

On the Way to the Cross - The Impossible Is Possible

Now a certain ruler asked Him, saying, "Good Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" So Jesus said to him, "Why do you call Me good? No one is good but One, that is, God. You know the commandments: 'Do not commit adultery,' 'Do not murder,' 'Do not steal,' 'Do not bear false witness,' 'Honour your father and your mother.' " And he said, "All these things I have kept from my youth." So when Jesus heard these things, He said to him, "You still lack one thing. Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me."

But when he heard this, he became very sorrowful, for he was very rich. And when Jesus saw that he became very sorrowful, He said, "How hard it is for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of God! For 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." And those who heard it said, "Who then can be saved?"

Then He said, "The things which are impossible with men are possible with God." Then Peter said, "See, we have left all and followed You." So He said to them, "Assuredly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or parents or brothers or wife or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God, who shall not receive many times more in this present time, and in the age to come eternal life."

We have entered the final six months of the Lord's ministry on earth and in this passage Jesus addresses some very important issues.

The way Jesus deals with this young man seems quite radical - even abrupt! And it is troubling. It was troubling for the disciples, for the wealthy young ruler, and probably for us. However, it would be easy to miss the truth if it was delivered any other way. Sometimes it's better to tell it as it is! Luke places this event in the midst of a series of incidents and parables designed to indicate the "character" of a true disciple. All the Gospel-writers place it near the end of the Lord's public ministry, and Mark supplies a little more detail: "As Jesus started on his way, a man ran up to him and fell on his knees before him" (**Mark 10:17**). Jesus is about to leave the town. Therefore, it was the man's last chance to ask his question. So he runs up to him and falls on his knees before him, and asks, "What should I do to inherit eternal life?" To everyone present it seems a picture of urgency, earnestness and humility.

Let's pick up the story again with the young man's question. "Good teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" But who is he, and why did he need to ask this question? The word translated "ruler" is Greek 'archon', "generally, one who has administrative authority - a leader, or official." Matthew's account (**Matthew 19:22**) adds another detail and refers to the ruler as a "young man," and **Luke 18:23** tells us "he was a man of great wealth." Here we have an earnest young man (very wealthy indeed), and probably because of his wealth and sincerity about spiritual matters, he was entrusted with governance in the synagogue (a ruler, a respected person in the community).

Note, most of the wealthy, religious people who asked Jesus public questions were trying to trick him. But this man's question was no trick. It was a sincere question to which he needed to know the answer... "How do I inherit eternal life?" The young man obviously believed that eternal life is something we earn or merit by what we

do. He thought that eternal life is a reward for what we do on earth. Let's move on....

Verse 19, **"Why do you call Me good?"** When the rich young man calls Jesus "good" (*agathe*), the Lord quickly points out that, "no one is good" (*agathos*) except God the Father. Only God is intrinsically, absolutely and entirely good! The Greek word used implies *'that which is good in character or constitution, and beneficial in its effect'*. However, what stands out with this word, as opposed to the other Greek words translated 'good', is the aspect of it being *'beneficial in its effect'*. God's goodness benefits others!

Notice, the young man calls Jesus "good teacher", not Lord. So the first thing He points out is that no one is intrinsically good except God. Why say this? Because Jesus has picked up that the young man thinks he's good himself. Look at how he answered Jesus in verse 21, **"All these things I have kept from my youth."** Like most people who religiously kept the Law, this man thought he was good in God's eyes. But all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23). The young man wouldn't understand anything else Jesus tells him unless he grasps that our relative standards of "goodness" are a lot different to God's absolute goodness (and God's standards of righteousness).

The young man says that he has kept all the commandments, yet he still senses a lack, an incompleteness, or else he wouldn't have come to Jesus in the first place. Now Jesus speaks to the young man's point of need: *"When Jesus heard this, he said to him, 'You still lack one thing. Sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.'"* Jesus affirms the young man's neediness. The word translated "lack" means, "to be deficient in something that ought to be present (for whatever reason)." But the Lord's prescription is unpalatable... "Sell everything?" Jesus proposes that the man sells all his property and give the proceeds to those who are least able to reciprocate - the poor.

