

**“All Things Are Possible with God”**

*And they were exceedingly astonished, and said to him, “Then who can be saved?”  
Jesus looked at them and said, “With man it is impossible, but not with God.  
For all things are possible with God” (Mark 10:26-27).*

In last week’s Gospel reading, we watched Jesus destroy a man. This may sound a bit harsh, but that is exactly what we witnessed in Mark’s account of the rich man who approached Jesus wanting to know what he “must do to inherit eternal life” (Mark 10:17). Instead of congratulating this man for living an exemplary moral life (*which he had*), or even encouraging him to try a little harder, Jesus spoke an unforgiving and impossible word, showing the man how miserably he had failed to put God first in his life, and, in the process, Jesus shattered any hope this man had of achieving his way eternal life.

In today’s reading from Ecclesiastes, we are warned, “He who loves money will not be satisfied with money, nor he who loves wealth with his income.” These words spell out the truth Jesus had uncovered as he attacked the man’s self-reliant heart. And the result was that this man went away disheartened, dejected and destroyed by the impossible words of Jesus, and, before His disciples could ask Him for one word of explanation, Jesus turned His attention to them and said, “How difficult it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God.” And, Mark writes, “the disciples were amazed at his words” (Mark 10:24).

Why were the disciples so amazed at His words? Because, Jesus had just challenged one of their most basic assumptions about life. You see, in their day, and also in ours, material wealth was seen as a sign of God’s favor, and when Jesus condemned this rich, young man who had respectfully addressed Him as a “Good Teacher” (Mark 10:17), their ideas about wealth, and their cause-and-effect theology, took a major hit. But Jesus was just getting started, and, to make sure they understood His point, Jesus repeated His warning and then painted a vivid picture of just how difficult it is “to enter the kingdom of God” (Mark 10:24). Jesus said, “It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God” (Mark 10:25).

Now, you should know that there’s an interpretation out there based on a 19<sup>th</sup> century notion that this analogy about a camel going through the eye of a needle is actually a reference to a particular section of the city wall that served as an entrance in times of an enemy attack. So that access could be limited and the defense of the city maintained, this entrance was much smaller than the normal city gate and, consequently, it became known as “the needle.” And so, the interpretation goes, this emergency entrance to the city was, in fact, “the needle” Jesus was talking about, and, certainly, bringing a massive animal through such a small opening would be a challenge, but it wouldn’t be impossible. Well, I’m here to tell you today that this interpretation is *ridiculous!!!*

The comparison Jesus uses here must stand on its own. The needle is a needle. And the camel is a camel. And the task Jesus describes here is utterly, and without question, *impossible*. This is why Mark tells us that the disciples were “exceedingly astonished.” They had just heard an uncompromising word from Jesus that shattered all their ideas about how you get to heaven and He had left them with no room to bargain and no alternate path to try. What they had just heard from Jesus was an unbending and impossible assertion about the kingdom of God, and we can almost hear the desperation in their question as they throw up their hands in resignation and ask, “Who then can be saved?” (Mark 10:26).

And how does Jesus answer? He looks at them and says, “With man it is impossible...” And *this* is the moment of truth. It is the moment when Jesus’ merciless attack on the rich young man, suddenly turns on them. There was nothing they could do and there was nothing they could say. They were trapped by the impossible words that Jesus had spoken...and, today, so are we. You see Jesus speaks categorically. What I mean is that in His words to the disciples, and also to us, Jesus speaks in an unconditional manner that removes any hope that we can get to heaven on our own terms. And the result is the same for us as it was for the disciples; we throw up our hands in resignation and we desperately ask, “Who then can be saved?”

You see, we like to think that we have the free will to choose God on our own and determine for ourselves whether or not we will go to heaven. And categorically, without any mercy, Jesus says to us, “It is impossible.” Steven Paulson comments on our response to this categorical preaching from Jesus when he writes:

What is (our)...will expecting? (It’s expecting) A choice! The will wants the preacher to pose a hypothetical condition. In fact, the...will is like one of Pavlov’s dogs drooling at the mere mention of the word “*if*.” (But) When a categorical preacher delivers—for the first and final time in a person’s life—words that are not hypothetical and (are) completely without condition, what do you suppose happens? If you preach metaphorically, hypothetically—*as if*—to (the human) will, that will simply go on willing what it has always willed, and I assure you that whatever that is, it is not Christ. Categorical preaching shocks the will by giving it no chance; by speaking only of who Christ is and what Christ has done.<sup>1</sup>

These words highlight the desire inside each one of us to justify ourselves and make it to heaven on our own terms, and to this innate, sinful, damning desire, Jesus says, “It is impossible.” And, once this word of God has destroyed the desire of the human heart for a “do-it-yourself” salvation, and once the Old Adam has been put to death, then God creates a new life and He does in today’s reading with these miraculous words: “For all things are possible with God” (Mark 10:27). “With man it is impossible” This is a word of *Death!* “For all things are possible with God.” This is a word of *Life!*

And this is the message Jesus had been teaching day after day, and chapter after chapter. In the midst of their petty arguments about who was the greatest and how they compared with each other, Jesus was preaching and teaching them that they were on an impossible path that led to judgment, and that He had come to do for them what they could not do for themselves; in fact, the next words in Mark’s Gospel record Jesus telling His disciples for the third and final time, that when they arrive in Jerusalem, He will be “delivered over to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death and deliver him over to the Gentiles. And they will mock him and spit on him, and flog him and kill him. And after three days he will rise” (Mark 10:33-34).

My friends, it all points to this: Jesus came to die for us and by His death, we inherit eternal life. And there is no other way! Martin Luther once wrote that all of Scripture “intends to say that apart from faith in Christ there is nothing but sin and condemnation.”<sup>2</sup> But through faith in Christ, who died for us and rose again, there is nothing but forgiveness, life and salvation. And today, God has given these gifts to you. “With man it is impossible, but not with God. For all things are possible with God.” Go in the peace of this promise. Amen.

---

<sup>1</sup> Steven Paulson, *Preaching Categorically to Bound Wills*, Concordia Pulpit Resources: Volume 19, Part 4, Series B, September 13–November 22, 2009.

<sup>2</sup> Martin Luther, *The Bondage of the Will*, translated by J. I. Packer and O. R. Johnston (Westwood, NJ: Fleming H. Revel, 1957), 299.