

## Doing the Impossible.

Text: Phil 4:13

Suggested Hymns:

598, 321, 205, 283, 376

1) The Impossible Is Not Possible For Man Alone

2) Impossibility Is Washed Away In Christ

3) Faith Produces The Impossible

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is Philippians 4:13, <sup>13</sup> *I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.* (NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

*“They said it couldn’t be done! They said nobody could do it!”* These are the catchy phrases you will find in television commercials and newspaper adverts. At first thought, they sort of sweep you off your feet.

Sometimes it certainly seems as though mankind is doing the impossible today. Think of all the accomplishments of man, and you begin to be real proud of being a member of the human race. But then in a moment of sober reflection doubt begins to creep in as you realise all the turmoil that man has generated, the havoc he has wrought on the face of the earth, and the destruction he has sown.

The more you think about it, the more you begin to despair as you realise that even though man has accomplished many marvellous things, he has always somehow managed to turn his greatest achievements into monsters which awaken fear and terror in the hearts of many people.

As a result we wonder about man’s ability to accomplish anything. Yet in spite of all this God comes to us through the apostle Paul to assure us that it is possible for man, for you and me, to do the impossible. May the Lord bless our meditation.

### 1. The Impossible Is Not Possible for Man Alone

No doubt there were some people among the readers of Paul’s Letter to the Philippians who were highly critical of his statement *“I can do all things.”* In

their estimation this self-sufficiency was the mark of arrogant conceit, the evidence that Paul was a proud boaster.

There have always been those people who have viewed man as the subject of blind fate and the unfortunate victim of circumstance. They see man as a cork bobbing on the mysterious sea of life, being belted and battered by the varying trends of conditions and coincidences. In their futility they see no hope for man either now or hereafter.

Unfortunately they completely fail to grasp the thought of Paul. His words were not the expression of a cocky individualist. They were rather the confident testimony of a dependent but victorious believer in Christ.

Long ago Paul had learned how incapable he was of producing anything constructive. His present confident declaration was made only after he had spent much time in the school of Christian experience. The former raging Saul who felt that he could single-handedly exterminate the Christian heresy by his determination, power, and authority, perished in the dust of the Damascus road. There in the realisation of the futility of his own actions and the recognition that he had been chosen to play a part in the plans of the ruling Christ, a new man was born.

His question "*Lord, what do You want me to do?*"<sup>1</sup> is the evidence of this. In the years that followed he was trained by the Holy Spirit, who led him into all the mysteries of the life that is hid with Christ in God. Time and again incidents occurred which demonstrated to Paul his personal weakness and the error of his selfish thought.

On one occasion he felt it was necessary for God to remove some physical disability from him if he was to become an effective worker for God. He even prayed three times for the removal of this burden, but God's answer to his prayer was that "*My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.*"<sup>2</sup> The ultimate result of all this was the conviction that in and through Christ he could do the impossible.

It is not possible for man to do the impossible until he has learned this lesson. As long as a person remains dependent on his own strength, ability, and wisdom, he is doomed to frustration and defeat. He certainly will be able to

accomplish things in the material realm, but his total inability to accomplish anything in the spiritual realm will spoil all other achievements.

Even though the humanists like to ascribe a great deal of ability to man, yet the fact is that ever since the fall of Adam it has been impossible for man to reach his full potential. Man today is but a poor caricature of what the noble Adam was before he succumbed to temptation. The leprosy of Adam's sin has spread through the entire human race, enslaving and dooming it.

There is not a person on the earth who can produce anything good by himself. Man cannot even resolve to do good, much less do it. In fact, there is a terrific war between good and evil in us Christians at all times. We know what is right, and we aspire to do it, but then our baser nature exerts itself, and we are drawn away from our good intention. Paul said it this way: *The good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I [do].*<sup>3</sup>

As long as a man continues this unequal struggle on his own, he is certain to be defeated. Frustration and despair will weigh him down as he sees himself falling far short of the standards of excellence that God has established for him to meet.

This means that alone we cannot win. Alone we can only do that which is possible for us to do — bring forth more sin. Alone we can only be the battered victim of our own desires, the wishes of Satan, the enticement of the world, and the darkness of death.

If we are to win, to defeat these enemies of our soul, to do the impossible, we must recognise our weakness and our need for help. We must give up our self-sufficiency or be ruined forever. We must cry out with the apostle Paul, "*O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?*"<sup>4</sup>

## **2. Impossibility Is Washed Away In Christ**

What a tremendous difference there is between Paul's previous moan for help and his confident assertion *I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me*. But interspersed between these two statements stand the manger, the empty cross, and the open tomb. Paul had learned to recognise these symbols as the marks of the victory of the Deliverer of all helpless and hopeless mankind.

God had sent His own Son, Jesus Christ, to carry away the gates of impossibility which restrained mankind. He, the second Adam, accomplished the tremendous task by winning the victory over those things that had destroyed the first Adam. He, the eternal Son of God, made Himself of no reputation and took upon Himself flesh and blood that He might redeem all mankind. In man's stead He lived spotlessly, resisting the temptations of the devil. All through His life He rendered to God the perfect obedience that fallen man had been unable to produce.

