

Don't Sacrifice the Permanent on the Altar of the Temporary

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Preacher: Dr. Carl Ellis

- [0 : 00] Mark 10, verses 17-31. As Jesus started on his way, a man ran up to him and fell on his knees before him.
- Teacher, good teacher, he asked, what must I do to inherit eternal life? Why do you call me good, Jesus answered. No one is good except God alone.
- You know the commandments. You shall not murder. You shall not commit adultery. You shall not steal. You shall not give false testimony. You shall not defraud.
- Honor your father and your mother. Teacher, he declared, all these I've kept from since I was a boy. Jesus looked at him and loved him.
- Amen. Amen. One thing you lack, he said. Go sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven.
- [1 : 09] Then come and follow me. At this, the man's face fell. He went away sad because he had great wealth.
- Jesus looked around at his disciples. How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God. The disciples were amazed at these words.
- But Jesus said, guys, children, how hard is it to enter the kingdom of God? It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God.
- The disciples were even more amazed and said to each other, well, who can be saved? Jesus looked at them and said, with man, this is impossible.
- But not with God. All things are possible with God. Then Peter stood up.
- [2 : 13] We have left everything to follow you. Truly, truly, I say to you, Jesus replied, No one who has left home, brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age.
- Homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and fields, along with persecutions. In this age and the age to come.
- But many who are first will be last. And the last will be first. You may be seated.
- I've never tried this before, but I'm going to try to do a keynote in the middle of this. And if it doesn't work, then we'll just forget it. Okay.
- Okay. Okay. Don't sacrifice the permanent on the altar of the temporary.
- [3 : 41] Let me tell you something. This passage has been beating me up for the last month. So I'm going to share my beat up with you this morning. But God loves us, right?
- The older I get, the more I understand two things. First, how temporary the present reality is. I'm kind of glad of it.

You know, when you start accumulating a lot of years, you begin to wonder, well, what? You know, the pressure is on, right? To go for all the gusts you got. Because you only go once around in life, right? But hey, you want to hang out in about a million years?

That's fine. I'll be around, right? Is that right? Okay. Because we got eternal life. The other thing is how permanent the kingdom of God is.

Today there's a lot of talk about the kingdom of God. However, most people seem to see the kingdom in institutional terms. This church, this denomination, this structure.

[4 : 44] Or even in doctrinal or theological terms. We're the kingdom because we subscribe to reformed theology, right? Okay. Well, institutions arise out of the kingdom of God.

That's true. But they are not themselves the kingdom of God. Sound doctrine and sound theology flow out from the kingdom of God.

But they are not themselves the kingdom of God. Well, where is the kingdom of God? Well, it's present everywhere. It is invisible to our flawed eyesight, which depends upon our perceptions.

However, it is as plain as day to true sight, which is based on God's word. When is the kingdom of God?

Well, the Bible teaches us that it is present throughout all of history. And yet, it transcends history. It is in a perpetual state of unfolding in our world.

[5 : 53] So with that in mind, let's look at our scripture today. Anyway, Jesus' encounter with this rich young ruler was promising. It looked like it was the beginning of a beautiful relationship.

First, he came running to Jesus. In the Middle East, it was kind of an embarrassment to run for a grown man. This was an indication of his humility in spite of the fact that he was a VIP.

He came with sincerity. He wasn't about to let this opportunity go by. Second, he came in public. Unlike Nicodemus, he did not seek a private meeting with Jesus at night.

Second, he came in broad daylight with many onlookers, even though he was a ruler. Third, he fell on his knees before Jesus.

By this, he demonstrated at least two things. His belief that Jesus was the good teacher and his deep desire to be taught by Jesus.

[7 : 14] Fourth, Jesus' reply revealed something profound about this young man. When Jesus says, Why do you call me good?

No one is good except God alone. Understand this. This was not a rebuke. It was an affirmation of this man's deep faith.

It was a confirmation before the public of two things. That this young man had all his theological ducks in a row. Namely, that he recognized Jesus, not just as a good teacher, but as the divine teacher.

Fifth, the questions show the strength of his convictions. What must I do to have eternal life? Now, some say he came to Jesus to justify his self-righteousness, but Scripture does not indicate this as it does in Luke chapter 10, verse 29, when the expert of the law tried to justify himself.

This is not one of those situations. This young man was in defiance of one of the most powerful political groups in society, namely the Sadducees.

[8 : 48] And the Sadducees taught constantly against eternal life. And to deify the Sadducees was not good for a budding career of a young ruler.

As a matter of fact, his question was politically incorrect. But he didn't care about politics. Sixth, I like this guy.

