

Mark 10:17–31, “The Eyes of Christ”  
10/17/21 21st Sunday after Pentecost  
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Mark 10:17–31 (NKJV)

<sup>17</sup> Now as He was going out on the road, one came running, knelt before Him, and asked Him, “Good Teacher, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?”

<sup>18</sup> So Jesus said to him, “Why do you call Me good? No one *is* good but One, *that is*, God.

<sup>19</sup> You know the commandments: ‘*Do not commit adultery,*’ ‘*Do not murder,*’ ‘*Do not steal,*’ ‘*Do not bear false witness,*’ ‘*Do not defraud,*’ ‘*Honor your father and your mother.*’ ”

<sup>20</sup> And he answered and said to Him, “Teacher, all these things I have kept from my youth.”

<sup>21</sup> Then Jesus, looking at him, loved him, and said to him, “One thing you lack: Go your way, sell whatever you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, take up the cross, and follow Me.”

<sup>22</sup> But he was sad at this word, and went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.

<sup>23</sup> Then Jesus looked around and said to His disciples, “How hard it is for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of God!” <sup>24</sup> And the disciples were astonished at His words. But Jesus answered again and said to them, “Children, how hard it is for those who trust in riches to enter the kingdom of God! <sup>25</sup> It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.”

<sup>26</sup> And they were greatly astonished, saying among themselves, “Who then can be saved?”

<sup>27</sup> But Jesus looked at them and said, “With men *it is* impossible, but not with God; for with God all things are possible.”

<sup>28</sup> Then Peter began to say to Him, “See, we have left all and followed You.”

<sup>29</sup> So Jesus answered and said, “Assuredly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My sake and the gospel’s, <sup>30</sup> who shall not receive a hundredfold now in this time—houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions—and in the age to come, eternal life. <sup>31</sup> But many *who are* first will be last, and the last first.”

Have you ever noticed Jesus’ eyes? There are a few times in the Gospels that Jesus makes eye contact with people in very meaningful ways. Here in Mark 10:21 there’s one that’s absolutely beautiful. There’s a man who wants to be saved but he’s not sure how to go about it, and the Bible says, “Then Jesus, looking at him, loved him.” Just imagine the creator of the universe, God in the flesh, Jesus Christ, looking at you with love in His eyes.

What kind of eyes does God have when He looks at you? During the benediction at the end of every service I say, “May the Lord lift up His countenance upon you and give you His peace.” What’s a countenance? It’s a facial expression. To have a lifted-up countenance is to have a smile on the face and love in the eyes. When Jesus looked at this wealthy fellow in Mark 10:21, the countenance of Jesus was lifted toward him.

How do you know God loves you and has a lifted-up countenance toward you? The evidence is the cross and the empty tomb, plus God’s Word of salvation going out to you and God baptizing you into Christ. He loves you so much that Jesus died for you. He loves you so much that He unites you with the crucified and risen Lord Jesus Christ through baptism and faith. Just as Jesus looked at the wealthy fellow with love in His eyes, He loves you too, and His countenance is lifted up toward you.

We are tempted to think that God might not love us, or that He put up with us for a while but now He’s done with us, or that God is like Mr. Potato Head and puts on His angry eyes when He looks at us. It’s true that God is just and holy, so we dare not think that we can go on sinning without consequence. His wrath and anger toward sin is justified. But it’s also true that He knows we are all sinners, and He paid the penalty of death for all sinners on the cross.

When it comes to this wealthy fellow that ran to Jesus on the road, knelt down before Him, and asked in Mark 10:17, “Good Teacher, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?”, Jesus, with love in His eyes, had the perfect things to say. Jesus said to him in verse 18, “Why do you call Me good? No one is good but One, that is, God.” I think Jesus’ goal with this answer is mostly to help the wealthy fellow realize that he should be humble and repentant before God no matter how good of a guy he judges himself to be.

Then Jesus lists some of the commandments which should always humble us since we have failed to perfectly keep the law in our hearts. But listen to the man’s response to Jesus listing off some of the commandments in Mark 10:19, Jesus said, “You know the commandments: ‘*Do not commit adultery,*’ ‘*Do not murder,*’ ‘*Do not steal,*’ ‘*Do not bear false witness,*’ ‘*Do not defraud,*’ ‘*Honor your father and your mother.*’” The man responds in verse 20, “Teacher, all these things I have kept from my youth.” He’s oblivious to his sin!

