

July 22, 2012 by Steve Brandon



The Road to the Kingdom

Mark 9:38-50

1. A Wide Road (verses 38-41)
2. A Difficult Road (verses 42-48)
3. A Salty Road (verses 49-50)

This morning, Lord willing, we will finish our exposition of Mark 9. Let me warn you that these are some of the most difficult verses in all of the gospel of Mark. Some of these verses are difficult to understand. Some of these verses are difficult to apply. And yet, because we are committed to exposition -- letting the text speak for itself -- we will tackle these verses this morning.

To be honest with you, if I wasn't committed to exposition, I would never preach from these verses. They are just plain too difficult. Furthermore, they deal strongly with the matters of judgment and hell, not such wonderful things to dwell upon. Most of us would rather not think about such things.

And yet, here they are. And as they are God's word, surely they have something for us. We must not ignore such passages as are before us.

As Mark Dever says, "Avoiding the doctrine of hell is one step away from denying it all together. But," (he continues), "when you get this right, when you begin to teach clearly and regularly that there is a judgment, then there is an appropriate care and humility that begins to characterize your congregation's life together as we realize the brevity of life and its seriousness and the certainty of judgment. We feel ourselves to be more objects of mercy than judges, more pilgrims than settlers, more stewards than owners". [\[1\]](#)

Let us read our text, ...

Mark 9:38-50

John said to Him, "Teacher, we saw someone casting out demons in Your name, and we tried to prevent him because he was not following us." But Jesus said, "Do not hinder him, for there is no one who will perform a miracle in My name, and be able soon afterward to speak evil of Me. For he who is not against us is for us. For whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because of your name as followers of Christ, truly I say to you, he will not lose his reward.

"Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe to stumble, it would be better for him if, with a heavy millstone hung around his neck, he had been cast into the sea. If your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life crippled, than, having your two hands, to go into hell, into the unquenchable fire, [where their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched.] If your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life lame, than, having your two feet, to be cast into hell, [where their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched.] If your eye causes you to stumble, throw it out; it is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye, than, having two eyes, to be cast 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 becomes unsalty, with what will you make it salty again? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another."

I have three points this morning. The first is this: The road to the kingdom is ...

1. A Wide Road (verses 38-41)

Now, obviously, we need to be careful when using such words. Jesus, Himself said, "Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it. For the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it." (Matt. 7:13-14).

Jesus said that the way into the kingdom is narrow. The way into the kingdom comes only through Jesus. Jesus, Himself said, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me" (John 14:6). We know that "there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).

We don't come into the kingdom through Moses or Mohammed or Ghandi or Confucius. We can only come into the kingdom through the shed blood of Jesus Christ. His sacrifice upon the cross for our sins is the only way that we will enter. Indeed, the road to the kingdom is narrow. This is the message that the world needs to hear. "Enter through the narrow gate" (Matt. 7:13). "Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved" (Acts 16:31).

And yet, for disciples of Christ (to whom Jesus is speaking), we must be careful not to make the road to Christ too narrow. The world needs to hear that the way to heaven is narrow. It's only through Jesus. The church needs to hear that the way to heaven is wider than you may think.

If you struggle at all with this concept -- the wideness of the road to the kingdom -- let me remind you that Jesus, who said that "there are few who find" the path to life (Matthew 7:14), is the same Jesus who said that "many will come from east and west, and recline at the table with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 8:11). Though there be few who enter the kingdom of heaven, the number of those who arrive will be "a great multitude which no one could count from every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues" (Rev. 7:9).

So, which is it? Is the road to the kingdom wide? Or, is the road to the kingdom narrow? To which I say, "Yes."

It all depends upon which perspective you take. And here in our text Jesus, speaking with His disciples, says that the road to the kingdom is wide. Look at verse 38,

Mark 9:38

John said to Him, "Teacher, we saw someone casting out demons in Your name, and we tried to prevent him because he was not following us."

This statement seems to come out of the blue. Jesus had just spoken about who was the greatest in the kingdom: the servant of all (verse 35). Jesus had just told them that "whoever receives one child like this in My name receives Me" (verse 37). Again we see an example of true greatness -- caring for the weak. And then John tells of trying to prevent this man from casting out demons? Where did this come from?

Perhaps John wanted to change the subject. Perhaps Jesus had set the matter straight regarding who is the greatest in the kingdom and John was embarrassed and so, tried to divert the discussion into another direction.

Perhaps the connection is "the name of Jesus." Jesus had just spoken of receiving a child, "in My name." And John remembered this incident when another man was casting out demons, "in Your name."

