Lessons in Leadership

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 20 August 2023

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. We are returning to our verse-by-verse study through the Gospel of Mark.

We've been out of Mark for a few weeks. I was in London preaching and missed a couple of Sundays, and then we came back and spent a couple of weeks in Colossians 3.
Just refocusing on what the church is to be and how we are to live. And we're going to get back into our study of Mark today. As the Lord brings to your mind and asks you to pray for me this week, I'll be, during the parts of the morning, Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday, be going to the Baptist Retirement Village in Oklahoma City to preach a Bible conference for them.
They've asked me to come and to do a study on the person and doctrine of Christ. And so, I'll be there during parts of the day, Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday, teaching those saints there.
So, if the Lord brings that to your mind, I appreciate your prayers for that. Also, I want to encourage you to come back tonight. We have restarted our evening service. We always take the summer off and then relaunch when school starts.
[1:21] Had a great time last Sunday night as we kicked off Sunday night service again. Tonight, we'll be taking the Lord's Supper together. And so, encourage you to be here and be a part of worship.

We are studying through the book of Lamentations. I did an overview of Lamentations last Sunday evening. We'll begin walking through the book tonight. I think you'll learn a lot about not only suffering in the lives of God's people, God's faithfulness and mercy in the midst of tragedy and heartache.
Also, a lot of Old Testament history that you'll learn. And so, I encourage you to come and be a part of our evening service tonight. We'll sing together and teach through Lamentations 1.
Take the Lord's Supper. I think you'll be blessed. I encourage you to be back and be a part of that.
Well, it's been a little while since we've been in Mark 9. So, I want to just remind you of the context because, as always, when you study the Bible, context is key.
And that's certainly true in our text this morning. We're going to look at in verses 38 to 41. Let's just remind ourselves, just even in chapter 9, of what's going on that we have already covered.
[2:35] Chapter 9 begins with the transfiguration, this climactic event that Jesus leads a few of His disciples to be a part of.

It was an event that was extremely important to understand who Jesus is. It ties in the Old Testament law and prophets.
It helps us get a preview of the coming kingdom. And so, so many amazing things are happening on the Mount of Transfiguration. But when they come down off that mountain, what awaits Jesus and the disciples with Him up the mountain, the three of them, what awaits is real life.
Just like for you was true for them, that when you have this great spiritual experience, this great emotional high in your spiritual life, what awaits is real life.
And as they come back down off the mountain, a debate awaits them. It's a debate between the other nine apostles who did not go up the mountain and the scribes.
[3:46] If you're with us this summer, you'll recall that the setting here is there was a man that had a child who was possessed by a demon. He had tried to bring his child to Jesus.

Jesus was away. He was up on the Mount of Transfiguration. The other nine apostles said, we can cast the demon out. They had been commissioned to do that, given the authority to do that, had done that before.

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host

But for some reason, they were unable to do it. And so, this debate breaks out as the scribes, the religious leaders there, use this opportunity to call into question the legitimacy of the apostles, the legitimacy of the ministry of Jesus.
The father is in despair. The son is miserable as he's possessed by the demon. The apostles are embarrassed.
And the scribes are gloating. The pride of the apostles is crushed. And so, they wait until they are alone with Jesus.
[4:55] We see it in verse 28 of Mark 9. When he had entered the house, the disciples asked him privately, why could we not cast it out? You've given us the power and the authority to do this.

We've done this before. Why were we unable to do this? And they wait until they're alone because they don't want to have this conversation about their own failure in public.
They have already been shamed publicly by the scribes. And Jesus says in verse 29, this kind cannot be driven out by anything but prayer. In other words, they failed to pray.
That can be true for us, can't it? We who have taught Sunday school for a long time, we who have served in Awana for years, we who have preached sermons for years, we who have shared the gospel as a part of our life, all of us who have been active in ministry, if we're not careful, we can rely on our giftedness or rely on our experience so much that we fail to be prayerful.
It's a bad place to be. And so Jesus corrects them and says, no matter what your calling is, no matter what your gifting is, no matter what your background is, you can never be fruitful in ministry without prayer.
[6:17] It's a good word for our church to remember. We're in the midst of a real season of blessing. The Lord's kindness has been upon us. We have all kinds of new people coming to our church, getting ready to start a new members class again very soon.

