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With God All Things Are Possible
Mark 10:13-31

Please open your Bibles once again at Mark 10:13-31 and then bow your heads with me as we pray together...

“Spirit of God, we pray that You would continue Your work as the Other Counselor like Christ, by taking what is Christ’s and making it known to us tonight by illumining our understanding as we sit under the ministry of Your Word. We pray, Spirit of wisdom and understanding, that You would enlighten our minds in the knowledge of Christ and draw us again to Him, and away from riches and worldly comforts. We pray that we might hear in the preaching of the gospel the call of the Father who draws us out of death to newness of life. For Christ’s sake we pray, Amen.”

Tonight we are going to deal with one of the most unpopular and dangerous ideas of our time. We are going to talk about drawing lines. We are going to talk about defining boundaries. We are talking about deciding who’s in and who’s out. Nobody likes to be excluded. It is politically incorrect to exclude. We have been taught that we all *deserve* inclusion. To draw boundary lines and exclude people who do not conform to those boundaries is a deeply, deeply unpopular concept today. If you insist on drawing lines, you will make people mad.

Well, in Mark 10:13-31, Jesus draws some lines. He establishes boundaries. He talks about who is in and who is out and what the difference is. Would you look at the passage with me, please?

In the first story, in verses 13-16, the disciples consider the little children to be *out*. Some of Jesus’ hearers bring Him their babies and infants and toddlers for a blessing, and the disciples—like many today still—think there is no place in the kingdom and no grace from God for such as these. The disciples draw a boundary line. They exclude the little children.

Jesus, however, is angry at their error, verse 14, and He rebukes them saying, “Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the Kingdom of God.” And verse 16 tells us that these little children do, in fact, receive Christ’s benediction.

In contrast to the disciple's perspective, excluding children, Jesus *includes* them. He blesses them.

And then He draws a principle from that. He uses them as an example for the disciples themselves. Jesus redraws the boundary lines, do you see? Look where *He* draws them. The first clue is there again in verse 14. "Of such is the Kingdom of God." The Kingdom of God belongs to people like these little children.

And verse 15 makes His point clearer still, "Assuredly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, will by no means enter it." Do you see where *Jesus* draws the boundary? He wants the disciples to understand that far from little children's being excluded, they actually provide the model of real discipleship—not that we should be *childish*—but that we should be *child-like*.

The implicit trust, the dependence, the simple, unadorned confidence towards Christ that these children display as they squirmed happily in His arms, *that* is to be the model that the mature disciples are to imitate. They are to give up their attempts at seeming sophistication and make certain that they grasp how simple the gospel really is.

And this is crucial for us to see if we are going to understand the rest of the passage. The gospel is as simple as a little toddler trusting Jesus to pick Him up, hold him in His arms, put his hand on His head and bless Him. Saving faith, faith that *receives* the Kingdom of God here and now and that *enters* the Kingdom of God hereafter, when it comes in judgment-day fullness, such faith, is not a complex thing. It is child like. It is so simple. You trust Christ. He will save you. *Faith* is where Jesus draws the boundary lines. Without it you will be excluded from the kingdom. You will neither receive it nor enter it. Faith alone, simple, unadorned, childlike, dependant, trust in just Jesus, saves. That is the gospel. That is where Jesus draws His boundary lines. Do you look to Him with a trust that simple?

The next story is another example of wrongly drawn boundaries. Look at verses 17-22 with me, please.

Jesus puts down the smiling children, and while they run back to their parents, a young man comes running over and throws himself down at Jesus' feet. "Good teacher" he asks, "What shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?"

You see his concern? It's a good question, don't you think? It's certainly one we all ought to be asking of Jesus Christ. What must I do to be saved? If you have *never*

thought to ask that question, it may be because of sheer presumption on your part. Perhaps you've never stopped to think that being saved was something you *needed* until now. Perhaps like this young man, you must come running to Jesus, too.

But look at Jesus' response to him. It begins with a challenge. This young man calls Jesus "good," as a kind of throw-away complement, I suppose, rather than as a serious confession of deep conviction about Christ. His grasp of what it meant for Jesus to *be* good is seriously lacking. It is shallow and superficial, and it indicates, as we'll see, that this young man has been drawing the boundaries *for himself*, and in such a way that they *include* him, all too easily. And so Jesus points him back to God as the one whose character establishes the *definition* of good, whose own goodness determines where the boundaries fall.

Now his *was* a true statement, of course. Jesus *was* good, in the same ways as God is good. And some commentators have, therefore, found an implicit claim to deity here, on Christ's part. Only God is good, and unless you are calling me God then by definition, I cannot be good.

But the point this young man needed to see is not so much a point about *Jesus*—His deity and so on, as it about *Himself—His own spiritual condition*. He has subtly shifted the boundaries of what can be called "good" in the sight of God, redefined them to suit himself. He has quietly reconfigured "good" in ways that make it attainable and do-able, which is why he can go on to say with such breathtaking confidence of the commandments, "All these I have kept since my youth."

