

## **“The Look of Love”**

**Mark 10:17-31**

**April 28, 2024**

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### **INTRODUCTION:**

The central character of this story is commonly known as “the rich young ruler.” We learn from Mark only that he was rich. In Matthew’s account of this incident we learn that he was young (19:16-30) and in Luke that he was a ruler (18:18-30). It is likely that he was a member of the ruling class of Israel and a member of the Sanhedrin. In Jesus’ interaction with him, we read that the look on Jesus’ face communicated love. It was the look of love. Though everything about Jesus was filled with love for sinners, statements like this are very rare in the Gospel narratives. It is meant to be noticed. In last week’s sermon, we noted how everyone wants to be happy, and in this week’s sermon, we encounter yet another universal human desire. Everyone wants to be loved. Though he wasn’t aware of his central desire, the rich young ruler was looking for love as he stood before the one who alone could satisfy this desire. Tragically, he missed it. Lest we miss it too, let’s look more carefully at this story.

### **I. Looking for Love in All the Wrong Places – v. 17-22**

You may have heard the 1980 country song by this title. The artist, Johnny Lee, sang: “I was lookin' for love in all the wrong places, lookin' for love in too many faces, searchin' their eyes, lookin' for traces of what I'm dreaming of, hoping to find a friend and a lover. I'll bless the day I discover another heart lookin' for love.” Like the story before us today, those words end in disappointment of not finding what is being sought.

The rich young ruler runs up to Jesus as Jesus was departing on a journey and kneels before him. He had been running his whole life, chasing something that he never seemed to be able to find. His hope is that Jesus can help him find what he has been looking for. So he shows honor and deference to Jesus by kneeling before him. He asks, **“Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?”** Such a question indicates that he still had a sense that something was missing in his life, even though he had achieved what everyone in his day would have judged to be the epitome of success. Luke describes this man as *“extremely rich”* (18:23). Luke was not prone to exaggeration. He didn’t use words like *extremely* very often. For example, he reports earlier that after Jesus had fasted forty days in the wilderness, ‘he was hungry.’ If ever there was an occasion to throw in an adjective such as ‘extremely,’ that would have been it. So when he uses it here, describing this man as “extremely rich,” I think it safe to conclude that he was Bill Gates kind of rich. It says something

when those at the top still live with a deep sense of lack. It's like that old line of climbing the ladder of success, only to discover that your ladder has been leaning against the wrong wall. The British rock band, the Beatles, reached a level of popularity and fame that had previously been unknown by rock bands. But at the height of their popularity, they still craved something more. They believed that LSD could bring them what they were looking for, but they were tragically mistaken.

Jesus knows what is in the hearts of all people, and he begins to help this man by challenging his address to Jesus. **“Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone”** (v. 18). Of course, Jesus is God. He is not here renouncing his divinity but foreshadowing what he is about to ask him to do. He is about to ask him to give up everything and follow him, a demand appropriate to Jesus' divine identity. But then Jesus goes on to answer the question in a way that is curious to modern evangelicals. In answer to the question, “What must I do to inherit eternal life?” Jesus says essentially, “Obey the law.” Why doesn't he give an answer that is more akin to the apostle Paul, an answer like Paul states in Romans 4:5? **“And to the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness.”** It is true that all the Jewish rabbis of Jesus' day would have given an answer similar to this one from Jesus. “Obey God's commandments and avoid all sin and you will have eternal life.”

Let's try to clear up this matter by looking at the passage more carefully. Notice the wording of the rich young ruler's question. “What must I *do*...? In the rich young ruler, we have a man who had to have been a successful, hard-working man. Yet he still had a sense that something was missing even though he had been an effective task accomplisher all his life. He was troubled by a question most of us are asking ourselves. “Am I enough?” Are you troubled by that question? Perhaps you have labored and achieved great success at something, but you still are plagued by a feeling that it's not enough, that you're not enough. This nagging feeling keeps you from ever feeling like you can rest. You never enjoy that feeling of being complete. Perhaps it causes you to volunteer for too much at church, or maybe it produces in you the opposite problem of never volunteering for anything out of a fear that doing so will keep you from accomplishing the things that will finally help you feel like you're enough. I once knew a man who ran everywhere in order to get more done and be more efficient with his use of time. He would run in parking lots to get from his car to his destination or vice versa. I imagine the rich young ruler was like that, since we see him running to Jesus in the first line of the story.

Jesus leads this young man down a path that at first seems to affirm his strategy. Jesus tells him to keep the commandments he knows to keep. He then names commandments that are from the second half of the Ten Commandments, commands dealing with our love for others. The command

not to defraud is an application of the commandment against stealing and lying. The man replies, **“Teacher, all these I have kept from my youth”** (v. 20). It’s a bit of a mild rebuke to Jesus. In other words, he is telling Jesus, “I’ve tried that and succeeded at it, but it’s still not working.”

This is when we read of Jesus looking at him and loving him. As pointed out earlier, this is an unusual statement. Someone noticed the look in Jesus’ eyes, a look that communicated clearly the love Jesus felt for this man. In love, he speaks these words: **“You lack one thing.”** I imagine the young man’s hopes being raised at this point. “Finally, someone is going to tell me of the one thing I need to do that will fill this sense of emptiness deep in my heart. Finally, I will know that I’ve done enough.” But Jesus’ next sentence extinguishes all such hope. **“Go, sell all that you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me”** (v. 21).