We'll have a full room with that again. We're baptizing regularly. So many people part of our church ministry here. These are sweet, sweet days. But we must remember, we cannot rely on our creativity or our ingenuity or even our experience and background.
If we are going to have a faithful, effective ministry here, it must be that we are prayerful people. Never forget that. Never forget that without the power of the Holy Spirit, we would be completely unable to do anything of significance.
Right after that, in verse 30, Jesus prophesies His coming death and resurrection. Tells them that He's going to be delivered over into the hands of men.
He's going to be killed. But after three days, He will rise. So right after they have failed in ministry, He reminds them that the real hope and the real power is not in themselves, but in the sacrificial work that Jesus will do on the cross.
[7:42] And how do they respond to that? Well, verse 33 tells us they respond to that by having another debate. And this debate is among the apostles arguing over who is the greatest among themselves.

What a great conversation. Jesus, You just taught us, instructed us. You just told us You're going to die for us. You just reminded us You're going to lay down Your life for us and that we can have hope because on the third day, You're going to be brought back to life.
That's great. Now, on to more important matters of the day. Which of us is the best? You just say, how do you get so distracted? Except that we do it all the time, don't we?
We come in this place and sing and pray and study and set our sight on the Lord, and then we go home on Monday and we just start doing what they did, comparing ourselves against each other and trying to measure how we do.
And our pride grows, and what they do would be sad enough on its own. And it's made more sad because I think we can see ourselves in what they do so often.
[9:03] They're preoccupied with their rank and their status and their standing. And so, Jesus has to correct them. And He does that in verses 36 and 37.

Which brings us to our passage this morning, verse 38 to 41. And it's another uncomfortable exchange. It's another conversation between the apostles and Jesus where they just don't quite get it right.
Verse 38, John said to Him, Teacher, we saw someone casting out demons in Your name, and we tried to stop him because He was not following us.

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host

But Jesus said, Do not stop Him. For no one who does a mighty work in My name will be able soon afterward to speak evil of Me.
For the one who is not against us is for us. For 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.
[10:24] If I'm not mistaken, I think this is the first time that John the Apostle has had his own words recorded in the Gospel of Mark. And it's words where he got it wrong.

He says, Jesus, let me tell you what we saw and we were trying to do the right thing. We were trying to protect ourselves.
We were trying to protect the group. We were trying to protect what we're doing. Is this right? Are you proud of us? Did we do this right? And once again, Jesus says, you missed the mark.
There was some man that they had encountered who was casting out demons. The apostles ran across him and he wasn't one of the apostles.
He wasn't one of them. He wasn't in their group. And so they tried to shut his ministry down. Now we don't know who the man is. We know there were other Jewish men who did this kind of thing.
[11:30] The Gospel of Matthew chapter 12 tells us that. The inference in the text I take to be that this man was legitimate, that he was truly doing the work of Jesus, that he was successful in casting the demons out.

I don't believe this man to be a charlatan. I take him as a legitimate follower of Christ. And the apostles tried to stop him. They did not want him doing this.
Now why do they want to stop him? Well, it tells us. Because he was not following us, verse 38 says. He was not one of them.
He wasn't a part of their group. Now as we try to figure out exactly what's going on, we have to ask ourselves, was their motive right, but the apostles were just wrong in their decision making?
Was their motive wrong and their method wrong? It's a little hard to know. I mean, on the one hand, I can understand and appreciate where they may be coming from.
[12:35] They don't want somebody just in some rogue ministry just doing their own thing, just claiming to be doing things in the name of Jesus. We know there are people who claim the name of Jesus that are not legitimate followers of Christ.

We know that in our day today, there are people who claim the name of Jesus, but their lives and their doctrine expose them as false teachers and as false believers.
That was true in Jesus' day as well. Of course, these are also the same guys who upon hearing Jesus say he was going to die for them, then erupted in debate over which of them was the best.
So it's hard to know where their motivation was. It's hard to know exactly what was on their mind and their heart when they tried to shut this man down.
From what we know about John, the apostle, I tend to think he's not boasting here. I tend to take him as either trying to say, I think we got it right this time, or maybe even asking for approval, maybe even asking the Lord, did we do this right?
[13:49] John said, teacher, we saw someone casting out demons in your name, and we tried to stop him because he was not following us. The indication may be, Lord, we know you wouldn't want this.

