

WITH GOD ALL THINGS ARE POSSIBLE
Sermon for the 22nd Sunday after Pentecost, 2018
Mark 10:23-31

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 the Gospel from before, Mark 10:23-31: ²³ **Jesus looked around and said to His disciples, “How hard it will be for those who are rich to enter the kingdom of God!”**

²⁴ **The disciples were amazed at His Words. However, Jesus told them again, “Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! ²⁵ 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.”**

²⁶ **They were extremely amazed. They asked one another, “Who then can be saved?”**

²⁷ **Jesus looked straight at them and said: “With men it is impossible but not with God. For with God all things are possible.”**

²⁸ **Then Peter began to say to Him: “Look! We have left everything and followed You.”**

²⁹ **Jesus said, “Truly, I tell you, there is no one who has left his house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for My sake and for the sake of the Gospel, ³⁰ who will fail to receive a hundred times as much, now, in this time, houses, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and fields, with persecutions and, in the coming age, eternal life. ³¹ However, many who are first will be last, and the last first.”**

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

Dear friends in Christ,

In today’s Gospel, we find Jesus having a conversation with the disciples about entering the kingdom of heaven and life as one in that kingdom. In one case, he describes it as very difficult - **“How hard it will be for those who are rich to enter the kingdom of God!”** It’s not really impossible but really, really difficult. In another, he describes it as truly impossible - **“Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! ²⁵ 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.”** So which one is it?

Our text today follows on immediately from the Gospel from last Sunday.¹ To get better acquainted with what Jesus is teaching today, let us quickly summarise what happened.

A rich young man had come to Jesus, asking what he must do to inherit eternal life. Jesus truly loves this man, and this man appears *sincere* in his request. He has many things right. Certainly, he’s come to the right person, Jesus. Indeed, he runs to him. In the Gospel of Mark, it appears that only sincere individuals, with real needs, ever “run” to meet Jesus, and unlike the scribes and Pharisees, he kneels as a sign of respect to Jesus. He addresses Jesus in a very complimentary way, *“Good Teacher.”* It’s so complimentary that Jesus uses it to encourage the young man to consider the full implications of what he just said: *“Why do you call Me good? No one is good except One, that is, God.”* With this reminder of the First Table of the Law, involving God and His name, Jesus doesn’t seem to be criticising the young man, but rather asking if he understands the true implications of his address. It’s as if Jesus is saying, “How far are you willing to take this? Do you know who I really am? Are you willing to confess who I really am, not just with your lips but with your actions? Are you willing to believe in the impossible? Are you willing to accept just how difficult this mission is?”

The man asks his question: *“What am I to do to inherit eternal life?”* Our Introit Psalm today states: *“How can a young man keep his behaviour pure? By keeping it according to Your Word,”* (Psalm 119:9). Thus, Jesus points the man to the commandments. The list of commandments Jesus gives isn’t exhaustive, nor need it be. It makes the point. The man responds that he has kept these from his youth. Amazingly, Jesus does not contradict him. He goes into no lecture on the fact that we’re all sinners and no one has kept the commandments perfectly. Instead, Jesus “loves” him and tells him *“you lack one thing, Go, sell everything you have, and give to the poor! You will have treasure in heaven. Then come here and follow Me.”* Jesus’ “assignment” forces the young man to acknowledge whether or not he can say, *“I have been rejoicing in the way of Your Testimonies as much as in all riches,”* (Psalm 119:14). It also challenges him to place Jesus and His mission first, thereby testifying to whether the man gets the full implications of calling Jesus “good.” The man leaves saddened because he had many possessions. Did he go away to do what Jesus said, his sadness merely indicating that he realises now just how difficult genuine discipleship is? Or does his downcast demeanour indicate a refusal on his part to pursue the path Jesus has laid out? Whatever the case, Jesus turns to His disciples and comments how difficult it is for the rich to enter heaven, and this is how our Gospel text begins today: ²³ **Jesus looked around and said to His disciples, “How hard it will be for those who are rich to enter the kingdom of God!”** Difficult. Very difficult.

