



Speaker:
Paul Forrest

Mission: Impossible

Series: The Gospel of Mark · 34 of 34

1/31/2021 (SUN) | Bible: Mark 10:13-27

And they brought young children to him, that he should touch them, and his disciples rebuked those that brought them. But when Jesus saw it, he was much displeased, and said unto them, "Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom of God. Verily I say unto you, whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein." And he took them up in his arms, put his hands upon them, and blessed them.

And when he was gone forth into the way, there came one running, and kneeled to him and asked him, "Good Master, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?" And Jesus said unto him, "Why callest thou me 'good'? There is none good but one, that is, God."

"Thou knowest the commandments: *do not commit adultery; do not kill; do not steal; do not bear false witness; defraud not; honour thy father and mother.*" And he answered and said unto him, "Master, all these have I observed from my youth." Then Jesus, beholding him, loved him and said unto him, "One thing thou lackest: go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven; and come, take up the cross, and follow me." And he was sad at that saying and went away grieved, for he had great possessions.

And Jesus looked round about, and saith unto his disciples, "How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God!" And the disciples were astonished at his words. But Jesus answereth again, and saith unto them, "Children, how hard is it for them that trust in riches to enter into the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God." And they were astonished out of measure, saying among themselves, *Who then CAN be saved?* And Jesus looking upon them saith, "With men it is impossible, but not with God; for with God all things are possible."

We're following on today with this gathering in or around the house. Jesus has been speaking about adultery and remarriage.

Our reading today takes in two notable encounters. The first is about the children. *Allow them to come to me*, Jesus says. Then there's the meeting with the young man, known commonly as the "rich young ruler".

I expect most preachers would treat these two events separately. But because I've spoken over the last couple of weeks about Jesus's use of children to make his points, I thought I'd make only the briefest comments on this episode. I intend rather to focus on the other event.

Some parents brought their infants to Jesus to receive a blessing. The disciples told the parents off, no doubt keen that Jesus isn't distracted from his ministry. Remember, children were among the lowest in Jewish society. Jesus has very recently used the child to overturn these social norms.

But the disciples were still learning. And I think the attitude Jesus was attempting to re-educate them about was more than their low view of children. He was teaching them both to have respect to those least in the church *and* to discard their general elitism.

Jesus goes on to show the type of attitude needed for entry into his kingdom and uses some children as examples. I've said previously that Jesus has been using children to represent something else. Many commentators at this point change tack and suggest Jesus is now talking about his special love for children. If you accept the way in which he did recently, it makes no sense to start interpreting his lesson literally.

The children here are being used as examples. There's something about children that must be seen in the one who seeks entry into the kingdom of God. We've said it most certainly is not sinlessness! Neither is it humility. What is it then? **Infants are totally dependent on adults** for their welfare. They get their food at the hands of their parents, who also protect them. They're vulnerable, in other words. And in that society, they're socially marginalized.

- The sinner who comes to God wanting salvation must come empty-handed
- They must acknowledge their absolute dependence on God for salvation
- They must accept they don't belong in this world

They must become **vulnerable**, in other words, and this act of humility is one of the biggest barriers to people trusting in God. Some people refuse to accept they're helpless.

Compare this lowly approach to the rich young ruler we're about to consider. We'll see he wanted to bring some offering of his own that would merit salvation.

Yet I'm sure if we asked the people of that day, including the disciples, what type of person would be suitable for citizenship of the Zion of God, they'd describe a man like the one we're talking about today! An upstanding, respected member of society coming with a [seeming] desire to obey God. So the idea the kingdom of God belongs to people who are in some way like children is hard to accept.

So this isn't about Jesus's particular love for children. That interpretation is popular because it sounds more pleasant. And many doctrines are popular because they sound more romantic or exciting. Having said this, I think it's fair to say that, in bringing the children into the very heart of his public ministry, **Jesus is also teaching us that the gospel is for children too**. Unlike the religious people around him, he cared as much for infants as for adults.

~

We're looking at the account of "the rich young ruler", as he's come to be known. He wasn't a ruler of the synagogue but a civil magistrate. And our text tells us he was both rich and a young man.

