

Stumbling Blocks

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[0:00] Men, if you have your Bible, I want you to turn to Mark chapter 9. Mark chapter 9. I am one that tends to wander around in the dark. I don't mean I'm a lover of darkness.

I instead mean I don't like wasting electricity. And so I wander around sometimes in the dark. And I will tell you, I'll warn you, that if you do that around here, watch the stairwells.

Make sure you know when the stairs stop. Because if you think they don't and they do, it is a rude awakening. And if you think they're done and they're not, that's a rude awakening.

And I've done both in the hallways of this church, so be careful about that. Both can be very painful. I'll tell you what else is painful. It's hitting your toe on the leg of a chair.

That's a tough stumbling block, ain't it? Boy, that will bring the fruit of the Spirit out right there. That will. Especially when the furniture gets rearranged and you didn't know that.

[0:57] You know, and the lights are off and those type things. We need to watch out for stumbling blocks. We need to watch out for spiritual stumbling blocks as well.

There are things that get in our way spiritually. Things that other people do. Things that we do. Things that can easily cause spiritual mishaps.

We can cause them in other people's life. And that's a serious offense. And Jesus speaks to it in Mark chapter 9, beginning in verse 42.

He says this.

It's 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's better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into hell.

[2:25] Where the worm does not die. And the fire is not quenched. For everyone will be salted with fire. Salt is good.

But if the salt has lost its saltiness, how will you make it salty again? Have salt in yourselves and be at peace with one another.

I want to remind you of the context of Mark chapter 9 when Jesus speaks these words. The disciples were worried about someone doing ministry that maybe should not have been doing ministry.

They didn't like a guy who was changing lives in the name of Jesus that did not have their authorization. And they had approached Jesus about that.

And Jesus tells them not to worry about them. But to be more concerned about being a stumbling block. And in that conversation that I just read, I see three warnings about stumbling blocks.

[3:33] First one's this. Don't be a stumbling block. Verse 42 said, That round stone in the middle of that mill is exactly the kind of stone that Jesus was talking about.

When he said it would be better if they tie that to you and throw you in. And that's not just a figure of speech. The Romans would drown someone who was condemned for a serious crime against the empire by tying something heavy around them and throwing them in the water.

What a horrific scene. The graphic nature there is to show that it would be better to drown than it would be to lead others astray.

He speaks there of our influence upon these, quote, little ones that believe in me. And of course he speaks of children, but he's not merely speaking of children.

He's actually using affectionate terms. You see that in the letters of John. When John writes to the church, he talks about these precious little ones. It's precious affectionate talk.

[4:53] And what it implies is that those that seem little to us, those that seem insignificant to us, man, they're precious to the Lord Jesus.

We need to be careful how we treat believers. Scripture tells us we need to be careful in several areas. One is we need to be careful about hypocrisy, not being who we claim to be.

Jesus tells religious leaders in Matthew chapter 23 that their hypocrisy, through their hypocrisy, they, quote, shut the kingdom of God in people's faces.

Talk about a slap in the face. When the Christian mask comes off and spiritually ugly is seen, it's a stumbling block.

Find a good smiling Sunday Christian and put them in a long line where somebody dysfunctional is running it. You'll find out what kind of spirit they got with them, won't you?

[5:59] It's interesting, but be careful. Be careful because it could easily become a stumbling block. We need to be careful about a lack of forgiveness.

Paul in Ephesians tells us all these things that we need to put on as Christians. But before he says that, he talks about the things we need to put off. And he says some of the things we need to put off is bitterness.

And we need to put off wrath. And we need to put off anger. And we need to put off clamor. And we need to put off slander. In other words, don't talk mean.

Don't talk angry. Don't talk gossipy. Boy, have I got a prayer for you. You know? Have you heard what's happened to so and so?

Don't talk ugly. That kind of stuff sticks. My children were young.