We tried to stop him. He wouldn't stop. So if you hear about it, just know we did everything we could to shut it down. It's hard to know exactly what's going on in their mind, but what we do know is they are quite surprised, I think, by the response Jesus gives.
He says, do not stop him. I just kind of picture John going, oh man, why do they even bring it up?
We just had this experience of the debate with the scribes. The apostles looked bad. We just had this internal debate over who's the best of us.
We looked bad. And now I'm telling you, we try to shut this guy down. And we messed up again. Do not stop him, the Lord says.
[14:57] And his answer is, because no one who does a mighty work in my name will be able to soon afterwards speak evil of me. So I think Jesus himself gives credence to the understanding here that this was a true believer doing legitimate ministry.

I think we can take this as a real follower of Christ. Who was he? We don't know. He's unnamed for us.
But the issue is clear. And amidst the things we can't know for certain, I think there is one overarching principle that we can know that we must know.

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host

And that is that just because someone is not in your group does not mean they don't belong to Jesus. There were only 12 apostles.
Many disciples, many followers, only 12 apostles. Jesus spent most of his ministry teaching and training the 12. But they weren't the only ones that he was teaching.
[16:04] They weren't the only ones that he was leading and serving and preparing. They were the primary ones that he was calling into leadership after his ascension. But they weren't the only people that he was able to teach and to train.

And even among the 12, there is of course one, Judas Iscariot, who himself isn't even a true believer. But apparently the apostles had this idea that if you're not one of us, if you're not in our group, if you don't run with us, then you really shouldn't be able to do ministry.
And Jesus' words sound backwards to you because you're probably more familiar with his other saying. But here in Mark 9, he says, the one who is not against us is for us.
We're more familiar probably with Matthew 12, 30. Whoever is not for me is what? Against me.
These are two sides of the same coin. If you're not for Christ, you're against him.
But if you're not against him, he says, he's for me. And I think when you take those two things, Mark 9 and Matthew 12, you put them together, two sides of the same coin, here I believe to be the overarching principle that we are to take away.
[17:34] And that is, there is no neutrality when it comes to what you do with Jesus. There is no middle of the road.

You are either for him or you're against him. You're either one of his or you're a rebel. Whether it's Matthew 12 or Mark 9, when you put them together, one thing becomes crystal clear.
There is no neutral ground. You have his side and you have those who oppose him. And those who try to remain neutral have chosen to be against him.
And so he tells John and tells the apostles here, don't stop him. There are other people who are doing ministry that may not be a part of your group, but there's other people who know me and trust me and love me and worship me.
There are other people that are doing ministry. You don't have to be just exactly in your group. But even more than that, I think is the principle that you are either with him or against him.
[18:39] You're for him or you oppose him. And if you're not with him, you are against him. And if you are for him, then you're not against him. He says it both ways, positive and negative.

Matthew 12, Mark 9, all to teach the overarching principle, there is no neutral ground with Jesus. Now that's true in this room today.
You are either with him or you are against him. And there are no doubt some in this service, some will be in our next service undoubtedly for sure too, that would say, no, no, no, I really am middle of the road.
I'm not a believer. I don't, I haven't given my life to him. I haven't surrendered my life to him. He's not in control of my life. But, I don't mind the church.
I like the church. I like what the church does. I'm not a Christ follower, but, I don't mind bringing my kids to this place.
[19:43] We've got great kids ministry. They're nice to my family. My, my wife likes it. I've got friends here. My teenagers love it. I'm not, I'm not opposed to it. But, Jesus makes clear that's not an option.

because, if you say, I'm not for him, I'm not with him, I'm not one of his, then the only other alternative is to say, I am against him.
And you say, but, but I want a third option. I'm not for him. I'm not against him. I'm just kind of neutral. But, Jesus gives no third option.
If you are in the faith, if you are one of his, then you are his. And if you do not belong to him and you haven't turned from your sin and trusted him alone as your savior, then you are opposed.
Now, here's the good news. Christ saves sinners. That's the great news. Jesus forgives. Even this day, he can forgive you of your sin. Even this day, he can bring you from spiritual death to spiritual life.
[20:46] That's the great news. But there is no middle ground. There is none. You're for him or you're against him.

If you're not against him, if you're not a rebel, then that means you are one of his. And how do you have peace with God? The Father, Jesus told us in John 14.

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host

Jesus said, I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. The only way to have peace with God is through Jesus.
If you are one of his, you have peace with the Father no matter what. And if you don't belong to the Father through the work of the Son, you don't have peace with God no matter what.
And so disciples are learning a lesson here. A lesson in leadership. A lesson in conversion. A lesson in ministry.
[21:50] And then he gives this example in verse 41. For 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.