This wealthy fellow is pretty sure that he had perfectly kept God’s commands that day. Not only that but he had also been perfect the day before, and every day before that ever since his youth. I don’t think he’s trying to lie to Jesus, I think he honestly doesn’t think he’s a sinner.

There are two things that Jesus could do with His eyes at this point. Either roll them because he knows all people are sinners, including this man, or Jesus could look at the man with a kind-hearted love that desires him to repent and be saved. He does the second one.

Because He loves him, Jesus needs to help the man come to grips with the truth that he’s a sinner. If a man thinks he’s well, he won’t seek a physician. If he thinks he’s righteous and sinless, he won’t seek a savior. Remember, this man asked Jesus, “what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?” Jesus could have simply answered him with the thing He and John the Baptist had been preaching all along, “Repent and believe the gospel!” But since the man didn’t

see any sin in himself, he wouldn't have seen any need to repent. Since he thought he was doing so well following the law, he wouldn't have seen any need for the gospel good news of forgiveness.

What Jesus says next is meant to help the man see that he is guilty of the sin of idolatry. He is a wealthy fellow, but his wealth itself isn't the problem. The problem is that instead of him having wealth, his wealth has him. Instead of him having money and property, He has placed his trust in his money and property. Mark 10:21 says, “<sup>21</sup> Then Jesus, looking at him, loved him, and said to him, ‘One thing you lack: Go your way, sell whatever you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, take up the cross, and follow Me.’” <sup>22</sup> But he was sad at this word, and went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.”

Instead of loving God above all things, the man loved his stuff. Instead of fearing the holy God above all things, he feared losing his possessions. Instead of trusting in God to save and forgive and provide, he trusted in the security his wealth and possessions provided. He thought he had kept all the commandments, but he hadn't even kept the first one, “I am the Lord thy God, you shall have no other gods before Me.” What does that mean? “We should fear, love, and trust in God above all things.”

Now the man has been confronted with the sad fact that he is an idolator of money and possessions. Until now he had hardened his heart against the conviction of sin with an arrogant heart that was oblivious to guilt. But now he knows. Now instead of following Jesus he turns away, sorrowful, for he had great possessions. His heart is still hardened against repentance, but this time he proceeds knowingly in unrepentant sin, walking away from Jesus.

The commandments humble us so we repent. In repenting, we are asking for forgiveness for breaking God's commands, and we are believing in Jesus the savior who saves us. As forgiven people, the commandments are still God's will, but now they become a friendly guide as God is at work in us and through us to bear fruit in keeping with repentance.

However, this isn't how it goes for the wealthy fellow. He feels sad at the word which Christ has spoken, which is appropriate when we feel the conviction of the Holy Spirit, but instead of bringing this sadness to Jesus for forgiveness, he walks away. There are two kinds of sorrow that we can experience over our sin and the brokenness of the world: godly sorrow in which we turn to Christ; worldly sorrow in which we turn away from Christ.

The Apostle Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 7:10, “For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death.” The man asked how to be saved, so Jesus wanted him to experience a godly grief for loving his possessions more than he loved God. That godly grief would lead to repentance and salvation. Would he regret selling all that he had and following Jesus? No, Paul says it's a repentance that leads to salvation without regret. But with a hardened heart, the man grieved—he felt sorry—but with a worldly grief that Paul says, “produces death.”

Note that Jesus was not successful in bringing the man to repentance and faith, even though He said exactly the right things that the man needed to hear to be saved. We are not called

to be successful. We are called to be faithful. Sometimes your neighbors need to hear the law, other times they need to hear the gospel. When appropriate, share the law that repentance from sin is necessary. And when appropriate, share the gospel that God loves your neighbors and sent Jesus to die for them. Whether or not they repent is out of your hands.

If there is success and the person turns from sin and believes in Jesus then the Holy Spirit gets the credit for changing their heart. If there is what looks like failure and the person turns from Jesus and continues in sin, then it is the hardness of their hearts which is to blame. You are not called to be successful—only be faithful. The Lord Himself will work through the convicting word of law and the comforting word of gospel to accomplish what He intends to do.