Sixth, Jesus answered this young man's inquiry with an implied theological exam. You know the commandments. And you know what?

Seventh, this young ruler passed the exam with flying colors. Teacher, all these I have kept since I was a boy.

That's pretty good. And eighth, I want you to remember this. Jesus looked at him and loved him.

[10 : 06] This young man's profile was impressive. He had been a coveted kid on steroids. And now he was a covenant-keeping adult.

And at this time, remember, we're still in the Old Testament standard, right? So to keep the Old Testament, what did he have to do? He had to forsake his sin through repentance, submit himself to God as Lord, receive God's salvation promises by faith, and to eagerly demonstrate his faith and thanksgiving to God for his saving grace by doing good works.

And in this case, it was keeping the commandments. Well, he could not have done all of this in his own strength.

Uh-oh. He did all this by God's grace. He was a believer like Nicodemus. He had real faith in Jesus.

But like Nicodemus, his faith at this time had a wrong orientation. Now, faith itself is much more discernible than orientation of faith.

[11 : 33] Mm-hmm. You got that? Okay. All right. For this reason, I would have found no fault in this young man.

I would have found no fault in this young man. None of us would have found any fault with him. His faith was strong.

His obedience to the law was spot on. He stood head and shoulders above his generation in his devotion. There was not a synagogue anywhere that wouldn't welcome him as a member.

And he would be able to pass the scrutiny of any theological test thrown at him. even Presbytery. Oh, hallelujah.

And yet, and yet, according to Jesus, this promising young man lacked one necessary thing. Well, what was it?

[12 : 41] What was it? First, there was no sin in being rich. Right. That's right. Okay. Jesus just said how hard it is for a rich man to enter the kingdom.

But he also said, with man, this is impossible. But with God, all things are possible. So if anybody's rich here, don't feel downcast. God can save you too. Okay.

By the way, we're all rich if you look at the world standards. If we're on welfare, living in the project, in some places in the world, that's upper middle class.

So keep your perspectives right. Okay. There was no sin in simply, second, there was no sin in being, sin in being a ruler. Right? Third, there was no sin in simply being powerful.

Fourth, there was no sin in simply being well known. Fifth, there was no sin in simply being influential. This guy had all of these. Well, what did he lack?

[13 : 52] What he lacked was a kingdom of God orientation. What he had was a this world orientation.

Right. Right. Right. Right. Right. And what is a this world orientation? I'm glad you asked.

It is a way of life limited by fallen human capabilities. Right. Yes. If God tells you to go and move, move, look out mountains, you reply, that can't be done, God.

You're in trouble. Don't worry, I'm not, I'm not suggesting anything here. And what is an orientation?

I'm glad you asked. It is the direction of your priorities, attitudes, outlook, interests, beliefs, intentions, et cetera.

[15 : 04] It is the lasting focus of your thoughts, inclinations, preferences, beliefs, aims, actions, et cetera.

In other words, your orientation is where your heart is. and with a this world orientation, this promising young ruler was bound to sacrifice the permanent on the altar of the temporary.

well, what is the kingdom of God? Well, we have no definition of it. However, we can describe it.

One, we can describe it as the realm of ultimate reality. In other words, the realm of the permanent. Got that?

The kingdom of God is the realm of the permanent. And what is the kingdom of God orientation? It is a way of life where God's unlimited capabilities preempt our fallen human limitations.

[16 : 19] Tell you what, if I didn't believe that, I'd be scared to preach the gospel. Only with a kingdom of God orientation will we be able to avoid what?

Sacrificing the permanent on the altar of the temporary. Now, listen to this. This is really, this is kind of, this is amazing. When Jesus said, quote, go sell everything you have and give to the poor and you will have treasure in heaven.

Jesus was not just commanding this young man to dispose of his wealth. That's not the point. What was happening here is that Jesus was giving him more than ample compensation with two unlimited offers.

First offer was the promise of treasure in heaven. Now think about that. Now this offer was not pie in the sky, by and by, hocus pocus.

Hmm. It was God's guarantee of eternal wealth. Oh my. Riches in heaven are far more valuable than riches on earth.

[17 : 45] It's like a billion dollars compared to a penny. If you can get the picture of that. It's even greater than that. Heavenly treasure is valued on heavenly standards.

And heavenly standards infinitely surpass earthly standards. Not only that, but heavenly treasure is permanent. It was already there waiting for this young man.

And earthly treasure is temporary at best. Riches in heaven are far more secure than riches on earth.

