***Grace to the humble, Opposition to the Proud -Mark 10:13-31***

Derek Berry
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*[What follows is the transcript of a sermon. It was originally intended to be heard, not read, so the tone is more conversational than academic. It has only been loosely edited, so forgive any grammatical, syntactical, or spelling errors. If you have questions, please get in touch with Pastor Derek at dberry@calvarybaptistsc.church.]*

Take your copy of God’s Word and meet me in Mark 10:13…

I think many of us will admit that the approach one takes to make a request from an authoritative figure can determine whether or not their wish is granted. Parents can probably relate to this the most. When Neriah demands something from me, she gets a very different answer from when she nicely asks me with her goo-goo eyes. Unfortunately, I think she’s caught on to this. But my authority and ability to grant her request don't change in either instance. My hands aren’t tied in either situation; I’ve chosen to respond to one disposition, not the other.

This gets at a biblical principle we see time and time in the Scriptures, and James spells it out for us in his epistle. God gives grace to the humble and opposes the proud. In other words, those who approach God with a contrite spirit are met with open arms. And those who pridefully believe they have what it takes to stand before God while simultaneously refusing to untie themselves from sin are met with opposition.

In our text this morning, we find these two contrasting ways of approaching the Lord Jesus. Mark lays out a clear juxtaposition between helpless dependency and prideful reluctance. We’ll consider our text in three points this morning:

1. The humble child

2. The prideful rich

3. The great exchange

Let’s start by rereading verses 13-14. The same word Mark uses for a child here is also used in the Greek OT when referring to a twelve-year-old. However, the word is also used to reference infants. So, although we don’t get the exact ages of the children, this most likely involves kids from anywhere from infants to twelve-year-olds. So, the parents hope to present their children to Jesus so that he’ll bless them, which is different from healing. We see this quite often in the Old Testament. Case in point: Israel places his hands on Joseph’s two sons and blesses them. These parents, recognizing someone greater than Jacob is in their midst, would like for him to bless their children.

However, they’re met with hostility from the disciples. We don’t know why. Perhaps they’re once again drawing too small of a circle for Jesus’ in crowd as they did in chapter nine. Or maybe they just don’t want their teacher distracted by a bunch of rowdy kids. Whatever the reason, Jesus informs them that they’re wrong! As a matter of fact, he becomes indignant.

This is the only time Jesus is said to be “indignant” in all four gospels. And a person’s indignation always reveals their passion and love, especially if they’re known for their gentleness. So, on full display is Jesus’ unique affection and compassion for vulnerable children. In a time when children were not celebrated, Jesus openly affirms that children are worth his time and should be worth ours as well!

In Jesus’ day, sometimes children were loved, and other times they were exploited. It all depended upon how they were perceived as benefitting the family. That was the known and accepted culture of Jesus’ day. Infanticide was a typical practice of the day. History tells us that a father of a family could have his child put to death by a simple order up until AD 60. And infanticide itself wasn’t outlawed in Roman law until AD 375. And, of course, we read of Herod’s order to slaughter all children two years and under. There are a plethora of other examples to show that children were far from prized in this Greco-Roman culture.

Our culture is not much different. There’s a trend on Twitter at that moment called Dink’s. I had never heard of this phrase prior to this past week, but apparently, it’s been picking up steam. It stands for Dual Income No Kids couples. In these videos, the couple go back and forth about the advantage of not having children.

“We’re dinks, of course, we’re going to go eat out every night after work. We don’t have to ask our parents for financial help or to watch our kids when we want to go out. We’re going to go to Costco and buy all the snacks that we want. We have disposable income to spend on whatever we like that we don’t have to spend on a kid. I’m going to go to every football game and play golf whenever I want.”

I hope you see how children are viewed as an inconvenience and nothing more. This is the spirit of the age. And, of course, society’s disdain for vulnerable children is most frequently seen through abortion, where the worth of a child is not intrinsic to their humanity; it’s based on whether or not their parents desire to raise them. So, both in our culture and in Jesus’ day, children were viewed as less than.

However, the Bible gives a much less bleak presentation and outlook on children. I just read Psalm 127 this past week.

