

# Getting off the Highway to Hell

Mark 9:38-50

## Introduction

Aron Ralston is a rock climber – who was climbing in the mountains of Utah in 2003 – when due to a slip of some rocks – his right arm became trapped underneath a large boulder. Aron was stuck – and had no way to signal anyone for help. He had enough water to last for several days – but knew that if he did not free himself – he would die there.

So – after about 5 days - Aron did the unthinkable – with a pocket knife [after breaking some bones] – he cut off his right arm – so that he could free the rest of his body – and live to tell his story.

Ralston comments on the episode in surprising terms:

‘It was the most beautiful moment of my life,’. ‘The intensity of emotion . . .

‘Think of it like this. Take every instance of joy, happiness, pleasure, delight and fun you’ve ever had in your life, and pack it into one moment. Then multiply that moment by the power of [ten] . . . That’s how I felt.’

That is Aron talking about the moment he amputated his right arm to save his life. He’s referring to the joy he experienced after he’d sliced through the last tissue that had been attaching the useless limb to the rest of his body.”

Aron recognized that severing himself from his arm – was the key to freedom and life itself

In this next passage Jesus utters the words: ‘If your right 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.’ [Mark 9:43]

In this passage Jesus teaches the reality of an eternal hell – and that drastic measures should be taken to avoid such a place

Better to suffer the loss of a part of one’s body than to face the ruin of one’s soul in hell

Sproul: ‘By use of these ghastly images, Jesus made it plain that hell is a terrible place. Indeed it is far better to cut off one’s hand, cut off one’s foot, or pluck out one’s eye, than to go to that place. There is nothing worse than the abode of the damned. By the same token, of course, there is no place more wonderful, more blessed, than the abode of the redeemed, the kingdom of God.’

The doctrine of hell reminds us of certain realities - Our actions in this life do matter – reverberate with eternal consequences

Man is a rebel in God’s universe – He rejects God – He provokes God – refuses to obey God – committing acts of murder, stealing, immorality – He worships the creation / self – anything but God

Worse than that – He is enslaved to sin / held captive to it

How can He be set free from his horrible predicament?

That is what the gospel is all about

**Revelation 1:5 - 'To Him who loves us and released us from our sins by His blood.'**

Jesus in His death and resurrection – severs us from our sins by His blood

The great moment when the sinner forsakes His own sin – to embrace Christ as Lord and Savior – is the great moment of release and deliverance unlike any other

Sproul: 'When God removes our iniquity [thru faith in Christ] – we experience a liberation unlike anything the world can match. No windfall profit, no military victory, no election results, no romance or job promotion can liberate the spirit of a person as much as one sentence from God: 'Your sins are forgiven.' [Pleasing God, p. 127]

In this passage – Jesus emphasizes the desperate condition of the sinner

\*\*\* Far better to be a Christian who forsakes His sin and clings to Christ – than to be an unbeliever who clings to His sin and goes to hell for all eternity.

## **I. Charity Towards Others - vv. 38-42**

Jesus has told them that he who receives others in the faith – receives Jesus Himself – v. 37

John's conscience bothers him about an incident where they tried to hinder someone - - - and he says, 'Jesus – what about this situation – were we correct?'

Jesus basically says, 'no'

Here is this guy from another church / another denomination! / He is serving Jesus – doing things in Jesus' name

Jesus says, 'He's ok – leave him alone'

He is on our side!

We see in this passage of Scripture Jesus advocating a principle of charity or grace towards others

We may differ with other Christians on issues - - - like baptism / the rapture / Calvinism / Arminianism / schooling / etc.