I'd like to make it my aim today to remind you that salvation is of God, and to feed your souls through the glorious gospel of God.

To do this, I intend to present you with three statements—three reasons why salvation is impossible with men. GOD saves sinners. They cannot save themselves.

With men, salvation is impossible, because of their pride

Take a look again at the beginning of this meeting: **Mark 10:17** *And when he was gone forth into the way, there came one running, and kneeled to him, and asked him, 'Good Master, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?'*

He calls Jesus "good master". This is a digression, but worth noting while we're here. Jesus answers that in the next verse, by saying, "Why are calling me "good"? You know, there's only one that fits that description, and that's God!". Christ isn't saying here that he's **not** good but his Father in heaven is: he's saying, "If you want to call me 'good', you're confessing the truth that I'm God!"

The real problem, though, was his question. This is where pride comes into it. Another gospel writer reports it like this: "What GOOD THING shall I DO". This is not a cry of despair like the Philippian jailer. Do you remember, he cried "What must I do to be saved?" And that man wasn't told to go off and do anything: he was commanded to simply *believe*.

But this young man is a picture of every proud religious person who's ever lived. They, too, want to know which type of good work they should perform so that God will reward them with salvation. The religions of Viking paganism, Islam, Judaism...they're all the same: *all of man's religions are based on salvation through works*.

When you talk to people about the gospel, remember they're blind. Remember they're slaves to sin, utterly overtaken with what the apostle John calls "the pride of life". They'll tell you they're not a bad person; that they've made mistakes, like everyone else, but they're on the whole good people.

They, too, want this salvation, whatever it is. If there's a great place we can go to when we die, and be there forever, they want it. And they reason within themselves, "What shall I do, to get this?". Salvation by the grace of God alone is a mystery to them, because they won't accept that everything they've ever done, that they think is good, is in reality like filthy rags.

This man also pictures multitudes of people who've stepped forward at Christian rallies, campaigns, and so-called "revival meetings", who've come wanting eternal life, but with the same question in their mind, "What good thing shall I do?".

I know there are people who've been converted through the preaching of free-willers. But the fruit of ministries like that is exposed when you see the numbers of their "converts" who truly go on to follow Christ. Out of maybe hundreds of thousands of people who have "come forward" or raised their hand to be saved, hardly any are found afterwards to be following the saviour.

People want to DO something!

Some Christian might say, “I exercised my free will and chose God!” No you didn’t! God opened your hand and placed his gift in it. You were the empty vessel into which God poured his grace, and you simply received it.

Let’s move on and look at Christ’s answer. In his great wisdom, the Good Master did something very interesting. If this young man were around today, the preachers would say to him, “Let’s get on our knees; and repeat after me...”

But Jesus, knowing that this man is proud of himself, chooses instead to use the Law of God against him. He used it in the way it’s *meant* to be used: **to show a man that he’s a sinner**. The Law, when properly understood, points sinners to Christ; because, when you see the righteousness which the Law demands, it drives you to the only one who saves.

The Lord’s command to the man was, “Keep the commandments”. Do you think there was any chance this man could do this? No, he was, like you and I, a child of Adam, and he—like you and I—inherited the family disease: **sin**. This sinful man could no more keep the commandments than my dog.

The young ruler asked which ones he should keep. Maybe he thought Jesus would tell him the important ones that please God, so he could concentrate on them and not bother with the others! Maybe he thought this prophet had come with some new rule to keep. I don’t know.

But Jesus indulges him. He gives him a few commandments from what we sometimes call the “moral law”, written on the stone tablets. And the ones he gives are from the second table of the law, which are about men’s responsibilities to each other. These were regarded by the Jews as being a bit easier to keep, though Christ later showed them they hadn’t even kept one between them since they were given!

