Take Heed How You Lead

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Preacher: Dr. Michael Staton

[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. Here's the good thing, though.

As the Lord gives our church opportunities for ministry, it reminds us of why we exist. Above everything else, we exist to teach the Word and to help people know Christ better.
That's who we are. That's what we can uniquely do. And we've got to remind ourselves that of all the different things churches can busy themselves doing, there is nothing more important we can do than proclaim the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ and trust His Spirit to move in power.
So we pray that's going to take place even this moment here with us. Turn with me to Mark chapter 9, if you would, as we continue here in our study through the gospel of Mark.
We've come to this last section here in chapter 9. And honestly, I'll tell you that the next few weeks is just another example of why I believe the importance of preaching verse by verse through books of the Bible.
[1:18] Because all of the Bible is profitable for us. It's given to us under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. It's profitable. It's helpful for us to teach us, to train us, to correct us, and to guide us.

But to be honest with you, the passages we're looking at here the next several weeks are not passages that any preacher would wake up and say, I think I will choose to talk about this.
These are some of the hard, challenging, difficult sections of Scripture that we need to hear because they are for our good.
And frankly, passages that would be skipped over if we weren't walking through every word that the Lord gave to us.
We need to just let your eye kind of scan down verse 42 and following it into chapter 10 where we're talking about sin. We're talking about hell.
[2:17] We're talking about eternal judgment. Chapter 10, talking about divorce. I mean, these are hard issues. And it's one of the reasons why I like to discipline myself to teach verse by verse, word by word, because what that means for us as a church is we can't skip the hard passages.

We can't skip the unpopular things. We have to make sure that we are serving the congregation faithfully to preach, as the book of Acts says, the full counsel of God's Word.
That with love and with grace and with kindness and compassion, but also with clarity and boldness, that we as a congregation would say, whatever the Lord teaches, this we believe.
And whatever He has revealed to us in His Word, this we will proclaim. And I pray that as we look at these passages that are not easy, I pray that they would be most helpful and sobering for us.
You know, on Sunday nights, we're walking through Lamentations. And one of the things I've shared with our Sunday night congregation is that we live in a world that just doesn't do very well with thinking about serious things.
[3:46] We live in a culture that is just kind of entertaining itself to death. We live in a culture that when we're unhappy or frustrated or life is hard or it's a season of suffering, we want to do whatever we can to immediately make anything that's uncomfortable go away.

But that's to our demise. We've got to be able to handle and process hard things. We've got to be able to deal with the reality that there is a real heaven and there is a real hell, that there is real absolute truth.
There is right and wrong. There are things that are honoring to God and there are things that are sinful and displeasing to God. There is a way that husbands should treat their wives.
There's a way that wives should treat their husbands. There's a way that children should respond to parents. There's a way that the church should operate. There are things God has revealed to us.

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And part of that is to be clear on issues even if they are hard. The passage we're looking at this week and Lord willing next week are not easy, but they are important.
[5:08] If I were to ask you, what are you afraid of? What's your biggest fear? We would no doubt get a number of different answers, but I could probably get pretty close to guessing, I think, what our top fears would be.

For you, it might be the fear of heights. For many in this room, it would be the fear of public speaking. For some, it would be the fear of spiders, arachnophobia.
Anybody uncomfortable yet? What about the fear of snakes? Does that get you excited about the morning? The fear of germs? Now that everybody's kind of itchy and uncomfortable.
But our world has things that we're afraid of. And when you get to Mark 9 verse 42, what gets revealed to us is there is something far more severe and far more significant that should bother us. Most of us go through lives, our lives carefully avoiding snakes or carefully avoiding spiders or carefully avoiding whatever it is that makes us fearful.
[6:33] When Marcy and I were newly married, we had a house, and it was the last house in the section, and so it was just a bunch of field behind us. And so, Marcy can do anything except handle spiders.

That's her one thing she can't do. And so, I would come home from work, and Marcy would get—there was a spider in the house, which because we lived in the middle of this field, basically at the time, there was a bunch of them.
She would just get a glass and just put it on top of the spider where the spider would stay until I got home. And I would walk in the house, and I would just go around looking where all the glasses turned upside down.
And I was the Spider-Man. And I would take the glasses off, kill the spider, break the glasses, throw them away, and on we would go. Some of you can relate to those kinds of fears, those kinds of things that make us uncomfortable, that make us filled with dread.
But in verse 42, it's something far more serious that should cause us to sit up straight and to listen carefully and to be very intent on what Jesus is saying that should make us inspect how we live, how we talk, the way that we go through life, the way that we handle ourselves, because there is a warning given here that we cannot afford to miss.
[7:57] 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.

