

“The Look”

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Text: Luke 22:61; John 21:15-18; Acts 3:1-10; Col 3:8-20

And the Lord turned and looked at Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how He had said to him, “Before the rooster crows, you will deny Me three times.” Do you recall when it is that Palestinian roosters crow? Because if you assume that it is at dawn when the Rhode Island Red, or Browns crow in our setting, you would be off by five or six hours! Palestinian roosters crow at midnight! So we know precisely when Peter finished denying the Lord for the third time; it was in the middle of the night. Another significant point is that the inquest at the high priest’s house was a judicial proceeding held out of bounds in terms of timing. Midnight sessions were forbidden. **Now the men who held Jesus mocked Him and beat Him. And having blindfolded Him, they struck Him on the face and asked Him saying, “Prophecy! Who is it that struck You?”** Interesting. They blindfold Jesus, preventing Him from seeing and then taunt Him with **Who is it that struck you?**

The Greek for looking is *emblepas*. It is a fixed gaze such as Peter gave the lame man, resting at the Gate Beautiful, a gaze full of spiritual import, or spiritual discernment. It is Jesus seeing Peter for who, and what, and where he is! *Emblepas* points to a mysterious function of the eye—as contained in a “look,” an act of apprehension, yes, but also a look of joyous welcome, a celebration and conveyance of worth, value, love. Peter was in a moment of crisis. As the Lord of all creation looked on him; he became aware of his absolute nakedness before the Lord. God doesn’t look as we look. God sees all the dark places within us—from Him no secrets are hid!—and God sees all the glorious potentiality embedded within, created within us! He sees it all, comprehensively, thoroughly, entirely. Such knowledge is too wonderful for us, we cannot attain it—*not even at our most sublime moments of insight!* It is fact, God does not judge outwardly, or superficially (as we are apt to do). As it is written, 1 Samuel 16:7: **Do not look at his appearance, or at the height of his stature, because I have refused him. For the Lord does not see as a man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.** *Eliab had a heart condition that disqualified him from consideration as the future king of Israel! He was oblivious, perhaps, to the dark places within himself, **thinking himself better than he was.***

We are not absolute strangers to *emblepas*. The joyous, affirming gaze of a mother at her newborn baby is, I am told, one of the key markers to that child’s thriving. Maternity nurses watch for “the look” because they know clinically how essential is to the mother-child bond, and to the infants prospective well-being. The adoring face of one’s mother, one of the first of life’s realities to come into focus for a new born—that smile, that joy, that welcome and affirmation of worth, value, affection is life to the infant. “Oh, I am loved, wanted, valued, real . . . significant to others is a vital piece of information. Right up there with the gaze of Jesus! And, subsequently, in the gaze of Peter resting on the lame beggar. Jesus, looking through Peter, loved on that disabled

man and that love absolved his disability. The man **stood up, walked and leapt for joy, praying God.**

Let's back up momentarily, behind the jumping for joy and the welcoming of a newborn, and engage with the condition of Eliab. His inner darkness was prohibitive; it narrowed his future options. So when I spoke first about God seeing **all the dark places** I mentioned in the same sentence **all the glorious potentialities** God has placed in us as well.

What if the dark places are there for us to acknowledge and resist and the glorious potentialities, likewise, are to be acknowledged and affirmed, or enacted? What if it is the balancing act, just described, which is essential to character formation and the living of a good life? I suspect that this is the case. It will keep us humble to realize our dark potential (while refusing to give in to those impulses) and keep us balanced. Choosing to do no evil is as much a gain as choosing to do good. But shame, disappointment with ourselves (say, for sinning when we know better!) and guilt team up to put us into bondage to that darkness and to Satan who revels in wickedness and evil. So Jesus' look at Peter was loving; it combined a gentle, "I told you so" with an acknowledgment that the spirit is indeed willing but the flesh is weak. It combined an honest, real assessment of where Peter was, with the hope of "It's not over until it's over . . . **when you have returned**, or turned back, **encourage/strengthen your brothers** (Luke 22:32) spoken before the whole denial business transpired! Funny, but it occurs to me that the mother's loving gaze may communicate to her child, "You can do this! You can thrive. I am here to nurture you." A lot can be said with a simple, spiritual look.

It remains I think that we can be oblivious to both our dark side and our glorious potentiality. And I think we may tend to be more aware of the negative than the positive—we walk in shame and guilt more frequently than we do in the glory and freedom for which we were created. Why?

Can it be that the incarnation, or the passage of Jesus here on earth—the Nazareth path in Galilee of Judea that led to Jerusalem and death on a cross—has not changed us? That we still do not see the cross as a privilege and not merely as a cruel punishment—or assassination attempt ordered by Satan through his worldly henchmen? We have alluded to the great exchange before. We have lifted up the exchange of our sinful, fallenness for the righteousness of Christ. And perhaps we have erred by not explaining fully enough the reach of that exchange. Four things:

For example, Jesus offers us 1. humility in exchange for pride. When we are more proud of Him than we are of ourselves, what we are and what we think we have achieved. Then, there is the exchange of 2. simplicity for complexity, the spirit of the law for the legality and elaborateness of the law of works. Thirdly, 3. Jesus commands poverty over wealth to us—social standing, status and influence/prestige are excised as perishable, temporal goods. And, finally, 4. Jesus offers service for power. **He who would be greatest must be servant of all** (Matt. 20:26-28 & 23:11).

