

# A Sermon for DaySpring

By Burt L. Burleson

**“Entering In”**

Mark 9: 43-50

September 28, 2003

I think Jesus knew something about body memory. That thing your body does when it seems to have developed a mind of its own along the way. Your body thinks for itself, doesn't it? That's why athletes do drills and musicians play scales... that's why they practice over and over, so in the moment when they're making a play or playing a piece, they don't really have to think about it... it's just there.

Kurt doesn't have to think, **“Now what are the notes in a Dm? And which fingers will I use this time to play it?”** He doesn't have to think that in his head and then tell his fingers what to do. His hand just does it.

When Doug and I play racquetball... there are hundreds of different kinds of shots that can be made... different ways to hit the ball.

High and hard and off the ceiling so that it comes way back here.

Low and light and off the sidewall so that it dies up front.

There's the “kill shot”... the “dink shot”... the “Z shot”...

The “off-the-front-wall-high,-then-the-ceiling-so-that-it-dies-way-back-at-the-back” shot. It's the shot I hit when Doug moves up, thinking I'm about to hit a dink shot. I don't have to think about it, really. My body just knows it's the play to make then... we've played that much.

Of course, Doug's body knows that and it immediately runs back to the back wall so he can return my “off the front wall high, then the ceiling so that it dies way back at the back” shot with his “off-the-back-wall-first-then-the-ceiling” shot. But my body's way ahead of his now, so I stay up at the front, instinctively knowing his shot will come off the wall soft and I barely tap it for the point before he can get back to the front.

You don't really think when you type do you?

Or when you hit the light switch or the snooze button?

Or when you apply the breaks?

Or when you eat... you don't say, **“chew, chew, chew, swallow,”** do you?

Jesus knew this and said one day, **“If your hand or your feet or your eyes are causing you to sin, you ought to do something about that.”** Now... I know ultimately, we will and Jesus does point the finger at the heart and mind as the real culprits in our sinful ways, but sometimes don't you know the truth of this at a literal level?

We are creatures of habit...

and instinct...

and worse, impulse.

We move through life like “Pavlov's people.” Stimulus-response... fight or flight... eat or be eaten. Shop till you drop. Collect and control. We live a lot of life mechanistically.

*My hands, they have a mind of their own.  
They reach to possess...  
They fist up in anger...  
They wring themselves raw with worry.  
My hands, they cling and clutch and even gesture sometimes...  
And they do it, seemingly, on their own.*

*My feet, they have a mind of their own.  
They kick against authority...  
They move to tip-toe position to better see over the Jones' fence.  
They propel me down unwise paths.  
My feet, they climb ladders of success and walk away from injustice...  
And they do it, seemingly, on their own.*

*My eyes, they have a mind of their own.  
They tear up sometimes without my permission.  
They see with desire...they let in images.  
They distort what's really there and play tricks on me.  
My eyes, they can close themselves to the truth...  
And they do all this, seemingly, on their own.*

*My mouth, it speaks in unknown tongues sometimes  
when someone has been rude to me in traffic.  
My ears, they tune in without me telling them to the latest gossip  
and to stories of my peer's lack of success.  
My stomach, it demands Butter Pecan after every meal  
and Raisin Bran during Letterman.  
My nose has a way of sniffing around for compliments.  
My rear loves my couch and protests if I keep them apart.  
My mind even has a mind of its own. It loves to be cynical.  
I don't tell it to be that way... it just chooses it.*

*What a mechanistic man I am. I do what I'd rather not do. As Paul said, "**Who will rescue me from this body of death.**"*

The truth is, whether we blame hands, head, or heart... we are victims to our impulses... too much. We aren't really as free as we think we are. And freedom is what it's all about... "**it was for freedom,**" Paul says, "**that Christ set us free.**"

Freedom to be who we are...

Freedom to become who we're supposed to be.

Freedom to love...

And to let ourselves be loved.

Freedom to see what is...

And freedom know what's real...

And to do what's right.

That's what this whole religious deal is supposed to be about. It's what the Bible is about from Garden to Galatians. That's what the law was about. Those of you who resist the law... and those of you relish it to the point of idolatry, should remember that The Ten Commandments were given on a journey to freedom. God's people had been unchained from Egypt and were in the desert... that in between place... when the rules were given. The rules were given to those who were learning how to be free.

But the journey to freedom, as we saw in the Exodus story, was hard and at times painful. And often the people moaned about the price of freedom... and sometimes they said they'd just as soon go back. Remember...