And if your hand caused 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 caused 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 caused you to sin, tear it out.
It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into hell, where the worm does not die and the fire is not quenched.
For everyone will be salted with fire. Salt is good, but if the salt has lost its saltiness, how will you make it salty again? Have salt in yourselves and be at peace with one another.
[9:11] So in verse 42, we're talking about being careful to not lead others into sin. And verse 43 and following, we're talking about being careful that we ourselves don't fall into sin.

So we're going to take those two themes of this short passage here. We'll look at one this week, one next week, Lord willing. And just consider, how do we make sure, first, that we're not leading others to sin, and second, that we're not ourselves falling into sin.
So let's look this morning here at just verse 42. 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.
This is a hard saying. This is a hard reality. But if you know nothing about the Bible and all you've heard is just 42, whatever you know or understand, this much is immediately clear to us that Jesus cares greatly about how you influence other people spiritually.
That much is clear. Let's just look here at verse 42. We'll ask some questions of the text to help us to understand it. Number one, who is this warning to?
[10:40] Who is this warning to? Well, it's, it tells us in the first word, whoever. This warning is to whoever.

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Whoever would cause one of these little ones to sin who would believe in me. Whoever. Whoever. This could be to a self-professing unbeliever.
This is a warning to someone who does not know Christ, who rejects the gospel, who has heard the gospel and just outright denies it. And the Lord says to that person, it would be better for you to drown in the middle of the sea than it would through your life and your words and your rejection of the gospel lead others astray.
Could be to those who are self-professing Christians but aren't truly converted. To the one who says he's a believer, to the one who says he's a Christian and his children look at his life and are filled with so much confusion because on the one hand, you take us to church every Sunday.
On the other hand, you disrespect our mother every day. On the one hand, you tell us that we're supposed to read our Bibles. On the other hand, I hear your language and it says that you don't love Christ at all.
[12:17] And to the one who is a professing believer but maybe not truly converted that is leading others astray because their life does not match up in any way with our words, this is a severe word of warning to that person.

Whoever would be guilty of this should listen. This is also a word of warning to the one who teaches, to the one who would stand in front of someone in a service like this or sit around a table in a children's Sunday school class or stand in front of adults to teach the word, whatever it may be, to whoever would speak and teach and say, these are the words of God and I want you to listen to me.
I want you to believe me. This is what God's word says to that person. Better to be cast into the midst of the sea than to mislead people into error.
Whoever. This warning is to whoever. The book of James makes it clear that those who teach are held to a higher judgment.
So he says, not many of you should become teachers because this is a greater accountability, a greater judgment. It's one of the reasons why at our church we take training and equipping so seriously.
[13:49] Because while God only uses imperfect teachers, that's all of us, while all of us have plenty of things to still learn and still understand, none of us are a finished product.

All of us are still in progress of our learning. But to stand in front of a group of three or 13 or 300 and to say, I want you to listen to what I say and I want you to believe what I say and what I'm teaching you about God is true and is right, is a weighty subject.
But so is the way you just live your life when other people see you and look up to you and are influenced by you. Whoever, this is a word of warning to all of us.
Second question, who is the warning about? Who is the warning about? If you're an English teacher and it bothers you that I end it out with a preposition, help me out, I just can't think of another way to say it.
Who is the warning about? Well, here's what the warning is about. It's about causing someone who believes in Christ to sin.
[15:13] This is a warning about leading other people to sin. It's about leading a Christian, leading a believer, entice them into sin.

Whether it's something they would do that's wrong, something they would think that's wrong, something they would say that's wrong. And the language helps us out here.
This would include children, but I don't think the language in the context is limiting it simply to physical children. I believe this is referring to anyone who, a common person, an ordinary person, anyone who is particularly vulnerable.
Verse 36, he took a child and put them in the midst of them and taking him in his arms said, whoever receives one such child in my name receives me.
This is what he says after the apostles have the argument and debate over who is the greatest. And his point is, to be great in the kingdom is not to have the things the world would value.
[16:22] To be great in the kingdom is to just come to Christ in childlike faith with humility and complete dependence on the Lord.