Perhaps John was convicted in his heart and wanted Jesus' perspective on whether or not this was right or wrong. We don't know why John asked Jesus about these things.

But, we do know a bit about the man casting out demons in Jesus' name. He wasn't one of the twelve disciples. He was using the name of Jesus. That is, He was speaking with Jesus' authority, He wasn't given permission to use His name. He was having success. Demons were being cast out.

John and the disciples all saw this man doing what they failed to do. Remember when Jesus was on the mount of transfiguration? Nine of the disciples were at the base of the mountain. They were trying to cast the demon out of the man's son, but were unable. And here, this man was able to cast demons out of people. He wasn't a would-be exorcist, like the seven sons of Sceva. They were Jewish brothers, who attempted to invoke the name of Jesus, only to be overcome by the evil spirit they were attempting to cast out (Acts 19:13-19). No, it appears from everything that this man was a believer in Jesus. Somehow he had heard Jesus speak and believed. But, he simply didn't have a relationship with the disciples.

And so, they tried to prevent him because "he was not following us" (verse 38). That is so John. John and his brother, James, were called, "Sons of thunder" (Mark 3:17). At one point, James and John wanted to "command fire to come down from heaven and consume" those who didn't receive the message of Jesus (Luke 9:54). James and John were jealous for their ministry with Jesus.

They were just like Eldad and Medad. Do you remember when Eldad and Medad were prophesying in the camp? The Spirit of God had "rested upon them ... and they prophesied" (Num. 11:26). A young man "ran and told Moses" everything that was happening (Num. 11:27). And Joshua said, "Moses, my lord, restrain them" (Num. 11:28). After all, the truth of God came only through Moses. It didn't come through anyone else. So stop them, Moses!

Moses responded with grace, "Are you jealous for my sake? Would that all the LORD's people were prophets, that the LORD would put His Spirit upon them!" (Num. 11:29). In other words, Moses was saying, "Why stop someone whom the Lord is using?"

And Jesus responded the same way. "Why stop someone whom the Lord is using?" Verse 39 and 40, ...

Mark 9:39-40

But Jesus said, "Do not hinder him, for there is no one who will perform a miracle in My name, and be able soon afterward to speak evil of Me. For he who is not against us is for us."

In other words, Jesus was saying, "The road to heaven is a bit more broad than you think. You think that the only way to the kingdom is to come through you. But, God is bigger than that. God is bigger than you 12 disciples."

Or, as I have said, "The road to the kingdom is A Wide Road (verses 38-41)" How appropriate this message was for John who so thought that his way with Jesus was the only way.

I'm reminded of the story of the Christians who arrived their first day in heaven. They were greeted by angels and escorted onto an elevator, which began to ascend. First floor. Second floor. Third floor. Those who just arrived in heaven were excited about being there, and they were talking with each other in their enjoyment of the moment, as they anticipated seeing Jesus, face to face. As the elevator continued to rise -- fourth floor, fifth floor, sixth floor -- the anticipation only mounted. Suddenly, the angels who were with them in the elevator said, "Shhhhhhhhh." And so, everyone in the elevator quieted down. Seventh floor. Eighth floor. Ninth floor. Then one of the angels said, "It's OK."

You can talk now." Those on the elevator were confused. They said, "Why did we need to be quiet." The angel responded, "That's because the Baptists are on the eighth floor. And they think that they are the only ones here."

Such is the attitude of many Christians. Many Christians think that they have a corner on the truth. The Baptists think that they are right, and that nobody else is going to heaven. The Presbyterians think that they are right, and that nobody else is going to heaven. The non-denominationalists think that they are right and that nobody else is going to heaven.

Those who think that they have a corner on the truth need to hear these words: The road to the kingdom is wide. The truth of the matter is this: there may well be more in the kingdom than you think. There may well be people in the kingdom who you don't think will be there. There may well be people in the kingdom who you expect to be there, who aren't.

So let us rejoice wherever God is working! Let us not be more restrictive than Jesus. Let us not be more restrictive than Paul.

When Paul wrote the letter to the Philippians, He was in prison for preaching the gospel. He was rejoicing that his imprisonment was giving others a measure of boldness in preaching Christ. Listen to His amazing words, ...

Philippians 1:15-18

Some, to be sure, are preaching Christ even from envy and strife, but some also from good will; the latter do it out of love, knowing that I am appointed for the defense of the gospel; the former proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition rather than from pure motives, thinking to cause me distress in my imprisonment. What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed; and in this I rejoice. Yes, and I will rejoice.