How often have people been tempted to do things that were wrong or unethical or self-serving because of the lure of money? Money must either be controlled or it will control you. It's a very sad thing when our possessions begin to possess us! Jesus knew that this was an issue!

If the young man did what Jesus had told him, he had the Lord's assurance that he will have treasure in heaven. "Treasure" in the Greek means, "that which is stored up." It is an ironic exchange that Jesus proposes - exchanging fabulous wealth here on earth for fabulous wealth in the Kingdom of God. But money isn't the only thing that Jesus asked the young man to give up. He was asked to give up:

- Possessions - what money will buy, the paraphernalia of wealth.
- Status and influence that wealth affords.
- Power. Wealth is power. It buys influence.
- Leadership. The man isn't very likely to continue as a respected ruler without his wealth.
- Family. The young man probably comes from a wealthy family. But if he disposes of it, will his wife and family understand?

The Lord's words don't only upset the rich young ruler. They probably also upset many of us. Most people's response to this passage is: *"That doesn't mean everyone should sell what they have, does it? If everyone did that it*

would result in chaos." Obviously! But why are you even worried with the question? Do you feel possessive of what you have? Do you fear that Jesus may require you to do something that would cost you too much? What are you afraid of? And why do you fear? You fear because you sense that you are not fully surrendered, that's why! But relax, don't get discouraged, Jesus isn't against prosperity. He is merely pointing out what He has recently made very clear...

"No servant can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money" (Luke 16:13). Now, his disciples have had an object lesson - an (actual) extremely rich man to learn from. The real question that needed to be answered is this, *"Can this young man become a disciple?"* After all, 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 (verse 25). The answer is made clear in verse 27, *"The things which are impossible with men are possible with God."* Mark puts it a little differently, *"With men it is impossible, but not with God; for with God all things are possible" (Mark 10:27).* Yes, absolutely nothing is impossible with our God!

Jesus said, "All things." That includes getting a rich man or an ordinary person like you and me into a perfect heaven. With God, all things are possible. This is our faith! When the angel of the Lord appeared to Mary he said this, *"For with God nothing is impossible" (Luke 1:37).* If nothing is impossible with God then that means that all things are possible with God. That means that God can take a ruined or tragic situation, a forgotten or forlorn life, a broken dream, a corrupt society, and transform them into something of significance. It means that God is able to bring something out of nothing; and make a way where there is no way. Therefore, what would it mean to you today if you really believed this verse? What would happen in your marriage, family, friendships, profession or business if you really believed this verse?

Are you dreaming the kind of dreams that make room for this verse to be realised in your life? If you really believe that with God all things are possible, what would you take on right now! What would be the first thing that you would like Him to do "with" you? Yes, it does say, "with God" all things are possible, implying a togetherness with Him!

When we see this emphasis, we get to know the importance of working together with God as Jesus worked together with His Father. What's more, the Lord made a promise that He would never leave us or forsake us. Yes, He really is with us always! He is with us no matter what the circumstances. And, because He is with us, all things are possible! Maybe if we all truly believed in the divine hope that is present in this small statement, we would begin to see the "rule" of Kingdom of God present with us. Maybe our lives, the church, our community, our nation, and even the world would be transformed. After all, with God ALL things are possible!

To end, I'd like to address the issue of prosperity. Jesus has just declared that what is impossible with man is possible with God. Peter then jumps on this and says, "See we have left all and followed You" (verse 28). Jesus responds by stating that no one who has given anything up for the sake of the kingdom of God will go unrewarded. His exact words are, *"Who shall receive many times more in this present times, and in the age to come eternal life."* The New Living Translation says, *"Will be repaid many times over in this life, and will have eternal life in the world to come."*

Notice that the Lord promises to multiply back everything that you have given up for Him and His kingdom. But also notice where these rewards are going to manifest "in this present time - in this life!" You don't have to wait until you get to heaven to enjoy the rewards of your obedience! And these rewards include material things. Listen again to the words of Jesus, "*Assuredly I say to you, there is no one who has given up houses...*" (verse 29). A house is a material thing, it represent prosperity here on earth. With God **all things are possible** and He never forgets what you have given up for Him. So He desires to repay you many times over - in this life! No seed you have planted in His kingdom will be unfruitful. So start to dream big dreams again - what is impossible with man is possible with God! **Amen.**