In the garrisoned keep of my old pagan heart—in the shielded place of my former faithlessness, or unconverted mind(!)—*either will do*, the truth of the beatitudes has yet to dawn. In the inner recesses of my unbroken darkness, which the Light of the world has yet to shatter; in unspeakable silences, which render me both mute and dumb—where I am partially paralyzed still, as one lamed from birth, I lie begging, seeking to be healed, longing to be freed . . . there I find blockages waiting to be dissolved! This Christian, such as I am. I wrestle with truths of God as yet unconvincing and unintelligible, I cry out, “Come, Lord Jesus, and save me more.

Humility, simplicity, poverty and service, then, are the key elements of the great exchange. They represent a radical inversion of worldliness—and especially of success in that worldliness. ***An inversion of values—which reshape what we do, knowing why we do them!*** If we are born-again, converted to Christ, we get this. To embrace these values, frankly, is to follow in the wake of Jesus of Nazareth! To follow Him! To obey His commandment to love as He loved from a reconditioned heart! That is evidence of the difference the incarnation made, and continues to make! *And this authenticates the authority of Jesus.* We are going to reflect on Col. 3:8-20; but before we do that let’s pray over Paul’s prayer for the Colossians

9 For this reason also, since the day we heard of it, we have not ceased to pray for you and to ask that you may be filled with the [a]knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, 10 so that you will walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, [b]to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and [c]increasing in the [d]knowledge of God; 11 strengthened with all power, according to [e]His glorious might, [f]for the attaining of all steadfastness and [g]patience; joyously 12 giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified us [h]to share in the inheritance of the [i]saints in Light. 13 [j]For He rescued us from the [k]domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of [l]His beloved Son, 14 in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins¹. Amen.

¹Footnotes

- a. Colossians 1:9 Or *real knowledge*
- b. Colossians 1:10 Lit *unto all pleasing*
- c. Colossians 1:10 Or *growing by the knowledge*
- d. Colossians 1:10 Or *real knowledge*
- e. Colossians 1:11 Lit *the might of His glory*
- f. Colossians 1:11 Lit *unto all*
- g. Colossians 1:11 Or *patience with joy*
- h. Colossians 1:12 Lit *unto the portion of*
- i. Colossians 1:12 Or *holy ones*
- j. Colossians 1:13 Lit *Who rescued*
- k. Colossians 1:13 Lit *authority*
- l. Colossians 1:13 Lit *the Son of His love*

The authority of Jesus Christ is the theme of Col 3:8-20. In fact, Paul warns us against being **cheated** by **philosophy and empty deceit** in verse 8 and proceeds to pillory the **principles of the world** as the chief culprit in this “cheating” and “deception.” And then, in verse 18 revisits this warning in the words **let no one defraud you!** We have lots of “empty deceit” in pop psychology (which permeates our thought culture) through misapplied psychological terms and theories bandied about as “truth” when they are “nothing,” or “empty” attempts to defraud us of ***the truth in Christ and our reward of faith, or trust in Him as our authority.*** Psychology tricks us into thinking of each other as diagnoses, and not as persons created in the image of a loving God! We dehumanize each other in that way, and through political stereotyping—it’s truly frightful.

Do you wonder where the **fraud** is in this? It lies in substituting the **principles of this world** (naturalism, materialism, humanism, Marxist, scientism, secularism, queer theory and gender identity—to name a few) for **the fullness of God** that we have in Christ. That sleight of hand is fraudulent.

In Christ, or “according to Christ,” in whom dwells all the fullness of the Godhead—in physical, visibly, tactile and sensible forms, as in one human body and in whom we are complete, as well as completely forgiven, exonerated and absolved **in Him who is the head of all principality and power.** (v.9) Paul proceeds to spell out the consequences of this identity in Christ. We are **circumcised. . . putting off the body of the sins of the flesh. . . by Christ.** And we were **buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised with Him through faith in the workings of God . . . made alive together with Him** as those **forgiven by Him**—all of our trespasses trashed and obliterated.

There has been a great reduction of requirements for salvation—almost as if God has gone “minimalist” on our sinning! The demands we couldn’t meet and the commands we couldn’t keep . . . **he has graciously taken out of the way.** He has done for us what we couldn’t begin to do for ourselves. Certainly, never on our own! (v. 14) And in the process of doing that, Jesus has **disarmed the principalities and powers**—making a public spectacle of them, **triumphing over them** in the process. Now all of this is gained ground, spiritual territory and prerogative taken back from the Enemy.

Here’s the point, because we have gained so much ground, because we have been liberated from vain philosophy and empty deceit—we should never, ever go back!

Therefore let no one judge you . . . in food taboos, dietary restrictions, rules about drinking, what festivals to keep, which new moons, or sabbaths to celebrate! Because they are not all that important, **they were.** At best, exercised properly, only **shadows of the things to come—the substance of which is Christ.** (v. 17)

Paul urges us to “keep the main thing, the main thing.” Don’t mistake the husk for the kernel. Only grind the grain for flour. Then we come to the caution about **defrauding**. **Let no one defraud you of your reward** (your liberty in Christ, your forgiveness, bold access to the father, the surety of eternal life, your share in the estate, your stake in the kingdom—any and all of the promises of God). How? Through false humility, demon worship which covers the worship of angels, especially those things of which the unbeliever is both unaware and uninformed. All this are recidivisms of the fleshy/carnal mind. Look forward, climb upward—stop dragging along the unredeemed past, irrational guilty, unwarranted shame. Rather hold fast to whom you are because of Who He is. This is the best, and only way forward. Christ is the Head—your whole being is nourished and knit together by Christ—you are the fruit of His ministry. **If you died with Christ from the basic principles of the world**, why, live as though we are still subject to those things? New disciplines, regulations, spiritual hoops to jump through? You will prove as foolish as the Galatians! Don’t. Make no time for folly!

Amen