Did you catch what Paul was saying? People were out there preaching with bad motives! They were preaching Christ from envy. They were preaching Christ from strife. They were proclaiming Christ from selfish ambition. In their preaching, they were trying to hurt Paul, "Look, Paul, you aren't the only one who can preach Christ. We can as well. And people are coming to Christ under our preaching! You aren't the big-shot that you think you are."

And to all this, Paul rejoiced. He said, "whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed; and in this I rejoice. Yes, and I will rejoice." So, let us not be more restrictive than Paul. Let us not be more restrictive than Jesus.

The road to the kingdom is wide. Many will enter from different denominations. Many will enter from different beliefs. In Revelation 2-3, Jesus addresses seven churches. Only two of the churches could be signified as "good" churches. But, in every church, there is a reward awaiting for the one "who overcomes." In Revelation 3:4, we read of Sardis, the dead church, "But you have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their garments; and they will walk with Me in white, for they are worthy."

Many will enter the kingdom: Arminians and paedobaptists and congregationists and charismatics and post-millennialists and theistic evolutionists and feminists and annihilationists and theonomists and evidentialists and pragmatists and those who are pro-choice and those who have an easy-believism gospel and those who practice second-degree separation and those who believe that musical instruments in worship services are wrong and those who allow women preachers and those who believe that portions of the Bible contain errors and those who hold to all other sorts of deviant beliefs, that are different than we believe.

There will be those in the kingdom who will arrive with error in their theology. Now, they will be there despite their theology. And when they get there, they will finally know the truth. And there may well be sadness on their part at what they opposed. But, if they have the gospel, if they are trusting in Jesus alone to cleanse them from their sin, they will be in the kingdom.

Praise be to God that this is the case. If you could only get into heaven if all of your theology was correct -- well, then we would have no hope. As James Montgomery Boice once wrote, ...

If sinners could be saved from sin by philosophical debate,
the wise, the brilliant might get in; but what of those of low estate?

But we preach Christ, the crucified, a gospel wicked souls count odd;
They think it foolish, weak, despised, but we: the pow'r and grace of God.

Our gospel's simply Christ alone, for we know God sent him to give
A righteousness that's not our own and holiness that we might live. [\[2\]](#)

It's simple faith and trust in Christ that is the road to the kingdom, not necessarily having all of your theology perfect. That's not to say that our theology is of no concern to us. Nor is it to say that we ought not to have confidence in what we believe. It's good for us to believe that we, at Rock Valley Bible Church, are right -- that we proclaim the truth of God and that we proclaim that Christ is the only way to God. And we ought to believe that we are right. And we ought to hold to our theology strongly. And we ought to contend for our theology vigorously. This is what Jesus did. This is what Paul did.

But, we also need to realize that there are many who aren't in our camp whom the Lord is using. We need to realize that there are many who differ with us on various issues who, nevertheless, believe in the saving gospel of Jesus Christ. And in this, we must rejoice. This is what Jesus did. This is what Paul did.

Furthermore, we must rejoice in any little thing done to propagate the kingdom. Look at verse 41, ...

Mark 9:41

For whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because of your name as followers of Christ, truly I say to you, he will not lose his reward.

We must rejoice even in a cup of cold water given to refresh the souls of those going out to proclaim His name. We must rejoice in the little gifts given to spread the gospel. God will sort it all out in the end. We simply need to rejoice when the gospel is clear. We can do this by praying for other churches where the gospel is preached. We can do this by rejoicing when other churches who are faithful to the gospel are prospering.

Well, we need to press on to my second point. The road to the kingdom is also, ...

2. A Difficult Road (verses 42-48)

Listen carefully to the words of Jesus, ...

Mark 9:42-48

"Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe to stumble, it would be better for him if, with a heavy millstone hung around his neck, he had been cast into the sea. If your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life crippled, than, having your two hands, to go into hell, into the unquenchable fire, [where their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched.] If your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life lame, than, having your two feet, to be cast into hell, [where their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched.] If your eye causes you to stumble, throw it out; it is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye, than, having two eyes, to be cast into hell, where their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched.

A key word in these verses is the word which means "stumble" in the Greek. The Greek word is skandalon (skandalon). It's where we get the word, "scandal." To cause someone to stumble is to tempt them to sin or to lead them astray or to snare them. You need to be careful that you don't snare others (which is what verse 42 addresses) You need to be careful that you don't snare yourself (which is addressed in verses 43-48).

