

**Kingdom Allies and Enemies**  
**Mark 9:38-50**

It's great to sing to our God on high who is ruling and reigning from His throne, and we get to represent Him as citizens, kingdom citizens, although we know that our kingdom is not of this world as Jesus made that clear, but we know that it is coming, and until then, we represent Him, our King, who reigns. And as is important for any citizen of any nation or kingdom, it's important to have an understanding of who your opponents are and who your allies are, who are your enemies and who are the ones you can trust. It seems pretty basic, important for any terms of diplomacy or international workings that will take place. It's important to understand who is working with you, who is with you and who is against you. And that is what we find out in our passage today as we conclude Mark chapter 9 - this discussion, this understanding of allies and enemies in the kingdom, for us to learn, as Jesus teaches His disciples.

So, join me in looking at Mark 9, starting in verse 38, and we'll read through the end of the chapter; "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.' 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. 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 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. 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.' 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.' " A passage that we come to this morning where John prompts this discussion here about kingdom allies and enemies. As Jesus so often

does, He continues to teach and lay out more principles after a simple question or scenario is raised from one of His disciples.

So, to begin our time this morning, we're going to look at verses 38-41 where we'll find the kingdom friends - kingdom friends, starting with the allies, the people that we can trust, as far as Jesus teaches here. And as we look at these verses and break them down, first in verse 38, we find the confusion - the confusion about kingdom friends is what we find as far as how this discussion begins in 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.'" This scenario that comes up, and it's a pretty vague scenario; it's possible that this came about because of what was just taught. In the flow of this passage, if you look at verse 37, you remember how we ended last time; Jesus saying, "Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me, and whoever receives me, receives not me but him who sent me." Jesus teaching about serving, what it means to be a "...servant of all," and taking this object lesson by bringing this child in the midst of everyone there in the house and saying you must even receive and serve an insignificant child. You're "...servant of all" is literally that to everyone, not just to one another as twelve disciples, but to everyone, children included, even in a society that did not view children as significant.

So, in this discussion, John's probably sitting there thinking to himself, okay, I wonder how this works because I'm thinking of a time when I interacted with someone, and I was not very much serving to them. I wasn't acting as a servant ought to act. In fact, I opposed this person. And so, John brings this up for discussion. There was this time, this random person... We don't know much about this person. We saw someone "...casting out demons in your name..." This random exorcist, this person that was actually going up to demon possessed people and casting the demons out and doing it in the name of Jesus of Nazareth, Jesus the Messiah, and John says this is how I responded. This is how we responded in this scenario. We didn't necessarily serve them. We weren't a "...servant of all." as you were just saying. Instead, we tried to stop him because he wasn't following us. He wasn't with us. So, John throws this scenario out there, asking for Jesus' thoughts on these things, to see what He has to say.

So, John makes a big assumption. Alright? His big assumption here is that this man doesn't truly know or follow Jesus because he's not physically with

the disciples. He's not physically with them and following around with them. It's like John and the other disciples that were with John in this scenario are kind of like some of the people back in Israel in Numbers 11. They had a similar scenario arise in the camp of Israel, and Joshua and others stood opposed. In Numbers 11:26-29; "Now two men remained in the camp, one named Eldad, and the other named Medad, and the Spirit rested on them. They were among those registered, but they had not gone out to the tent, and so they prophesied in the camp. And a young man ran and told Moses, 'Eldad and Medad are prophesying in the camp.' And Joshua the son of Nun, the assistant of Moses from his youth, said, 'My lord Moses, stop them.' But Moses said to him, 'Are you jealous for my sake? Would that all the Lord's people were prophets, that the Lord would put his Spirit on them!'"

Another instance where just because it's not Moses particularly prophesying in this moment in Israel's history, everyone else starts to rise up and say stop! We can't have the Word of the Lord coming from someone else. It has to only come from Moses. And Moses has to correct them and say that's not true. God's Word can come from other people, and we have to actually continue to measure it along with the standard of God's Word that we already have and make sure that it doesn't come in a way that contradicts because that then would no longer be God's Word.