These guys were so preoccupied with being first. We already had that conversation. They were so worried about being left out that they began to see anyone who was not in their immediate group as part of their competition.
That is the problem they had. So concerned with their standing. Jesus, am I first place? Am I second place? Who's the best among us?
If he's the best, how close am I? What do I have to do to unseat him as number one? Where am I in the rankings? Where am I in the standings? And the problem when you see life and ministry like that is you turn other believers into your competition.
That's what Jesus is correcting them on. And so Jesus reassures them that anyone who's a legitimate believer, anyone who is doing true faithful ministry for the glory of God will never lose their reward.
[23:09] In other words, you don't focus on yourself. You focus on the one you're serving, namely, namely, Christ.

And every ministry that's done, every sacrifice that's done for the cause of Christ, he tells us, earns reward. Reward that you can't lose.
I love this because our church has hundreds hundreds and hundreds of servants. Most of whom won't receive a paycheck, won't receive recognition, aren't known for their service.
they're just faithfully loving Jesus and serving people. And Jesus says, understand, doesn't matter what group you're in, doesn't matter what team you're part of, doesn't matter if you're on the in crowd or not on the in crowd as the world may see it, if you are serving in my name, you are gaining eternal reward that no one can steal.
You say, what kind of work do I have to do? Verse 41, you give a cup of water to drink. In other words, the simplest, most basic thing you do to the glory of Christ for the good of people, that's what believers do.
[24:53] Don't get hung up, he says, on who's first and who's second. Don't get hung up on hierarchy and authority and responsibility. Just serve.

Just serve. The smallest act of kindness, he says, is rewarded.
And the problem that we have to be aware of is the same problem the disciples need to be aware of, and that is that if you see other people in the church or even other churches as your competition, then what you will do is think their success is taking away from you.
And when you see other people or other churches like that, then you turn your brothers and sisters in Christ into your competition, and then we get completely off track.
And so, in this short conversation between Jesus and John, what are some things for us to know? What are some implications for our ministry, for our church, from this short encounter that Mark records for us?
[26:11] Let me give you a few. Number one, this is not saying that everyone who claims to be a follower of Christ really is one.

We do need to start with that. This text is not saying that everybody who claims to be a Christian, that everybody who claims to speak for Jesus truly is a believer.
We need to understand that's not what it's teaching. Matthew 7 has made that abundantly clear. Not everyone who says to me, Lord, Lord, will enter the kingdom of heaven.
There will be people who say, we taught in your name, we did ministry in your name, and the fact of the matter is, they never truly belonged to the Lord.
This text is not saying that everyone who claims to be a believer truly is. Don't get that wrong. We need to understand that. We still have to use discernment.
[27:13] We still have to be careful who we do ministry with, who we partner with. But here's the good news. You and I do not bear the responsibility of making that final call of who truly belongs to

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host

God or not.

Let the Lord handle that. Jesus is teaching his apostles here to not see other legitimate believers as their competition.
But that doesn't mean that we don't still need to be discerning. We do. Which leads to number two.
This is not saying that it's wrong to call out false teachers and false doctrine.
This text is teaching us that other true believers are not our competition. And other true believers who aren't one of our exact group does not mean that they're excluded.
But it does not say that it's wrong to call out false teachers and false doctrine. The Bible's clear that must happen. When someone reveals themselves to be a false teacher, to use the New Testament language, when someone reveals themselves to be a wolf, we need to warn people about them.
[28:36] Don't misunderstand what Jesus is saying and push it further than what he intended for it to be. Just because somebody calls themselves a church does not mean they're the people of God.

Just because someone has the title pastor does not mean he speaks for God. His life, his doctrine, his character will in time reveal that.
Do not take away from what Jesus says that it's wrong to call out false teaching and false doctrine.
Third then, on the positive side, what do we do with this?
Third, it shows us that all of us need to be open for correction. All of us need to be open for correction.
Just think of who Jesus is correcting in this passage. He's correcting John the Apostle. John the Apostle wrote the Gospel of John, the letter of 1 John, 2 John, 3 John, and the last book of your Bible, Revelation.
[29:46] Five New Testament books of the Bible are written by John. He is being corrected.