Are we to understand this to be Jesus’ prescription for everyone? Does being a follower of Christ require the liquidation of all our assets and then giving away those assets to the poor? Clearly not. There are other rich people in the New Testament who are not told to do this. In Jesus’ interactions with another rich man, the tax collector Zacchaeus, the same demand is not made of him. Zacchaeus does end up giving half his goods to the poor, as well as repaying fourfold anyone he had defrauded. But he doesn’t impoverish himself, as Jesus asked the rich young ruler to do, and still Jesus says of him, **“Today salvation has come to this house”** (Luke 19:9). What’s more, if every follower of Jesus were required to do this, we would all be poor with no Christians left to relieve such poverty.

Even though giving away all our assets is not a universal requirement for being a follower of Christ, there is a universal requirement that can be found here. It is the one you have heard me mention many times. We must change our central mindset from achieving to receiving. The rich young ruler was troubled by the doubt that he was not enough, no matter how successful he was, because he had the wrong view of success. Success in biblical terms is not defined by how much we achieve, but in dependence on Christ. It is seen in moving from the question, “Am I enough,” to the realization that Jesus is enough.

This realization that Jesus is enough could come to this man only by giving up the success that was so precious to him. He would no longer have to prove himself worthy of being loved. Instead, he would find himself with nothing to offer of the currency that had once dominated his life. He would be like the tax collector who goes into the temple in the agony of a guilty conscience. He is unable to offer God anything other than his neediness, as he prays, **“God be merciful to me, a sinner”** (Luke 18:13). He would be like the children in the

passage just before this one, the ones of whom Jesus said, **“Whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it”** (Mark 10:15).

Is there something in your life you can't imagine living without? It may be money, health, the approval of certain people, a spouse, or any number of things. Jesus is here inviting us to imagine what it would be like to live without that and find him enough. He is saying this to us, just as he did to this rich young ruler, out of a heart of love. He is looking at us now with a look of love and saying, “I want to be with you and I want you to be with me.” Jesus is inviting us to live without a net, and find in him more than anything we ever imagined possible.

## **II. Finding Love in the One Right Place – v. 23-31**

After the rich young ruler walked away from Jesus' invitation, Jesus took the opportunity to instruct the disciples on what they had just witnessed. He said, **“How difficult it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!”** (v. 23). The disciples were shocked at this pronouncement. There has always been something of the heresy of prosperity theology among God's people, the idea that godliness and righteousness leads to earthly riches. So Jesus repeats himself again, declaring that wealth is an obstacle to a godly life. Jesus then adds a colorful image to his claim. **“It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God.”** Some have attempted to soften the force of this by saying that there was a gate in the city wall of Jerusalem that was known as “the eye of the needle” because of its small size. A camel could fit through such an opening, but only with great effort. Jesus would then be saying, “It's possible, but not easy, for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven.” Clearly, based on the next part of the dialogue, that is not what Jesus' disciples understood him to be saying. They ask, **“Then who can be saved?”** We then read these glorious words from Jesus. **“With man it is impossible, but not with God. For all things are possible with God”** (v. 27).

I asked you earlier to think about something you just can't imagine living without, just as the rich young ruler couldn't imagine living without his wealth and influence. Perhaps he was fearful that the loss of his money would expose his relational poverty. Perhaps he feared that he would be all alone if he were just another poor man in a nation of poor men. If coming to receive the love of Jesus requires giving up his wealth and power, how could he possibly do this? He could not, and neither can you or I. “With man it is impossible.” But then receive those wonderful words from Jesus. “All things are possible with God.” This means that you can be released from the fear of losing that thing, whatever it is. We are talking about the God who caused 90-year-old Sarah,

Abraham's wife, to conceive. This is the God who raised the dead and who parted the Red Sea for Israel to pass safely through.

Jesus then sweetens this whole process of receiving his love by talking about the rewards of giving up all to receive him. **“Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands, for my sake and for the gospel, who will 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.”** Note that the reward isn't just in the next life, but in this one. And it is a hundredfold what was given up. Had the rich young ruler done what Jesus invited him to do, his life would have been enriched and not impoverished. There would have been no regrets, but only gratitude to God. Such is the case with us all.

How should we understand Jesus' promise here that in this life we will receive a hundredfold of anything we have given up for his sake, even houses, family and lands? It seems to me that he is referring to the family of God. This is a reference to the church and its value. When we follow Jesus, we become such a close family that we gain brothers, sisters, mothers and fathers of all who also follow Jesus. And the generosity of our brothers and sisters in God's family means that there is sharing between us. And then Jesus ends by promising the very thing that the rich young ruler had asked about, eternal life. We will also have, in the age to come, eternal life.

## **CONCLUSION:**

What Jesus asks the rich young ruler to do, he has done himself. Jesus is the ultimate rich young ruler. He too is young, and he too has been rich. He enjoyed riches far greater than any earthly riches, enjoying the glories of heaven and life within the riches of the Trinity. But he left it all and became a poor man. He went into a poverty greater than any of us could even imagine, becoming sin for us. Had the rich young ruler of our passage done what Jesus asked him to do, there would have been some poor people experiencing much-needed relief from their painful poverty. How much more so with Jesus! Through his poverty we have been made rich. We can now be delivered from the emptiness of always feeling that we're not enough. Jesus is enough, and he has loved us and made us his own.