¹ Mark 10:17-22

These words amaze the disciples. Perhaps they assume that wealth is a sign of God's blessing and therefore an indicator of one's relationship with God. Money is a good gift from God, but God's Word also warns, "*the love of money is a root of all evils,*" (1 Tim. 6:10). How many of us are rich toward God by supporting the preaching of His Gospel? The text as it stands warns us today about the danger of allowing riches to get in the way of our total devotion to God. Riches, rather than always being a sign of God's favour, can actually get in the way of one's trust in God.

But it gets worse - or at least it appears to. Jesus goes on to teach His disciples a deeper truth.

Jesus told them again, "Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! ²⁵ 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."

²⁶ **They were extremely amazed. They asked one another, "Who then can be saved?"**

²⁷ **Jesus looked straight at them and said: "With men it is impossible but not with God.**

Humanly speaking, no one can slip a camel through the eye of a needle. Not only are riches a huge hindrance to entering the kingdom and thus merely difficult, but Jesus also says it is impossible for a rich man to enter the kingdom. And not just the rich! **"Who then can be saved?"**

Jesus answers: it's impossible for anyone to enter the kingdom of heaven on one's own. Man simply cannot save himself, neither the rich young ruler nor the disciples nor anyone else.

It's not just riches that can get in the way of heaven. In his Letter, James writes, "*Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above,*" (James 1:17). Everything in our lives that is truly good comes from God the Father, who dwells above the heavenly lights. He doesn't change, loving us one minute and then turning on us. He is the Lord, the God of steadfast covenant-love, who does not change like shifting shadows. He has given us our physical lives, as well as rebirth through His mighty Word into spiritual life so that we might be a kind of firstfruits, that is, the prime, prize part of all creation, the part that He is proudest of. Unfortunately, *any* of God's greatest gifts can and often are used by Satan as his greatest temptations and most powerful idols. At one time Jesus said, "*Whoever loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me,*"² showing that even parents, children, and spouses – people closest to us - can become idols. We see it today. How many people forego church because of their family members? How many leave a church where God's Word is properly taught to join a church that errs in some doctrine because they want their children to have a "better" youth group?

The Gospel account of the rich man serves as a narrative example of the warning given to all believers in our Second Reading from today. Hebrews 4:11 says, "*Let us be diligent to enter that rest,*" and, as was urged earlier in this same Letter to the Hebrews, to "*encourage one another daily... that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin!*"³ - any sin.

The truth is that no one can save himself. It is impossible, and unlike "difficulties," there are not grades of "impossibility." With man, it is simply impossible. With any man, all men, anyone, anywhere. There are no exceptions. No matter what race, no matter how smart, no matter what age, no matter what gender, no matter how rich, no matter how poor. Man cannot and does not do it, not even with a little help from God. It isn't that man does his part and God does his. Man's only part in the equation is the impossible. What man brings to the table is the impossible. Man merely brings sin. The only thing men supply is man's need.

No, man needs the God of the possible to do the impossible. The disciples **asked one another "Who then can be saved?"** ²⁷ **Jesus looked straight at them and said: "With men it is impossible but not with God. For with God all things are possible."**

For us, it's not just difficult; it can't happen. But with God, all things are possible.

Are we willing to believe in the impossible? The Gospel is the Good News that God does the impossible for us. He has paid the price that was impossible for any one of us to pay. He has paid for your sin, my sin, the sin of the whole world. No mere mortal could do that. But **with God all things are possible.** God became man so that you and I might be saved. In Jesus, God died for us. The impossible is possible with God. Indeed, He and He alone opens stony hearts to believe. He truly can make a camel go through the eye of a needle, and it doesn't matter if one has plenty or nothing, whether one is rich or poor. Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved.⁴ Jesus alone has saved us from eternal death. We confess this truth whenever we say with Luther in the Small Catechism, "*I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith. In the same way He calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian church on earth, and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith.*" Not only our salvation but also our conversion is all God's doing - God doing the impossible.