The context here is dealing with those with whom we disagree -- the one who isn't in our camp. I believe that this is our primary application. We must be careful with those who disagree. Verse 42, ...

Mark 9:42

"Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe to stumble, it would be better for him if, with a heavy millstone hung around his neck, he had been cast into the sea.

Jesus describes an awful death. In ancient Israel, they used a millstone to grind their wheat. These were large, flat stones with holes in the middle of them. You would drop these large stones onto a vertical pillar, which had a flat stone base. You would then rotate this stone upon the other and it would grind the grain that was between the large stones. They had two sizes. One was small enough that you could rotate it by yourself (Matthew 23:41). The other was so large that you needed a donkey to turn it for you.

Jesus is referring to the larger size, several feet in diameter, which only enforces to make this imagery all the more horrible. Can you imagine? Imagine being taken to a dock on the lake. Then, having a flat stone slipped over your head, attaching it somehow, so that you are wearing the millstone as a necklace. And then, you are pushed into the water. Once tossed over the edge, you would have no chance of ever breathing air again. You would be dead in about 10 minutes, as the water would fill your lungs and you would suffocate. Such is the gruesome death that Jesus described. And yet, that would be preferable to causing a young believer to stumble.

That's who Jesus is referring to. He calls him, "one of these little ones who believe" (verse 42). I don't think that Jesus is referring to a child. I think that Jesus is referring to a young believer. This may be a child, but I don't think that it has to be a child. It refers to someone who is young (and weak) in their faith. You don't want to cause them to stumble. That is, you don't want to snare them or entice them to sin. You don't want to lead them astray.

So, be careful toward those you disagree with. They are "little ones" who need care and compassion. They don't need you to crush them over their heads. They don't need you to stop them. You need to gently come along side of them and learn about them. And if they are false teachers, then certainly, by all means, "exhort [them] in sound doctrine and ... refute those who contradict" (Titus 1:9). And do it strongly and with full gusto.

But, if they are believers and misguided, do as Priscilla and Aquila did when they encountered Apollos. He was "mighty in the Scriptures" (Acts 18:24). He was "fervent in spirit" (Acts 18:25). He was familiar with John's ministry. But, he was not aware of Jesus. Priscilla and Aquila (husband and wife) "took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately" (Acts 18:26). And Apollos went on and began to "powerfully refute the Jews in public, demonstrating by the Scriptures that Jesus was the Christ" (Acts 18:28). Oh, how easily Priscilla and Aquila could have caused Apollos to stumble.

So, if a young believer says a few strange things, be patient. You don't have to correct every error that you hear. Consider who is saying it. Consider that they may be saying it from a sincere, but uninformed heart. Be patient with them as they grow in their faith and as they grow in their theology.

Certainly, there are a host of other applications here. Don't lead young believers into sin. Young believers often come out of a life of sin. They may not be strong enough to enjoy their freedoms in Christ. They need a pure way. So, lead them in a pure way. Don't be a stumbling block to them. The consequence of doing so is severe, like drowning in the sea with a millstone around your neck. So do what's best for you in the long run.

But, beyond enticing others to sin, we may also bring ourselves down. That's the focus of verses 43-48.

Mark 9:43-48

If your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life crippled, than, having your two hands, to go into hell, into the unquenchable fire, [where their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched.] If your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life lame, than, having your two feet, to be cast into hell, [where their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched.] If your eye causes you to stumble, throw it out; it is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye, than, having two eyes, to be cast into hell, where their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched.

Again Jesus gives us a horrible image to make his point. He pictures self-amputation. He pictures you cutting off your hand, chopping off your foot, or gouging out your eye, as the more preferable option to death. "If your hand/foot/eye causes you to stumble, [then] cut it off. It is better for you to enter life without your hand/foot/eye, crippled/lame/blind than having them and to be cast into hell, into the unquenchable fire, where their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched."