So, in the same way, you have John here and the other disciples saying, well, yeah, he was "...casting out demons in your name...", in the name of Jesus and not in the name of someone else, and it was working, and the demons were coming out of these people, but still, I mean, he wasn't really with us. Right? So, we told him to stop. And John is seeking for some vindication here. Come on, Jesus. back me on this one. Right? This was a good thing to do. Right? This was the correct way to handle this. Right? ...as he brings up the scenario. You can see the same confusion even playing out today for us, not just back in Israel, not just here with Jesus and His disciples, but you and me in our church and the other churches that are here in the Antelope Valley. You start to think, someone comes up, ahh, Central Christian is also doing a Vacation Bible School. What does this mean? You have to pick one. There's only one right Bible school in all of the Antelope Valley. Or, there's another church in town that's actually claiming to read from and preach from the Bible as the Word of God. Is it possible that there's two Bible believing churches in the Antelope Valley? There's other people that are actually calling themselves Christians? What do we do with this? Who's right? Who's wrong? I mean, they're not here in this building here on J and 35<sup>th</sup>, so

obviously, they can't be right. Is that how it works? What are we to do? Should we stop them? Should we protest them? Do we recruit their people to us? Is that how it works?

Jesus gives us a very clear answer in our passage, and that's what we find in verse 39, the clarification about kingdom friends. If John brings up the confusion, Jesus brings the clarification in verse 39; "...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.' " ... "Do not stop him..." You did the wrong thing. Jesus doesn't give John the vindication that he was hoping for. Instead, He surprises Him by saying this man that was "...casting out demons..." in My name was doing a good thing. It was a good work. He says he's a kingdom friend. He's an ally, actually. How do we know this? How do we know he's a friend? Jesus' reasoning is "...no one who does a mighty work in my name will be able soon afterward to speak evil of me.' " They're not going to turn around and completely disown everything and go against Me. Paul uses a very similar argument in 1 Corinthians 12:3. Paul says, "Therefore I want you to understand that no one speaking in the Spirit of God ever says 'Jesus is accursed!' and no one can say 'Jesus is Lord' except in the Holy Spirit." As a general rule therefore, as you start to look at what Jesus is saying and how Paul even uses that, as a general rule, if there's people speaking well of Jesus, then they're kingdom friends. They're speaking highly if they're actually acknowledging Him as the way of salvation and no one else and attributing to Him as deity and God the one true God, then they're kingdom friends. They're allies. They're on the same team.

Then right away you can start to think but there's got to be an exception to this rule. I mean I could just go to other places where Jesus talks and I'll find an exception to this rule, like Matthew 7:21-23. "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.' " And at this point, you think, is this contradictory? Is this one of those moments here in Jesus' teaching where you have Him in our passage right before us today saying, hey, it's simple; if they're doing mighty works in My name, then you can trust them? But then in the Sermon on the Mount,

He's teaching not necessarily just because they do mighty works in My name doesn't mean they're actually going to be in the kingdom. How does this work? Does Jesus not realize what He's doing? Is He teaching one thing on one day and then changing His mind and teaching something else the next day and loosening up? How do we reconcile these two things, these two clear teachings that Jesus even gives us? And I think the key is in the time element.

There's a time element in the way that it's phrased in the text in front of us. When He says, "...for no one who does a mighty work in my name will be able soon afterward to speak evil of me," He's just talking about in the near term. In the near term, if there's someone here as John has found that is "...casting out demons..." in the name of Jesus, it's a great and mighty work, a wonderful thing, properly giving praise and glory unto God through Jesus. Then He says it's fine. In the near term, in the near scope of this ministry, it's great. He's an ally. It's a good thing. Don't stop this, that's fine. But Jesus isn't speaking to the end time. Jesus isn't speaking to this man's eternal destiny. Jesus isn't speaking to when he will actually have to stand before God. That's what the Sermon on the Mount does. But for this moment, for this brief kind of moment of history and ministry and Christ's life, this is fine. He's an ally. He's doing good work. Don't stop him. As far as his salvation is concerned and what is the end result for this man, Jesus is not addressing that. That's something that will eventually come out. The reality is the whole expression, as people say, that time and truth go hand in hand, and you give it enough time and the truth will come out. Give him more time. This man's doing a good work today, and he's attributing it to Jesus, and that's great, but give it time. It's possible that this man could just be doing it for a wrong reason, and he might not actually truly be a follower of Christ, but that's something he'll take up with God in the end, but for now he's doing a good work. Let him do this good work in the name of Christ.

