

St Paul's Sept 2026

1 Jn 2:22-end. Mark 9:38-end

Abiding in Christ & avoiding hell

I am going to speak on the gospel passage, but it is a theme picked up in **John's** letter: "*And now, little children, abide in him, so that when he appears we may have confidence and not shrink from him in shame at his coming.*" **Abide** in him.

The Mark passage starts with the disciples saying to Jesus that there's **someone claiming to be a Christian** who's not part of their group, and whether to stop him from doing what he's doing. And Jesus says "*no, whoever is not against us is for us*". They might not be part of our group, but they are **part of Christ's people**. And he then says how his people and **those who bless them will be rewarded**: "*For truly, I say to you, whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because you belong to Christ will by no means lose his reward.*" There are those who belong to Christ, and those who don't, and it's not just those in our particular group who do.

And from going from rewarding those who are good to his people, he **moves to those who are bad to his people**, to those who make them sin: "*Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him if a great millstone were hung around his neck and he were thrown into the sea.*" There's blessing for those who bless his people and trouble for those who don't. For those who make **his people sin, there'll be real trouble**.

This is really an **echo of God's calling Abraham** at the beginning. Abraham was the start of the people of God, a people who are called to be God's people, and this is what Jesus is talking about. Gen 12: "*I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.*"

He then moves onto **how his people must all be careful not to sin**. To abide in him. To stay with him, and not sin. His teaching on this now is very strong.

He talks about **cutting off if necessary** the hand, the foot or the eye. Do whatever is necessary **not to sin**. This is so important he says. If you have to cut off your hand or foot not to be tempted, do it. "*And if your eye causes you to sin, tear it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into hell, 'where their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched.'*"

We are on course for heaven, Jesus says, but if we sin, we might go to hell. **Hell** is not something preached much, but Jesus believed in it and taught about it here. What is hell? "*where their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched*". In a cemetery, I think you see quite a few worms. Because they can feed on the dead. What this is saying is that the worm can just keep on feeding because the dead will ALWAYS be dead. The unquenchable fire is saying the same thing. It is a symbol of destruction, that will be permanent. The fire is not satisfied, quenched. Utter destruction. **End of life**. Hell is everlasting death or nothingness.

People might think that's ok. You live now, then that's it. But in comparison to possibly living forever in heaven, it's awful.

Matthew describes it slightly differently. There, Jesus calls Hell the *fiery furnace or outer darkness*, and then always says: "*In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth*". I don't think there is a place of **eternal weeping or pain**. I think it is **eternal death**. But it seems this is **sorrow and anger associated with it**.

Hell is something Jesus believed in and taught about. **Not everyone will go to heaven**. I don't believe it to be eternal weeping and pain, but a total end, but a total end people don't slip into unawares, but realise with grief and anger.

Then finally in the passage, Jesus talks us **keeping our saltiness**. "*Salt is good, but if the salt has lost its saltiness, how will you make it salty again?*" And "*Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another.*" It is another way saying, stay with God. Keep your **distinctiveness**. But also live at peace with everyone, being like the **salt in food, keeping it good**.

