

## Jesus Prepares Perfectly-Seasoned Disciples!

A sermon based on Mark 9:38-50

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

It's enough to make your mouth start watering uncontrollably. Just one word. BBQ! Or maybe it's just me, but I love barbeque, and there's no better time for barbequing than the summer, right?

Summer, however, is coming to an end and, unfortunately, so are the days of pulling up to Fred Meyer and catching a whiff of those ribs slow-cooking over the coals...or maybe the smell of whatever you've had on the grill this summer. Regardless, if there's one kind of food I just can't get enough of, it's barbeque.

Now, you might notice I didn't mention any specific kinds of BBQ. It's because different parts of the country interpret BBQ in different ways. In Memphis, it's all about the dry rub. East Coast barbeque is basted with a vinegar-spice mixture and served with a ketchup-based sauce. And down South, they let the meat stand on its own and do the talking.

No matter what style you might enjoy, what we can agree on is what sets decent BBQ apart from "to die for" BBQ is the seasoning.

Well, as we talked about last week, Jesus was on the last leg of the journey of his earthly ministry, from Mount of Transfiguration down to Mount Calvary. Jesus was treating every second as a vital moment for teaching, encouraging, and preparing his disciples. Well, as we'll see from our gospel, he had a recipe in mind for them...the same recipe he has in mind for you today...a dash of encouraging the weak, a pinch of avoiding causing anyone to stumble, a little bit more than a hint of being filled with God's Word, and of course, a whole lot of love. It's no surprise what he's making. Jesus is preparing perfectly-seasoned disciples!

We got a little taste of that seasoning last Sunday when we looked at the section of Scripture right before our verses today. To Jesus, true greatness in the kingdom of God is found not in being the best, the richest, the smartest, the most important. True greatness comes from being filled with the greatest, Jesus, and following his selfless example of humility. Certainly one of the seasonings we want to keep in the spice rack of our faith lives.

But Jesus didn't stop there. There was more he needed to do to prepare his disciples. We can see that in our gospel this morning. Do you remember what happened after Jesus finished talking about humility in the Kingdom?

One of the disciples, John, approached him with this situation: a man (presumably a follower of Jesus) was doing miracles. He was driving out demons in the name of Jesus. Just one thing, though. He wasn't a disciple. Jesus had never given him authority to perform these incredible feats. This man had no right. He had to be stopped. So, John and the other disciples did what they thought was right. They told him to stop.

Do you think John was maybe looking for some approval? Well, if John was waiting for “a pat on the back,” he wasn’t going to get it from Jesus. What he did get was a rather forceful rebuke. “Do not stop him!” Do not continue that negative behavior towards that man!

Because here were the facts of the situation. Yes, the man wasn’t one of the Twelve. Yes, he hadn’t received the training and teaching the disciples had from Jesus. Yes, the man hadn’t been given verbal authority by Jesus to perform miracles. But the fact the man was doing all this in the name of Jesus showed he was a believer. He may not have had understanding of Jesus to the extent of the disciples (you might even say he had a weak faith compared to their “strong” faith), but what he was doing brought honor and glory to Jesus. In fact, even if he had done nothing but give someone else a glass of water in Jesus’ name, he was acting in faith and bringing honor to Jesus’ name.

And for the disciples, who were more spiritually mature in their faith, their job was to encourage faithfulness, not discourage it. In fact, look at how serious Jesus was about it. Discouraging the weak, causing one of the little ones (little in regards to their faith) to stumble in sin...some pretty serious consequences. “It would be better” for a millstone, one of the huge stones the oxen would turn in a circle to grind the grain, put one of those around their necks and throw them into the sea. Or, just as worse, any part of the disciples that was causing them to act like that, or to just sin in general, needed to be removed...amputated.

Now, we know Jesus was speaking figuratively there, but it all underscores the seriousness of sin and the seriousness of getting that rot out of their lives. And Jesus means that for us, too.

Have you ever watched one of those cooking competition shows on TV? I’m a big fan of shows like Top Chef, Masterchef, the Next Food Network Star, shows that pit chefs against each other, giving them the opportunity to prepare a dish, put it up against their opponents’, and get the judges’ approval.

And often, more times than not, there’s one thing that makes their dishes either rise to the top or fall flat. Any guesses what that might be? Seasoning. Forget to season your meat, and your dish fails.

Well, brothers and sisters in Christ, we are Chef Jesus’ dish. He wants us to be perfectly –seasoned disciples, again, flavored with encouraging the weak in faith, not causing anyone to stumble and sin, being filled with the Word, and having lots of love. Sounds reasonable, right? But what happens when our sinful nature gets its hands on that recipe?

Forget about encouraging those who are weak in their faith. Instead, we turn into John and attempt to discredit, discourage, and just plain cut down those who are putting their faith into practice. We see that here. It’s deflating when someone who is so gung-ho about doing work for the church, serving their Lord, either doesn’t get the help or support to do the work or is made to feel as though their idea is not valid, not worth it, or, to be frank, just plain stupid.