He adds even more teaching to this. In verse 40 of our text, He gives, not just the clarification in 39, but the criterion for kingdom friends in verse 40, and it's this simple principle; "For the one who is not against us is for us." This simple axiom that He gives; it's a positive way of identifying the friends of the kingdom. He states the reverse of this principle at other times in His teaching and in His ministry. You might have heard of Matthew 12:30, where He says, "Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters." - kind of the negative side of this

principle. So, when you think about this, when He's saying here, "For the one who is not against us is for us." And then, the negative side of it, the positive and then the negative; "Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters." Ultimately, we realize as we put this together and as Jesus has taught multiple times, there's no middle ground when it comes to following Christ. There's no riding on the fence. There's no kind of in and out depending on the day. You're either with Him or you're against Him.

And how true that is at this point in His ministry. I mean, think of how much Jesus has done. He has said a lot. He has done a lot. And so, you're either offended by everything He's said and done, or you actually believe it, and you're drawn to it. You're either thinking this is offensive that this guy would call Himself the Messiah and the Son of God, or you're thinking this man is the Messiah and the Son of God. You're either offended at His teaching that you must take up your cross and be willing to just sacrifice your life for following Him, and you're drawn to that, and you come to it, or you're offended by that. That's the case there's no middle ground. So, if you found someone who is not against Christ, then they're clearly for Christ as He gives this principle. They are a friend. They are an ally in the kingdom. We obviously know that there were more than just twelve that followed Jesus. We can think of other times like in Luke 10:1, He sends out "...seventy-two others and sent them on ahead of him, two by two..." to preach. So, not just the twelve, there's more. And other places in the gospels, we see time and time again that it was more than just the twelve disciples that would be following Jesus around.

We see also that for John, when he's at this moment, he needs to look beyond this inner crowd. He needs to kind of get his head up and look beyond the twelve that are there with Jesus, and realize that there are more that are actually believing in Christ and following Him. It's the same thing that Paul had to do in his ministry. You might remember when Paul was in jail, and he wrote a lot of letters, one of the letters being to the Philippians; and he talks about what people were doing and how he was being treated and how people were acting in Philippians 1:15-18; "Some indeed preach Christ from envy and rivalry, but others from good will. The latter do it out of love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel. The former proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely but thinking to afflict me in my imprisonment. What then? Only that in every way, whether in

pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed, and in that I rejoice.” Paul had to deal with the same thing. There were even people that were preaching the gospel so as to somehow stick it to Paul and be somehow their way of inflicting him as he says, You’re in jail. You’re stuck right there, and we’re going to go out and preach. Shame on you. Watch us go and preach the gospel. And Paul realizes that that’s clearly and envious and rivalry. That’s selfish ambition that’s motivating them to preach, but what’s happening? The name of Christ is being preached, and so, at that point, they’re definitely not against Christ so they’re for. They’re a friend. They’re an ally even if their heart is somehow misguided in some way.

Jesus also not only identifies what these friends look like through these kind of expressions here and these principles, but He gives the necessary behavior that you need to have towards kingdom friends. How do you treat allies? How do you treat those that are on the same team in the kingdom? And that’s verse 41, the conduct toward kingdom friends, the conduct that must be had. 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.” Jesus goes farther; it’s not good enough for you to think, okay, this man was preaching the gospel, or this man was casting out demons in the name of Jesus, so we’ll just kind of get out of his way and let him do that. Jesus goes a step further, and He actually talks about the conduct of supporting such a person, actually upholding them, and He does it in this very simple illustration of giving them “...a cup of water...”, a very tiny way that someone can serve an ally or a friend in the kingdom. So, the standard goes beyond just getting out of their way, it goes beyond the idea of letting them do the work, but actually supporting the work. Even if it’s in a tiny way of support, it’s still noticeable to God. There will be a reward for such support for the friends of the kingdom. This is the opposite of John. John wasn’t letting this man do his thing, and thinking I’ll ask Jesus later. He actually stepped in and opposed this man. He stopped him. He interfered. And Jesus says on the other hand, they’re a friend. You should support what they’re doing.

