, for some, may be hard to hear, at least understand this.

That Jesus was deadly honest. He doesn't try to say things just to make him popular.
He doesn't try to say things just that somebody wants to hear. He is deadly honest about life and death and heaven and hell.
And even if you don't like the message, you ought to at least consider with appreciation that the very Son of God Himself, who is the judge of all people, has been crystal clear about the most important thing you could ever know.
He says you don't want to lead somebody astray. You don't want with your words and with your life to lead other people to disbelieve the gospel.
[9:17] Better if your life were cut short than you lived long enough to lead people astray, verse 42 says. In verse 43 to verse 50 is a brief transition that goes from leading others into sin, and now we're talking about your own life, your own sin.

And these words too are quite dramatic. Verse 43, And if your hand causes you to sin, cut it off.
It is better for you to enter life crippled than with two hands to go to hell, to the unquenchable fire.
And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off.
It is better for you to enter life lame than with two feet to be thrown into hell. And if your eye causes you to sin, tear it out. But it is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into hell, where their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched.
You don't have to have much background or training in Bible interpretation to understand in those few short verses that Jesus takes sin very seriously.

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[10:48] You don't have to have a lot of background in knowing Old and New Testament to read that one paragraph and understand whatever is being talked about here, this is something that Jesus thinks is very significant.

That sin is so serious that you dare not play with it or take it lightly or joke about it.
So much so that in this hyperbolic metaphor, in this exaggerated example, he says, If it's your hands, get rid of your hands.
If it's your feet, get rid of your feet. If it's your eyes, get rid of your eyes. The message is not about self-mutilation or self-harm. The issue clearly is saying, you do whatever it takes to fight sin.
And we know that the issue is not merely our bodies, it's our hearts and our minds. Jesus himself has already taught us in Matthew's gospel that the problem with adultery starts with the lust of the eyes and the problem with murder starts with hatred in the heart.
[12:00] It's not ultimately about your hands, your feet, and your eyes. It's ultimately about your heart and your mind. But your hands and your feet and your eyes will do the work that your mind and your heart desires and loves.

And the point clearly is, fight sin so strongly that you would do whatever it takes to enter the kingdom and to not face judgment.
Now, whatever you know or whatever you believe, nobody can say anything other than Jesus truly believed in heaven and he truly believed in hell.
He truly believed that sin was deadly. Whatever else you may think or whatever else you may believe, you cannot argue with the fact that Jesus believed in heaven and Jesus believed in hell. And Jesus believed sin was deadly. So as we walk through this, I want to just give you a few headings that I hope will help you to understand the important things here.
[13:24] Number one, we must fight against sin. We must fight against sin. And when you fight against sin, let me just give you a few things to maybe make a note of of how we do that.

One, we fight seriously. We must fight against sin seriously. He gives us these three graphic metaphors of how we're to do it.
Better to lose your hands, better to lose your feet, better to lose your eyes than to live in sin and go to hell. And this is graphic, and this is shocking, and it's supposed to be because Jesus wants to make perfectly clear how serious this is.
Better to limp into heaven than to strut into hell. And we've got all kinds of people in the world. This is true in Asaph's day in Psalm 73, that they would wear their pride as a necklace and wear their violence as a garment.
Just this morning, again, I saw videos of people on the open streets in our nation just beating and pulverizing people for no reason, putting it on the internet to make them famous.
[14:44] For what? For being violent. No longer hiding it. Wearing it as a garment, as a necklace.

It's a Psalm 73 world. It's a Romans 1 world. And there are people mocking the things of God and strutting up and down the streets, mocking the things of God, and apart from the grace of Jesus Christ changing their life, they will strut their way to hell.
Jesus says you better fight sin seriously. Deal with your hands, deal with your feet, deal with your eyes.
Now when you read those verses I just read to you, it does sound quite shocking, and we can at least say this, Jesus takes our sin usually much more seriously than we do.
Here's the problem. He's the judge. You may not take speeding seriously, but when the police officer pulls you over, that officer takes your speeding seriously.
[16:06] And in that moment, it really doesn't matter how seriously you took it, you are guilty. You may have stolen from your neighbor, and you thought it was just kind of a joke.

But you stand before a judge, and the evidence is clear, you are a thief, and it doesn't matter if you thought it was a joke, that judge takes it seriously, and you are guilty.
That's what we see the way Jesus views sin. To you, it may be a joke. It's just words.
It's just something everybody does. It's just boys being boys. All the girls do it.
It's a dangerous thing to stand before a judge who takes your sin more seriously than you do. He says, watch your hands, because your hands are what engage in sin.
[17:17] Watch your feet, because it's your feet that take you to places to sin. Watch your eyes, because it's your eyes that indulge in sin. So watch what you do.