[6:59] And I had a neighbor that was sweet and wave. And I didn't know him very well. She'd always wave and be sweet. And we had a baby monitor. And I found out a rude awakening one day that those old baby monitors, I don't know if they're still like this, but when you unplugged one of them, the speaker would pick up on something else.

And that was back in the day with cordless phones at the house. And it picked up on her phone. She wasn't that sweet after all. Found out some things. Be careful.

Sticks. Every time I saw her after that, I went, boy, you're a rascal, aren't you? We also need to be careful about our partiality, our prejudice.

In James, in chapter 2 of James, he warns us again and again about this. It is a sin to hold your faith in Christ and not love your neighbor.

And I mean love the ones you don't even like. Sometimes these are your love folks and just like them. Let me tell you what will happen.

[8:13] If God's placed somebody in your life you just simply don't like, pray for them. And I don't mean pray down the fires of hell upon their head.

I don't mean that. I mean sincerely pray for them. Lord, that person's got a bad attitude. I don't like being around them. Will you do a work in them, Lord, to help them to feel better about themselves or to feel better about life or to be easier to get along with?

And you know what? Anytime that I've prayed for one of you like that, God's done a work in my life to help me see something about that person that I didn't see before.

We need to love our neighbors. God's placed them in our lives for us to influence and as my grandpa used to say, just kill them with kindness.

It'll burn them up like heaping coals on their head. Just treat them with kindness when they mean to you. Do a number on them. We also need to be careful about our language.

[9:25] Reject filthiness and foolish talk. Crude joking. Sound like a Christian. Don't be a stumbling block.

Also, don't be a stumbling block about flaunting your Christian liberty. I thank God that through the power upon the cross and the blood of Christ, we are free in Christ.

But there are some things that you do that can cause others to stumble. Paul talked about this, about what we eat.

Be careful what we eat. And the reason why he hit on that was because they would sacrifice meat before their gods.

Pagans would. They would burn this meat before their gods. And then they would sell that meat after they cooked it before their god. Well, can you eat that meat?

[10:30] I mean, it burn in. It's pretty good, you know. Do you eat that meat? Or do you not eat meat that's been sacrificed to idols? So there was this debate in the church back and forth about what you do about that.

Well, they've sacrificed this to idols. Those idols don't even exist. So why am I worried about those idols? That's good meat. I think I'll get it. And somebody else would say, no, it's been sacrificed to idols.

And what Paul says is the way you decide that is don't be a stumbling block for other people. There's nothing wrong with eating that meat. But don't eat that meat if it's a stumbling block to someone else.

Today, just to be frank, it's not so much about what we eat. It's about what we drink. So be careful. Romans chapter 14, verse 13 says, decide never to put a stumbling block or a hindrance in the way of a brother.

It's just not worth it. Stay away from it. And then we also need to be careful with the Word of God.

[11:37] Teaching falsehoods will lead people astray. And what God calls sin is sin and I can't change that and I better not try to. I better just stick to the Word of God. Now listen, all those things can cause someone to walk away from God when we really should be encouraging them to come to the Lord.

Our actions should be used by the Holy Spirit of God to draw them nearer to God instead of them to question the reality of that God. So we need to be careful about that.

Don't be stumbling blocks. Second thing is this. Remove your stumbling blocks. There's a lot that can make us stumble.

And I want you to look at the radical nature in which Christ describes it. He says in verse 43 that if your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off.

And if your eye causes you to sin, tear it out. Because it's better to not have a hand than to go to hell. It's better to not have a foot than to go to hell.

[12:53] It's better to not have an eye than to go to hell. It's graphic and very plain language. And people have a hard time with this section of Scripture for a couple of different reasons.

One is the numbering of these verses. And you probably didn't even pick up on it. But if something interesting happens that I want to explain to you, that I read out of the English Standard Version and verses 44 and 46 are not in there.

They're not even listed. If you look at the small numbers it says 43 and then it goes straight to 45. And the reason why that is, but in yet earlier translations, like the King James, they will be in there, those verses.