We have to consider our kingdom friends here in the Antelope Valley. They’re around. Our goal is not the self-promotion of Valley Bible Church. Our goal must be the glorification of Christ and the growth of God’s kingdom. Speaking ill of others and competing with other Bible churches - it’s unacceptable. There’s no room for that. And it’s so tempting and easy to

fall into a place where comments are made and jokes are spoken, and we let words go forth in a careless fashion about other churches and other ways of doing things around here, but the reality is according to what Jesus says, if they're upholding the name of Christ, and they're preaching the gospel message, the true gospel message not a mixture of it, but the true message that we have revealed in Scripture, then we need to be praising God for them. These are faithful laborers. We need to be thankful for this work. We need to support and be excited about what God is doing. God is working in so many more people's lives than what we have here, and so many more churches even than what we have in this corner, in Lancaster. We need to thank God for the allies that we have. We need to not only acknowledge them but even support, pray for them, be excited for the work that God is doing for the kingdom through these other people. God is a lot bigger than us. He's not dependent upon our small congregation here.

But not just the kingdom friends that we recognize here and how to support them and to hopefully pray for them and see the work of God continue, in verse 42 we have a shift, a shift to address the opposite, the opponents, the kingdom foes, as we find in verses 42-48. The kingdom friends that we have just seen as John brought up and now the kingdom foes, the enemies of the kingdom. And what we'll see here is there's really two main enemies that Jesus talks about. In verse 42 is the first enemy, and that's the enemy outside - the enemy outside, and then in verses 43-48, it's the enemy inside - the enemy inside of all of us. So, first the enemy outside in verse 42. He 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." You can tell the shift. Jesus, as He does often, continues teaching after addressing, not just what John brought up in his scenario, He continues onward to teach more. And you can tell the change, the change here, as He goes to address those who are opposed, no longer just the friends. He has harsh words for those in opposition to the kingdom. How can this opposition look? He states it pretty clearly; it's causing or leading other believers into sin in one way or another.

You know, it's simple for us to be aware of news and media and what's taking place around the world and how there are terrorists and hate groups that have this way of indoctrinating the young and just pumping them full of evil and wicked ideas and kind of thinking. So much so, that it leads to just violence and unrest, and we see that, and we just are... It's appalling to

even be aware of that treatment and that way of doing things, and you have that feeling, and that's even channeled in a spiritual sense to what Jesus is talking about here - how much more so when it comes to someone causing a young one, physically or spiritually, a young believer... and they're getting led astray into some way of sin. There's stumbling that's taking place, and someone's responsible for that. Someone is actually leading and promoting that path to sin. That same feeling that we have that we're just so against and appalled at when we see it happening around the world in a physical sense, how much more so spiritually when it's taking place.

Jesus actually says it would be better for this kingdom foe to be killed violently. I mean, you look at the description here. If someone's going to actually cause someone to sin or lead them into sin, "...it would be better for him if a great millstone were hung around his neck and he were thrown into the sea." This massive stone for farming - when you have the harvest and you bring the grain in, and the donkey pulls this stone, and it crushes the grain, and you take that stone that is undoubtedly heavy, tie it around someone's neck, and then throw them into the water. It's a hopeless scenario. It's a terrible scenario; it's death that Jesus is describing.