Even though God has done the impossible and redeemed us, paying for all of our sins, and even though He has done the impossible and turned our hearts of stone into believing hearts, until we enter fully into the kingdom of eternal rest, the road will

² Matthew 10:37

³ Hebrews 3:13

⁴ Acts 16:31

be hard. Jesus calls us to our own mission. It is difficult, very difficult, but Jesus, the one who did the truly impossible job of going the way of the cross for our salvation, calls upon us to pick up our own cross daily and follow Him.⁵

Jesus wants to alter the simplistic thinking of His disciples in this regard - especially in regard to prosperity being the sign that we are among God's blessed people. Quite to the contrary - being a follower of Jesus might entail persecution. In fact, we see this beginning to happen in our own backyard today. At times, such persecution will seem to the world and even to our own flesh as if *God is abandoning us*. Contrary to many popular health, wealth, and prosperity preachers, your best life now might entail the cross.

In today's Gospel from Mark, Jesus explains to the disciples that the benefits are huge - "**in the coming age**," that is, "**eternal life**." In the meantime, He says, God's many blessings come "**with persecutions**." The difficulties are also great. Jesus implies that we could even lose family members over our faith. As He says elsewhere, "*I have come to bring division... a son against his father*," (cf Luke 12:51, 53). And He specifically warns about persecutions. In this life we will have great blessings, as fellow believers will make up our new family, but we will also have trials and tribulations, and along with these there will be constant temptations, not least of them the desire to look for our security and comfort in wealth.

But remember, no matter how difficult it gets, Jesus has completed His mission for us. We are assured of the victory in Christ because He has done the mission impossible. Amen.

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

PRAYER FOR THE TWENTY-SECOND SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Almighty and everlasting God and Father, You have made your promises to us and to our children. Therefore look with mercy on this place of worship, and open Your ears to our prayers as we have gathered here to hear Your Word and to praise Your name.

Fill our minds with the light of Your Holy Spirit that we may hear, read, and receive Your Word with true reverence, faith, and gratitude. Teach us of Your creative power, wise care, and continual mercy. Move us to praise You not only for those things but especially for the gift of Your Son Jesus Christ, who came to serve us, and give His life as a ransom for us. May we believe Your Word with all our hearts, and let it rule our lives.

Give us the spiritual gift to see ourselves as You see us. Grant that our whole lives may be in penitence for our sinfulness and faith in Jesus' redemption. Fit us out with Your armour and weapons that we may be strong in Your mighty power, equipped to resist the attacks of Satan, the temptations of the world, and the weakness of our own flesh. Rescue us from the slavery of sin in our lives, and keep us safe for the eternal kingdom of Jesus Christ, our Saviour and Lord. Give us opportunities to serve others in sincere love, empowered and motivated by Jesus' humble service to us.

Help us to know and use the power of prayer, so that in faith we may seek Your blessings for all our needs, place before You the needs of our loved ones and all other people, and trust in Your goodness, no matter how You direct our lives.

Protect us from the dangers of storm and fire, disease and famine, division and war, treachery and rebellion, luxury and ease, ignorance and superstition, lingering illness and painful death, and from an evil end. We know only too well that we have broken Your commandments, and that we deserve Your anger and judgment, but treat us always according to Your mercy, O Lord. Give us power to submit humbly to Your wise and holy will.

Bless Your Church, and keep it strong in the truth of Christ Jesus. Inspire Your people to worship You with pure hearts. Give pastors to Your Church who honour their calling with a godly life, seek the lost with a Christlike love, and preach the whole saving plan of God with boldness. As we witness apostasy rising in our country, give us strong hearts and clear voices to warn those who would seek to silence You or Your Word, that there is a coming judgment, and that those who reject You will likewise be rejected.

Wield the sword of the Spirit among all nations, that wickedness may be put down, and righteousness may flourish. Give to all rulers unselfish zeal and wise goals, that they may work for the peace of the world and for the well-being of all mankind. Bless our own land, we pray. Give our Queen and all who make and administer our laws wisdom and high principles, that they may carry out their tasks in a way pleasing to You. Bless all honest work in agriculture and industry, so that our needs may be supplied, the less privileged provided for, and all moved to live in constant remembrance of Your goodness and care.

All these things we pray in the name of Jesus Christ, Your only Son, our Saviour, to whom, with You and the Holy Spirit, be all glory and praise for ever and ever. Amen.

