

## Looking at Him, Jesus Loved Him

Mark 10:17-22

Trinity Lutheran – Kearney, Missouri

October 11, 2009 – Nineteenth Sunday After Pentecost



Grace to you and peace, from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. In today's Gospel, Mark recounts for us a familiar story. It's a variation of a story Matthew told before him, but Mark has added a detail Matthew neglected to mention – a detail that's probably rather important, if you think about it. Of course you're all familiar with the basics of the story. It's about a rich young man who comes to Jesus asking what he has to do to be saved. And when Jesus reminds him that he already knows what the requirements are for those who desire to save themselves, this particular young man responded, saying: "Teacher, all these I have kept from my youth." And it's precisely at this point where Mark – and Mark alone – tells us what Jesus attitude was toward this strong-willed, foolish young man: "Jesus, looking at him, loved him."

Every student of the Small Catechism ought to have learned at least a little bit about the differences between God's Law and His Gospel. But if you'll indulge me for just a moment, I'd like to just give us all a brief overview of these two doctrines, starting with the Gospel. The Gospel is nothing more nor less than a clear, simple expression of God the Father's overflowing, abundant love *for you* – despite the fact that none of us deserve such love from Him. The Gospel does more than just tell the story about how God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, for the Gospel wants you to know and never doubt that Jesus was given over unto death *for you*. Stated another way, the Gospel is not quite so concerned with the forgiveness of sins *in general* as it is with *you* hearing and believing that Jesus has forgiven your sins *in particular*. The Gospel wants *you* to know that *you* are the one for whom Christ died – that *you* are the one whose eternal life was guaranteed in Christ's resurrection – that *you* are the one to whom Jesus spoke His promise at your Baptism: namely that He would be with you always, even to the very end of the age. The Gospel then, can be boiled down to four syllables: God's love *for you!*

Now for the Law. Usually people don't speak in such glowing terms about the Law. Where most see the Gospel as *the* expression of God's love *for* you, they see the Law as God placing His demands *on* you. God's Law often sends your life in a direction you might not want to go. The Law tells you what you must and must not do, the ways you must and must not speak, even the sorts of thoughts and desires you may or may not entertain. The Law is full of wrath. The Law is filled with God's judgment. The Law is condemning, damning and disheartening. In short, the Law most certainly doesn't often sound much like an expression of God's love. But we must be careful not to mistakenly think thusly about God's Law. We dare not fall into the trap of thinking that only the Gospel speaks of God's love – and that the Law does not. To the contrary, the Law most certainly also speaks of our heavenly Father's love toward you! You need to know that the Law is as much a reflection of God's love as the Gospel. As He does with the Gospel, God also speaks His Law to you because He loves you – and because He wants you to be with Him forever.

Consider again the rich young man's reply to Jesus: "Teacher," he said, "all these I have kept from my youth." It was then that Jesus, looking at him, loved him, and said: "You lack one thing, go, sell all you have and give to the poor." Now you might be wondering how it is that Jesus loved this man by telling him to sell everything he owned and give it to the poor. Did you ever think that perhaps Jesus spoke thusly to this man in order to pry his fingers off of those useless things he loved and trusted most? Jesus wanted him to stop worshipping his false, lifeless god – a god which would only lead him to death and the grave. This man was happy to call Jesus "Good Teacher," but entirely unwilling to call Him Lord and God – because he already had a lord and god in his money and possessions – a god he had no desire to abandon! That was why, disheartened by Jesus' words, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions which mattered more than God.

Do you remember earlier when Mark told us the story about how Jesus fed five thousand men with some loaves and fishes – especially how that story began? When Jesus went ashore He saw a great crowd, and He had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. Well, that same compassion is again the motivator in today’s Gospel, but for a different reason. This rich young man, unlike the others, wasn’t feeling harassed or helpless, but instead, safe and secure in his riches – indeed, falsely safe and secure. He wasn’t like a sheep without a shepherd, but rather confident in who *he* was, what *he* desired, and where *he* wanted to be. In the feeding of the five thousand, Jesus’ compassion is what moved Him to teach the crowds many things, but in today’s Gospel His compassion is what moved Jesus to kick this rich young man in the pants – and that’s the Law. Either way, His great compassion put God’s love into action. And so, like the Gospel, you can likewise boil the entire Law down to four syllables: God’s love *for you*.

“Jesus, looking at him, loved him.” *Whack!* Jesus, looking at you, likewise loves you personally and individually – and sometimes you and I need God’s love to come to us in, shall we say, some rather uncomfortable ways. We need Jesus to condemn our sin and rebellion in the Ten Commandments so that we won’t continue running after the impulses of our fleshly desires – leaving Jesus the same way the rich young man left Him in today’s Gospel. We need the Holy Spirit to press the heavy weight of regret upon our consciences, so that we will be discontented by every consolation except for that which God the Father gives us in His Gospel. And we sometimes even need some lousy experiences or some great misfortune – hopefully not too many of them, but enough to get the job done – because without the harsh conditions of life, we would all too easily become satisfied with this crummy world we live in and soon forget the promise God spoke to us concerning the resurrection and the life which is to come.

“Jesus, looking at him, loved him,” and said to him: “You lack one thing: go, sell all that you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven – and come, follow Me.” Disheartened by these words, the rich, young man went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions. Dear saints of God, whatever demand our Lord Jesus makes upon you, He makes on account of His great love and mercy toward you. When Jesus tells you that you need to listen to the Ten Commandments – and to order your life according to them – make every effort to hear and obey what He says. For these commandments are nothing less than the shape of the life God has created for you to live, as He orders your days and deeds in His peace.

When Jesus demands certain things of you – be it your possessions, your loved ones, or even your own life – at the end of your days give it to Him gladly. After all, we know from God’s Word that there’s nothing our Lord will take away from you that He cannot return tenfold. Indeed, Jesus Himself once said: “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 . . . and in the age to come, eternal life.” When Jesus speaks His Law to you in any way, hear in and under the harshness of that Law the tender voice of His great love for you. For where the Law is, you may be sure that the Gospel is never far away. In either case, our Lord knows exactly what you need, and He will never fail to give you your full share. Even when He speaks harshly to you, that’s much better than Him not speaking at all. In many and various ways God spoke in ancient times to the fathers by the prophets, but here in these last days, He has spoken to us through His Son – and where His Son is, there also is forgiveness and life. Amen.

And now that peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep your hearts and minds in that one true faith in Christ Jesus, unto life everlasting. Amen.