So people often say, well they've taken those verses out of Scripture. That's what's wrong with that stuff. Well let me explain. Archaeologists and just the understanding of the canon of Scripture and how we got it and the documents that we find, all of that has so progressed in the last 400 years that we understand a lot more about the original manuscript than we ever did before.

And in the oldest documents we found, verses 44 and 46 are not there. where you thought, well why did Mark put verse 44 and 46 in there?

[14:13] Well, Mark didn't number. Mark wrote the Gospel. The numbers were added, the chapters and verses were added a lot later so that I didn't have to tell you this morning, why don't y'all turn to about the middle of Mark and I'm going to take off here.

That's why those chapters and verses are there. But I will tell you that what verse 44 and verse 46 say is the same thing that verse 48 says.

It was just repeated three times. And in the oldest manuscripts, it's not in there but one time. And that's where it says where their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched.

So my only point, I want to point that out because somebody will point it out to me afterwards, you know, is this. Nothing was taken away here.

The phrase is just not repeated three times over. Because in the oldest more reliable documents, it was not. Now, the bigger issue and what more people have an issue with with this section of Scripture is what it says.

[15:20] And I want to ask you something. And I normally when I ask questions that are rhetorical, I'll just let you know that. I don't want you answering my questions in the middle of the sermon most of the time. But I do want you to this time.

And I want you to do it with a show of hands. How many of you have ever sinned with your hands? Raise your hand. You've ever sinned with your hands. Okay. Well, if you didn't raise your hand, you just did sin with your hands because you lied with your hand.

How many of you have ever sinned with your feet? Raise your feet. No. I can't see that. How many of you have ever done anything?

that was against God. How many of you have ever went a place, traveled to a place, you didn't need to go, you shouldn't have been there, and it led you to do something dumb that divides the guidelines that God gives us?

How many of you have ever looked at the wrong thing? Now, I want you to understand something. A first glance is not what gets you in trouble. The second look is what gets you in trouble.

[16:43] The fixation is what gets you in trouble. If King David had walked out on his patio that night and looked down at Bathsheba and went, oh my soul, and went back in the house, he would not have sinned with his hands, he would not have sinned with his feet, he would not have sinned with his eyes.

But because he didn't flee from it, because he did take a second look, because he did become fixated on it, because he did scheme and plan for it, it led to a lot of sin.

Now, if you've sinned with your hands or your feet or your eyes, are you sorry for that sin?

Do you want to turn away from that sin? If so, cut that hand off. Cut that foot off.

Pluck that eye out. To my knowledge, nobody in here has done that. And the reality is, Jesus didn't mean for us to literally do that.

[18:08] Because Jesus knew that you can still do the wrong thing without a hand. And you can still go to the wrong places without a foot. And you can still focus on the wrong things without your eyes.

What Jesus is doing in this passage is exaggerating. Now, some of you got a little, you don't like that. You don't like me saying that. Well, let me give you a technical theological word for that. The technical theological word for that is hyperbole. Jesus used hyperbole. Do you want to know what hyperbole means? It means he exaggerated. It means that he spoke in stark, plain terms to get the point across.

He does not mean it literally here any more than he calls, when he calls himself a door, does he mean that he's made out of oak. Does not mean that.

He does not mean any more than when he says you must hate your mother and your father and your brother and sister to follow me. He does not mean we ought to hate our family. What he does mean is that we ought to put him so far above everybody else in our life.

[19:21] It'd be like the difference between love and hate because I love God that much more than anything else. That's what he meant. It was a comparison. All of that is stark, shocking words to get the point.

And his point is let nothing be a stumbling block that keeps you from the Lord. As the great theologian Barney Fife said, nip it in the bud. Do away with it.

The reality is that we can do the wrong thing without our hands. We can go the wrong places without our feet. We can focus on the wrong things without our eyes. You can do it in the dark.

Instead, what we need to sever, what we need to gouge is the sin that we do, the sinful places that we go, the sin that we focus on. There's certain things that we venture into to do that we know is displeasing to God.

