

## Impossible Is Nothing

### Mark 10:17- 31

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What a joy it's been to worship and adore our Savior this morning already. He is so good and gracious and kind to save sinners like each of us. What a Savior we have! It's my joy and privilege to open God's Word with you this morning. I invite you to turn in your Bibles to Mark 10. We'll be looking at verses 17 through 31.

We are continuing our study through the Gospel of Mark. As you're turning there, you'll probably notice that we're skipping over verses 1-16 of chapter ten. We're intentionally doing that and will be returning to that passage next month when Pastor David is back in town and will be preaching on that. Today's passage is Mark 10:17-31.

In this passage, we get to observe a fascinating interaction between Jesus and a rich young man that addresses a question every one of us will be faced with at one time or another. This all-important question is how can I guarantee that when I die I will have eternal life?

Has this ever been a question you've asked or wrestled with? Maybe you're here today because you want an answer to this very question. Maybe what's led you to ask this question is your struggle with guilt. You know you've done and said some pretty bad things and are wondering, "Is there a way for someone like me to be saved, to make it into God's heaven?"

Or maybe you've been forced to wrestle with this question at the funeral of a loved one. As you sat there staring at the casket, you could not keep your mind from wandering to the question of your own mortality and what lies beyond the grave for you.

Or maybe you're here today and you've lived a good life. Sure, it's not perfect, but you've never done anything really that bad. Even though you think you should feel good about your chances of God letting you into heaven, you still can't shake this nagging doubt in the back of your mind that you just haven't been good enough.

Maybe you're here today and you've never really considered this question before. You'd rather just focus on the present and not give much thought to the future.

Whatever the case may be, I want to encourage each of you to listen carefully to God's Word this morning and what God has to say about this question. There really is no more important

question than this. Eventually death will come to each of us and we'll either enter into eternal life with God or eternal punishment. So the stakes could not be higher.

Let's turn now to God's Word and hear what God has to say about how we can have eternal life with Him. Look with me at Mark 10, beginning in verse 17:

<sup>17</sup> *As [Jesus] was setting out on a journey, a man ran up, knelt down before him, and asked him, "Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?"*

<sup>18</sup> *"Why do you call me good?" Jesus asked him. "No one is good except God alone. <sup>19</sup> You know the commandments: **Do not murder; do not commit adultery; do not steal; do not bear false witness; do not defraud; honor your father and mother.**"*

<sup>20</sup> *He said to him, "Teacher, I have kept all these from my youth."*

<sup>21</sup> *Looking at him, Jesus loved him and said to him, "You lack one thing: Go, sell all you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me." <sup>22</sup> But he was dismayed by this demand, and he went away grieving, because he had many possessions.*

<sup>23</sup> *Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, "How hard it is for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!"*

<sup>24</sup> *The disciples were astonished at his words. Again Jesus said to them, "Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! <sup>25</sup> 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."*

<sup>26</sup> *They were even more astonished, saying to one another, "Then who can be saved?"*

<sup>27</sup> *Looking at them, Jesus said, "With man it is impossible, but not with God, because all things are possible with God."*

<sup>28</sup> *Peter began to tell him, "Look, we have left everything and followed you."*

<sup>29</sup> *"Truly I tell you," Jesus said, "there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for my sake and for the sake of the gospel, <sup>30</sup> who will not receive a hundred times more, now at this time —houses, brothers and sisters, mothers and children, and fields, with persecutions —and eternal life in the age to come. <sup>31</sup> But many who are first will be last, and the last first."*

*"The grass withers and the flower fades, but the Word of our God endures forever"* (Isaiah 40:8). Let's pray.

God, we come now to Your eternal, life-giving Word, asking for Your Spirit's help. Take the penetrating truths of this passage and apply them to our lives. Do what we cannot do for ourselves, O God of the impossible. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

I'm sure we all know people we would categorize as "go-getters." These people are driven—they know what they want and they know how to go get it. These people are confident in their ability to get the job done, close the deal, make the sale. In our passage this morning we are introduced to a go-getter. Look at how the Holy Spirit describes this guy in verse 17. When Jesus was setting out on a journey, a man ran up and knelt down before Him, asking, "Good Teacher, tell me, what must I do to inherit eternal life? I'm ready."

Somehow or another this man has heard about Jesus and is now refusing to let this opportunity to talk to Jesus pass him by. It doesn't matter that Jesus and His followers have already left; he's going after them. So he straps on his fastest pair of running sandals and takes off. Now, we don't know how long he had to run, but eventually he catches up to them and immediately runs straight up to Jesus and kneels down before Him.

