

Bible Study Handout

Mark 9:38–50

Jesus expands our view of who belongs. Outreach begins when we stop drawing lines and start seeing allies.

Background of Mark

The Gospel of Mark is the earliest of the four canonical gospels, traditionally linked to John Mark, a companion of Paul and Peter (France). Early church testimony (Papias, Irenaeus) affirms that Mark wrote down Peter's preaching (Ehrman; Lane). Most scholars date it to AD 65–70, likely in Rome during persecution under Nero and in the shadow of the Jewish War (Marcus). The gospel is fast-paced, emphasizing Jesus as the Son of God, discipleship through suffering, and God's power revealed in weakness (Bock). Structurally, it divides into Jesus' ministry in Galilee (1:1–8:26) and His journey to Jerusalem culminating in His passion (8:27–16:8) (Garland). Its significance lies in shaping both Matthew and Luke and in its call to cross-bearing discipleship that trusts resurrection hope (Moloney).

Exegesis of Mark 9:38–50 (Wesleyan/Methodist Perspective)

9:38–41 – The disciples try to stop someone outside their group from casting out demons. Jesus corrects them: 'Whoever is not against us is for us.' Wesleyan theology hears in this the truth of prevenient grace—God works through people beyond our boundaries (Maddox). Even small acts, like giving a cup of water, are means of grace in God's kingdom.

9:42 – Jesus warns against causing 'little ones' to stumble. Wesleyans emphasize social holiness—discipleship is communal, and holiness requires protecting and nurturing the vulnerable in faith (Collins).

9:43–48 – Jesus uses radical imagery of cutting off limbs to stress the seriousness of sin. For Wesley, this connects to sanctification, the ongoing work of grace that removes hindrances so believers may grow in perfect love (Collins).

9:49–50 – Salt and fire symbolize purification and preservation. Wesleyans see this as sanctifying grace, which refines disciples and empowers them to live as peaceable witnesses, flavoring the world with God's love (Maddox).

Connection to the Whole Bible

This passage echoes Moses' words in Numbers 11:29, where he welcomed others prophesying outside the camp. It also resonates with Paul's joy in Philippians 1:18 that Christ is preached regardless of motives. Jesus' warnings about stumbling blocks in Matthew 18:6–9 and His call for gracious, salty speech in Colossians 4:6 further connect Mark 9 to the larger biblical witness. Together, Scripture affirms that God's Spirit works broadly and disciples are called to humility, openness, and unity in mission (Bock; Marcus).

Wesleyan/Methodist Lens

John Wesley's theology reflects the heart of this passage. Prevenient grace reminds us that God is at work ahead of us, calling us to see allies instead of rivals (Maddox). Social holiness insists that disciples guard one another's faith and especially protect the weak (Collins). Sanctification means surrendering anything that hinders love of God and neighbor, mirroring Jesus' call to cut off stumbling parts. Communal holiness calls us to live as salt—preserving unity, flavoring the world with grace, and being at peace with each other (Maddox).

Reflection Questions

1. Why did the disciples want to stop the outsider?
2. How does Jesus' response widen our view of who belongs?
3. What does the 'cup of water' teach us about small acts of service?
4. What modern stumbling blocks might hinder faith?
5. How can we live as salt and peace in our church and community?

Key Takeaway

Mark 9:38–50 reminds us that God's Spirit works beyond our boundaries. Wesleyan theology teaches that grace is prevenient, social, and sanctifying—expanding our vision of who belongs, calling us to guard the vulnerable, and shaping us into salt and peace. Outreach begins when we stop drawing lines and start seeing allies.