Stop it. Don't do it. There's places that we go that we know will be tempted to fail the Lord. If we go to those places, hear me, stop going.

[20:46] If it's at work, fight another job. Get away from it. That's the language that Jesus is using. Do whatever you have to do to stop it.

Don't do it. We have to put up guidelines in our lives to get away from it. We need to be so determined to avoid sin that it is as final and as certain as if you lost a body part.

Why? Because anything that leads us to sin leads us away from Christ. And there are stumbling blocks that hinder our walk. If there are things in people's lives that keep them from coming to Christ and claiming Him as their Lord and Savior, they'll face a lot on this earth that is a lot less fulfilling than it could be.

And then they'll face an eternity apart from God forever. Christ says that we will face an unquenchable fire in hell.

hell. And verse 47, the word for hell is very interesting. There are two Greek words that's used for hell in the New Testament. One of them is Hades, and that is the place of the dead.

[22:12] The second one, and it's the one that's used here, is Gehenna. And Gehenna is a compound word in the Greek language. Ge means valley, and Hinnah is short for Hinnom.

And so Gehenna is the valley of Hinnom. And the valley of Hinnom is a valley on the southern and southwestern side of Jerusalem, of the old city of Jerusalem, David's city, Mount Zion.

It's on that side. And in Old Testament times, it was used by cultic groups to dispose of human sacrificial remains when they sacrificed a child before their God or when they sacrificed a loved one before their God.

They would throw those bodies into that valley. It became a place of defilement. It became symbolic as a place of defilement.

King Josiah, when he came on the throne, that young king that was so burdened about the neglect of God's word in the temple and he brought such reform and brought the word of God back to the temple, he defiled that valley during that reform.

[23:35] And by the time Jesus speaks in the New Testament, it has become a trash heap for that city. It's become a symbol known as a powerful image of divine judgment, of God's divine judgment.

As a matter of fact, when Jesus speaks of the fire never goes out and the worm never dies, he's actually referring to the last verse in the book of Isaiah.

Isaiah chapter 66 verse 24. It won't be on the screen, just listen. It says this, And they shall go out and look on the dead bodies of the men who had rebelled against me, for their worms shall not die, their fire shall not be quenched, and there shall be an abhorrence to all flesh.

What Jesus is doing is he's using a graphic lesson of what eternity with God would really look like, where the fire does not die, the misery does not leave.

They understood that kind of talk. People today don't like that kind of talk. They don't like to talk about hell.

[24:42] But if we're going to be biblical, we've got to talk about hell. I always get two responses when I talk about this. One is I've got good godly people that love the word of God that come to me and say, Thank you preacher for preaching on hell.

Nobody preaches on hell anymore. I've not heard a sermon on hell in years. And when they say that to me, I think, you know what? Three years ago I preached a whole series on the reality of eternity.

I spent seven weeks on hell. You should have been listening. That's what I think when you say that, okay? And then somebody else and they probably won't tell me, but they'll say that talk is offensive. Do you know how we understand hell the way we do? Do you know who talks about hell more than anybody else? Where basically all of our understanding of hell came from?

Jesus. Jesus talked about it. Everybody loves to talk about heaven. Nobody loves to talk about hell. We'd love to just usher anybody that dies into heaven in our minds.

[25:51] I've seen funeral after funeral where we do it. But the reality is hell is just as real as heaven. And Jesus speaks of it more than anybody else does.

And so, if Jesus talked about it, we must talk about it. And I want to be clear. It is a literal yet spiritual place that is filled with torment that one feels for all of eternity.

It does not stop. It's not for a certain time. Jesus says everlasting. Jesus uses the words eternal. Jesus uses the word unquenchable. He uses those words. The descriptions of hell are hellacious. hellacious. But I want you to know the greatest torment of hell is there's no hope of salvation through Christ.

[26:55] that Christ is not there. And it does not change. Hell is final.

And it's eternal. Remove anything in your life that can cause you to stumble into an eternal hell. if you've never given your heart and life to the Lord Jesus Christ but there's a reason why you just don't want to commit your life to Christ.

