

38 “Teacher,” said John, “we saw someone driving out demons in your name and we told him to stop, because he was not one of us.”

39 “Do not stop him,” Jesus said. “For no one who does a miracle in my name can in the next moment say anything bad about me, **40** for whoever is not against us is for us. **41** Truly I tell you, anyone who gives you a cup of water in my name because you belong to the Messiah will certainly not lose their reward.

42 “If anyone causes one of these little ones—those who believe in me—to stumble, it would be better for them if a large millstone were hung around their neck and they were thrown into the sea.

43 If your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life maimed than with two hands to go into hell, where the fire never goes out. **[44]** **[a]** **45** And if your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life crippled than to have two feet and be thrown into hell. **[46]** **[b]** **47** And if your eye causes you to stumble, pluck it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into hell, **48** where

“the worms that eat them do not die,

and the fire is not quenched.’ **[c]**

49 Everyone will be salted with fire.

50 “Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can you make it salty again? Have salt among yourselves, and be at peace with each other.”

Jealous

Jealousy - would you consider that a good trait or a bad trait? It's described as “The green-eyed monster,” in Othello. Jealousy is often selfish, suspicious, insecure, and possessive. It breeds tension, destroys families. Are there any redeeming qualities to jealousy? The Greek from which jealousy comes didn't always carry with it that negative attribute rather it is the intense desire either positive or negative for something. Which is why God describes himself as Israel's husband; a jealous God: who expects our exclusive love and worship. The Psalmist writes, “*Zeal for your house will consume me.*” That zeal was applied to Jesus as he cleared out the temple.

You're probably wondering why are we even talking about this? The word Zelos doesn't even appear in our lesson but we see the results of envy - discord, rivalry, factions, discontent. The disciples still wanting to be great don't get it and become jealous of others. Jesus response is to point his disciples to the fact that they are indeed great but not in the way that they think, that they should be

zealous but not for greatness over others but rather for this gift which is worth more than an arm, leg, or eye. It's a gift we should zealously seek and be assured it's ours because of God's zeal for us.

Last week we heard that greatness in the kingdom of God is welcoming and receiving little children or infants. Greatness is service and love to others. That word welcome was repeated multiple times. So what kind of students were the disciples? No sooner had Jesus finished his lesson on what it means to be great in God's kingdom that John reports to Jesus what he had done. This isn't a question asking, "Should we have done this?" but a statement almost expecting a pat on the head. John says, "*We saw someone driving out demons in your name and we told him to stop, because he was not one of us.*" They saw someone driving out demons, relieving agony and comforting people, pointing people to Jesus' using his name, doing the same things Jesus was doing. The problem wasn't that they were "casting out demons by the power of bezebul," but the fact that they weren't following us, or one of us.

After a lesson on welcoming children and receiving sinners they suddenly exclude those who are different. Maybe it was because they realized how ineffective they were. Maybe it was because they realized that earlier they had struggled to drive out a demon to which Jesus' responds, "*This kind can only come out with prayer.*" (In other words, "Quit trying to drive out demons in your name. Who are you? You are servants of the one true God. Isn't this all about Jesus?") But now they encounter some who are driving out demons and they jealously protect their own positions.

Jesus responds, "*Don't stop them... No one who does a miracle in my name can in the next second say anything bad about me, for whoever is not against us is for us.*" The kingdom of God is greater than their little group. It wasn't just them. It wasn't about the disciples. It was and always has been about Jesus. It's also important to understand what is being said and what is not being said because it can sound like Jesus is saying, "doctrine doesn't matter... just say Jesus." Jesus wants us to pay careful attention to the words coming out of his mouth, so much so that he tells us to "*obey everything I have commanded you.*" (Matthew 28:20)

Jesus says, "*Whoever is not against us is for us,*" and in Matthew 12:30 and Luke 11:23 Jesus said, "*Whoever is not with me is against me.*" Did Jesus forget? Has he suddenly changed his mind? It's important to pay attention to pronouns. It's not an us vs. them. It's not about you (the disciples). It's about Jesus. Note the with me, against me. Jesus isn't contradicting himself he's excluding his disciples in one and including himself in another. Just because they aren't following you... doesn't mean they are against you.

Jesus also doesn't say, "Join them," but "Don't hinder them... Don't stop them." Jesus would never encourage people to misuse the name of the Lord. Jesus would never tolerate false teachings concerning himself what he is saying is that people are far too important, God is zealous for his people

and what one deserves for leading others astray Jesus won't even describe, only that it is better to be buried at the bottom of the sea the millstone of a donkey tied around your neck than for one of these micron - little ones/infants/babies/toddlers to think that their faith isn't enough. That's zeal.