Jesus says, 'that's o.k.' - - - you can still accept them as brothers and sisters in Christ – as long as they look to the Savior alone for their salvation

\*\*\* Sometimes people can become very zealous in their pursuit of truth – that is a good pursuit – and a good thing to have zeal in [study the Bible / read theology / seek answers to questions] - - - but there is always the risk where Satan tries to ruin a good thing – and turn that person's zeal into a proud / hyper-critical spirit of everyone else around them who does not have the same views – or practices

'I can't fellowship with them – they don't recite the creed every Sunday'  
'I can't fellowship with them – they let their kids watch Phineas and Ferb'  
'I can't fellowship with her – she drinks Coke / doesn't use the KJV of the Bible'  
'I can't worship with those heathens – they don't wear a tie on Sunday'

Sometimes you can be so right you're wrong

Jesus squelches that sectarian spirit here

\*\*\* Grace in the heart should lead to grace towards others

In the Christian life – we are in a fight / a struggle – we can choose to embrace those who are in the fight with us – or we can lob our grenades in their direction

I recently read a devotion by Tony Dungy – he was head coach of the Colts – won Super Bowl – 2007. He says his 2007 team wasn't the most talented team he ever coached – 2007 wasn't the most injury free season

What made this team stand out?

Ans.: They knew how to play together as a team

The church is a kind of a team  
Our faith is not just an individual thing – but God has placed you and I on a team

Are you a team player?

If someone hands you the ball – do you run with it? / or are your arms full with the clutter of the world?

Do you block for others? - - - so they can run further?

How do we block? We lift one another up in prayer [prayer is one of the most selfless ways to show your commitment to your team] – to ask God to bless your fellow team members / protect them from sin / harm

v. 41 – give a cup of cold water = an act of humble service to help another

Jesus has told us that greatness is expressed in humble servanthood to the glory of God

Giving someone a cup of cold water = pretty simple task

We're not talking about some giant act of service = loaning someone a million dollars to start up a business / raising someone else's kids - - - [this is pretty small by comparison!]

We sometimes get caught up in trap of wondering what we can do for God - What big thing can I do?

God may be saying, 'do something little – start there'  
Anyone can give someone a cup of cold water

Start small – help serve food / clean up at church coffee time  
Be an Awana listener – get involved somewhere – it doesn't have to be big – but you have to be present!

You can't serve Jesus if you stay at home and watch t.v. – when God's people are gathered

You can't give the little one a cup of cold water – if you're too busy chasing Mr. Green – when God's people are gathered

I heard a speaker say – in the 50s in America – if you were a regular attender of church – that meant you were in church 3 times a week [Sunday morning / evening / Wed.]

Now – if somebody says they are a regular attender of a church – they mean that they are in church 3 times a month

That's not progress – that's a decline

To serve the Lord – we just need to be present – we can find ways to serve – your reward will not be lost

#### v. 42

In the opposite direction – instead of serving others – we can be the instrument of other's sin / causing them to stumble / disbelieve – by teaching or example

Jesus says it would be better for a man to be drowned than to incur further guilt for causing / leading others to sin

## II. The Unquenchable Fire - vv. 43-48

Here Jesus speaks on the topic of hell

The Scriptures uniformly and clearly present the idea of man standing before God in judgment at a day in the future

Acts 17:30-31 – ‘God is now declaring to men that all everywhere should repent, because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness.’

Heb. 9:27 – ‘it is appointed unto man once to die and after this comes judgment.’

The unrepentant wicked of our world are gambling – they are placing a wager on the hope that there will be no calling to account for their actions – no hell – that there is no God who is offended, etc.

Jesus tells us right here – Make no mistake – there will be a judgment

Some people view the doctrine of hell as simply a scare tactic of the church

Ron Reagan jr. in a political ad advocating [freedom from religion foundation] – ‘Ron Reagan - life-long atheist – ‘not afraid of burning in hell’.