With men, salvation is impossible, because of their self-righteousness

The man, in his blind pride, confidently tells the Messiah that he’s kept these commandments since he was a boy. I think he was in work when the Sermon on the Mount took place! That would’ve shut him up, wouldn’t it? Imagine his face if he’d have heard Jesus say, “So you’ve never killed anyone, eh? Ever been angry at someone? Ever? Then you’re a common murderer, a lawbreaker and deserving of divine retribution.” That would have done the trick.

By the world’s standards, this *was* an unusual man:

- He was rich, yet he knew there was more to life than what he could see and touch
- He was young, yet he had an interest in spiritual matters uncommon in younger people
- He was a man of standing, yet he risked his reputation by dropping to his knees and asking about spiritual matters in front of a crowd
- ...and he had some belief that Christ was able to point him in the right direction to attain eternal life.

You know the sad thing? He believed what he was saying! According to the people’s understanding of the Law, he *had* kept it. I’m sure he really had never been with another woman; I’m sure he never did kill anyone; and I’m sure he visited his mum and dad.

But there's the problem: he has no idea of God's holiness and *does not understand the Law in a spiritual way*. You can bet your life he'd hated people and had his eye on other fellows' wives. His version of obedience to God was *outward*. Like people today, he prided himself on *outward respectability*, but his heart was black as coal.

I was speaking to a young lady a while ago now (she's a professing Christian) about this issue of law-keeping. She'd gone and joined a "Jewish Roots" group. She's been re-baptised into this group as an act of repentance for her Christianity, which she now believes is all completely corrupt. And one of her new duties is obedience to the Law of God. She'd begun ploughing through Deuteronomy, to learn what her new responsibilities are—to see what **good thing** *she* could do to please God.

Let's look very briefly at some scriptures to help us see clearly the error of the young man in our account, the deluded woman I've just spoke of, and everyone else who seeks to be right with God by the keeping of the Law: **Romans 7:4 Wherefore, my brethren, ye also are become dead to the Law by the body of Christ, that ye should be married to another, even to him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God.**

He who is raised from the dead is, of course, Christ Jesus, our beloved saviour. Did you get that? We are DEAD to the law.

And we now have a new husband, and that is Christ. Now, you can't have it both ways: you're either married to the Law or married to *Christ*. You're either bound by the Law or *free* in Christ. What do you think Jesus would think if you wanted to go back to your old husband? You've received of him *perfect righteousness*—do you really want to try and improve on that?

Turn over the page to Romans 8, and let's read verses 3 & 4: **For what the Law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteousness of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.**

If only the rich young ruler knew this! That the Law could never save anyone, because of the weakness of our flesh! If we could find a man who *had* no weakness of flesh, who never sinned in thought, word or deed, then he could earn perfect merit with God; he would be truly righteous.

Thanks be to God that such a man was found—and it was the God-man himself. Because of him, the righteousness of the Law was fulfilled in us. That means that **all God's chosen people are treated as if they'd personally kept the Law of God as perfectly as Christ did.**

Self-righteousness, then, is another reason why men can't save themselves. You only have to look at the parable of the two men in the temple. One came proclaiming his own righteousness, and left that temple as lost as when he went in. The other confessed his sinfulness and left that place right with God.

Here's my third and final statement.

With men, salvation is impossible, because of their love of the world

Here's the crunch time. Jesus now, knowing all along that this man was in love with his riches, continues to humour this man's error. He tells him to do just one more thing, then he'll be perfect. He tells him to *sell everything and give the money to the poor*.

Picture this: a man comes to New Road Church one Sunday morning. He's rich. And he says, "I've been a good man all my life. What else do I have to do to get eternal life?" Can you imagine how he would react if you spoke to him like Jesus did?

Okay, none of us is God—we can't read people's minds, or know all about them without ever meeting them, so I'm not suggesting we try the approach Jesus used; but imagine saying, "Okay, friend, what I'd like you to do is go and sell your house, sell your holiday homes abroad, sell your three cars, sell your jewellery, sell your expensive clothes (there's some good charity shops around here; you can pick up some nice second-hand clothes there); oh, and empty your bank accounts. Then take all the money, and we'll give it to needy people in the area. Then follow Jesus, and you'll have treasure in heaven."