But it is Christ's agenda here to show this man how wrong he has been and how sin ensnared he remains.

They say that one of the first rules of great writing is to *show* people things, not simply to *tell* them things. A great writer will paint a picture with words, rather than simply report what things look like. They will do more than merely describe: they will evoke. Great writers get inside the heads of their readers and enable the readers to see for themselves the world the writer is creating.

Well, Jesus takes this zealous young man on, and like a master writer, skillfully leads him to discover the truth *about* himself, *for* himself. He does not simply *tell* him, He *shows* him, He leads him into discovery. And look at how He does it: verse 19, "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.'

Jesus begins by listing commandments, drawn from the second table of the law, the second half of the Ten Commandments, which deal with our duty to one another. What must you do to inherit eternal life? *You must obey the law of God. Do this and live.*

Now keep in mind this young man's real problem: he has a superficial idea of what it means to be good. So when he hears Jesus' reply, listing the commandments, he is quick to claim perfect compliance with God's demands, "Teacher, all these I have kept from my youth."

Now there are some important features of Jesus' dealings with this man at this point that we need to make sure we do not overlook if we are going to understand what is going on here. Notice, first of all, that Jesus does something interesting with the second table of the law. Did you spot it? He rearranges the commandments, and He modifies one of them in particular, doesn't He? Look at the passage. He moves the fifth commandment, "Honor your father and mother" to last place, so that *His* list begins with commandment number six, "Do not commit adultery," and then He subtly alters the tenth commandment from "Do not covet" to "Do no defraud."

Why does Jesus change the tenth commandment and reorder the list to deemphasize it, tucking it away behind "honor your father and mother" like that? Well, I think part of the reason is that Jesus doesn't want this young man to feel the challenge of the law of God too soon and so leap into a closed and defensive posture. He wants to keep opening up this young man to His teaching. He is gently leading him on to fuller and fuller statements of his own self reliance. "Oh, yes," he says, "all these have I kept from my youth. No problem." And Matthew's account even has him adding, "What do I still lack?" "What else have you got, Jesus? No need to worry about the commandments in my case. I've got them all in the bag unless there is something else?" Jesus leads this man to a full statement of his self righteousness so that when he finally exposes his *true* condition, there will be no escaping the truth.

And then notice secondly that Jesus does not list the *first* four commandments in His dialogue with the young man: have no other gods before the Lord, do not make idols, do not take Lord's name in vain, remember the Sabbath day. He only mentions commandments five to ten. Why does He omit the first table of the law like this?

By omitting the first four commandments which address our duty towards God, and by subtly deemphasizing the sin of covetousness, Jesus is quietly building His case, skillfully setting His trap, which is about to be triggered with devastating power.

Look at verse 21 with me, “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.”

Now the trap has fallen and this young man is suddenly caught in its grip. What was the commandment that Jesus deemphasized and that the young man thinks himself free of? “Do not covet.” What is the sin that His instructions here powerfully exposes? Covetousness. The love of possessions.

“Go and give your treasures away. Repent of your covetousness. And you will have treasures in heaven.” Matthew 6:21, “where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” That is the principle. You want eternal life. Your treasure must be in heaven. *I* must be your treasure. So give your earthly treasures away. Take up the cross and follow me. Make *me* your treasure. I am the pearl of great price. Prize me. And forsake your trinkets and toys.”

But this young man was sad at His word and went away grieved for he had great possessions, verse 22. It would seem that in his case the love of earthly treasures was worth more to him than treasure in heaven, than the pearl of great price. He went away sad because he saw now that he had to make a choice. He could either love stuff or he could trust Christ. But it could not be both.

Jesus had not told him his sin, but He had shown it to him. And He had shown him that his sin involved more than a transgression of the tenth commandment alone. Bound up with his covetousness was idolatry. He had made his possessions ultimate in his life. He was not willing to part with them for anything. Not even for Jesus. Not even for eternal life.

The law he thought he'd been keeping, he'd actually been breaking all along. As he gave free reign to his covetousness, he began to worship the created things rather than the Creator and broke the first commandment—you shall have no other gods before me. He had made his possessions into an idol and broke the second commandment—you shall not make a graven image or bow down to it or worship it. He began minimize the means by which God has revealed Himself to us in His name, by His word, in His law, invoking God but not submitting to Him, and so broke the third

commandment—you shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain. He began to claim that life was his own and denied that God had the right to regulate and rule it, and so broke the fourth commandment—remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy.

Jesus wanted to ***show him his sin*** rather than simply ***tell him he was a sinner***. He wants him to *see* it for himself. And in particular, He wants him to see how the sin of covetousness, his love of possessions, had become ***idolatry***.

The sins of the ***second table*** of the law, our duty towards each other, rest on and flow from ***sins of the first table***, our duty towards God. A failure to give God the glory, exclusively, to value His name, word, ways, works, and all the means by which He reveals Himself to us, to worship Him only in the ways He has prescribed, to recognize and surrender to God's claim to Lordship over our lives and to set apart due time for His praise and service: all those failures are ***foundational*** and, from them, flow ***every other sin***.