Are you zealous? Are we jealous? Are we that interested in other people? Do we try to protect our positions in the church? Do we want to be seen as the most saintly, the most caring and compassionate, the most generous? The sinful nature will strive for positions or find something in which to take pride. Pride, ego, and selfishness build as jealousy causes self-esteem issues. It creates unhealthy rivalry, ruins relationships, and destroys trust, excluding others because they're not one of us or they're not following us.

Sometimes we confuse "us" with "Jesus" and think others or even other churches can't possibly do any good without us. Like the disciples we may become jealous of their ministry, their growth, and their works and think, "How can we compete with that?" And that's the problem. This isn't a competition. We are for God, not for us, or for them. But we see a gift and think, "I could have done better." A beautiful gift is given and people come out of the woodwork, "That could have been sold and given to the poor." I'm not immune from counting the blessings God has placed in the lives of others while ignoring those God has given me.

Jesus says, "*Don't stop them.* Don't become a stumbling block to them for whoever is not against us is for us." That doesn't mean set aside every teaching about Jesus and who he is in order to join together with everyone. There are divisions in the church that force us to have some separation. We will seek unity through God's Word but we won't set it aside because we are jealous of being bigger when we should be jealous and seek after the things of God. Far too often we are jealous of things which aren't good for us, which harm others and for that we should have millstones hung around our necks and be thrown into the sea. Jesus speaks seriously about sin, "If your hand causes you to sin cut it off. If your eye causes you to sin pluck it out." If we did that we'd have to cut off our heads because it's not our hands or our eyes that cause sin but the sinful nature living inside of us.

But God has done something about our sin. When we remember what God has done for each of us personally and who we are in Christ there is no reason to be critical of the gifts of others but stand in awe at the jealousy of God.

What the disciples forgot is that Jesus called them specifically. Jesus went to each one and said, "Come... Follow me." With all their failures Jesus never sent them away. Rather than give up on such an arrogant group he sat down and began to teach them again. He associates with them by saying us instead of me. Jesus was jealous for his church. Zeal for the house of God consumed him to such an

extent that he turned over the money changers tables and drove those selling goods out of the Gentile courts. Zeal for his people drove him to these moments of passion prediction. Zeal drove him to the cross knowing full well what would happen to him there.

And there he was buried - not in the depths of the sea with a millstone hung around his neck, which would have been better by far, but on a cross where he suffered not just physically but he took on hell and separation from God for us. Jesus entered hell for us. Our zealous God cut himself off from life for the sake of his sinful creation and he came back because of our justification.

God is a jealous God - not that he resents the success of others but he is vigilant in guarding his people from harm and danger. There is no need for the disciples to be worried that they will miss out on the kingdom. There is no need for them to worry about Jesus moving on to those who are more effective in the kingdom. Jesus came for them too. He chose them. He is jealous for them too. But it's not just about them. Paul writes in 1 Timothy 2:4 - "*God wants all to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.*" The disciples soon understood what that would mean for Gentiles and not just for Judaism. Soon they would understand what Jesus would accomplish on the cross and they would be zealous to seek and save.

God has also chosen us as well. He has called us out by name, "You are mine." In baptism he proclaims his name over us. He calls to us in his Word, "*Come. Follow me.*" With all of our failures he doesn't send us away. He instructs us to flee from sin and rejoice in the good works of others as God works through them. And for all the times we've become jealous, caused some to stumble, and tried to stop them - he reminds us we are forgiven. Don't be jealous of their work. Remember what God has done for you. God doesn't just bless you. But he has chosen you. He has sent his son to serve you. He brings us a cup of cold water. The same living water that he offered to the Samaritan woman.

That is the same water you bring to others. Whether you bring a literal cup of water or the word of God what makes this work precious is that this water is given to a person because he belongs to Christ. Even that little work will be remembered and recorded and rejoiced over in heaven. If giving out cups of water is rejoiced over how much more the regular work we do on a daily basis? How much more the mother who cooks a meal that is so quickly forgotten. How much more the lawn that always needs to be mowed. The books that need to be balanced... The bills that need to be paid.

People need to know the serious nature of sin as well as what God has done for them. Be zealous for this work. Be jealous for the Church, God's Church, his bride of which you are a part, all because God was zealous for you. Amen.