

The Impossible Made Possible.

Text: Matt 19:23-26

1) As Far As Man Is Concerned, No One

Suggested Hymns:

2) As Far As God Is Concerned, Every One

519, 323, 267, 343ALHB, 333

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 Matthew 19:23–26, ²³ *Then Jesus said to His disciples, “Assuredly, I say to you that it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. ²⁴ And again I say to you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.” ²⁵ When His disciples heard it, they were greatly astonished, saying, “Who then can be saved?” ²⁶ But Jesus looked at them and said to them, “With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.”* (NKJV)

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

Dear friends in Christ,

It will help us in understanding our text if we take notice of the connection in which it was written.

A rich young man had come to Jesus. In the course of the conversation he told Jesus, *“All these things I have kept from my youth. What do I still lack?”*¹ We see he was exceedingly proud of his good works.

Jesus wished to open his eyes and show him that he really lacked everything, because in spite of the works on which he prided himself, his heart was not right. Therefore Jesus said, *“If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me.”*

“But” — oh, that fateful, terrible “but”! — *“when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.”* Indeed, he had done many good, out-wardly good, works, but his heart did not belong to God. His heart loved, and trusted in, riches.

And now our text begins, *“Assuredly, I say to you that it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven.* How difficult it is for a rich man to enter the Kingdom!

Jesus illustrates this truth, ²⁴ *And again I say to you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.* What does Jesus mean?

People have sought all manner of clever explanations of these words. Some have said that the translation *“camel”* is incorrect; the Greek word rendered thus in our Bible ought to be translated *“rope.”* It is easier for a rope to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter heaven.

Others have gotten busy with *“the eye of a needle.”* They say that the gate in the wall of Jerusalem closed at sundown. However, there was a small opening in the wall for latecomers. If a camel got on its knees, it could be pushed through this small opening. This they claim is *“the eye of a needle.”*

My friends, there is no need of any such far-fetched and fanciful explanations. Jesus’ words were a proverbial saying, expressing impossibility. Coming into the Kingdom is so difficult for a rich man that, in other words, it is impossible. That is the only correct understanding.

The disciples understood it that way. Therefore we read, ²⁵ *When His disciples heard it, they were greatly astonished, saying, “Who then can be saved?”* Our text expresses the intense feeling of the disciples. They were dumbfounded, taken off their feet. They felt the very foundations shaking when Jesus spoke those words.

You may wonder, whether they were rich men that they should become so excited about the words of Jesus. Certainly not; they were poor men. However, you do not have to be rich, to be like a rich man in your heart.

These disciples felt that by nature they were just like that young man. By nature their heart loved the things of this world. By nature there was no difference between him and them. If it is not possible for that rich young man to enter the Kingdom, *“who then can be saved?”* No wonder that they were agitated.

And I should be agitated about this question for myself and for you. And you should be agitated and with intense feeling ask: “*Who then can be Saved?*”

The theme for today is *The impossible made possible*. May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. The Impossible Made Possible

Jesus Answers:

As Far As Man Is Concerned, No One

“*Who then can be saved?*” Jesus answers, “*With men this is impossible.*” As far as man is concerned, no one can be saved.

If man is to be saved, there must be the right relationship between God and man. Man’s heart must be right toward God. That was the trouble with the rich young man.

The trouble was not that he was rich or that he had lived a wicked life. He had lived a good life outwardly. He was a respectable young man. Perhaps the mothers of the village pointed him out to their sons as a role model. However, his heart did not belong to God. His heart was riveted to the things of this world. While he did not kneel before the golden calf, gold was his god.

Now this young man is not the only one of his kind. He was a true son of Eve. Eve looked at the tree of whose fruit she and Adam should not eat and saw that it was a tree to be desired, and she permitted this desire to grow so that it possessed her heart.

God’s commandment was forgotten, and God Himself was cast off the throne. Ever since then the heart of man by nature centres on the things of this world.

True, man still knows that there is a God; he still knows that he must give an account to Him; but nevertheless his heart is filled with the love of this world.

The objects of this love vary, but they are always of this world. With some, perhaps the majority, money and temporal possessions occupy the first place, the throne that ought to be God’s.

With others it is honour and fame, with still others it is the pleasures of this life. With a comparatively few the objects of love will be a little higher and

nobler, the arts and sciences, and the like. And again, the objects of man's love may change; but always, by nature, they are things of this world.

And now, as far as man is concerned, no one can be saved because no man can change his heart. No man can by any powers within himself tear his heart away from the things of this world and rivet it upon God. Man can change his outward behaviour, but he cannot change the attitude of his heart. As little as the Ethiopian can change his skin or the leopard his spots, just so little can man change his heart. As far as he himself is concerned, his is a helpless and hopeless case.

Nor is that all. Not only can man not change his heart, give his heart back to God and put God again upon the throne; but this stealing away of the heart is a sin, a crime. Casting God off the throne of the heart is rebellion against Him.

Remember how Absalom tried to cast his own father, David, off the throne. You know what a dastardly deed that was and how he was punished, and deservedly so. A thousand times worse, however, is man's rebellion against God, casting God out of the heart and pledging allegiance to the passing things of this world. Rebellion deserves punishment.

And not only that. The sin of rebellion leads to other sins. Because man through this rebellion has cast out God, he continues to transgress all the laws of God. And as he cannot stop rebelling, he cannot stop sinning.