And whoever would lead one such as that into sin is in danger. This is a warning about tempting people to sin, leading people to sin, causing others to sin.
You might just make note of Matthew chapter 18. In Matthew 18, he says the same thing.

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Right after the argument of who is the greatest, verse 4, whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom. It's all about the humility, the dependence of a child.
That the greatest in the kingdom is not what others say about you. The entrance into the kingdom is not the strongest, the smartest, the brightest, the most powerful.
[17:36] It's about a humble dependence upon Christ. In chapter 9, verse 41, it says, truly I say to you, whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because you belong to Christ will by no means lose his reward.

So in verse 41, he says, even the smallest act of kindness when done for the glory of Christ will be rewarded.
Verse 42, even the smallest act of leading someone astray, the Lord also takes notice of that.
And so this warning is about this simple thing. Do not take lightly the impact you have on the lives of other people.
Do not take lightly the impact you have on other people's lives. Far more eyes are watching you than you know.
[18:43] Far more people hear what you say than you know. Your spiritual influence is far more reaching than you realize.

I mean, maybe in your mind you would say, well, I think that's true if you're a pastor or I think that's true if you're a deacon in the church or I think that's true if you're an influential leader, but I'm just a common person.
Listen, we're all common people. All of us are common people. All of us are made in God's image. All of us were born with a sin nature. All of us need grace in order to find salvation. All of us. And all of us influence people on a daily basis.
Every single one of us in this room influence so many people. And the influence we have over each other is often unseen for the positive and the negative.
[19:58] I mean, from something as simple as the way that we are in a worship service, what we do that's distracting or not.

When you participate in worship, your children see that or when you don't, they notice that. When your Bible is open and you're following along, the children see that and if the Bible is closed or they see you surfing through things on your phone, they see that.
Now, you're not standing up teaching a lesson but you're influencing. On the positive side, when you engage in singing and when you pray and when you are kind and friendly and when you care about people, your children see that too.
You influence far more than you know. And even in just a very real practical way, when someone is here on the platform singing or someone is preaching, when you're engaged, when you're listening, it's life-giving.
And when we move around and 600 heads turn because someone's moving and leaving, it's, people see that. And it's not that in any of those things, not that any of us want to lead someone astray.
[21:28] We don't fail to sing because we want to teach kids not to participate. We don't fail to listen because we want our children to think that preaching doesn't matter. It's none of those things.

It's just a matter of we teach and influence far more than we realize. And we are tempted to let ourself off the hook because we think, well, I'm not a pastor or I don't teach the class.
But verse 42 is clear. This is to whoever. This is for all of us. And the warning is simply this. Your spiritual influence goes much deeper than you realize.
Much deeper than you realize. For our children, you go to school and you're around other students that I'll never meet.
when you go to your soccer team and your football team and your children's squad, you're around students that will never hear me preach.
[22:38] But you have access to be a spiritual influence for them. Mom and dad, when you go to work Tuesday, you're around people, most of whom will never set foot in this place.

But they know you, they see you, they hear you. We sometimes want to think that spiritual influence is just for the few, but this is addressed to whoever.
Don't take lightly the spiritual impact you have on other lives. Well, that's what the warning is, and that's who it's to.

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Third, what is the warning? What is the warning? Here it is. It would be better for him, for this whoever, if a great millstone were hung around his neck and he were thrown into the sea.
That's a hard saying. the language here, this is the millstone of a donkey. It's a very, very heavy thing.
[23:58] He's referring to an apparatus so big, so heavy, it required an animal to be able to turn it. This is not something that a mere person could do with their hands.

This is a millstone that required an animal to be able to make it move. It was a large round stone. They would use it for grinding their grain, much too heavy for a single person to lift it.
The clear implication here is if you have this millstone around your neck and you are dropped into the sea, you absolutely would drown.
And Jesus says it would be better for someone who's going to lead others to sin if they were drowned in the sea.
It would be better to die a premature death than it would to lead other people to sin.
[25:11] That's how seriously God takes sin. And when you and I read that verse and we think, that sounds kind of harsh, what that does is it just helps us to understand we rarely see sin the way God does.