And you look at the way He phrases it here; "...it would be better for him..." if he went through that hopeless scenario of death? And you have to think, how would this be better? I mean, what would this be better than? Better than another way of dying? I don't understand. This is pretty bad. This is pretty terrible. And the reality is what Jesus is alluding to here is this violent physical death would be better than facing God's judgment for leading others to stray. We think of this, and a picture like that that Jesus uses, and we think that's terrible, and He says that's nothing compared to what that person will have to go through when they stand before God, and they have to give an account for leading people into sin, for causing others to stumble. That is a terrible thing to fall into the hands of Almighty God who's a God of wrath and justice. Jesus puts it this way in Luke 17:1, "Temptations to sin are sure to come, but woe to the one through whom they come!" You do not want to be that one that is bringing the temptations for people to sin. You're an enemy of the kingdom in doing that.

Kingdom foes bring the temptation to the child of God. Paul taught against this very thing in very practical ways in Romans 14. In Romans 14:13, he says, "Therefore let us not pass judgment on one another any longer, but

rather decide never to put a stumbling block or hindrance in the way of a brother.” Let us have that resolve. Let us really make that a point, that we would stay far away from causing other people to be led down this path into sin. How dare we toe the line or get as close as we can and draw other people with us. In that same chapter, in Romans 14:21, Paul says, “It is good not to eat meat or drink wine or do anything that causes your brother to stumble,” just to show the extent to which Paul is addressing this. He’s examining this on every level, looking at everything that’s taking place, at every action in his life, at every word spoken, at every way that he spends his time. Is this causing other people, is this bringing people into this temptation to sin against God? May it never be! Let us never put stumbling blocks in front of our brothers and sisters in Christ. We become an enemy of the kingdom when we do that.

Kingdom foes don’t only exist on the outside as we’re aware, as we’ve seen, as we have Jesus teaching here, but we see as Jesus goes on in verses 43-48, we find the enemy on the inside. Look again at these verses, verses 43-48; “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. 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.’ ” Jesus here is addressing the enemy, an enemy that we can all relate to, the enemy of the flesh that we all fight against, our own flesh, and He does this giving three different examples: the hands, the feet, and the eyes. And you think, why? Why these three? If you’re going to pick body parts, why the hands? Why the feet? Why the eyes? Hands were just often known for the simple means by which you accomplished jobs and tasks that are before you, your work or what you do. Your feet are the way that you get places and you visit. It’s where you go. And your eyes are the ways that you can take things in and process. You have thoughts and desires through your own eyes. It’s what you think, and so through addressing the hands, the feet, and the eyes, he’s addressing what you do, where you go, and what you think. All these things are very encompassing of our lives.

And it’s also good to be clear at this point, as I can tell looking around, our congregation isn’t in the habit of this, but Jesus is not advocating self-mutilation in these verses. There’s none of that here. Even if, think about it,

even if someone were to chop off a hand or to chop off a foot, it does not mean that they will stop sinning. That's not what the Bible teaches. That's not what Jesus teaches in the fullness of His teaching. We all know that sin is traced back not to a limb, sin is traced back to the heart of mankind because our hearts are deceitful and wicked. They're desperately sick. That is where sin comes from. It's within. It's from our hearts, and so Jesus is not advocating, saying that you will solve the sin problem if you're willing to chop off a limb, that's not Jesus' teaching here. Jesus is aware of where sin comes from. So, what is He doing? Instead, He's revealing the radical approach one must have to removing sin from their own life. This is not a game. This is not a task that goes on and on, and so you kind of chip away at it a little bit when you feel like it. This is a radical approach that you must have to removing sin from your life.

To call yourself a friend of God, a kingdom ally, and to be comfortable with sin is contradictory. It doesn't work. A kingdom citizen will fight relentlessly and ruthlessly against their own flesh and passions. That's what He's saying. Why? Why will you fight so relentlessly and ruthlessly against all these fleshly passions and desires? Because the kingdom citizen knows what is at stake. You know what is at stake in this battle with the enemy within. It's eternity; eternal life is at stake. It's not for random reason that Jesus mentions hell every time when he gives an example here. In all three examples, He has a reference to hell and even some of your Bibles might have... in verses 44 and 46, maybe they're in brackets, maybe it's a footnote. It's down at the bottom of your page, but it's a repetition of verse 48 which is another description of hell. While verses 44 and 46 aren't in the earliest manuscripts of the New Testament (so probably were never originally written by Mark), they still show that Jesus is clearly talking about hell in a picturesque way that we really haven't seen yet in the gospel, and that description is found anyway in verse 48 which is original and was in the writing of Mark in the New Testament.