Why? Because heavenly riches are never subject to decay or crime. As Jesus said in Matthew, where moth and vermin and destroy and where thieves break in and steal.

You don't have to have wealth insurance in heaven. had this young man taken Jesus up on his first offer, he would have been wealthier already in heavenly terms.

[18 : 55] He would have been wealthier already in earthly terms. Say what? What did Jesus say? Verse 29. Truly I tell you that no one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel will fail to receive 100 times as much in this present age.

That's what Jesus said. Homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children, and fields. But unfortunately, unfortunately, this bright young man didn't stick around long enough to hear that.

Jesus' second offer. Quote, then come follow me. Had Jesus, had he taken Jesus up on the second offer, this young man would have had the honor of following the divine teacher for the rest of his life on earth.

And this would have been a priceless privilege. Why? Because to be in fellowship with Jesus was to be in fellowship with the true and living God himself. He would have had the joy of life at its fullest with his divine teacher for all of eternity.

Truly, these were offers this young man could not refuse. Yet he refused them. Why?

[20 : 31] You know why. Because he only had eyesight. His eyesight left him with a this world orientation. And as a result, he had a distorted sense of value.

And with a distorted sense of value, what did he do? He sacrificed the permanent on the altar of the temporary.

That's what you do when you have that. Sound familiar? Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. What he lacked was true sight. That comes by faith, by the way.

Now, Jesus was not challenging this young man's faith. He wasn't challenging his faith. He affirmed it. What he was challenging was the orientation of his faith.

That's what trips us up. Was it powered by kingdom of God possibilities or was it hobbled by this world's restrictions?

[21 : 41] This young man's security was in his earthly wealth and power, which are temporary, not in eternal wealth and power, which are permanent. For all of his faith and integrity, he never understood God's memo.

And what's the memo? If you sacrifice the permanent on the altar of the temporary, you end up with nothing. If you sacrifice the temporary on the altar of the permanent, you end up with everything.

What did Jesus say in Matthew 6, verse 21, where your treasure is, hello, your heart will be also. Don't worry, my toes hurt worse than anybody else's in here, okay?

Now, let's make some observations about this. I hope this technology works. Let's make some observations. What is the relationship between our Christian faith and our faith orientation?

It is similar to the relationship between a cell phone app and the operating system of the cell phone.

[22 : 53] You got it? All right, let's see if this works. Ooh, praise him, praise him. Okay. The app runs on the operating system, right?

Now, what if the operating system crashes? What happens to the app? Let's find out. Uh-oh, there it crashes. So the app was all right, right? No. The app will crash with it.

Okay, praise the Lord. The app could be of top quality with great sophistication, but it is subject to crash if the operating system crashes.

The problem is not the app itself. The problem is the operating system on which the app runs. The question is, is it flawless, stable, and crash-proof, or is it flawed, unstable, and just destined to crash?

All right. Want to go next up? What is the relationship between Christian faith and our faith orientation?

[24 : 08] Glad you asked. Okay. Our Christian faith may be strong, sound, and intense, but if it functions on a this world operating system, it will crash as the operating system crashes.

You ever run into people who kind of walked away from their faith? you see what happened? The kingdom of God operating system is flawless, stable, and indestructible.

Why? Because it is permanent. This world operating system is flawed, unstable, and destined to crash. Why? Why?

Because it is temporary. The kingdom of God operates according to God's infinite capabilities, not according to fallen human limitations.

The kingdom of God operates from the unlimited perspective of eternity, not from the limited perspective of time. If Christian faith functions on a kingdom of God operating system, then it will prevail and persevere.

[25 : 26] But if Christian faith functions on this world operating system, it will falter and fail. For example, I will always be thankful for the two articulate young men who led me to Christ.

The strength of their faith was impressive, amazing. I grew like a weed as they disciplined me. However, as time passed, I began to notice that they moved more to a this world orientation.

Today, they are preoccupied with the characters of this life. They don't appear to be walking with the Lord. I don't know what's going on in their own hearts. Well, what went wrong?

What went wrong? Their faith orientation crashed. And as a result, they began to sacrifice the permanent on the altar of the temporary.

Today, there are Christians being seduced by ideologies from a this world orientation. And this is nothing new. They think they're following Jesus because the ideologies almost sound right.

[26 : 39] of the orientation of their faith. Their faith is faltering because the orientation they have is crashing.

The ideologies they depend on sacrifice the flawless on the altar of the flawed, sacrifice the up-to-date on the altar of the obsolete, sacrifice the normal on the altar of the abnormal, sacrifice the eternal on the altar of the temporal, and sacrifice life on the altar of death.