But what if we are not the one calling others to repent, but we are the one being called to repent? If you are like me and everyone else in the congregation, then you daily need to repent. Our sinful nature clings to us and tempts us along with the world and the devil to turn away from Christ and to fear other things and to love and trust other things more than God.

So repent. If you hesitate, remember the eyes of Christ. He looks at you and loves you. He spoke those words of law to the wealthy man because he loved him and wanted him to repent and be saved. It is with that same kindness that He calls me to repent and you. Romans 2:4 says that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance. It says, "the goodness of God leads you to repentance."

Very briefly now, Jesus looks two other places. He first looked at the wealthy fellow and spoke a very specific word of law to him to convict his heart of a sin he had. Second, Jesus looks around and says a general truth. Third, He looks at His disciples and speaks a specific word of comfort.

Jesus might not be telling you to sell all you have and give it to the poor and take up your cross and follow Him. Or he might. That's a very specific word of law to combat a very specific form of idolatry: the idol of money and possessions. It is in essence the same as plucking out your eye or lopping off a limb if it causes you to sin. If your great possessions are causing you to sin like this wealthy man, sell them and give the money to the poor.

But then Jesus looks around and says a general truth, and this part definitely applies to us. In Mark 10:24 Jesus said, "Children, how hard it is for those who trust in riches to enter the kingdom of God! <sup>25</sup> It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.' <sup>26</sup> And they were greatly astonished, saying among themselves, 'Who then can be saved?' <sup>27</sup> But Jesus looked at them and said, 'With men *it is* impossible, but not with God; for with God all things are possible.'" This should serve for you and for me and for all humanity as a general warning about the love of stuff. Any stuff that you have is a blessing given to you from God. Don't make God's blessings into idols that you worship. Hold loosely to the material blessings of this life.

Jesus is making the point that if you have a lot of stuff, then you are more likely to trust in that stuff to provide for you than you are to trust in God to provide your daily bread. If you are

wealthy, you are less likely to see your need for help, and therefore less likely to see your need for a savior.

The disciples are flabbergasted at Jesus saying in general that it's hard for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of God. In the mind of many Jews of their day, there was the notion that if things go well for you in this life, it's because God is pleased with you. But if you're poor or sick or troubled, then God is displeased with you. That's false, by the way. But by their reasoning, if a person had great wealth, then it was a sure sign that God was pleased with them. Jesus contradicts that idea. God's blessings are not all material.

Though it is impossible for us by our own strength or deserving to enter God's kingdom, with God it is possible. By the powerful word of the cross we are saved. God's Word was powerful to create light when He said, "Let there be light." And His Word is powerful to save when He says, "Your sins are forgiven on account of Jesus Christ."

If our hearts are hardened like this poor wealthy fellow in Mark 10 then we'll say what sin? I don't have any need to repent! But if God's Word has its way with us He will draw us to a godly sorrow over sin to a repentance that leads to salvation without regret.

Finally Jesus turns His gaze towards His disciples to give a specific word of comfort to them. To the wealthy fellow He gave a word of law and command to humble him. Then His general statement was a warning to us all to not trust in riches. This final statement is one of comfort to you who are giving up worldly pleasures and worldly comfort as you follow Jesus and love your neighbor. It is not in vain that you make such sacrifices.

The disciples had left everything and followed Jesus. Jesus tells them in Mark 10:29, "Assuredly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My sake and the gospel's,<sup>30</sup> who shall not receive a hundredfold now in this time—houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions—and in the age to come, eternal life."<sup>31</sup> But many *who are* first will be last, and the last first." Jesus is giving this comfort: if your family rejects you because you are following Jesus, you have brothers and sisters and mothers and children in the family of God; if you lose your house and your possessions for His sake, the houses of all Christians are homes for you in the family of God.

As the eyes of Christ moved from the wealthy fellow to looking around and finally to His disciples, He said different statements that will apply to our hearts differently depending on what we are facing. But the eyes through which He looked were filled with love, and that does not change depending on what we face.

With love He calls us to repent. With love He forgives our sins through the Word of the cross. With love He comforts those who make sacrifices with the knowledge that these are not done in vain, but hold an eternal reward.

May the peace of God which surpasses all understanding guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen