

**In the name of + JESUS +**

My mom was a short, petite little lady. She left the big jobs of disciplining us kids to our dad. However, there were very few times she needed to do that. Even with her slim, slight figure, she could command immediate changes in attitude and behavior...and...all it took was a look. One look from that lady, and you knew that in her otherwise sweet and gentle demeanor, she meant business! Look out! Straighten up!

“If looks could kill.” As I grew older, I used to imagine lightening bolts coming from those eyes of her’s as they were locked on me. She was serious, and if I knew what was in my best interest, I’d better get serious, too!

**“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!”** said Jesus (Matt. 23:29), no doubt with a “get-serious” look on His face, eyes blazing a trail into their hidden hearts. To be sure, Jesus’ words wouldn’t fit in with Dale Carnegie’s advice given in his 1936 bestseller, How To Win Friends and Influence People. And yet they needed to hear those words—desperately needed to hear them!

But Jesus spoke those words to them in love, never in hatred nor malice. When God speaks His Word of Law, He desires that we turn from our sin and seek the forgiveness and healing that He alone offers and would give to us (“*repentance*”).

**“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites,”** said Jesus, **“For you build the tombs of the prophets and decorate the monuments of the righteous, saying, ‘If we had lived in the days of our fathers, we would not have taken part with them in shedding the blood of the prophets.’ Thus you witness against yourselves that you are sons of those who murdered the prophets. Fill up, then, the measure of your fathers”** (Matt. 23:29-32).

Jesus was deadly and right-on SERIOUS! But did you hear His tone...the bold-faced mocking of their rank hypocrisy? He wanted them to recognize it and repent of their pious platitudes of, “We wouldn’t have ever done what our fathers did—we’re better—smarter—more educated—you-name-it—we’re better than any of them! Ever said that? *“I’m better than that—I’d never do that!”*

Jesus pushes things forward, though. He drives straight for the logical conclusion: *“I know your hearts! I can see the rage and murder in your eyes! Go ahead! Walk in the footsteps of your fathers! Go ahead and kill Me too, so you can continue your family tradition!”*

**“There is nothing new under the sun,”** said the Preacher in Ecclesiastes. Murderous thoughts and angry, raging looks are as old as the fall into sin. Cain’s downcast eyes became murderous toward his brother, Abel. Man exercises in his sin the cause of murder, though the original source is Satan, who—says Jesus—**“was a liar**

***and murderer from the beginning.***” St. John writes in his First Letter (3:12) that the murderer Cain ***“was of the evil one.”*** Indeed, it’s all just as Jesus said as He addressed the Jews who wanted Him out of the way—dead. He identifies Satan as the father of all who hate God’s Son.

But about this time we’ve got to be wondering what all this has to do with us. Aren’t John and Jesus just wailing on Cain and the murderous Jews? So what’s that got to do with us? We’re pretty pious followers of His. “Surely, not I, Lord!”

But then the Apostle John interrupts our back-patting train of thought with these words: ***“Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him...If anyone says, ‘I love God,’ and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen”*** (1 John 3:15; 4:20).

Connect the dots, says Jesus, looking straight-on at us. If I claim to love God while hating my brother/sister, I’m both a murderer and a liar, and I simply cannot love God... and if I don’t love Him, then I must hate Him. Looks like...I’m in the same boat with you...and we’re in the same boat with Cain and those hostile Jews. In fact, that is just what we confess in that Lenten hymn:

*I caused Your grief and sighing  
By evils multiplying  
As countless as the sands.  
I caused the woes unnumbered  
With which Your soul is cumbered,  
Your sorrows raised by wicked hands.  
(LSB #453, “Upon the Cross Extended)*

Stop pulling the wool of arrogance and pride over your own eyes. Don’t lie to yourself. You’ve said in your heart, *“I have good reasons for hating my parents!” “I have right-on reasons for wishing my brother/sister dead—out of the way for good!” “I’m going to let you see the angry rage in my eyes for what you’ve done to me—I wish you were dead!”*

That’s enough for God. In His sight, you are a murderer. No knife or gun in sight, but...”if looks could kill...” We’re right with those murderous Jews in the Gospel Reading for this evening. *“I caused Your grief and sighing...”*

What a marvel, then, that God the Father would allow His Son to be murdered at the hands of sinful people, just to save a bunch of rotten, rebellious sinners with eyes filled with rage against God and against others who get in our way! But listen: ***“God shows His love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since, therefore, we have now been justified by His blood, much more shall we be saved by Him from the wrath of God”*** (Romans 5:8-9).

The wrath of Almighty God is not a murderous glance from the Father, but a look of righteous judgment upon the guilt of sin—my sin—and yours. We all deserve God’s wrath, but instead of giving us that wrath, instead of giving us “looks that could kill,” God put it on Jesus. All of it—on Jesus. And—marvel of marvels—Jesus took it...all of it...willingly...unto death...for us...for me and you...and for our salvation!

By faith, look into the eyes of Jesus, hanging and bleeding and dying upon His cross. You won’t find murderous rage in His eyes. You won’t find looks that could kill. Rather, in the eyes of Jesus you see this: **“Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do”** (Luke 23:24).

Once God gets our attention—once we catch His eyes looking at us—we see the utter horror of what we’ve done...or thought...or said in angry rage against another person—so deep and horrible this corruption in us is! And we can but say, **“God, be merciful to me, a sinner.”**

And He is. God has mercy upon sinners and joins heaven’s angels rejoicing over the **“one sinner who repents.”** Christ’s voluntary sacrifice at the hands of murderers, the death by which He has extinguished the wrath of God toward us, seals our healing—and begets us unto life! **“For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by His life. More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation”**

(Romans 5:10-11).

Truth is: God’s look at Calvary did kill...did sacrifice...did reject...did unload both barrels of punishment...and wrath and death. **“The Lord laid upon Him—upon Jesus—the iniquity of us all.”** Jesus died. He died for you. He died for all. He died that you might live and with your own eyes behold the mystery, the miracle of mercy and love unfathomable. Philipp Nicolai wrote of it in his hymn, “O Morning Star, How Fair and Bright.”

**Lord, when You look on us in love,  
At once there falls from God above  
A ray of purest pleasure.  
Your Word and Spirit, flesh and blood  
Refresh our souls with heavenly food.  
You are our dearest treasure!  
Let Your mercy Warm and cheer us!  
O draw near us! For You teach us  
God’s own love through You has reached us.**

(LSB #395, verse 3)

Ah, if looks could heal and make alive...

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