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Watch where you go. Watch what you see. We're to fight sin seriously. But we can also say that we've got to fight sin immediately.
In this text, in the metaphor that Jesus uses, if it's your hands, cut them off. If it's your feet, cut them off. If it's your eyes, pluck it out. These drastic measures are done immediately.
Sin is cancer and cannot be allowed to grow. We must deal with it immediately. Seriously, immediately also, we fight sin continually.
It's true that salvation comes to you at a moment in time, and you are justified by faith, by trusting the Lord Jesus Christ, and that salvation, the Bible teaches us, as once for all.
[18:26] But even as believers, we must continue to fight against our sin. It's not your experience, nor is it the teaching of the Bible, that when you come to faith in Christ, that all of a sudden, you never sin again.

Look back over your last 24 hours. Believers, any pride, any anger, any jealousy, any harsh language, any spirit of unforgiveness, any selfishness.
The truth is, even as believers, we've got to continue to fight sin, and we fight it continually. The church is not a collection of perfect people. Let's be very clear on that. And if today, you're here as an unbeliever, and part of your struggle is you say, I know so many Christians, and they're so far from perfect, let me just affirm that.
Yes, we are. We're very far from perfect. But if you're not a believer, I want to be crystal clear to you, that what you do with the gospel message of Jesus, if you reject it, will not be erased from your record, based on what somebody else did.
You won't be able to stand before the Lord, and say, I heard the gospel, I rejected it, but I ought to be able to, be allowed into heaven, because I know some other people, and they didn't live perfectly.
[20:02] It's not the way it works. But I will say to those of us who are believers, for the sake of the glory of Christ, and the sake of those who do not yet believe, we must take our own sins seriously.

And while it's true, nobody's going to stand in front of the Lord, and be able to use your life as an excuse, to justify their sin. I can assure you, we want no part of leading anybody astray, how do we know?
Because verse 42 shows us clearly, how seriously the Lord takes that. And so we want to watch our life. We want to watch our doctrine.
We want to make sure, that as people watch our lives, they see that our life, reflects the grace that we preach. We fight sin seriously.
We fight it immediately. We fight it continually. We do whatever is necessary.
[21:13] If you have a job, and you're passing a billboard on your way to that job, and that billboard leads you to lust, you can't take the billboard down, but you can go a different route.

You say, well, that's going to cost me 10 minutes. Pluck it out. Cut it off. Take it that seriously.
You pass a certain place of business, and that place of business is a temptation for you to sin. Go a different route.
Whatever it takes. If your smartphone's causing you to sin, smash it. You say, but I need to be able to text.
No, what you need to do is not live a life of sin and be in jeopardy of being bound to hell when you die. That's what you need to do. Cut it off.
[22:21] Pluck it out. Your phone is not sinful, but if for you, it leads you to sin, get rid of it. Your phone's neutral. Your action is not.

If your computer causes you to sin, get rid of it. Your computer is neutral. Your sinful action is not. Do whatever it takes.
Put your computer in the middle of the dining room table where everyone that's in the house will see it if that's a problem for you. Do whatever it takes. Change the way you drive to work.
Change the TV shows you watch. Change the people you spend time with on the weekend. I'm not your boss. I'm not your Holy Spirit. I'm not trying to be. I'm just trying to help you to understand that Jesus' metaphor here is very clear.
If something is causing you to sin, get rid of it now. Nobody heard Jesus say these words and walk away and say, I wonder what he meant by that.
[23:27] It would be crystal clear. We must fight against sin. Secondly, we must warn against hell.

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We must warn against hell. Verse 48, we don't want to be thrown into hell where their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched.
I'll tell you what Jesus believed about hell. And seeing as he is the eternal son of God and the one the Bible says created all things, I'll take his word for it.
One, hell is a real place. It's a real place. It may surprise you to know this. Jesus in the Gospels spoke more about hell than he did heaven.
He repeats this in this short passage multiple times. You can't miss it. Verse 44, better for you to enter life crippled than with two hands to go to hell. Better for you to enter life lame than with two feet to be thrown into hell.
[24:44] Verse 47, better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into hell. It's a real place. Second, it's a place of suffering and torment.

It's a place of judgment and pain. The word for hell here is the word Gehenna. This is an Aramaic form of a Hebrew word.
Referred to a valley in the southwest part of Jerusalem just outside the city walls. And before Jesus walked the earth physically, it was a place where the most wicked acts imaginable were perpetrated there.
It's a place where people would sacrifice children. I can't even, I can't even fathom my mind how, how far down the path of sin you have to go to let your life be involved in that.
That's what happened in Gehenna. By the day of Jesus, 2,000 years ago, it had become essentially like a city trash dump.
[26:00] People would dump their trash there and there they would burn it. And so because it was constantly burning trash that was deposited there, there was this constant flame and constant smoke that was going up.

The fire, the flame was unending. It was a place they would take the bodies of criminals and dump them. And those bodies would be burned.
Because there was trash and because there was human flesh deposited there, the food supply for the worms and the maggots would never run out.
That's why you get that kind of language. You don't want to go to the eternal place called hell because what you see with your eyes here at Gehenna where the fire burns and the smoke never goes out and the worm never dies is but a picture of the most awful reality imaginable.
Nobody would have heard Jesus say that and wonder if hell was real and wonder if it was worth doing whatever you could do to never be there.
[27:30] It's an eternal place. Verse 48, the fire is not quenched. Jesus makes clear you either enter life or you enter hell.

Verse 25, I'm sorry, Matthew 25 verse 46 says, these will go away into eternal punishment but the righteous into eternal life. And the word eternal is the same.
Eternal life lasts forever. Same word, eternal punishment forever. This whole idea of the worm and the fire that's not quenched, it actually, Jesus is borrowing here from the Old Testament.
The very last verse in Isaiah, this will be 700 years roughly before the life of Jesus. Isaiah 66 verse 24 speaks of that.
Isaiah is talking about a picture where you see this vision of those who opposed God and they've been defeated and their bodies have been slain and the birds and the worm feast on those dead bodies.
[28:45] and he's using that imagery to talk about the awfulness of hell. So we fight against sin and we warn against hell and third, we must guard against spiritual lethargy, against spiritual laziness, against spiritual indifference.

You know, one of the things that is possible for those of us who come to church every Sunday is if we're not careful, we can train train our bodies to go and train our bodies to do, but our hearts have grown numb.
That's a dangerous place to be where you can sing I surrender all while you clutch everything of the world with all your might.
Where you can say all I have is Christ, all I need is Christ while you're desperately, frantically looking all around this world for something besides Christ to satisfy your soul.
You must guard against spiritual lethargy. Verse 49 says, everyone will be salted with fire and salt is good but if the salt has lost its saltiness, how will you make it salty again?

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[30:37] Have salt in yourselves and be at peace with one another. It's kind of a strange couple of verses. See if I can help you with it just a little bit.

Salt was, in the ancient world, not only a preservative for meat, salt was also used in sacrifices. Ezra 6, 9 in the Old Testament speaks of salt being used with sacrifices.
Ezekiel 43, 23 and 24 speaks of the same thing. Leviticus 2 speaks of a grain offering where you were devoting yourself to the Lord.
You're offering a sacrifice of your own heart unto the Lord. Romans 12, 1 in the New Testament says that we offer our lives as a living sacrifice.
So we don't offer animals on the altar anymore. Christ has fulfilled all that the Old Testament law pointed toward. The Old Testament law was a shadow. Christ is a substance. The real has come.
[31:40] We don't go back to the shadow. But what we do now is, according to Romans 12, we offer our lives as a living sacrifice. What we know is that pure salt would not lose its property.

But if it was impure, then it would lose its value. James 1, 27 says that we are to keep ourselves unstained. Other translations say keep ourselves unpolluted from the world.
We're to keep our heart pure. And the question he raised at the end of the passage is, what good is salt if it no longer works as a preservative?
If you have salt and it's lost its flavor and you're adding salt to make salt salty, then the salt is worthless. all of this in the context of fighting sin, of living holy lives, of being a living sacrifice unto the Lord.
In other words, if we don't deal with sin, we're not going to be useful. If we're not devoted to the Lord, we're not going to be useful.
[33:06] If we're not a living sacrifice unto the Lord, we're not going to be useful. Matthew 5 says, we are to be the salt of the earth.

We cannot grow lethargic in what we've been called to do. We must, as Christians, understand that our lives count and they count for all eternity.
we must understand as we're raising children that the single most important thing we can do for our children is teach them to love Christ.
Christ. The most important thing you can do for your spouse is lead them to know Christ. The greatest thing our church can do is be clear and faithful on the gospel and share the gospel and make disciples so that people love and know Christ.
The most important thing you can tell someone you've just met is not your job or your GPA or your income. The most important thing you can tell someone is the one who saved your soul.
[34:29] Salt was a preservative. It protected. it was tasty. It enhanced.

And that's what the church should be. our church should be little glimpse of heaven on earth.
Just just a small taste imperfect though it may be. We should want to come into this place on the Lord's day because we get to be gathered with hundreds of people who know Christ and love Christ who have been saved by his grace and we really believe that eternal things matter more than earthly things and we really believe that Jesus Christ has paid for our sin and there is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus and we really believe great is our reward in heaven and we really believe to live is Christ and to die is gain and we really believe our citizenship is in heaven and we really believe here we have no lasting city but we seek the city which is to come and we come and we sing about it and we pray about it and we read about it and we preach about it and we talk about it and we get just a little glimpse a little taste of heaven when we gather here in this place and in so doing we're helping preserve we're helping at least in this small part of the world this community can know there's a place where people still love the truth and preach grace and strive to forgive and are looking more and more like Jesus and in whatever way we can by God's grace just pushing back the tidal wave of sin and debauchery because we're the salt of the earth not because of our works not because of our intellect not because of our education but because of the grace of the
Lord Jesus Christ now when you read these words that Jesus spoke it may break your heart it may crush your spirit it may bring great conviction upon your soul or it may make you turn your head in anger and disgust but please do know this that the way you feel about what is eternally true does not change what is eternally true please know that that as you hear the word of God taught in the reality of heaven and hell

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I pray by God's grace that it makes you run to the cross cling to the Lord Jesus to call upon his name but do know this that if you say that message makes me angry or those words make me unhappy you've not changed what is true all you've done all you've done is turned away from the one who stands ready to save your soul so what should you do well if you're a believer I think it's safe to say for every single one of us no matter who we are we should take our sin more seriously we should fight more earnestly we should care more about people who watch us and see us and will emulate us to make sure we never lead them astray and if you're not a Christian here's what you should do you should say the one who made heaven and earth the one who made all things is the one that I will stand before after I die and he's also the one who has warned me about what is to come unless I turn from my sin and trust in him his word would be a good one to take the judge himself has been clear not only has the judge been clear the judge himself will pay your cost [40:41] Jesus himself went to the cross on the cross he took upon himself the sin of all who would believe he took upon himself the wrath of God the father poured out upon sin that all who would believe in him would have his righteousness given to them placed in their account your judge your judge will forgive you not by your works that would be an insult to his work and that would be a drastic over emphasis on your good works to think your works could get you to heaven but by grace he forgives by grace he takes broken people just as they are and he calls them to life and he makes them a new creation and he gives them a new heart and he will take your sin and remove it as far as the east is from the west and he will call you his own and welcome you into his family not after you've gone to church for six straight months not after you've memorized the books of the bible in order not after you've given an offering for two straight weeks not after you go to bible college or seminary right where you are this day if you would believe in his name and in your heart cry out to the lord and say god have mercy on me i'm a sinner i ask you to forgive me make me a new creation i know i deserve hell but i know that by grace one second after i die i'll be with you and you'll have an entire eternity to figure out just how gracious he is whatever you believe whoever you are i'm glad you've come but i will beg you this day do not leave this morning until you're clear in your heart that the lord jesus christ is your savior that you would leave this place ready to fight sin whatever it takes for the glory of his name and the good of those who will believe lord we do thank you today for your word these are not easy verses we know that but they are true and because they are true they are helpful lord i pray that we as believers would take our sin seriously and fight it continually and immediately and that any who do not know you that even this moment they would cry out to you in their heart and they

will find your grace to be more than sufficient in the name of christ we pray amen just a couple of things before you go we've got bible study classes that start here in about 20 minutes if you don't know where to go go right out here and turn left to our guest information we've got some volunteers who would love to help you find a class that would be a good fit for you if today you've come to the place where you recognize your need for a savior maybe you've already in your own heart just now cried out to the lord we want to help you we want to lead you as you grow we want to be able to disciple you and train you you can any of you use that guest information card that connection card let us know how we can pray for you let us know what your needs are if you've just prayed to receive christ for the first time let us know we want to sit down with you and disciple you with an open bible and help you grow in your knowledge of the lord you let us know how we can serve you tonight we've got our evening service at five we're studying through the book of lamentations tonight we're going to be in lamentations chapter three some of your favorite words of the bible you may or may not know it but are in lamentations three for many of you one of your favorite hymns is from lamentations three we'll study those words in chapter three tonight and look forward to seeing you here alright god bless you you're dismissed your your one one one because of it it fathers fathers there are fathers they they they they they they they they they they they they they they they they they they they they they they they they they they they they they they they they they they they they they they fathers they fathers they they fathers fathers fathers out fathers fathers fathers fathersays fathers fathers fathers fathers fathers

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