**“At least back in Egypt Pharaoh’s chariots didn’t chase us and run over us.”**

**“Back in Egypt we didn’t have to deal with these gosh darn snakes.”**

**“Back in Egypt we had more than manna to eat.”**

**“All we get out here is manna. Manna cakes, manna flakes... manna pies, manna fries... manna on manna sandwiches... baked manna, seasoned with just a touch of... manna.”**

**“Hi honey, I’m home... what’s for dinner? Ummm, my favorite... chicken fried manna, mashed manna, and a manna tart for dessert.”**

**“Dear... could we move back to Egypt?”**

Reminds me of the Matrix... most of you've seen this popular film with all its spiritual themes... and this is one of them. It's a world run by computers and human beings are just the fuel... body batteries.

They live a life in their minds... in a digital matrix. It's not a real world at all. They're all just floating in vats but they don't know it. They think they're alive.

Except a few who have gotten out of the matrix. They've been rescued... redeemed... enlightened. They live a tough life. Exiled... moving about on a ship... hiding from sentries, battling robots... and only eating mush... bowl after nutritious bowl.

One of them decides he's had enough mush... a Judas character, who decides he'd rather have the fantasy if it means he can eat steak and be rich and sleep in a comfortable bed. He'd rather live an illusion...

so he betrays his friends,  
forfeits his freedom,  
and returns to his prison.

Sometimes we don't believe the real thing is worth it. That life, with a capital L, is worth the journey. ...Worth the struggle, the wait, the sacrifice, the discipline, the changes, the letting go. That it's worth the giving up... the dying to self. All the things that Jesus calls us to like being pour in spirit... meek... peace making.

The illusion is easier, so we believe the illusion... it's a "sort-of-life." But according to Jesus, it isn't life. And that's what the gospel is about and what this text is about.

Jesus doesn't talk about getting into heaven here... but getting into life. Heaven may ultimately be a part of it but the word isn't even used here. It's LIFE. **“If you want to enter life.”**

Jesus doesn't say, "**Mind your Ps and Qs so you can get passed the Pearly Gates... walk on those Streets of Gold... and play on all those heavenly golf courses.**" (That is scriptural isn't?)

He does use the phrase, "**The kingdom of God,**" but he always said that was now... at hand... and within us. It's here... it's life and it's available. And he says in no uncertain terms that we don't want to miss it. "**It'd be better to enter life crippled.**" It's that good... we don't want to miss this and our sin... all those unChristlike instincts... are causing us to miss it.

It's so important and so worth it... that's why he uses such strong language. Jesus doesn't say, "**Hey Burt, you might want to think about learning some patience... working on that giving spirit some... maybe not thinking about yourself quite so much. Tweak that a little.**"

No... "**cut your hand off**" that's how important this is. Do something if it will lead you to life. This life is that great.

I know some of you are wondering, there in the pew, if I'm ever going to get to the "H Word." Jesus says the "H word." This is one of those tough texts where Jesus talks about Hell and fire and folks being tossed into the flames.

**I don't like these passages... Some preachers do. I don't, especially not when Jesus is involved.**

I tend to avoid them... but I shouldn't. I don't think this is so hard, really. God is inviting us to life... one way or another. We can respond to the invitation and get busy on our journey to freedom or we just fall asleep in the matrix of our sin, in which case God's going to use a little fire to wake us up.

Jesus says in our text, "**Everyone will be salted with fire.**" Ever put salt on a wound? Maybe one of those big strawberries you got sliding into second base? It burns like the dickens. But... It heals. Heat purifies. Fires burns away the chaff from the good grain. And the sin from my life.

It'd be easier if I'd take care of it myself... and choose to get rid of those things that stand in my way of the life God is leading me towards. But one way or another God wants to free me from my sin by fire if necessary... and lots of us know what that's like... it's hell.

And do notice, that the text doesn't say, "**God throws you in.**" You'll just be thrown in... probably by yourself into a hell of your own making.

Or maybe we're set free as we in love cooperate with God and develop some new habits... some Christlike instincts... loving impulses. So that our hands, rather than causing us to sin... reach out to bless. And our feet, rather than leading us astray... are walking us into the divine mystery. And our eyes? They're seeing the truth and the presence of God and the eternal now all around us... all the time.

This is not easy work... It's painful like amputation. It this takes time... a lifetime. But... we do have a friend in Christ who has shown us the way and who will walk beside us and lead us to life. We do not struggle alone in our sin. And we do not struggle in some desperate work to win God's approval. We struggle, we work, but we do so in grace. We work and we struggle to grow, but we do so by grace.

Trying to take hold of what has already been given. Trying to realize what we already are. "Who will save you from this body of death? Thanks be to God, it is our Lord Jesus Christ." Amen

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