And the end result of this is sacrificing the permanent on the altar of the temporary. Now, now, look, I'm not challenging your faith or even your salvation this morning.

Don't, I'm not, I'm not attacking that. I'm not criticizing that. I don't know where you are, but I'm not sacrificing, I'm not attacking your faith or criticizing your faith or your salvation.

I'm not challenging that. But what am I challenging? I'm challenging the orientation of your faith. Get that straight. Is it powered by kingdom of God possibilities or is it hobbled by this world restrictions?

[28 : 05] You know what? This world's restrictions are under the illusion that we live by bread alone. Sound familiar somewhere?

But a kingdom of God orientation knows this, that we live by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God. Even the bread itself comes from God's word.

Amen. All right, let's wrap some of this up here. Romans 14, 17. For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit, right?

In other words, righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit flow from a kingdom of God orientation. Because the kingdom of God is permanent, it is invincible.

what did Jesus tell Pilate? My kingdom is not of this world. What did he tell Peter?

[29 : 13] The gates of hell shall never prevail over the kingdom. Christian faith with a this world orientation will not accomplish much.

Even if it's strong and intense, even if it is theologically correct. Christian faith with the kingdom of God orientation is powerful and effective.

You can even move mountains. Even if the faith is the size of a mustard seed. Isn't that what Jesus said?

Now, I'm not challenging your faith or your salvation this morning. Please get me right here. I am challenging the orientation of your faith. Is it powered by kingdom of God possibilities or is it hobbled by this world's restrictions?

Hebrews 11.1 Now, faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance of what we do not see. Seeing implies here seeing with our eyes.

[30 : 27] that's eyesight. Hope with the kingdom of God orientation will never fail us. Hope with the this world orientation is bound to fail us.

With the kingdom of God orientation, you also have true sight. With this world orientation, you only have eyesight. Unlike eyesight, true sight is not limited by your present circumstances.

Unlike eyesight, true sight is not bound by fallen human restrictions. Let me share this with you.

You can read this for yourself in 2 Kings chapter 6 verses 8 through 23. Let me summarize this for you. The kingdom of Aram was at war with Israel.

And Elisha kept revealing to the king of Israel everything that Aram was saying in the secret meetings, right? In the situation room, right? And the king couldn't figure out what the heck is going on?

[31 : 39] Where is this? So anyway, so eventually Aram found out that Elisha was in Dothan. So here he is in Dothan.

And the king sent the army of Syria to surround Dothan. And here's the passage here. Verses 15 and 17.

When Gehazi, the servant of the man of God, got up and went early in the morning, went early the next morning, an army with horses and chariots surrounded the city. Oh no, my lord, what shall we do?

His servant asked. Elisha, what does he say? Oh, don't be scared. He says, those who are with us are more than those who are against us. But look!

Elisha says, okay, Lord, open his eyes, please. And the Lord opened his servant's eyes and he looked and he saw the hills full of horses and chariots of fire around Elisha.

[32 : 43] The actual situation did not change for Gehazi, but his sight orientation changed from eyesight to true sight.

The facts of the situation remained the same, but his view of the situation was radically changed because Gehazi finally had true sight.

Is that clear? Okay. I'm going to do something I've never done before. I'm going to give you a final exam. Okay.

All right. Oh, by the way, it's not going to be hard. These are the easiest questions, easiest questions I can find in the final, okay? You should already. All right. An answer for yourself.

Which takes more faith? God's already fulfilled promises or God's not yet fulfilled promises? Uh-uh. Uh-uh. Not yet, right? Uh-huh.

[33 : 42] Okay. Well, guess what? If your answer was not yet fulfilled promises, then your faith has a this world orientation.

Uh-oh. Don't worry, I missed that one too. Why does it have a this world orientation? Because we see God's faithfulness as limited by our time constraints rather than unlimited by eternity.

Just remember this, for God, past, present, and future are now. And let me make this declarative statement. I know this is true. God never makes a promise in time that he hasn't already fulfilled in eternity.

Oh, my goodness. That should do something for your faith. All right. Second question. Eternal life begins for us after death. True or false?

Okay. That's good. That's good. That's good. And why is it false? Because the Bible tells us that if we believe on Christ and his father, we have what?

[35 : 05] Already passed from death to life. That's why I said, hey, let's hang out in a million years. We have eternal life. We don't need an afterlife. We're there already.

Okay. All right. All right. That was good. Okay. I'm going to show you something. What comes to your mind right when you see that? All right.

All right. All right. All right. Some people say other things, right? Okay. Okay. Noah's promise. Noah's covenant promise, right? Right? To us, right?