He may by sheer will-power out-wardly abstain from this or that sin, but he cannot stop sinning; his rebellious heart continually flies in the face of God. No wonder that St. Paul exclaims in Romans 7:24, ²⁴ *O wretched man that I am!* What a tragic situation!

Who then can be saved? As far as man is concerned, no one. Whether you are rich or poor does not make an ounce of difference. Rich and poor live in different houses, wear different clothes, eat different food, but both have the same wayward, rebellious, self-willed, self-centred heart. Both are helplessly lost if left to themselves.

2. The Impossible Made Possible

Jesus Answers:

As Far As God Is Concerned, Every One

However, thanks be to God, Jesus does not stop by saying, ***“With men this is impossible”***; He continues, ***“But with God all things are possible”***; and therefore, as far as God is concerned, every one can be saved.

“With God all things are possible.” God can perform miracles. And in saving man, God must and does perform miracles.

We just heard that man’s heart is not right with God and that he therefore continually sins against Him. Now, in saving man, God did not start with man’s heart, but with man’s sin.

God decided to get sin out of the way, really out of the way; for sin is the wall of separation between God and men. But how was this to be done? How was sin and how were all the evil consequences of sin to be eliminated?

No man could do it. But God’s wisdom found a way. He sent His own eternal Son. He had His Son become man, a real man, born of the Virgin Mary. This God-Man could do what was entirely out of the question for any mere man. The God-Man’s heart was right. God was enthroned in His heart. God reigned supreme there.

Hear Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane, ***“Not My will, but Thine, be done.”***² Because His heart was right, His life, too, was right. In thought and word and deed He never once swerved from the path of God.

And in all this He acted as man’s Substitute. ***“The LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.”***³ When on the cross Jesus bore the punishment of men’s sins and triumphantly cried out, ***“It is finished,”*** He had taken away the sins of the whole world. He had torn down the wall of separation.

Now that the wall of separation has been removed, God approaches the heart of man. God comes to man with the marvellous Gospel-message of salvation through Christ as it is summed up in that wonderful statement ***“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.”***⁴

Now God performs another miracle. Let us remember that, when man hears this message, he cannot receive it. Man’s mind objects and calls it foolishness that God should punish the innocent Jesus and let the sinner go scot-free.

Man's will objects. He is too proud to accept such a gift. He wants to save himself through his own works. Man's heart objects. It first of all wants salvation for this life. After this life has been made secure and happy, perhaps there will be time for thinking about yonder life.

But God performs miracles. With His wonderful Gospel-message of Jesus and His love He continues to shine into the heart of man. By this message He enlightens the mind, so that all at once man sees that this message is not foolishness, but the very wisdom of God, and he is filled with joy over the fact that God found a way of salvation.

God operates with this Gospel also upon the will and turns him, so that he no longer wants to save himself, but falls on his knees and pleads, "***God be merciful to me, a sinner.***" God continues to shine into the heart and changes the heart, so that man has only one supreme desire, namely, the desire to be saved, saved by Jesus Christ.

Thus the heart of man is changed by the mighty working of God through the Gospel. Now there is again a happy relationship between God and man.

After having thus brought man to faith, God performs still another miracle. By the same Gospel by which He has kindled faith in man's hearts He also engenders love as a fruit of faith.

The heart of man casts out the false gods, and the Triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is once more enthroned. The whole outlook on life is changed. The question in the heart now is, *How does God look upon all things?*

The motive for man's actions is changed. The question is no longer, *What pleases me?* but, *What does my God and Saviour want me to do?*

It is true, this throne of God in the heart is very shaky. The devil, the world, and our flesh are constantly trying to dethrone God and to pre-empt the throne again for the things of this world.

However, once more the power of God is manifest. Scripture says that you "***are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation.***"⁵ Through the preaching of the Gospel God not only changes the heart, but by the continued preaching and reading of the Gospel He maintains this change.

“Who then can be saved?” As far as God is concerned, every one. Christ died for all. God wants the message of salvation preached to all. The Holy Spirit wants to work faith and love in the heart of every one.

You object, saying that so many are not saved. Indeed, that is all too true. However, it is in no way God’s fault. Think of Jerusalem. Did any city ever have a better preacher than Christ, who preached both by words and deeds?

Yet listen to Jesus’ lamentation: ***“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing!”***⁶

“Who then can be saved?” When that question was asked, the disciples were exceedingly agitated. However, not only they but also Jesus was profoundly moved. We are expressly told that before answering He looked at His disciples. The emotion of His heart was in that look.

He looked at them with love, indicating the longing of His heart that they all might be saved. He looked at them with anxiety lest some be lost.

Jesus Christ is here today. He is looking at every person in this congregation and in that look there is both love and anxiety. Let us not disappoint Jesus, but rid Him of His anxiety.

Cast away all thought of self-help. Despair of doing anything for yourself in the matter of your salvation. Distrust any advice that implies any power within yourself.

On the contrary, cast yourself whole-heartedly upon God’s might and His mercy in Christ Jesus. Let no condition of life, neither poverty nor riches, deter you.

Trust God to continue and complete His work in you.

Let us close with the words of the hymnist,⁷

In [Christ] alone my trust I place,
Come boldly to Thy throne of grace,
And there commune with Thee;
Salvation sure, O Lord, is mine,
And, all-unworthy, I am Thine,

For Jesus died for me! Amen.

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

¹ Matthew 19:20

² Luke 22:42

³ Isaiah 53:6

⁴ John 3:16

⁵ 1 Peter 1:5

⁶ Matthew 23:37

⁷ ALHB 343