***3*** *Behold, children are a heritage from the Lord, the fruit of the womb a reward.* ***4*** *Like arrows in the hand of a warrior are the childrenof one's youth.* ***5*** *Blessed is the man who fills his quiver with them! He shall not be put to shame when he speaks with his enemies in the gate. -Psalm 127:3-5*

Far from an inconvenience, children are blessings. And being the God of the OT, Jesus embodies this disposition towards children. One scholar informs his readers that you’d have difficulty finding in ancient literature concern for children comparable to that shown by Jesus. Princeton theologian B.B. Warfield once stated, “Childhood owed as much to the gospel as womanhood.” In other words, much like the unique elevation that Jesus provided women through his interactions with them, he similarly elevates children through his earthly ministry.

This should translate to the church and how we protect and value children. We’re in an age where the world wants to indoctrinate children with godless ideologies. The world knows that young children are impressionable; therefore, more and more cartoons and messages are aimed to pervert their minds. To the best of our ability, we should protect our children from these demonic messages, and we should speak of voiceless children who are being slaughtered in their mother’s wombs. I pray that as a church, we’d be known for caring and affection for children in reflecting the Lord Jesus. Let’s reread verses 15-16.

Two points I’d like to consider here. First, God saves children with the gospel. I know this may seem rudimentary, but it bears saying. God saves young children with the gospel. And this points to the simplicity of the gospel message. Therefore, we should be evangelizing our kids. Don’t think yourself above teaching children the gospel. Charles Spurgeon once said:

“I will say broadly that I have more confidence in the spiritual life of the children that I have received into this church than I have in the spiritual condition of the adults thus received. I will go even further than that, and say that I have usually found a clearer knowledge of the gospel and a warmer love to Christ in the child-converts than in the man-converts. I will even astonish you still more by saying that I have sometimes met with a deeper spiritual experience in children of ten and twelve than I have in certain persons of fifty and sixty.”

Preach and pray for the conversion of children. Secondly, what does Jesus mean by verse 15? In other words, what characteristic is Jesus appealing to in children that results in possessing the kingdom of God? Because there’s something about a child that’s essential for entrance into the kingdom. Well, I don’t think Jesus is referring to innocence or purity because, technically, children inherit the sin of Adam and, therefore, possess a sin nature from birth. What Jesus has in mind is an objective state that every child has experienced, especially in this culture, and that’s helpless dependence. Children are aware that they are at the bottom of the social ladder and have nothing to offer Christ. They are absolutely, completely, totally, objectively helpless! Therefore, they must rely on others to meet their needs. They have no clout or standing because their hands are empty. And so is the requirement to enter the kingdom of God, as the beatitudes state. Have you come to him in this way this morning? If you go to him this way, he will hold you in his arms, and you’ll hear him pronounce a blessing over you as well. Or does the rich young ruler better describe you? This leads us to our second point this morning.

Let’s reread verses 17-18.

This text reveals that the man who approached Jesus had great wealth. Luke calls him a ruler, and Matthew says he’s young, hence the title of “rich young ruler.” Consider his question, “What must I do to inherit eternal life?” Any devout Jew would have known the answer to this question. This was a reoccurring subject that the rabbis and scholars of Jesus’ day would have spoken and written on. The answer everyone would have given was, “Obey the statues of God and avoid sin.” So, if this was common knowledge, why would this question be posed to Jesus? This rich young ruler most likely understood that something was missing. As we’ll consider soon, he felt like he had done all that was asked of him in the law, yet he probably sensed that a piece of the puzzle was missing. And he was right.

In verse 18, Jesus challenges the young man’s understanding of the concept of goodness. The Hebrew Bible would use this term of others in a derivative or qualified sense, but only God is good in the absolute sense of the word. Contrary to the belief of some, Jesus is not denying his divinity in this text. He’s simply saying, “Do you realize what you’re calling me when you say that I’m good!” As we’ve studied the book of Mark, we’ve seen that Jesus is indeed good because he is indeed God. However, the rich young ruler would use this term too loosely. Not only did he view Jesus as good, but he viewed himself as good also. And that’s what we’ll see as we continue to read verses 19-22.

This man had two problems. First, he didn’t recognize his own sinfulness. What is Jesus doing here in verse 19? One may surmise that he’s teaching a salvation by works. Think about it. When asked what to do to inherit the kingdom, Jesus points to the second table of the law. But if we dig deeper, we’ll see exactly what Jesus is doing. He’s utilizing the law of God to expose this man’s sin. Now, technically, he’s correct. If someone were to keep the law of God perfectly from birth, he would be allowed entrance into heaven based on his works. And in that case, it’s not faith that saves; instead, it’s the works of the individual.