Every now and then, someone actually does this. In 2003, 28 year-old, Aron Ralston took a hike through Blue John Canyon in Southeastern Utah. While navigating a narrow canyon, an 800 pound boulder shifted and pinned his right hand and arm against the canyon wall. He knew that there was no chance of being discovered. He hadn't told anyone where he was going. He was 20 miles from the nearest paved road. He was 100 feet below the desert surface in a narrow canyon, only a few feet across. He knew that the only chance for survival was to amputate his arm, which he did with his pocket knife. And then, bleeding from his right arm, and fighting shock, he proceeded to climb out of the canyon, walk 7 miles in the desert sun, and climb up an 800 foot embankment to the trailhead where his truck was parked. Losing an arm saved Aron Ralston his life. [\[3\]](#)

Another similar event took place in September of 2007. Sampson Parker was harvesting corn in South Carolina. At one point, some of the stalks of corn got stuck in a set of rollers. So, he reached his hand in the machine (which was still running) to pull the stalks out. But, the machine caught his glove, and sucked his hand into the machine. As he tried to pull his hand free, the machine pulled his hand further in. Somehow, he managed to jam the machine with a steel rod, but was unable to loose his arm. He yelled for help for more than an hour, but was too far for anyone to be heard. Sparks from the machine started a fire. His skin began to melt in the heat. His time was short. So, he too, pulled out his pocket knife and began cutting off his arm. When he got down to the bone, he dropped to the ground, using his weight to snap his arm and free himself. As soon as he did, the tire to his machine exploded. Soon afterwards, he got in his truck and drove to the highway and waved down some help. Losing an arm saved Sampson Parker his life. [\[4\]](#)

Another similar event took place in August 2011. John Hutt, a 61 year-old retired logger from Colorado had gone into the woods by himself to cut some firewood for the winter. At one point, the six-ton trailer on his truck slipped and landed on his foot, trapping him. He couldn't reach his cell phone (which was in his pickup). It took him about 30 minutes to realize that nobody was going to come and rescue him. So, he too took out his pocket knife and began to cut away his boot. When he saw how badly his toes were crushed, he knew that he had to cut off all five of his toes to get free. He said, "It hurt so bad. I would cut for a while and then I had to rest." Cutting off his toes saved John Hutt's life. [\[5\]](#)

Each of these men took drastic action to save their lives. Each of them saw the danger of their circumstances. Each of them knew that there was no other way to live, but to cut off a part of their body. And so they did. And so they lived.

And Jesus says that we may very well be in the same predicament. Our lives are in danger. We are headed to hell, a horrible place where their worm does not die and where the fire is not quenched. Our body members are bringing us into sin. The only way to reach the kingdom is to take some radical action like cutting off a limb.

Now, along with all the commentators that I read, I don't think that this is literal. I don't believe that Jesus expects us to walk around without our hands, our feet or our eyes. Because, you can lop off your hand, and still engage in all the sin that your heart desires. You can chop off your feet, and still get to where you can still sin up a storm. You can pluck out both of your eyes, and still lust in your heart.

We are sinners at heart. Removing your hand and foot and eye are merely external actions, which don't deal with your heart's sinful desire for doing wrong. Sin must be fought at the heart level, not merely at the body level. But, as He often does, Jesus is speaking in hyperbole to describe how deeply we are called to fight our sin.

And if by removing our hand or our foot or our eye, we might remove our sin, by all means, let us pull out our pocket knives and go to work like Aron Ralston and Sampson Parker and John Hutt.

Kent Hughes is really good on this point. He says, ...

What Jesus is calling for is not physical mutilation, but spiritual mortification--the cutting off of harmful practices from one's life. The hand, foot, and eye encompass the totality of life. The hand symbolizes what we do, the foot where we go, and the eye what we see. His logic is impeccable and compelling. It is better to clean up your fleeting life here through some healthy self-denial, than go bearing your sins to an unending Gehenna, an eternal, smoking rubbish heap where the worms eternally gorge themselves on the refuse of your life. Any sacrifice, any discipline, any self-denial is worth it! [\[6\]](#)

We teach our children this little song. It goes like this, ...

O be careful little eyes what you see
O be careful little eyes what you see
For your Father up above is looking down in love
O be careful little eyes what you see

O be careful little feet where you go
O be careful little feet where you go
For your Father up above is looking down in love
So, be careful little feet where you go

O be careful little hands what you do
O be careful little hands what you do
For your Father up above is looking down in love
So, be careful little hands what you do

We teach that to our children. Do we teach it to ourselves? Do we believe (with John Owen) that we "ought ... to make it [our] business all [our] days to mortify the indwelling power of sin"? [\[7\]](#) God is looking at the way that we deal with our sin. He calls us to deal radically with our sin. Don't let it run amok. Don't deal with it lightly. Fight it with all of your strength. Eternity is at stake.

Jesus describes hell with the most awful of words. He describes it as a place where the worm does not die and the fire is not quenched (verses 43, 45, 47). This describes unending torment. The worm feeds on your flesh from the inside. The fire is fueled from your flesh from the outside, and it never stops.