To say that this guy knows how to make an entrance is an understatement. He has Jesus' attention, he has the disciples' attention, and as he's panting and catching his breath, this go-getter finally gets out his question that's been plaguing his mind for quite some time now. He says, "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?"

There are a lot of ways Jesus could have answered this man, aren't there? But look what Jesus does in verse 18: "*Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone.*" Instead of immediately answering the man's question, Jesus seems to be quibbling over the man's greeting. "*Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone.*" I think it's not that Jesus is dodging the question; He's actually beginning to answer the question.

Notice what the man says: "*What must I do...?*" In answering this way, Jesus is subtly communicating that no matter how much doing you do, you still will not be good enough for God's heaven—because only God is truly good. Jesus is wanting the man to realize his inability to ever be good enough to earn and inherit eternal life.

If we look carefully at the passage, I think deep down the man knows this. That's what's given him this angst. That's what's driving him to ask this question of Jesus. Look at the interaction in verses 19 and 20. Jesus goes on to say to him, "*You know the commandments: Do not murder; do not commit adultery; do not steal; do not bear false witness; do not defraud; honor your father and mother.*" The man responds, "*Teacher I have kept all these from my youth.*"

I don't think the man is being arrogant here. From a simply external behavioral perspective, it is very likely this man has kept the law. He hasn't killed anybody. He's not committed adultery. He's never stolen anything from the local market. He has been a good man. Yet, even with all his goodness, he still cannot find peace about his eternal destiny. He still feels like there is more he must do in order to be saved. It's this angst in his soul that has driven him to hunt Jesus down and ask, "*What must I do to inherit eternal life?*"

Notice how our sweet Savior responds to this man's pleas. Look at the beginning of verse 21: "*Looking at him, Jesus loved him...*" Jesus is not merely glancing at this man. No, this word "looking at" communicates much more than that. Jesus is intently looking into this man's eyes, seeing into his very soul as he kneels there before Him. As Jesus looks into his eyes, His heart is filled with love for this man. He wants this man to know that what He is about to say to him comes from a heart of love that genuinely cares for him and wants what's best for him.

So with all this love in His eyes, Jesus looks down at this man kneeling before Him and says, "*You lack one thing: Go, sell all you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.*" But as Jesus spoke these words, the man's countenance began to change. His face that was so full of earnest anticipation a minute ago now is clouding over with anguish. Soon, his shoulders begin to heave, and tears start streaming down his face. He turns away from Jesus and begins to make his way home. Verse 22 tells the sad story: "*But he was dismayed by this demand, and he went away grieving...*" Why? "*...Because he had many possessions.*"

Let's slow down and take a few minutes to think about the interaction Jesus has with this man. In telling him to sell all he has, Jesus is driving at this man's heart. He's helping him see what is truly his functional god. Although this man would certainly say he trusted in God, when push comes to shove, what Jesus is graciously and mercifully revealing to this man is that it's actually his wealth that he looks to for refuge from the uncertainties of life. It's his many possessions, not God, that ultimately provides him comfort and joy. So for this man, his functional god was his wealth, with the security, comfort and privileges that brought him. But sadly, he'd sooner part with God than with his stuff.

What Jesus is lovingly pointing out to him is that although he had kept some of the commandments, he is failing to keep the first commandment: "*You shall have no other gods before me*" (Exodus 20:3). Jesus is helping him see that his possessions occupied first place in his life. It's his wealth, not God, that he loves with all his heart, all his soul, all his mind and all his strength. In calling this man to sell all he has, Jesus is telling him, "You must abandon control of your life and give exclusive control of your life to me." Jesus is not content to have part of you. He

demands all of you. Notice what He says in verse 21: *“Go, sell all you have... Then come, follow me.”*

Think of it like this. When you invest your money in the stock market, financial advisors will tell you to diversify your assets. It’s foolish and risky to put all your money into one company. If that one company goes under, then you’ll lose everything. So the financial advisers encourage you to spread your money out over a variety of companies and markets. That way, if one company goes under, you’ve not lost everything. This is wise advice when it comes to the stock market. The world encourages you to diversify your assets, but this is not how Jesus does business.