What do you think would happen? I don't think you'd see him again. He'd go away sorrowful; because, although he'd never have admitted it to you, he loves his wealth.

Here's a question: what would you do? If God laid it on your heart, would you give up your house? Your car? What about your family? Do you love God more than you love them?

This rich, young man, only moments before the most enthusiastic man in the crowd; seeking after eternal life; hanging on Jesus' instructions. I tell you: THIS MAN WAS READY TO DO ANYTHING—unless, of course, the cost was too much; *and it was*.

He loved his money. He likely worked very hard to amass all his wealth. Natural man concerns himself with many things in this life, but some are of great concern to him. And when people have great concerns in this life, they naturally love these more than God.

Have a look at this counsel from the Lord: **Colossians 3:2 Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth.**

And see 1 John 2: 15, which is a clear warning: **1 John 2:15 Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.**

Jesus makes it clear by using a picture, saying that it would be easier to get a camel through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter God's kingdom.

Well, after Jesus had said this, the disciples were amazed. They gasped, "Who then CAN be saved?". It'll help us to understand where the disciples were coming from to appreciate why they were so shocked.

The Jewish understanding of the Kingdom of God and its Messiah was a material one. They expected the Messiah to come and lead the Jews in a huge uprising which would overthrow the Roman tyrants and establish a literal kingdom where the Jews ruled.

The disciples, though, were beginning to understand that wasn't the purpose of God. But I'm certain some of their pre-conceived ideas remained.

The master has destroyed their notion of men of great standing making up the kingdom, now he tells them that most *rich* men won't get in either! No wonder they were "exceedingly amazed".

They probably thought, "Jesus, you've ruled out the most successful men, the respectable ones, and even our religious leaders. Who's left? Is this kingdom to be ruled by the lowly nothings of the world?" If that's what they thought, they'd be right for a change!

The apostle Paul tells the church at Corinth (1Co 1:26): **Not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called.** It's a meek and despised minority who'll inherit the earth, and all heavenly treasures.

~

Now I've told you that, with men, salvation is impossible. We've examined this from three different angles. I can't leave it there, can I? Many of you will know by experience that salvation *cannot* be impossible, because you've testified that you're God's children—that is, you've abandoned any hope of saving yourself, and have fled to that city of refuge, which is Christ Jesus the Lord.

We've proven, through the meeting of the rich young ruler, that man cannot save himself. In reply to the question posed by the disciples, "Who then CAN be saved?", Jesus confirms this truth: with men, he says, salvation is impossible.

But praise God, that's not the end of his sentence. Praise the Lord for these words, "BUT...WITH...GOD". "But with God", he says, "ALL things are possible". Because of his almighty nature:

- He was able to *predestine* people to eternal life, according to nothing more than his own good will
- He was able to *call* them to himself, by the irresistible power of the Holy Spirit
- He was able to *justify* them, imparting to them the exact same righteousness as Jesus has
- And he was able to *glorify* them, making them kings and priests with himself, and promising them true peace and joy forever

Man cannot do any of these things; but God can—and **has**.

Christ took the sins of his people on him and owned them; then the Father punished him instead of those people, so that now there's not a scrap of anger left in our Father. It means he can never be angry at the believer, because his anger is all spent.

The idea of fitting a camel through the eye of a needle is absurd. It would take such a change in the nature of the camel that's beyond our imagination. **But God does that with a sinful man.** He's able to fit the proverbial camel through that needle. And make no mistake: **the change required to turn a rebel into a servant of God is just as huge.** This is why we should learn to appreciate just what a miracle it is when a sinner is saved.

You know, when I persuade sinners to believe the gospel, I'm conscious that, with me, their salvation is impossible. **But...with...God**, all things are possible. If they are his, they **will** come to him, and they that come to him **will not** be turned away.

As for me? With God, it was possible to save this blasphemer from his rebellion. And, more than that, God made it **certain**.

Is this you? Then thank God for his so great salvation. Does this *not* describe you? Then to you I say, "Believe the gospel", and we'll leave you in the hands of our God, for whom all things are possible.

Amen.