He draws from the Old Testament, in this description of hell, specifically from Isaiah 66:24, "And they shall go out and look on the dead bodies of the men who have rebelled against me. For their worm shall not die, their fire shall not be quenched, and they shall be an abhorrence to all flesh." When you look at this and you see what Jesus is teaching strongly, passionately about, how He's laying this out - how to battle the enemy within and the necessity of doing so, His teaching is really simple. Sacrifice in this life, not

the next. It's simple advice. It's the best teaching you can have. Choose now. Don't roll the dice. Don't risk this. Sacrifice now in this life, not the next. Give up now if you have to. Give up whatever it is. Be radical in your approach to putting off sin and taking kingdom living seriously because you have acknowledged that your life is no longer your own; it is Christ's. And so you will go to whatever length is necessary to get rid of this sin so that you can enter into the next life, into the kingdom. The alternative is, frankly, a foolish alternative. To hold onto fleshly passions now, to hang on to what feels good, to be lazy in your approach to that and fighting it, to not sacrifice, and then to stand before God and Him to ask you was it worth it to hold onto all that? Because now, "I never knew you; depart from me..." (Matthew 7:23) You're not a child of mine; you must experience the wrath of God for eternity.

Do not tolerate the foe within. Do not tolerate the enemy of your flesh. It is not worth it. There's so much New Testament teaching on this. Galatians 5:24; "And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires." Colossians 3:5; "Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry." Titus 2:11-12; "For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age..." Jesus has essentially taken John's scenario that started off our passage and just turned it completely, because there you have John and he's bringing this up to Jesus, saying, well, what about them out there? Because I know we're good. I mean, we're right next to You, Jesus. We're in proximity. We're one of the disciples, but what about those guys out there? What's up with them. What's going to happen to them? What's their story? And what Jesus has done is now taken John's finger away from blaming others (as we are so good at doing) and He's brought it back upon himself. Examine yourself. Stop looking at other people. Stop pointing out the wrong in others. Examine yourself. Make sure you are not causing others to stumble. Make sure you are actually fighting the foe and the enemy of your flesh within. Examine yourself. Kill any rebellious passion or impulse you can find, and then ask God to reveal more and then kill those passions as well. Why would you take this lightly? Eternity depends upon it.

The disciples have a tall order. They should know that by now. They're not following Jesus to have the front row seats anymore. He just keeps

unleashing upon them. You must lose your life for the sake of finding it and saving it. In the end, you must deny yourself. You must be the "...servant of all." You must be radical in your mortification of your flesh, in your sinful passions and desires; anything less is unacceptable for the kingdom. You must understand who the allies are. Support them, but you also, at the same time, you must be well aware of the enemies and make war against those enemies of the kingdom.

To end our passage in verses 49-50, Jesus ends with two unique verses here that speak of kingdom fervor, the desire, the zeal that you must have in living as a kingdom citizen. These short verses again, "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." These are some verses here. In fact, in the other gospels, you don't really find this. You don't have what you have in verse 49, specifically, the motivation for kingdom fervor coming here in verse 49; "For everyone will be salted with fire." And we struggle to understand what this means, and many interpretations are given, more than we need that's for sure. So, what is being said here; "...everyone will be salted with fire." Salt was known to do many things in that time as this was all taking place. It could preserve in one hand, but another reason or another use of salt is a purifying agent, purifying. There's a lot of Old Testament references for this as well. They commanded certain offerings to be offered in the tabernacle with salt. If you thought about some of the grain offerings that were offered unto the Lord in the tabernacle and in the temple, there must be salt to purify the offering. Leviticus 2:13; "You shall season all your grain offerings with salt. You shall not let the salt of the covenant with your God be missing from your grain offering; with all your offerings you shall offer salt." And then again in Ezekiel 43:24; "You shall present them before the Lord, and the priests shall sprinkle salt on them and offer them up as a burnt offering to the Lord." So, Jesus here is saying that you will be salted with fire, or you will be purified with fire.