When the first table gets overlooked, the second table will be ignored. When we make God ***small***, we make self or stuff or some other created thing ***big***. When we come to prize anything more than God, when our deepest love and strongest affections are reserved for something that is not God, we have become ***idolaters, blasphemers, and Sabbath breakers***.

This young man had begun to worship his possessions. And Jesus' loving preaching of the law was designed to expose his idolatry and teach him how wrong his understanding of the holiness of God, the standards he demands, and the depravity of his own heart, really was.

Sin always involves a belittling of the standards God has given us. We always ask, "Did God ***really*** say...?" when we are ready to plunge into some course of disobedience. When this young man came to Jesus, he honestly thought he had obeyed God's law perfectly. Yet Jesus exposed the festering idolatry of his heart bubbling away just beneath the surface, just under a thin veneer of self righteous legalism.

Whenever I meet self righteousness and legalism, I start looking for the secret sin that festers away, quietly indulged, lovingly tended, secretly cherished in that legalist's heart. Legalists are secret antinomians. The self righteous are often, unwittingly, the most self-indulgent. That was certainly the way it was for this young man.

Jesus would have each of us search our hearts tonight, because it may just be the case that for all our religion, for all our goodness and efforts to conform to the outward norms we believe God requires; it may just be that under the veneer of it all festers some quiet idolatry, some hidden deity of our own invention before whose private altar we continually bow and scrape. In His love for you, just like for this young man, Jesus would expose it all to your view tonight.

And then finally look at the third story in verses 23-31. This too is about boundaries.

The disciples still don't understand that salvation is not a matter of performance or merit or personal attainments. They've watched this zealous, religious, morally upright, rich young man walk away broken by Jesus' exposure of his sin, and they are puzzled. So Jesus says, "How hard it is for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of God!" Twice He makes that declaration, the second time elaborating a little on His meaning—look at verse 24, "How hard it is for those who *trust in riches* to enter the kingdom of God!" Trusting in riches is the issue. That is where this young man's real faith rested. No one who trusts in riches has a home in glory. And just to make His point, Jesus paints the absurd picture of a camel going through the eye of a needle. A camel will sooner be threaded through a needle than a rich man enter God's kingdom! It is impossible!

At this, the poor disciples can't stand it any longer, and they blurt out, "Who then can be saved?" They are so upset because, to them, like most Jews of the day, riches were generally considered a sign of God's favor. So, if the rich, who are blessed by God can't be saved, what hope is there for the rest of us?

But that is *precisely* the point, do you see? There *is* no hope, so long as we keep looking to some attainment in ourselves, whether riches or moral obedience, or legal performance. Hope of salvation must rest *elsewhere*. Verse 27, "With men it is impossible, *but not with God; for with God all things are possible.*"

God saves sinners. Rich men and poor men alike, if they enter the kingdom of heaven, do so *only* by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. They do so only because God in His mercy has worked the miracle of redemption and claimed them for His own.

So here are the two sides of salvation that bracket this whole section of Mark 10. In verses 13-16 Jesus says that faith alone—simple, unadorned, earnest trust in Christ—

saves. Now in verse 27, Jesus says God alone must save us. Both are true. The first point tells us that salvation is so simple and free. It is a child resting on Christ. That's all it takes. Faith is as simple as that. And it calls us to believe. The second point tells us no one, however lost and sin ensnared they may be, is beyond saving. No one is too lost for God. No one too trapped for Christ. Salvation belongs to the *Lord*.

What we must do is abandon our self-salvation methods—whether legalism, or materialism—and turn to Christ. Only He can save. With man it is impossible, but with God all things are possible.

Peter interjects at this point. He sees the hope he's been searching for. After all, he has left everything and trusted all in Christ.

To which Jesus explains, in verse 29-30, that forsaking all to cling to Christ leaves no one bankrupt, friendless, orphaned, or alone. When the love of money is forsaken, we find spiritual riches in Christ. When family ties are broken in favor Christ's plan and priorities, more family than we can number encircle us in the body of Christ. When the comforts of house and hearth seem to pass us by because we put Jesus first, we will never be without a place to belong.

It seemed to the rich young man that Jesus' equation simply did not check out. Follow Jesus or live for riches? Riches won. He did the math and concluded that riches were more valuable. What he did not understand is that simple child-like faith may cost us everything, yet if we gain Christ, we lose nothing. What he did not see, and what Peter seems to suddenly grasp, is that when you place everything of value this life offers in one scale and Jesus in the other, Jesus outweighs them all. He is more precious and more valuable and infinitely more satisfying than the world's fading pleasures.

Will you cling to Christ? Lean the full weight of your soul on Him. It may cost you, yet whatever you lose, you will gain far more. You will have the pearl of great price, though it cost you everything to gain Him.

Amen.