This man, John, walked with Jesus, talked with Jesus, followed Jesus. One of the few that stood nearby at the crucifixion of Jesus, and yet he needed to be corrected.
Which reminds us that none of us are above being corrected. That all of us must continue to study and to learn and to grow and to subject ourselves to biblical teaching with a humble, teachable spirit.
Let me just read you one example of this. Just make note of Acts, chapter 18. In Acts, chapter 18, we read about Apollos and Priscilla and Aquila.
Speaking of Apollos, it says, he had been instructed in the way of the Lord, and being fervent in spirit, he spoke and taught accurately the things concerning Jesus, though he only knew of the baptism of John.
[31:03] He began to speak boldly in the synagogue, but when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately.

He was sincere. He was devoted. He was fervent. He just didn't know all the story. And so, other more seasoned believers took him aside privately, not publicly, didn't embarrass him, didn't shame him.
This man wasn't, wasn't teaching anything wrong with any kind of ill in his heart. He just didn't know all the fullness of what Christ had done. And so, he needed to be instructed.
He needed to be taught a more excellent way. So, so it is with us. We all need to be taught. We all need to continue to grow. All of us should be in the Word every single day.
And if you ask yourself, how would I know if I truly see myself as needing to keep growing? The answer is very, very simple.
[32:04] Are you in the Word daily? not out of a spirit of legalism as if, if you read your Bible X number of days, God loves you more.

If you miss a day, God's going to zap you. Not that kind of thing. But from the heart that says, I love the Lord, I want to know Him, I know I need to know Him more, and I desire to be in the Word daily.
If you're not in the Word each day, if you're not learning and worshiping and growing and being instructed by the Word every day, then what that may reveal is that you're not desiring to be instructed by the Lord.
And one of the things we take away from this passage is that even the Apostle John needed to be instructed and corrected, and that's true for us too. Fourth, be careful of looking for reasons to exclude others.
Be careful of looking for reasons to exclude others. Yes, there are times we have to separate from people. There are times where a person, a pastor, an author, a church, a ministry has crossed the

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host

line and we have to break from them.
[33:31] There are times when people appeared to be true believers. They prove themselves to be false believers. And at that point, you don't listen to them anymore.

You don't read them anymore. You don't subject yourself to their instruction anymore. But don't look for reasons to exclude others.
Don't assume the worst in people. If somebody denies the deity of Christ, have nothing to do with them as far as a teacher. Pray for their salvation.
Pray for their conversion. But if somebody claims to be a pastor or a teacher of God's Word and they deny the deity of Christ, have nothing to do with them. If somebody affirms that sin is not sin, have nothing to do with them.
Pray for their conversion. If you know them personally, share the gospel with them. But as far as a teaching standpoint, have nothing to do with them. But don't go to church on Sunday or Sunday school on Sunday just looking to get somebody saying something wrong.
[34:47] Don't have the mindset of who can we separate from today? Who can we kick out of the club today? We've got to be careful.

This is a real danger in our church culture today, in the world at large, in the church here. I don't mean here locally, I just mean in general.
Where somebody has proven themselves to be unfaithful, unqualified, unsound, untrue, they need to be named, called out, and you separate from them.
But I do fear that we have this mindset of people that just in our world look for a reason to not like somebody.
Let's give an example. Our church has a choir. And we have a choir by conviction. There's a reason why we do. There's a reason we have children's choirs.
[35:49] There's a reason we have youth choir. There's a reason we have an adult choir. It's not because we can't think of anything else to do. It's not because we've got all these kids and what are we going to do with them.

There's a reason we do. There's convictions of why we do. There's a reason and a purpose of why we do. But that doesn't mean that a church that doesn't have a choir doesn't love Jesus.
That doesn't mean that a church that doesn't have a youth choir doesn't love teenagers. And we want, even though there's things that we value and reasons we value them and convictions behind them, let's not look for reasons to disassociate ourselves from other people or other churches.
I wear a coat and tie generally on Sunday mornings. There's a reason that I do. If you ask me about it behind the scenes, I'll tell you. There's a reason. It's not just because, you know, I'm afraid of what will happen if I don't.
I've got a reason. I've got a conviction. But let's not pretend you have to wear a coat and tie to preach the Bible. I mean, the disciples did, but that's beside the point.
[37:02] Let's not pretend you've got to have a wooden pulpit to preach the Bible. There's a reason this is here, by the way. I want people to walk in the church and say, I know what that church believes. I know what that church values.