Since this in itself was not sufficient to free mankind, Jesus also willingly took upon Himself the punishment of man's sin and paid the supreme penalty on the accursed tree of Calvary. He was stricken, smitten, wounded, and afflicted for man's wickedness. He bore the full measure of God's wrath against sin as He hung suspended between heaven and hell, forsaken by His Father and deserted by His disciples. He shed His innocent blood and gave up His holy life as the payment for man's freedom. He carried the sins of all humanity with Him and buried them in His grave.

But that was not all; on the third day Jesus burst the bands of death into tiny bits and came forth victoriously alive to declare to people of every generation that all that had enslaved them had been washed away in His one great sacrifice.

Then, forty days later, Jesus ascended into heaven that He might dispense the fruits of His victory to His followers and be invisibly present with them to give them the power to do the impossible.

Do you want to share in this victory? Do you want to rid yourself of depressing feelings of futility and frustration? Do you want the ability to do those things which are impossible for man? Then you must give up!

You must give up any confidence you may have in your own abilities. You must push down your pride, which is so often the cause of your defeat, and plead your utter helplessness on bended knees before the cross of the Crucified. You must repent of attempting to be the master of your fate and the captain of your soul.

Only such unconditional surrender can prepare the avenue for Christ's entry into your heart. But once you have surrendered to Him, He will flood your total being with His light and life. He will lift you up, wash you clean in His

redeeming blood, give meaning and purpose to your life, and send you out into the world a new creature with the ability to do the impossible for the glory of God.

### **3. Faith Produces The Impossible**

There are many people who are extremely sceptical of the Christian's claim that he can do the impossible. We would be the first to admit that by himself the Christian is as weak as anyone else. But the Christian does not stand alone. His sufficiency is of Christ. His claim to the ability to do the impossible does not rest on the personal possession of superior power but on the sure and certain promises of the almighty God.

His faith draws on the power of Christ to whom alone nothing is impossible. But let us not deceive ourselves into having faith in faith to accomplish the impossible. The power for such accomplishment does not reside in faith, but in Christ. Faith must unite us with Christ that His power for doing the impossible may flow through us.

Through faith in Christ, Christians have accomplished the impossible in the past and will continue to do so in the future. Look at Peter! He did the impossible by walking on the waters of the Sea of Galilee in response to Jesus' invitation for him to join Him. As long as he put his trust in Christ and kept his attention riveted on Christ, he easily walked along on top of the waves.

But as soon as he directed his attention to himself and to the size of the turbulent waves, he began to go down. You see, Christ's power for the performance of the impossible flows out to us in direct proportion to the degree in which we place our faith and trust in Him. Our failure to place our full trust in Christ is the reason we have so much difficulty in traversing the waters of the treacherous sea of life.

Now mind you, this does not mean that if a person believes in Jesus Christ, he will no longer encounter difficult situations, trials, and tribulations in life. But what God is saying to us through Paul is that if we surrender ourselves completely to Christ, place Him first in our lives, and are guided in all things by His Word, we will find power and strength in Christ to conquer the obstacles. We will be victorious over the very things which defeat and destroy the average person.

Today fear is rampant in our world. The tensions of war, terrorism, the advancements in guided missiles, and the many crimes on our local streets have all combined to depress, bewilder, and terrorise the people of the world.

But not so the Christian. He can do that which is impossible for the natural man. He can shackle his fear and live confidently, hopefully, and expectantly. He can do so because he knows that the God in whom he has placed his trust is the One who still rules and controls all things.

The Christian can do so because he believes the reassuring words of God, as written in Isaiah 41:10, <sup>10</sup> *Fear not, for I am with you; Be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, Yes, I will help you, I will uphold you with My righteous right hand.*'

Out text says, *I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.* In Christ we absolutely can do those things which are impossible for man. What is preventing you from living abundantly and from doing great things for the advancement of the kingdom of Christ? Are devilish temptations destroying you? You can be more than a conqueror over Satan through Christ who conquered for you.

Is it greedy materialism? In Christ you can find a new set of values. Is it perverse sensualism? In Christ there is power for control of our baser nature and a return to refreshing purity. Is it alcohol, drugs, smoking or some other addictive habit? In Christ there is a power to break its grip and to build a new life. Is it the fear of sickness or death? Fear not, for the great Physician of body and soul came to give you a life that shall never end.

Yes, and if need be, our faith in Christ can even bring us power enough to move the mountains into the sea. Jesus once said, as we read in Matthew 21:21, *“Assuredly, I say to you, if you have faith and do not doubt, you will not only do what was done to the fig tree, but also if you say to this mountain, ‘Be removed and be cast into the sea,’ it will be done.*

Perhaps you are still saying: *“I believe in Jesus, but I am not doing the impossible. I seem to be shackled by habitual sin and beset with doubts and fears.”* If this is the case, then take a new look at your God — a God who is big enough to marvellously control the movements of the billions of stars in the sky

and yet tender enough to be concerned about the welfare of an insignificant sparrow.

Look once again to God's mercy in the light of your unworthiness as you look with seeing eyes at the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross. Then turn to Him and pray fervently the prayer of the doubting father as recorded in Mark 9:24, "***Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!***"

God will hear you and send you His Holy Spirit to strengthen your faith so that you, too, will be able to exult, ***I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.*** The impossible has become possible. Thanks be to Christ. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> Acts 9:6

<sup>2</sup> 2 Corinthians 12:9

<sup>3</sup> Romans 7:19

<sup>4</sup> Romans 7:24