What's more real? This is question number one. What's more real? Time or eternity? Uh-huh. Good, good. Y'all are getting it. Fifth, God knows all things actual and all things possible.

True? Therefore, the path God has chosen for us is the wisest one. You ever doubt that? Oh, God, why did you do this to me?

[36 : 12] You see it from his point of view, you say, oh, God, I'm sure glad you did that to me, right? All right. Romans 8, 28, you know this. We know that in all things God works good for those who love him and those who are called according to his purpose.

Now, let's, how do we do on the exam? Let's look at the final grade. I stand before you as one who has never passed this test.

Why? Because to fail this test only takes missing one question.

Y'all did pretty good, but, you know, I did pretty good too, but, right? And, and therefore, I am in a constant state of repentance.

repentance. And if you're like me, you need to do some serious business with God right now.

[37 : 30] In other words, check the orientation of your faith by God's word, repent of your wrong orientation, and ask God to fix your orientation appropriately.

And always remember this, always remember this as you do this, before Jesus called this rich young man to repent of his wrong orientation, what did he do?

He looked at him and loved him. Before Jesus called you to repent of your wrong orientation, he looks at you and loves you.

So, please, don't walk away sad like this young man. I'll share this with you too. This is kind of interesting. here's one example of my failures of this.

And I'm going to only share the one that's safe to share. Okay? I'm not going to tell you that other stuff, but I'm going to just say the safe stuff. Okay. Praise him.

[38 : 34] All right. 1971, I was driving across the Pennsylvania turnpike in a blinding snow storm. I didn't have snow tires and everything. And I was tired. My focus was on my fatigue, trying to make time.

It was not on God's wise guidance based on Romans 8 28. I'll admit that. And I was stuck in the left lane, which was stopped while the right lane was flowing by.

As soon as a gap popped up in the right lane, I tried to get over. But the car behind me cut me off by pulling into the space in front of me. And I couldn't get over. And I was ticked.

I'll never forget this. It was a yellow Chevy Nova. With a bumblebee painted on its side. And when that happened, I blew up.

I used every cuss word I could imagine. Have you ever had moments like that? I pounded my fist on the steering wheel. Good I was driving a Volvo at the time because I could take that kind of punishment.

[39 : 43] I just blew up. And I was even angry at God for letting this happen. God, you know I'm tired. Trying to make time. Eventually, the right lane also came to a stop.

And things stayed like that for 45 minutes. And after the traffic began to move, I saw what caused the delay. It was a 20-plus car pileup.

And as I slowly passed the pile of mangled, burning cars, I looked over and guess what I saw? That yellow Chevy Nova with the bumblebee painted on its side.

And needless to say, I broke. I broke. I'm not challenging your faith or your salvation. I am challenging the orientation of your faith. faith. The question is, is it powered by kingdom of God, unlimited possibilities, or is it hobbled by this world's restrictions?

Is it based on true sight, the original sight based on God's word, or is it based on eyesight, the flawed analogy of true sight? The basic requirement of the kingdom of God is an ongoing repentance and faith.

[40 : 58] Repentance involves dumping your this world orientation. faith means embracing your kingdom of God orientation. Now you understand what the apostle Paul was talking about in Romans 12.

Do not conform to the pattern of this world. You know what the pattern of this world is, right? But be transformed by the renewing of your mind.

Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is, his good, pleasing, and perfect will. Does that make a little more sense to you now?

In other words, do not hobble your faith with a visceral orientation, but let your faith be empowered with a kingdom of God orientation. Only then will you be able to avoid sacrificing the permanent on the altar of the temporary.

temporary. Let's do some business with God, okay? Worship team, don't move. Nobody move. Just for the next couple of minutes, if you feel convicted by this, as I do, I'm going to ask you to pray and do some business with God.

[42 : 11] Really ask him to liberate you from this world orientation and to empower you with a kingdom orientation. Let's pray.

Father, I pray that you will give us true sight. I pray that you will give us the grace to repent of the many times we have sacrificed a permanent on the altar of the temporary.

For the many times we have gone according to the limitations of this world, this fallen world, this sinful world, instead of the unlimited, all powerful nature of your kingdom.

We are your people. You chose us to be your witness in the world of your kingdom. And so often you cannot be distinguished from those in the world.

Make us that peculiar people that you talk about. please, Lord, renew us, forgive us for our and thank you for looking at us and loving us.

[43 : 35] So we pray that by your grace, you will transform us in ways that we haven't even imagined. For we ask it in Jesus' name.

Amen.