***12*** *But the law is not of faith, rather “The one who does them shall live by them.” -Galatians 3:12*

In other words, for the one who keeps the law perfectly, it’s not faith that saves him. The problem is that all of humanity has inherited a sinful nature from Adam that bans us from being able to keep the law. So then, what is the purpose of the law? There are several, but we’ll deal with one this morning.

***19*** *Why then the law? It was added because of transgressions, until the offspring should come to whom the promise had been made, and it was put in place through angels by an intermediary…* ***21*** *Is the law then contrary to the promises of God? Certainly not! For if a law had been given that could give life, then righteousness would indeed be by the law.* ***22*** *But the Scripture imprisoned everything under sin, so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe. -Galatians 3:19, 21-22*

***20*** *Now the law came in to increase the trespass…-Romans 5:20*

So, the purpose of the law is to reveal sin as sin. It is like the light that shines through the window to reveal the filthy room that you thought was so clean.

***7*** *What then shall we say? That the law is sin? By no means! Yet if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin. For I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, “You shall not covet.”* ***8*** *But sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, produced in me all kinds of covetousness. For apart from the law, sin lies dead.-Romans 7:7-8*

No one who takes a look at the law and then makes an honest assessment of themselves walks away feeling good about themselves. You may think you’re a good basketball player, but not when compared to Lebron James. You may think you’re a good brawler, but not so compared to Mike Tyson. You may think you’re a good person, but not so when compared to the law that reveals God’s holiness.

Especially when we consider the spirit of the law, as Jesus reveals in the NT, lust is adultery of the heart, anger without reason is murder, coveting is idolatry, and that’s just three of them. And the logic of the NT is that if you’ve broken one, you’ve broken them all.

***10*** *For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, “Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them.” -Galatians 3:10*

***10*** *For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become guilty of all of it.* ***11*** *For he who said, “Do not commit adultery,” also said, “Do not murder.” If you do not commit adultery but do murder, you have become a transgressor of the law. -James 2:10-11*

That’s because the same God made all the commands, and to break one is to disrespect God completely. So what is Jesus doing here? He’s trying to get this young man to see that he’s not good. That he falls short. That he’s in need of grace. He wants to change his disposition of pride to that of humble trust, like that of a child.

***24*** *Therefore the Law has become our guardian to lead us to Christ, so that we may be justified by faith. -Galatians 3:24*

This is a master class in evangelism by the way that we should be employing in our everyday evangelism. The average person you come in contact with believes that they're good enough to get themselves into heaven. Like Jesus, we should be utilizing the law to show people their sin and their great need for a savior.

Charles Spurgeon quoting a street preacher said, **"It is of no use trying to sew with the silken thread of the gospel unless we pierce a way for it with the sharp needle of the law."** The law goes first, like the needle, and draws the gospel thread after it: therefore preach concerning sin, righteousness, and judgement to come. Let such language as that of the fifty first Psalm be explained: show that God requireth truth in the inward parts, and that purging with sacrificial blood is absolutely needful. Aim at the heart. Probe the wound and touch the very quick of the soul. Spare not the sterner themes, for men must be wounded before they can be healed, and slain before they can be made alive. No man will ever put on the robe of Christ's righteousness till he is stripped of his fig leaves, nor will he wash in the fount of mercy till he perceives his filthiness. Therefore, my brethren, we must not cease to declare the law, its demands, its threatenings, and the sinner's multiplied breaches of it."

But, of course, not everyone is humbled by the law. We see the young man’s response in verse 20. So, Jesus personalizes the first commandment in verse 21. So, he’s continuing to show this man his sin. Verses 21-22 reveal two things. First, that repentance is essential for salvation. Jesus could have just said, “No, really, all you have to do is believe.” But any faith or belief that lacks repentance is not a salvific type of faith. It can’t save, which is James’ point. This man must repent of his greater love for riches than God. Another critical element we need not jettison in our evangelistic efforts.

The second thing this reveals is our second subpoint. Remember, the first was that he didn’t recognize his own sinfulness. The second problem is that he valued his riches above Christ.

Tim Keller makes a great point about verse 22. He went away “sorrowful,” the text says. There’s a place where the same Greek word is applied to Jesus. Matthew records that Jesus started to sweat blood as he grieved in deep distress. Why? He knew he was about to be shaken to his core as he was about to experience wrath from the one from whom he had received nothing but joy for all eternity—the one who is the core of his identity. When Jesus called this man to give up his money, he grieved because money was for him what the Father was to Jesus. It was the center of his identity. To lose his money would have been to lose himself, which he wasn’t willing to do.

