

Read: Mark 9:38-48

Whatever It Takes

Mark 9:42-50

“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. 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. 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. 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, where ‘the worms that eat them do not die, and the fire is not quenched.’”

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Some athletes would do almost anything to win and get better. One all-star baseball player used to practice batting all day when he was younger. He would hit baseballs until his hands started to bleed! Hall of fame basketball player Magic Johnson used to shovel his driveway of snow in winter just so he could shoot a few more shots. NFL quarterback Russell Wilson spends over a million dollars per year on his body. He has personal trainers, a personal chef, and all the best equipment to help him get better.

Wow! You can say that for many athletes, they are willing to do whatever it takes to get better and try to win championships. It doesn't matter how much hard work and pain they have to go through—they are willing to do it because they know how much they want to achieve their goals.

Today we hear some very strong words from the Lord. Jesus said that if your hand or foot causes you to sin, you should cut it off, or if your eye causes you to sin you should poke it out. Ouch! Does Jesus really mean that? Well . . . yes, and no.

Jesus wants us to understand how serious and dangerous sin is. That's why Jesus said it would be better to lose your hand or foot if it means you stop sinning and then don't go to hell. But please, please don't try this at home! If your one hand or eye was gone, obviously your other hand or eye would sin too. Jesus' words aren't really about body parts. Jesus is talking about our hearts. Our hearts lead us into sin. So why does Jesus speak such sharp words? Jesus wants us to have the attitude that we do whatever it takes to avoid sin and hell and protect your eternity.

Thanks be to God that Jesus himself is the eternal answer to our problem! First, Jesus is our Savior who has erased all our sins so that we don't need to worry about them or about hell. Jesus has set us free from hell and given us heaven! But secondly, Jesus, who conquered sin and death, is the one who will give us the strength to fight against temptations and to stay strong in our faith. Are you concerned about sin? Then listen to your Savior and stay close to him! His forgiveness and strength will help you to battle against Satan and win!

The questions below are to help families discuss this devotion. The questions are divided by age group as suggestions, but anyone could reflect on any of the questions as they desire.

Questions for the Younger Children

- What does God want us to try so hard to avoid?
- Why is sin so dangerous?

Questions for Elementary Age Children

- What exactly is hell?
- How and when did Jesus suffer hell in our place?

Questions for Middle School and Above

- Think of at least one way that Christians do “whatever it takes” to avoid sin in their lives.
- Agree/Disagree: Pastors should talk less about sin and hell in church. If they did, more people would come to church. Explain your answer.

Closing Prayer:

Dear Jesus, sin is so dangerous! It leads us away from you! Help us to resist temptation and do what is right in your sight. Amen.

Hymn: CW 462:1-2 – Oh, that the Lord Would Guide My Ways

Oh, that the Lord would guide my ways
To keep his statutes still!
Oh, that my God would grant me grace
To know and do his will!

Order my footsteps by your Word,
And make my heart sincere;
Let sin have no dominion, Lord,
But keep my conscience clear.