Jesus is saying, “Give me everything. Put all your eggs in My basket. Go all in on Me and Me alone.” This is a remarkable demand of Jesus. I want to be clear here—Jesus is not saying that in order to be saved, you must sell all you have. It’s actually much more radical than that. What Jesus is doing in this passage is striking at this man’s idol, the false god in his life, and saying he must be willing to give that false god up, with all the seeming security, comfort and peace that false god promises. Jesus is telling this young man—and any one of us who wants eternal life—to forsake all other hopes, all other securities, all other allegiances, trusting exclusively in Him.

But in making this demand, we must remember that Jesus is not being harsh here. This is not some angry, power-hungry tyrant. No, this is a loving Savior. Don’t forget verse 21: *“Looking at him, Jesus loved him.”* Jesus loved him. It’s love that’s driving this. Jesus is demanding exclusive control of this man’s life because He loves him. And He’s demanding exclusive control of your life because He loves you.

Jesus know He is a far superior Savior than wealth or any false god could be. You see, wealth can come and go in an instant, but Jesus remains forever. Wealth can only provide temporary pleasures and comfort, but Jesus promises eternal pleasures and comfort. What’s more, in making this demand, Jesus is not asking us to do something He was not willing to do. Listen to what the Holy Spirit says in 2 Corinthians 8:9. *“For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ: Though he was rich, for your sake he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich.”*

You see, Jesus is the true and better rich man Who was willing to give it all away so that we can become rich. Through His perfect life of obedience and sacrificial death on the cross, He paid our debt to sin. And then through His resurrection from the dead three days later, He guarantees eternal life to all who will turn from their sins and their false saviors, trusting exclusively in Him.

With eyes of love, Jesus is looking into your life and saying, “Stop looking to \_\_\_\_\_ for your security and comfort. Instead, look to Me.” What are you withholding from the loving gaze of Jesus? What are you afraid to let go of in order to follow Jesus? As you’re thinking and praying

about your answers to these questions, I want you to consider what this rich man would say if he were here today.

Would he say to you that it was worth it for him to hold on to his wealth for the 50, 60 or 70 years of his life, yet lose his soul for all eternity? Or do you think he would be pleading with you to not make the same mistake he did, to not put your hopes and dreams in the things of this life that could slip through your fingers so easily, but to put your hope, dreams and trust in Jesus and the life to come?

Sadly, this man chose worldly treasure when Jesus was offering him heavenly treasure. He chose what could not last and rejected Jesus' offer of everlasting life. In so doing, he became a living example of Jesus' warning back in Mark 4:18-19. In that passage, Jesus is speaking about different people's responses to the message of the gospel with these sobering words: "*Others are like seed sown among thorns; these are the ones who hear the word*"—like we're doing this morning— "*but the worries of this age, the deceitfulness of wealth, and the desires for other things enter in and choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful.*"

This man's wealth had deceived him. Despite his initial desire to inherit eternal life, his desires for other things have come in and choked it out, and "*he went away grieving.*" In all the Gospels, this is the only man who met with Jesus and went away sad. Let us not turn away from our Savior.

At this point, the disciples are all staring at Jesus in stunned silence. Can you picture this? They can't believe their eyes. There, walking away in the distance, is a man whom any of them would have thought had a shoe-in's chance for heaven. He's so morally good. He's kept all the commands. And he's rich. Surely that means God loves him and has blessed him. But then Jesus turns his eyes away from the figure disappearing into the horizon and with that same intense look that Jesus has, He looks at His disciples. He doesn't want them to miss what He's about to teach them. Look at verse 23: "*Jesus looked around...*" He's got their attention. Then He said to His disciples, as they're watching this man walk away, "*How hard it is for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!*"

It's important for us to realize Jesus hasn't changed topics all of a sudden. To enter the Kingdom of God is to have eternal life. It's to be saved. This is not missed by the disciples. Look at their response to what Jesus said: "*The disciples were astonished at his words...*" You see, it's apparent that they assumed, as one commentator points out, that just as all other things in the world are easier for the rich, so entry into the Kingdom of God must be easier for them too.

Now, Jesus isn't done rocking their world, is He? Look at the rest of verse 24 where Jesus goes on to say, "*Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! 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.”* At this, their mouths are just hanging open in utter shock and amazement as the full force of what Jesus is saying lands on them.