I can tell even by the setup of the platform and the look of the pulpit that there's a high love and respect for the Bible. There's conviction. There's a reason for it.
But let's not pretend that if you go to a church without a pulpit, that means they don't love Jesus. Let's not let small preferences like that make us move away from people.
And that happens all the time, by the way. Just because somebody doesn't say something the exact way that you do or have the same style or preference that we may have, let's be careful.
Yes, where there are false teachers, you've got to avoid them. Where there are people that mislead God's people, we want nothing to do with that. There are all kinds, and in fact, I don't know this for sure, but I would, I feel pretty confident to say, if you tell me in the top 20 current best-selling books in the Christian world today, I would be quite confident we have very few and maybe zero of those in our church bookstore.
[38:17] bookstore. Because they're often largely written by people with dangerous theology. And they're in bookstores because they sell, not because they're sound.

But, if somebody just has a little bit different style or preference, they don't have to be just like us to be in.

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host

They don't have to look just like us and dress just like us and talk just like us. Let's not make the mistake the apostles made here and assume that if they're not one of us, not meaning one of the Lord's, just one of us, our group, our circle.
Let's be careful with that. One of my mentors says, you know, people that live like this, they end up, them and all of their friends can fit in the phone booth because you just start cutting all your friends up.
And you end up saying, is there, is there any book I can read? Is there, we have to be discerning, but let's not just do away with all of the people that love Jesus.
[39:34] There may be things of people, they reveal themselves as false and we've got to make some hard decisions. In our church, we do this. There are authors, we just don't do their books, not corporately.

We're not telling you who you can read as a person. We're not the Holy Spirit. We're not the dictators. We are, however, shepherds of the church. We are shepherds of God's people and there are certain songs we won't sing and certain books that we just don't do and certain conferences we just don't promote among our people because the people who lead them or write them or teach them have proved themselves to be beyond the line.
But let's not think that everybody has to be just like us in all things. Doctrine, yes. Jesus, of course. But if they're just not one of our exact group, let's not look for reasons to separate from people.
Number five, I think this teaches us that we are to break down artificial barriers in the church. Break down artificial barriers in the church.
If there's people and even in our own congregation and you say, you know what, you're not one of us, you don't listen to the music we listen to or you don't have the same hobbies that we have, then you're not really one of us.
[41:00] One of the reasons why convictionally in our Sunday school classes we've got larger rooms now and larger classes is we don't want people going to Sunday school just with people just like them.

Our exact age. Our exact life stage. Our exact preferences. I mean, have who you want for your friends and spend the most time with who makes you the happiest.
That's fine. But let's remind ourselves as a part of the body of Christ. We want to break down artificial barriers. It's one of the reasons why we don't have a contemporary service and a traditional or a blended service and a contemporary.
We want to break down those artificial barriers. We don't want to make a church where we just have all these little small subgroups where everybody that you're around is just like you.
So, I just talk to people who are middle-aged that are empty nesters and have the same hobbies that I do. And no, I need to be around our younger people.
[42:08] I need to be around our senior adults. I need to be around people who have been in our church for a long time. I want to be around people who are brand new to our church. I want to have the fullness of the body of Christ as a part of my life and my weekly friendships and conversations.

Let's break down any artificial barriers in the church. Six, differences matter but should be held in the right way.
Differences matter but should be held in the right way. Let me just give you some real life, I think, applications of this.
that come from this text here. First, think in the realm of, I've got a friend of mine who explains, using these words. I think this is really helpful. First, think in terms of fellowship.
Who do we have fellowship with? Who do we have Christian fellowship with? Well, there are pastors that are friends of mine that believe Jesus is God's son, believe he lived a sinless life, believed he died on the cross, believe he rose again, believe he ascended to heaven, believe he's coming back, believe he is the only way to salvation.
[43:28] And I have great friendship with them. We are in fellowship with each other. We may disagree on what the New Testament teaches about spiritual gifts.

We may disagree on matters of eschatology, being pre-meal or post-meal or all-meal. There may be matters of disagreement.
There may be disagreement on church polity, how a church is structured, how a church is organized, how things should be led. We may disagree on things that should or should not happen in a worship service.