⁵ Luke 9:23

22nd Sunday after Pentecost

Ecclesiastes 5:10-20

¹⁰ A person who loves money will not be satisfied with money, and whoever loves wealth will not be satisfied with his income. This also is pointless. ¹¹ When goods increase, those who consume them increase. Therefore, what advantage does their owner have except to see them with his eyes? ¹² The sleep of a labourer is sweet, whether he eats little or much, but the plenty of the rich man will not permit him to sleep.

¹³ I have seen a painful evil under the sun, wealth hoarded by its owner so that it harms him. ¹⁴ That wealth has also been lost in a bad venture. When he has a son, he will have nothing in his possession. ¹⁵ He will go back naked, as he has come out of his mother's womb. His toil will not enable him to take anything at all that he can carry away in his hands. ¹⁶ This is also a painful evil. He will depart exactly as he has come. Therefore, what advantage will he gain from exerting himself for the wind? ¹⁷ Moreover, he even used to eat in the dark all his days. He used to be greatly frustrated, sick and angry.

¹⁸ Here is what I have seen to be good: that it is proper to eat, drink and find satisfaction in all the toil in which a person labours under the sun during the few days of his life that God has given him. For that is his lot. ¹⁹ Moreover, when God has given any person wealth and possessions and has granted him the opportunity to enjoy them, to accept his lot and to be happy in his toil, this is the gift of God. ²⁰ For he will not often think about the days of his life, because God keeps him occupied with the joy in his heart.

Hebrews 4:1-16

¹ Therefore, since the promise about entering His place of rest remains, let us be fearful that any of you will seem to have missed it! ² For indeed we have had the Good News told us, just as they had, but the Word that they heard did not benefit them, because it was not united with faith in those who heard it. ³ For we who have become believers are entering His place of rest, as He has said: "As I declared on oath in My anger, 'They will certainly not enter My place of rest.'" Yet His works have been brought into being since the foundation of the world. ⁴ For somewhere He has spoken about the seventh day in this way: "And on the seventh day God rested from all His works." ⁵ Again, in this passage: "They will certainly not enter My place of rest." ⁶ Therefore, since it is certain that some people are entering it, although those to whom the Good News was formerly told did not enter because of their disobedience, ⁷ He is again appointing a certain day, "today." A long time afterwards, He says,

through David, as has been stated above, "Today, if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts!" ⁸ For, if Joshua had given them rest, God would not be speaking subsequently about another day. ⁹ Therefore, a Sabbath rest remains for the people of God. ¹⁰ For the person who has entered God's rest has himself also found rest from his works, as God did from His. ¹¹ Therefore, let us be diligent to enter that rest, that no one may fall by following the same pattern of disobedience!

¹² For the Word of God is living and active. It is sharper than any two-edged sword. It penetrates even as far as the dividing of soul and spirit and joints and marrow. It also discerns the thoughts and intentions of the heart. ¹³ No creature is hidden from Him. All things are naked and exposed to the eyes of Him to whom we must give an account.

¹⁴ Therefore, since we have a great High Priest, who has gone through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us cling to what we confess! ¹⁵ For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathise with our weaknesses. However, we have One who has been tempted in every way like us. Yet He was without sin. ¹⁶ Therefore, let us come boldly to the throne of grace to receive mercy and find grace to help us when we need it!

Mark 10:23-31

²³ Jesus looked around and said to His disciples, "How hard it will be for those who are rich to enter the kingdom of God!"

²⁴ The disciples were amazed at His Words. However, Jesus told them again, "Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! ²⁵ 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."

²⁶ They were extremely amazed. They asked one another, "Who then can be saved?"

²⁷ Jesus looked straight at them and said: "With men it is impossible but not with God. For with God all things are possible."

²⁸ Then Peter began to say to Him: "Look! We have left everything and followed You."

²⁹ Jesus said, "Truly, I tell you, there is no one who has left his house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for My sake and for the sake of the Gospel, ³⁰ who will fail to receive a hundred times as much, now, in this time, houses, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and fields, with persecutions and, in the coming age, eternal life. ³¹ However, many who are first will be last, and the last first."