So often throughout the Gospels, the disciples completely miss what Jesus is saying, but not here. They're hearing it loud and clear. It's boggling their mind. Look at verse 26. They exclaim, *“Then who can be saved?”* Jesus, who can be saved? Do you hear the shock and maybe even exasperation or desperation in their voices? *“Jesus, this is ridiculous. There's no way this massive camel can fit through this tiny little eye of a needle. If salvation is impossible for even the rich, what hope do we have? What hope is there for anyone?”*

But look at Jesus' answer in verse 27. Looking at them, He said, *“You're right. With man it is impossible, but not with God, because all things are possible with God.”* His point is so beautifully simple. When you look to yourself to get into heaven, you might as well try to force a camel through the eye of a needle. It's not going to happen. But when you look to God, the impossible is nothing! God is in the business of fitting camels through the eyes of needles. He's gotten really good at it and He loves doing it. What Jesus is teaching us is that salvation is a gift from the top down, not worked for from the bottom up. Left to ourselves, we would never abandon control of our lives and follow Jesus. Sin has so messed us up that we, like the rich man, will always trade Jesus for things.

In Romans 1:25, the Holy Spirit says our problem is that we exchange the truth about God for a lie, worshipping and serving what has been created—stuff—instead of the Creator Who is praised forever. That's our problem and this is why it is impossible for us to save ourselves. Left to ourselves, we would never be willing to submit to Jesus' demand for exclusive control of our lives. But as we just had the joy of witnessing through six baptisms, thanks be to God that He is willing and able to do the impossible. He saves!

Let's look at verses 28 through 31 where Jesus is going to unpack the blessings that come from following Him. Remember, Jesus' call to follow Him is given in love. He wants what is best for us. Thus He does not want His disciples focusing only on what they must give up in order to follow Him, but also on all that He wants to give them as they follow Him. Listen to how Jesus responds to Peter:

*<sup>28</sup> Peter began to tell him, “Look, we have left everything and followed you.”*

*<sup>29</sup> “Truly I tell you,” Jesus said, “there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for my sake and for the sake of the gospel,<sup>30</sup> who will not receive a hundred times more, now at this time —houses, brothers and sisters,*

*mothers and children, and fields, with persecutions —and eternal life in the age to come.* <sup>31</sup> *But many who are first will be last, and the last first.*”

“*And eternal life...*”—that’s the big question. “*But many who are first...*”—that’s the rich man—“*will be last, and the last first.*” This is an absolutely incredible promise of Jesus, isn’t it? Although following Him will mean we must be willing to give up everything, Jesus will provide a hundred times over what He has called us to leave behind. Do you know how He’s going to do that? He’s going to do that through His body, the church—through you and me.

For some of us, following Christ may mean losing houses or jobs, but through the hospitality and generosity of Christ’s people, Jesus will provide. For others, following Jesus may mean rejection from our family, friends or the social group we used to be a part of. But Jesus is promising, “You will not be alone. I will give you a new family and new friends in My church.” Jesus is assuring all those who are willing to give up everything to follow Him that from His fullness He will more than repay everything they left behind.

This certainly does not mean life will always be easy. Jesus is quick to point out that persecutions will also be part of our lot for following Him. This would have resonated with Mark’s original readers who were under Roman persecution for their faith. No matter what happens, no matter how much we give up for Christ, no matter how much we have to suffer for Him, it will all be worth it in the end. All of Christ’s followers will receive the gift of eternal life in the Kingdom of God.

One day, Christian, all of God’s people will live in God’s restored world under God’s good rule and blessings for all eternity. This is the glorious future the rich man wanted, but was unwilling to give up his wealth for. So my challenge for you this morning is to not make the same mistake he did. Do not turn your back on Jesus. Do not look away from His loving gaze because you think He asked too much of you. The best bet you can make is to bet your whole life on Him. He will not disappoint.

Let’s pray.

O Jesus, You are calling us to do something that on our own is impossible to do, but thank You that impossible is nothing for You. You are the God of the impossible. You put camels through the eyes of needles all day long. So, Jesus, I pray right now for those in this room who are wrestling, who are reluctant to give You everything, who don’t know if they can really trust You to have exclusive control of their lives. I pray that You would do the impossible and save them.

Jesus, I also pray for the rest of us who, by Your grace, have been brought into Your family and who desire to follow You faithfully, but who struggle so much with our hearts wandering back to our false lovers, our false gods. O Jesus, I pray that You would continue to do a gracious work that only You can do by calling us out of our foolishness and sin, and into greater and greater obedience, trust and faith in You. You are such a good Savior! Don't let us spurn Your look of love to us today. We ask these things in Your name. Amen.

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