Paul describes this as "eternal destruction" (2 Thess. 1:9). Jesus didn't merely dream up this sort of language. He was quoting from the last verse in the prophet Isaiah, in which Isaiah is describing the eternal, enduring state. Isaiah writes of the godly who are in the kingdom, ...

Isaiah 66:22-24

"For just as the new heavens and the new earth
Which I make will endure before Me," declares the Lord,
"So your offspring and your name will endure.
And it shall be from new moon to new moon
And from sabbath to sabbath,
All mankind will come to bow down before Me," says the Lord.
"Then they will go forth and look
On the corpses of the men
Who have transgressed against Me.
For their worm will not die
And their fire will not be quenched;
And they will be an abhorrence to all mankind."

Listen, hell is a real place. Hell is an awful place. And by God's grace through faith in Christ, we can escape that place. So, believe in Him. Trust in Him. Join in the fight against your sin.

The choice is really yours. You can be a never-ending object of God's wrath. Or, you can be a never-ending recipient of God's mercy in Christ. Oh, church family, side with Christ and cherish His mercy to you.

Let's move on to our third point. Finally, The Road to the Kingdom is ...

3. A Salty Road (verses 49-50)

Mark 9:49-50

"For everyone will be salted with fire. Salt is good; but if the salt becomes unsalty, with what will you make it salty again?
Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another."

At this point, we come to some of the most difficult verses in all of the Bible. J. C. Ryle, one of my favorite commentators said this,

Verse 49 appears to baffle all the commentators: 'Everyone will be salted with fire.' The true meaning of these words and their connection with the context are problems which seem not yet solved. At all events, not one of the many interpretations which have been proposed so far is entirely satisfactory. We must confess that it is one of those knots which are not yet untied in the exposition of Scripture. ... My own conviction is that we must wait for more light, and regard the text at present as one of the 'deep things' of God. [\[8\]](#)

So, what hope do we have this morning? About as much hope as my point makes clear. The Road to the Kingdom is A Salty Road (verses 49-50). What does that mean? I don't know. But, that's what verses 49 and 50 appear to say.

Six different times in these two verses, salt is mentioned. The command at the end of verse 50 is clear, "have salt in yourselves."

Salt in the ancient world had two qualities. It was a preserver. They didn't have refrigerators in Jesus' day. So, they would salt their meat to preserve it. And, it gave flavor. This is just like we use it today; we have salt on the table to enhance the flavor of our food.

That's why (in verse 50), Jesus affirms how good it is. "Salt is good."

At the very least, Jesus is calling us to these two qualities. Disciples of Christ have a preserving influence upon our society. Christians are the ones who have started the schools, believing that knowledge is crucial to one's walk with God. Christians are the ones who have started hospitals, believing that every soul is precious in God's sight. We ought to preserve life as well. Direct people toward the Lord.

And don't lose this heart for people. In verse 50, Jesus speaks about salt becoming unsalty. The Jews knew of worthless salt. As salt mixed with the Gypsum near the Dead Sea, it became diluted and worthless for (1) preserving or for (2) flavor. Instead, we ought to give flavor to life. Our lives ought to be a blessing to others. So live a life of blessing. Speak truth. Show kindness. Have joy. Give love.

And that's where the text ends: "Be at peace with one another." In many ways, I believe that this verse ties us back to the beginning of the context of these words. In verses 33-34, the disciples were arguing amongst themselves about who was the greatest in the kingdom. And now, Jesus says, "have salt in yourselves and be at peace with one another."

That's the road to the kingdom. And that's the best that I can do with verses 49 and 50.

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on July 22, 2012 by Steve Brandon.
For more information see www.rvbc.cc.

[1] Together for the Gospel, 2012 (See <http://t4g.org/>).

[2] James Montgomery Boice, Hymns for a Modern Reformation.

[3] http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/5956900/ns/datetime_nbc/t/desperate-days-blue-john-canyon/#.UAuAsrSe47t.

[4] http://today.msnbc.msn.com/id/21973683/ns/today-today_news/t/save-his-life-man-cuts-arm-pocketknife/#.UAsCTrSe47s.

[5] <http://www.foxnews.com/us/2011/08/31/colorado-logger-cuts-off-toes-after-foot-is-pinned/>.

[6] Kent Hughes, Preaching the Word, Volume 2: Mark, Jesus, Servant and Savior, p. 39. You can read it here:
<http://books.google.com/books?id=1hLq-P5KDYcC&pg=PA39>.

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