Because Jesus says, if you are going to use your life and your words and your influence to take an ordinary common believer and entice them to sin, entice them to disobey, entice them to do what's incorrect, entice them to believe things that aren't right, it would be better for you if you were drowned in the sea than it would for you to face the judgment coming to you as a result of leading people into sin.
That's how seriously God takes sin. So, we've got to ask yourself, how can a person lead others to sin?
sin? We've got to be aware of this because certainly we don't want to be guilty of verse 42. So, let's just ask ourselves for a few minutes, just by way of application and implication of this truth that we don't want to lead others to sin, how could a person lead someone to sin?
Number one, we do this by teaching them to believe something that's not true. We could teach them to believe something that's not true.
[27:00] I think of this verse often when I watch some of the garbage that takes place in churches or on television, men who are supposed to be trustworthy spiritual shepherds teaching things that are so clearly unbiblical.

And yes, it may get them large crowds, and yes, it may sell lots of books, and yes, it may make them lots of temporary fame and fortune, but it would have been better for them to have been drowned in the sea than it will on judgment day to stand before the living God when they have purposely misled people in terms of spiritual truth.
Now for you, there's no one in this room who wants to lead their children astray. There's nobody in this room that's wanting to teach people things that are false, I trust.
But let's be careful. This is why, 2 Timothy, we study to show ourselves approved. This is why we labor in the Word.
This is why we do ladies' nights of theology. This is why we have the Institute. this is why we do so many different things in our church because we want to do everything we can to help all of us rightly divide the Word of Truth.
[28:31] And just a word of very practical application, if you've got little children at home and you're teaching them and you say to yourself, but what if my kid asks a question, I don't know how to answer, it's not a question of what if, it's just a question of when it happens.

It's going to happen. And when your child asks a question that you don't know the answer to, resist every urge within you to answer it in a way that will just make them forget what they asked.
Resist the urge to answer in such a way that they think you know the answer even if you don't. far better to say, I don't know the answer to that, but we'll work on it together.
We'll study this. We'll look this up. We'll get wise counsel. Don't be afraid to teach your children. Don't be afraid of their questions, but just know that it's so much better to just say, great question. I have no idea. We'll look it up than it is to teach something that's wrong. You've heard me say before, someone, asked me a few years ago, does it bother you when you preach that there are people that may not be listening to you?

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[29:47] And the truth is, it bothers me far more that there are people who are listening to me. It bothers me far more that there are people who will hear what I say, believe what I say, remember what I say, be influenced by what I say, because if that's true, then the accountability has just gone way up on what I owe them before the Lord.

I don't want to say things that aren't true, neither do you. So we study to show ourself approved and we're honest. So I'm going to ask a question we don't know.
Just be honest. You don't have to know everything to be a good teacher. If you had to know everything to be a good parent, none of us would have kids anymore. Just be honest.
Just be faithful and study and learn together. Here's a second way that we can lead people astray. That's enticing people to disobey the word of God.
Enticing people to disobey the word of God. This is simple peer pressure. It's wrong if we try to get someone to use certain language, not honoring to God.
[30:59] It's wrong if we try to get someone to do something they shouldn't do. And it would be great if everybody who went to church was never engaged in peer pressure. But we've got to be honest and say, look, we're all still sinners.

Even if we're forgiven and redeemed, we still struggle with sin. And we've got to make sure we're not doing anything in our life that would lure or entice anybody else to sin.
Don't try to get someone to lower their biblical convictions, to lower their biblical standards. probably far more likely, though, for those who are gathered here is going to be number three, and that's being an example of disobedience.
This is where we all must take notice. If a child came up to you today before church and said, should I sing when the church sings, every adult in this room would say, of course you should sing. Of course you should. And then, suppose that same child watches you while we're singing. They're far more influenced by what they watched you do than what they heard you say.
[32:25] Far more. If somebody, a child came up to you and said, excuse me, sir, I'm just a child. I'm new coming in here to big church.

Should I listen when the preacher's preaching? We would all say, of course you should. No one's going to say, no, don't listen to the word being taught.
We're not going to say that. We're going to answer it correctly. Of course you should listen. And they're going to watch you. And they will forget how you answered the question.
But they will remember your example. And what I'm arguing for this morning is that we have far more spiritual influence than we ever realize.
If a little child came up to you and said, excuse me, ma'am, I don't know you, but one day I'm going to be married if it's the Lord's will. Should I be disrespectful to my husband?
[33:41] There's not a wife here who would say, you know, you really should. He probably is going to deserve it. Of course you ought to give it to him. No. Every lady here who's married would say, well, of course, one day, little girl, if you get married, of course you should respect your husband.