Little did he realize Jesus could relate to this man. About this time in his ministry, Jesus would have been in his early thirties. Jesus, too, was a rich man, far more prosperous than this ruler could ever imagine. However, he left that wealth behind to obey his father and for the love of his people.

***9*** *For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, so that you through His poverty might become rich. -2 Corinthians 8:9*

So, Jesus is the true rich ruler who has given away his wealth. And now he demands the same from this man. However, this man appraised the things of this world as much more valuable than the eternal life offered by the Son. This leads Jesus to say what he does in verses 23-25.

So, Jesus uses this metaphoric hyperbolic illustration to make a point. It’s important to understand that it’s hyperbole, lest you believe he’s saying no rich person can enter the kingdom like no camel can enter the eye of a needle. His literary saying is meant to highlight the stumbling block of riches because there are disadvantages to being wealthy. But first, to be clear, Jesus is not recommending poverty to his people because poverty doesn’t deliver one from the love of money either. As one preacher put it, “It is not the rich man only who is under the dominion of things; they too are slaves who, having no money, are unhappy for the lack of it…The money the one has, the money the other would have, is in each the cause of an eternal stupidity.”

With that said, wealth can be particularly dangerous. The Scriptures often paint the wealthy as those who are underprivileged and not overprivileged. He makes clear that no one can serve two masters. Remember the parable of the rich man and Lazarus and the parable of the rich fool. Wealth can do two things that are detrimental to the soul. First, wealth can numb one to the idea of being helplessly dependent upon something or someone else. Meanwhile, the poor are naturally in that position of knowing what it means to need a handout to make it. And without the spiritually impoverished disposition verses 13-16 refer to, entering the kingdom is impossible. It reminds me of what the Lord Jesus said to the church in Revelation.

***17*** *Because you say, “I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have no need of anything,” and you do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked…-Revelation 3:17*

Secondly, consider what wealth can do to the soul. We can become so attached to it and what it offers that it becomes infinitely more important than anything else. It can so easily pervert our values, which is why Jesus says we cannot serve both God and money. And it would be easy to think this only applies to the extra rich among us. But considering the rest of the world and history, this text certainly has something to say to us. What we do with our finances reveals what’s inside our hearts.

To remain helplessly dependent on Jesus and his grace, we must remain free from the love of money—just a few questions to consider for introspection. Can you give away large amounts of money? Are you stressed or worried when you have less than you’re accustomed to having? Does it get under your skin when you see people more well-off than you? The love of money can creep in undetected.

Consider the question in verse 26. Why ask this? Well, Judaism was guilty of its own “prosperity theology.” In their minds, wealth and riches were seen as evidence of God’s favor. Therefore, they’re thinking, if it’s hard for the person with God’s favor to be saved, what does it say about the rest of us? This is why Jesus corrects their poor theology to show them that wealth can actually build a barrier between them and God. Consider his words in verse 27. For man, it’s impossible for anyone to be saved, both poor and rich alike. It must be God who does the work in hearts for salvation. There’s another important tip for evangelism.

For our final point, let’s reread verses 28-31. These last verses stand in sharp contrast to the rich man's actions. We know from the gospels that Peter and Andrew still owned a home and a boat, so it’s not like they literally don’t own anything. However, their commitment to Jesus was total. They went where he said to go. Therefore, he gave them a sweet assurance that the rich young ruler was missing out on. Let me close with the words of John Piper regarding this passage.

“This text does not mean that you get materially rich by becoming a missionary-at least not in the sense that your own private possessions increase. It means mainly that if you are deprived of your earthly family in the service of Christ, it will be made up a hundredfold in your spiritual family, the church. But even this may be too limiting. What about the lonely missionaries who labor for years without being surrounded by hundreds of sisters and brothers and mothers and children in the faith? Is the promise not true for them? Surely it is.

Surely what Christ means is that *he himself makes up for every loss.* If you give up a mother’s nearby affection and concern, you can get back one hundred times the affection and concern from the ever-present Christ. If you give you give up the warm comradeship of a brother, you get back a hundred times the warmth and camaraderie from Christ. If you give up the sense of at-homeness you had in your house, you get back one hundred times the comfort and security of knowing that your Lord owns every house and land and stream and tree on earth. Isn’t that what Jesus is saying to prospective missionaries just this: I promise to work for you and be for you so much that you will not be able to speak of having sacrificed anything. That’s the way Hudson Taylor took it, because at the end of his 50 years of missionary labor in China, he said, “I never made a sacrifice.’”

So, leave a little and get a lot. Let’s pray.