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host

Now, those differences matter because they should all be convictions, not just preferences. So those differences matter, but they should be held the right way. We can have fellowship and friendship with people in Christ who believe the gospel, who are true followers of Jesus, even if we disagree on other things, even if those things matter to us.
A very well-known example of this would be R.C. Sproul, John MacArthur, two guys used by the Lord in powerful ways.
[44:53] They disagree on baptism. That's a big deal. Baptism is important. But they both believe the essentials of Christ and salvation, repentance.

You can have fellowship there. I've got friends of mine, but I disagree with them on some very important things. But we can have fellowship together if we truly belong to Christ.
That's the fellowship level. Then there's a deeper level. That's the partnership level. Now it's the question of not are we friends, not are you in heaven and I'm in heaven and all those things, but it's a matter of you do tighten the circle a little bit when you talk about partnership because if you're going to do gospel work and gospel ministry together, those shared convictions need to be present. So, there may be some people that are true believers and you love them and you care for them. You're not questioning their salvation.
They're not questioning yours, but it is difficult to partner in ministry together because maybe your convictions just are too different from each other.
[46:14] I was recently asked to speak at an event. People I know, people I care for, people I consider friends, people I believe are true believers, but I couldn't partner with them because our biblical convictions at some points were so different.

I just feel it would have caused too much confusion. I don't question their salvation. I'm friends with them. They're nice to me.
It doesn't break our friendship or fellowship, but there are some partnership things that make it difficult if certain shared convictions aren't there. And I think that's okay.
I think we're still staying within the heart of what Jesus is teaching in this passage. There's no neutrality with Christ. You don't have to be just like us for us to love and accept you.
But it may be at the partnership level in the local church that there's decisions to make. Then you get a third level even deeper in the local church. That's the realm of leadership.
[47:21] When you're talking about leadership in the church, now those strongly held convictions need to be there. If there's somebody who believes the gospel, but they practice infant baptism, how would that work in our local church?

How would it work where we believe in believer's baptism, but one staff member practices infant baptism, how would that work? Well, that can't work. I'm not saying that person can't be a believer. I'm not saying that person doesn't love Jesus. I'm not saying that person doesn't care greatly about the things of God. I'm not saying that person doesn't study the Bible with all their heart. It's just that the conclusion of what they've come to is a place where we can fellowship together, maybe even partner together in some things.
But as far as leadership in the church, there are some things that need to fit together for that local assembly to have peace and unity, and that's okay.
I have friends of mine I talk to all the time. We talk about ministry, we talk about the Bible, we talk about theology, but they wouldn't be able to serve here. I love them.
[48:37] I believe in them. They're brothers. others. But there are elements where they wouldn't be able to serve here because of doctrinal distinctives that they just don't hold.

Well, how do you deal with that in a real-life situation? I think the takeaway from this passage is, first and foremost, there's no neutrality with Jesus, either for Him or against Him.
If you're with Him, if you're one of His, then you're not against Him. Let's not make everybody be just like us. So, I don't want to stand here and tell you that when you move to another city, you have to find a church that's just like us.
You go to a new city, you may go to a church, they don't have a choir. You may go to a church, the pastor doesn't wear a suit. You may go to a church, they don't have a pulpit. You may go to a church, they don't have an evening service. You may go to a church, they don't have a youth minister that meets on Wednesday night.
You may go to a church, they don't have a wanna. Let's not think that we've got it all figured out and you have to be just like us to get it right. Let's be gracious. Let's be understanding.

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host

[49:42] Let's not think other churches in our city are a competition. They're not. If there's other churches and they're faithful and they're preaching a biblical gospel and they're being blessed and prospering, if it's a biblical gospel, praise the Lord.

If they're not a biblical gospel, then the last thing I wanna do is be envious or jealous of them. Either way, they're not our competition. If they're a true church preaching a true gospel, they're our brothers and sisters.

If they're not a true church with true believers, then Jesus says they're not one of His anyway. And so what we've got to make sure of here is we don't turn people and other groups as our enemies because lastly, and we'll end with this, in the end, ministry must be about Jesus, not ourselves. Ministry must be about Jesus, not ourselves. That's what he wanted John to understand. That's what he wanted. How can we feel and tell them that he does not understand what he wanted to do in the end?

In the end, we're going to put one thing in the end. We're going to come in and if we're going to see what he wanted to do in the end. We're going to let them in the end. We're going to let them be here. We're going to let them have a place in the end. We're going to let them just because they're going to let them as they're going to get us on.

[51:16] We're going to let them they're going to all of us. We're going to let them are going to at the end. We're going to let them at the end. We're going to let them

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host