It’s almost a macho thing – ‘I’m not afraid of hell’  
AC/ DC can sing about being on the highway to hell – all their friends are gonna be there too

**Scripture: [Heb. 10:31] - ‘it is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God.’**

Somehow – I don’t think there will be any macho posturing in the afterlife  
Scripture says there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth [where the worm does not die and the fire is not quenched] / vivid imagery

In a New York Magazine interview in 2013 with Anthony Scalia – supreme court justice who passed away last year – a conservative on the court and a Roman Catholic

He was asked about his own legacy – b/c of all the conservative positions he has taken on the court - he was the most vocal voice of dissent against the gay marriage debacle

Scalia: I have never been custodian of my legacy. When I’m dead and gone, I’ll either be sublimely happy or terribly unhappy.

**[Interviewer Jennifer Senior]: You believe in heaven and hell?**

Oh, of course I do. Don’t you believe in heaven and hell?

**No.**

Oh, my.

**Does that mean I’m not going?**

[*Laughing.*] Unfortunately not!

### **Wait, to heaven or hell?**

It doesn't mean you're not going to hell, just because you don't believe in it . . . Everyone is going one place or the other.

Senior moves to a new topic

### **Can we talk about your drafting process?**

[*Scalia enjoying himself says.*]: 'I even believe in the Devil.'

We need more justices like him! – who recognize that they too will be brought to account before a higher authority some day

In this passage – Jesus teaches us that Hell is a place to be avoided at all costs

Is Jesus telling us that the solution is to cut off hand and foot – and pluck out an eye?  
A few have tried that route

Jesus has already told us that sin originates in the heart – any salvation must deal with the heart

He is conveying a picture of urgency and desperation  
The idea is – 'do whatever it takes to get rid of your sin'

Even if we cut off all our limbs – we would still have sin in the heart / mind sins like anger / greed / lust / hatred / etc.

But the Christian is one who looks to Jesus to be set free from sin / who repents of sin / forsakes it as He embraces Christ

Important truth here - - - **why do people go to hell?**

Because of their sin

Rom. 6:23 – 'The wages of sin is death – but the free gift of God is eternal life thru Christ Jesus our Lord.'

Sin expresses itself outwardly thru our bodily members – the hands steal or strike / the mouth utters blasphemies / the foot can take us places where we ought not go

Gouging out an eye / cutting off a hand / foot – are hyperbolic statements reflecting the Christian's militant stance towards sin

We are in a battle – and sin is a destructive enemy / sin will drag you down to hell

Peter says to abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war against the soul [I Peter 2:11]

Just as a surgeon removes a tumor from the body – so we should get rid of that which causes us to sin

John Owen: 'Men naturally desire nothing but what God hath made eternally inconsistent - namely that they may live in sin here, and come to blessedness hereafter.' [Works 5, p. 388]

What does the unregenerate want?

He wants to keep his sin now – stay attached to it – and still go to heaven

But – the Christian by very definition is someone who fights sin / forsakes it / puts it to death as he walks by the Spirit in faith

Rom. 8:13 - 'For if you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live.'

The Christian disciple is one who puts to death the deeds of the flesh / wages war against sin / fights the battle – even taking drastic measures to remove stumbling blocks – sources of temptation

This verse calls us to take stock of our lives:

Are there some things in my life that hinder my walk with Christ?

Are there habits / routines that need to go or be changed?

Have I truly repented?

We either forsake sin and embrace Jesus – or we cling to our sins coasting down the highway to hell

### III. The Salty Christian - vv. 49-50

Our passage closes with a few sayings about salty Christians

#### Conclusion

Sproul: 'Have you ever asked yourself where you will be a hundred years from now? You will be somewhere and you will be conscious. You will either be among the damned or in the state where joy never ends . . . where your eyes will behold the beautiful vision of the loveliness of Christ forever. If it takes the loss of a hand, a foot, or an eye to make sure you are there, the trade is worth it many times over.'

Hell is eternal and irreversible – a one way ticket bought by human sin

Lot was told to flee and get out of Sodom [but amazingly – he hesitated] – the angels did something amazing – they took him by the hand – in a display of God's grace

God still takes people by the hand today – calling them to the Savior

They put their trust in Jesus – believe Jesus died for you and rose again