And then that child sees you and watches you and hears you and your children watch you and hear you. And little eyes are watching that you never knew were watching. Ears are listening that you never knew were listening.
And they will forget how you answer their question, but they will remember, emulate, and model what they see in you. We have far more influence than we realize.
And we don't want to lead anybody astray. If your child came up to you today and said, Mom, Dad, should we love Jesus above everything else?
Should Jesus be our highest treasure as a family? We'd all say, yes. That's a great question.
[35:00] Yes. Jesus should be our greatest joy. We'd all say that. Then for the next number of years that we raise them in our home, they're going to see what we really value.

They're not likely to hear us ever sit them down and say, you know what, I love my work more than I love Jesus. Just want you to know that. They're not going to ever hear us sit them down and say, you know what, I love sports more than I love Jesus.
They're not going to hear us say that. We're not going to say, you know what, money is what really satisfies, not Jesus. They're not going to hear us say that. But they're watching.
They're observing. And they're learning. And I'm just arguing that your life and your words and your priorities and your decisions have far more impact than you realize.

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I think the areas, we could kind of sum up the areas where we're most tempted to lead people astray with idolatry, immorality, or spiritual indifference.
[36:32] Most of us, if we're going to lead people astray, it's because there's other things we put in front of God, or because of our immorality, they see dangerous examples, or just spiritual indifference that they see in us.

When you read verse 42, it makes it very clear that the Lord cares deeply about the way that we influence other people. Now, here's the good news.
There's no perfect parent out there. There's no perfect grand parent. There's no perfect Sunday school teacher.
There's no perfect church member. We've all fallen short. God in His grace forgives us.
God in His mercy knows everything about us, our weaknesses, our failures, our laziness, our anger, our disrespect.
[37:54] And God in grace proved His love for us by sending His Son to die for us while we were sinners.

And God is rich in mercy. And He forgives. grace. The last thing I would want you to walk away with this morning is a feeling of guilt and shame that just falls on you.
If you need conviction, I pray the Spirit brings conviction. Where I need conviction, I pray the Spirit convicts me. Where we need to take honest evaluation of our life.
Let's not be too quick to rush through that. And sometimes we need to just feel the weight of our sin. That's true. But not unto hopelessness.
Rather unto repentance. And I just want you to understand that if you look at your life and you say, I've not done a real good job raising my kids.
[39:16] I'm not sure I've taught them what's right. I've given them far too many bad examples.
Feel the weight of that. And be encouraged to know we have a God who forgives and a God who is merciful.

And if you're a teenager in this service right now, and you think back to the last month of your life, and you know you've pressured other friends of yours to lie, you've pressured other friends of yours to cheat on a test, you've pressured friends of yours to say or do things that weren't right, feel the weight of that.
And confess and repent to the Lord. And be encouraged to know that our God is a God of grace and a God of mercy and a God who forgives.
And if you're a teacher, and you've not studied how you should and prepared how you should and prayed how you should, feel the weight of that.
Let it drive you to repentance, but not unto hopelessness. For we have a God who forgives. And a God who is rich in mercy.
[40:40] Who knows our frame. God who forgives. And is a compassionate father. And he will forgive.

See, my greatest hope today is that we would leave and think, God takes sin very seriously. And to know that as we sung, though our sins, they are many, his mercy is more.
His mercy is greater. His mercy is stronger. His grace is sufficient. And if you don't know Christ as your Savior, this can be the very moment where you turn from your sin and call upon the name of the Lord Jesus and find forgiveness.
forgiveness. Because our God is a God of mercy. Aren't you glad? Heaven is not about what you've earned.
It's about a gift that the Lord has freely given. Do you feel conviction this morning? If you do, take it to the Lord.
[42:15] Do you feel guilty this morning? If you do, take it to the Lord. Do you feel overwhelmed and burdened this morning? If you do, take it to the Lord.

Let him convict. Let him heal. Let him forgive. And do you find yourself today aware of your desperate need for a Savior?
Take it to the Lord. The God who still forgives sinners and still welcomes guilty people like you and like me to be called his own.
Lord, we thank you today for this word of warning. It is a hard word. Lord, a hard warning, but one that we must heed. We don't want to lead anyone astray, whether by our words or by our actions.

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Would you help us? Help us to confess our sin. Help us to turn from our sin. And help us to lead others to know you more.
[43:37] In Christ's name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.
Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

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