Pluck it out. Cut it off. Remove it. It's better to do without it.

than it is to spend an eternity without Christ. Third warning he gives us is this.

[28:01] Do not underestimate the impact of stumbling blocks. Don't underestimate the impact of stumbling blocks. He says in verse 49 for everyone will be salted with fire.

It's a cool transition sentence. For everyone will be salted with fire. And then he talks about salt.

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. Listen friend we all suffer due to the schemes of the evil one. One who does not give his or her life to Christ that suffering will not stop in

this life.

that suffering will go on for all of eternity. Those who do live for Christ will sometimes suffer.

Sometimes we'll be misjudged.

Sometimes we'll be misunderstood. Sometimes we'll even be persecuted for our testimony. Here as a Christian or whether it's in eternity because we don't know Christ will all face trials that will come.

[29:15] That's what he means by we'll all be salted with fire. A better way for us to understand that in our language probably would be we'll all be sprinkled with suffering.

There's one commonality that draws this church together. There's more than one but let me give you one. That draws this church together and that's suffering.

that's something that we all have in common. Many of our people have been seemingly plagued by it of recent days. Just three weeks ago we had families suffering.

Suffering. Some of the hardest things they've faced in all their life. They were walking through that valley. Two weeks ago we had a different set of families suffering.

Struggling. was some of the most difficult things. Last week we had people struggling. Some of the most horrifying walking through some of the most horrifying nightmares that you could ever imagine.

[30:21] Suffering. There's a common bond here. And if it's been good days for you it's coming. I'm not a negative guy. Don't misunderstand me. I don't want to be a pessimist. But we're going to walk through struggles.

That's a common bond here. We're going to do that. And when suffering comes because of our stand for Christ Paul calls it the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings.

Now let me say this about suffering because of the cause of Christ. Let me just be completely honest. Folks we live in luxury when it comes to that.

We're not suffering because of the cause of Christ. We don't have pastors branded like a cow due to their faithfulness to follow Christ in a communist atmosphere.

I met a man branded on both sides in Southeast Asia who pastored a large church made up of small congregations that met in homes who had been persecuted for their faith.

[31:35] Oh if we'd been caught they'd sent us home but the people that we were with would have been imprisoned or tortured. It just really depended on what kind of local official got a hold of them quite honestly.

We know nothing about that. very few of us have suffered any suffering because we've stood for Christ in the world in which we live. We are blessed in that way and but we all do have hard times of any sorts and those hard times draw us together.

We all get salted with the fires of difficulty. It's a common bond there. And let me say this when that comes don't run from the church when times get hard.

I've heard too often seen somebody out somewhere. I think people think I go to Walmart to find people who are not active in church.

No, I went to get cottage cheese. That's what I went for. And they'll say preacher we're coming back. We're just going through some stuff right now.

[33:06] When this stuff passes we'll be back. I don't do it in Walmart. I drag them into the parking lot. Why don't you just bring all that junk with you and come on to the house of God and let us pray over you and let us love on you and let us walk with you through the valley that you walk through.

Because I'll tell you what Satan likes to do. He likes to do like the lions do the hyenas. He likes to find the ones all by themselves and corner them and just cause them to go through a living hell apart from God's people.

That's what Satan tries to do. He don't want to give you a headache today. He wants to steal, kill, and destroy. You just keep coming on back to the church.

If you're limping, we'll help you across the street. You just come on as you are and let us love on you. Let us care for you through the valley that you go through because we're all going to go through valleys.

Some of us are going to make our own valleys. Some of us are our own stumbling blocks quite honestly. And then some things happen to us just because life happens, period.

[34:32] And then some things happen because somebody else did it to us. There's nothing we could have done about it, but we're dealing with it. Come on to the church.

You need to hear that opening play. You need to hear that choir sing. You need to hear the ensemble. You need to hear the word of God. Don't let, if you're at home right now because you're going through something and you're just waiting until you get through it to come on back to church, church, just come on back next week.