For example, for months we had been talking about doing the steps out front. I don’t think anyone would disagree something needed to be done. But what if what’s currently being done with them isn’t what you had in mind? How easy is it to say, “That’s not what I would have planned to do with the steps, so I won’t support it. I won’t help out with it. Maybe I’ll even speak out against it.”?

Or for outreach...as disappointing as it can be to put in three summers of canvassing and only have one person (so far) come because of it, what’s even more disappointing is after three plus years of talking

about the importance of getting out there with the good news of Jesus (Jesus himself tells us as much), we still have the same small group of people willing to go. Or the same couple of people who will invite a friend when we have our friendship services.

I get it, it's not everyone's cup of tea, and that's fine. Not everyone can do it. But often times, what happens is not only do you miss out on opportunities to use your gifts to God's glory and to bring honor to Jesus' name, but also the person with the idea, the person with the zeal to do the work, the person who's doing the work, he/she gets discouraged from doing that work or any future work.

And it's not just by what you say, either, but by your actions as well. If a specific ministry here isn't worth your time to at the very least encourage the people who are doing it or pray for it, let alone support it with your time, your talents, your treasures, it's discouraging. And ultimately, it hinders the work of the Kingdom.

This is serious. Jesus says this rot can't remain. He means exactly what he says here. In your life, if any member of your body causes you to sin and endangers your salvation, get rid of the offending member! A closer self-examination, show that the source of the problem is not the hand or foot or eye.

Would it ever occur to us to amputate our limbs if they got in the way of our entrance into heaven or of our service to one another? Would we not finally have to cut out our hearts, the seat of desire, and then amputate the head, the throne of memory and our sinful thoughts?

Maybe Chef Jesus should become Butcher Jesus. Because we aren't perfectly-seasoned disciples. We're sinfully-seasoned. We fall flat. We fail, and if Jesus were to get rid of our bad parts, he'd have to get rid of everything, and we'd be going to hell, where the "worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched."

Friends, all that's left for us to do is to cry out in repentance: "God, be merciful to me, a sinner. Pardon, cleanse, and restore me." And be sure, that prayer, your repentance is heard, accepted, and answered by your God.

How can you know? Because of what God himself tells you in his Word, "Live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God (or, in other words, as a pleasing aroma to God)."

You see, Chef Jesus didn't butcher our sinful hearts out. Instead, he performed heart surgery. It was the recipe Jesus had been working on from the very beginning. There was only one ingredient...lots of love. He saw mankind fall into sin. He saw every human being standing at the edge of eternal death in hell. And so, for thousands of years, Jesus let that love simmer, and it only grew stronger and stronger. And then he came to earth, became a man, and it was time to complete his recipe.

In all honesty, it's a recipe to die for. The recipe was for Jesus to die for us.

And as a result of his death on the cross, Jesus removed the sin from our hearts and peppered our hearts with the fragrant seasoning of full and free forgiveness, an aroma pleasing to God. With the sin gone, butchered out of our hearts, all that's left is what Jesus has carefully prepared us to be, his perfectly-seasoned disciples.

Again, how can you know? Listen to what Paul tells us, “For we are to God the aroma of Christ among those who are being saved...the fragrance of life.” What does it mean that now you are a pleasing aroma to God?

I’m sure many of you have walked into your house or a restaurant, where something’s on the stove or in the oven, and even before you taste...even before you see it, you know it’s going to be delicious. Why? The aroma of the spices and seasoning, it smells so good, so amazing, so pleasing, and the taste almost always follows suit.

That is what we are to God. With our sins removed by Christ’s death and his forgiveness, all he smells is Christ’s perfection in us. And for a perfect God who wants perfection from his people, nothing is more pleasing than that...you, his perfectly-seasoned disciple.

But you’re not done yet. You, too, are Christ’s disciple. Do you know what that means? In the original language, disciple referred to someone who was learning. That’s why the disciples called Jesus “Teacher.” They had much to learn from him.

We do, too. Now is not the time for your own recipes on how you think you should live this life. Now is the time to learn from the real Master Chef. And again, here’s what makes the perfectly-seasoned disciple. First, lots of Christ’s unconditional love, moving us to have lots of love for everyone around us. A dash of encouraging those who are weaker in their faith so that they aren’t stumbling in their faith and falling into sin, but are growing stronger. And finally, of course, the one ingredient that makes everything a little better...salt.

Jesus talks about that specifically here. Do you know what the salt he’s referring to is? The salt of his Word. Oh, in the wounds of our sins, the salt of God’s law, it burns. But the salt in the gospel, heals every wound.

I know doctors would probably caution you against having too much salt in your diet, but for the perfectly-seasoned disciple, Jesus knows you can’t ever have enough salt of his Word. Disciple, be generous with your helpings of that. Be filled with the Word.

You know, barbeque season may be coming to an end, but you’re not. You, disciple, have more seasoning to do. Life is too short for you to try your own recipe for living. Jesus’ recipe is tried and true. And you’re on the right track, filled with Jesus’ forgiveness and his perfection. Live your life imitating his love, be filled with the salt of his Word, and when your life’s timer buzzes, you’ll know you’re done as you enjoy the eternal banquet of glory in heaven. Amen.