So, then our question is how is fire functioning here? Fire seems to be referring more to the trials and the tribulations that come, the persecutions that believers experience in this life. As an example, 1 Peter 1:6-7 says, "In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to

result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.” Thus, taking this together, Jesus seems to be saying to the disciples that they will be purified or salted with persecution, fire. They will be purified with persecution, and that is, in fact, what comes for them, and that’s why there’s a lot of New Testament teaching talking about this - that persecution is a good thing and we should “...count it all joy...” because it does something. It purifies. It sanctifies. It’s a part of this process that God uses, this purifying process in our lives. Jesus promises that this is for the sake of their purification, their sanctification, and the same is true for you and me. We can be motivated to kingdom fervor. We can continue to press on with zeal because we know that God’s doing something with this. You will look more like Jesus because of it.

You think, this is going to be hard. Look at what He just told us to do. We have to be willing to give up our own pursuits and our own passions. We have to say no to our flesh. And surely, when we identify with Christ and no one else, the world’s not going to like that, and they’re going to have things to say about it, and there’s going to be persecution, and there will be suffering, and that’s exactly what all the disciples experienced. But Jesus gives His promise; you’ll be purified because of it. You will look more like Christ because of this persecution. It is bringing something beautiful and glorious.

He brings the metaphor of the salt as He continues it in verse 50; “Salt is good, but if the salt has lost its saltiness, how will you make it salty again?” Some people argue this isn’t true of salt; it doesn’t lose its saltiness. But back in first century Palestine and the salt they had, this was true. It was impure salt at that time, and it was prone to this kind of deterioration where it could lose its taste in saltiness. So, the same spiritual deterioration could take place in the disciples. They have a response that they need to give. They will come up against these persecutions. They will have to deal with these sufferings that will come. They can turn their back on God. They can say I’m done. I’ll go this far but no farther, or they can embrace it, embrace the persecutions that are there. Meet them head on and know that the sacrifice of their lives will be seasoned with salt as an offering unto God. Their failure to embrace the persecution, any running from this, any desire to serve themselves and no longer follow after Christ, would be simply like salt that’s just has lost its taste; it’s worthless, and God doesn’t want that. God doesn’t

want followers that aren't committed, that aren't willing to go through this trusting Him, that He's working through it to purify, to sanctify.

The final thing we have in our passage, in verse 50, the second half of it, is this mandate for kingdom fervor; "Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another." ... "Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another." He ends with this final command for the disciples to respond well to suffering, make sure the salt is there, not this impure, lame salt that's good for nothing, but truly, salty, tasty, good salt in you. They must be purified by God's work and "...be at peace with one another." They ought not to rise up against each another and start to make this a competition and divide one another. They need to join together at this time. Now that they have some clarity here. He says, "...be at peace with one another." Now that you know what the kingdom friends are, who your allies are, that they are the ones proclaiming the name of Christ, doing works in His name; and now that you know who the enemies are, what you need to stay far away from; "...be at peace with one another." Do not divide one another; unify the church, knowing clearly that it all comes together in Christ.

In the same way for us, you and me, as kingdom citizens now, after the time of the disciples no doubt, but still dealing with the teaching of Christ, for us today knowing that we have the work of Christ going forward in this valley, in this city - God's work is going forth, and we rejoice in that. Those that are upholding the name of Christ and pushing forward. At the same time, we become more aware of that which is opposed to Christ, those that are causing people to stumble and bringing the temptations, maybe even ourselves at times, our own flesh that is warring against God's desires and His plans for the kingdom. How we must fight these foes, these kingdom foes! And we must fight with fervor, with zeal, hopefully offering up our lives to God in such a way that He is pleased, rather than salt that has completely lost its taste and is worthless. May God be pleased with our efforts to be loyal, faithful kingdom citizens that represent Him well.