Don't wait. Just come on back next week and let you love on me because I'm telling you, Satan loves to pull us apart. Just a little excursion there from the passage. church. But I just want you to know, we come as we are and let God love on us through his people.

And I'm telling you, that's where the church becomes the church. That's why I love church. We need each other. And hardship binds us together.

However, stumbling blocks tear us apart. When stumbling blocks are in the way, we don't do the job that God has called us and enabled us to do.

[35 : 53] And when the church does not function as the church, there's a lack of peace in the church. You find a dead church, you'll find discord.

You'll find difficulty. There's a lack of peace. Unproductive churches lack peace. So listen, you're always going to hear from me.

If you don't, I shouldn't be doing what I'm doing. You're always going to hear from me. Stay productive. Let's do something in the kingdom of God. And I don't mean just to do something and be doing it.

I mean do something not for busy's sake, do something for kingdom's sake. Please understand, Christian, that when we stumble around in our walk with Christ, it will not only affect us, it does not only affect our relationship with Christ, it affects those around us.

It affects our relationships with each other. Christ. And Christ has called us to be the salt of the earth.

[37 : 08] That means that we are to preserve what is right. That's what he means by salt. That means that we are to flavor our society with the good news of Jesus Christ.

That's what he means by being the salt of the earth. Don't be a stumbling block. pay attention to the areas of your life that can easily become a stumbling block because those stumbling blocks, they're holding you back.

Listen, church, they're holding us back from being everything that God would have us to be. And it may be hindering others from ever even coming to Christ.

Christ. Instead, let's be salt. Salt of the earth. I don't add salt to food anymore.

I had a heart attack last year and I stopped eating salt, adding salt. So when I find something that's already got salt in it, boy, give me a pretzel, I'll have a heyday.

[38 : 21] I didn't add anything to it. Why? Because salt's attractive. Provides flavor.

Let's be salt of the earth. Not so people can be impressed with us, but so people can see Jesus in us.

And let's not let anything that we're doing cause us to be less than what we should be in our relationship with Christ. But also, let's not let anything in our life be something that causes somebody else to stumble because that's what we're doing.

As we talked about a couple weeks ago, let's put others before ourselves. Let's get the stumbling blocks behind us. With every head bowed and every eye closed, I ask you this morning, if you've ever given your heart and life to the Lord Jesus Christ, if there's something that somebody in this church has done or somebody in your life that proclaimed to be a Christian has done and they become a stumbling block for you and you don't want to give your life to Christ, listen, if there's any reason why you don't want to give your life to Christ, that is a stumbling block.

Satan has put it there and he is doing that to hinder you from coming to Christ. And so if you've never given your heart and life to Christ, I encourage you today to come. Say, Pastor, I want to come as I am and I ask God to forgive you my sins, to come into my life and to change me.

[39 : 53] I'll be happy to guide you in what that means. It all starts with a personal relationship with Christ. It's all there. If you've never done that publicly, but you've done it privately, never been baptized as a believer, that's a stumbling block.

It becomes a hindrance to us. So you come and say, I want to be baptized. We're going to plan on doing that in the coming weeks. Maybe you're here this morning and you know there's a stumbling block.

I have prayed before I got in the pulpit that God would show us the stumbling blocks in our own lives, things that we needed to remove and that His Holy Spirit would reveal that to us. Will you lay that at the altar this morning? You can do it where you stand in just a moment. You can do it with me praying for you. You can do it at this altar. But will you put that behind you today and move forward?

Maybe God's drawing you to Pickens First Baptist Church. Blessed to have several guests with us today and some of you have been coming for some time and you feel like God's drawing you to this place. If He's doing that, you come.

[40 : 57] We'd love to guide you in what that means. Honestly, I have no idea what God's led you to do. But I do know you'll never be satisfied unless you follow it. So do exactly what God tells you to do.

Lord Jesus, lead us right now to simply be obedient and follow you. In Jesus' name, amen.