

“Then who can be saved?”

23And Jesus said to His disciples, “Truly I say to you, it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. 24“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.” 25When the disciples heard this, they were very astonished and said, “Then who can be saved?” 26And looking at them Jesus said to them, “With people this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.”

Last week we considered the astonishing story of the **rich young ruler**. Let me review by saying;

- He came to the right person.
- He asked the right question.
- He wanted a life, above what he had in this world.
- He acknowledged that he had an emptiness. A cavity in his inner person that was hungering.
- He came humbly.
- He came at some level believing Jesus had what he needed, or at least could tell him how to proceed.
- How could you get all of that right and still go home empty?

All of us are sensitized at some level to spreading the good news. We call ourselves "evangelicals". That means we are at least aware in some small way that it is our job to let others know about what Jesus has done for us, and for them.

This event, and the resultant failure, was to the disciples, and to us as well, not less than astonishing.

How did the best candidate for salvation that ever walked on top of the earth get so much right, and still go home empty? The disciples are incredulous. They're like that end segment on Bill O'Reilly's news show entitled, "What just happened?"

We're the same way. What just happened here. You come to Jesus,

believing He has answers, with all the right questions, in humility, and you go away not only rejected, but incredibly sad. How did that happen?

This opens us up to doctrines that we are uncomfortable with. Very uncomfortable.

Who then can be saved? The disciples are watching in astonishment as this man disappears. He's walking away.

We're fascinated with the art of the deal these days, aren't we. We watch these shows, they're all phony, but we watch them anyway, where people dicker over the price of something. It fascinates us.

We have a candidate for president who says he can make us rich by getting us the best deals we've ever seen, on a world level. The art of negotiation.

In the movie, perfect pitch, the girl that's getting rejected from the acapella group is retreating ever so slowly. Dragging the chair. She keeps looking back. Finally the other girl says, "come back."

Jesus doesn't watch him walk away and at the last moment, call out to him and say, come on back, let's talk about this some more. I threw out my number, you're supposed to at least make a counter offer so we can negotiate. That's how it's done.

That isn't what happened. The disciples, in full amazement, are watching him get farther and farther away. He diminishes. Then he disappears. Wow. WOW!! Really, Jesus?

What just happened here? Help us understand this, because, we would have really loved to have a guy that sharp with all of those resources working with us on our side. Best candidate . . . ever. And You just blew him off.

And this gets right at the question that christianity, especially in our time, teeters on. The disciples phrased it perfectly for us. "*Then who*

can be saved?"

Before we get into our short passage, I want to approach this question from the Word of God, as review, in a couple of other places.

Moses asked the same question as God was passing by Him in the cleft of the rock in Exodus 33. We need to base our answers in what God told Moses directly. No better source. No clearer statement. It's where Paul goes when he talks about election and predestination in Romans 9.

Here's the answer to the disciples, and by extension, our question;
19And He said, "I Myself will make all My goodness pass before you, and will proclaim the name of the LORD before you; and I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show compassion on whom I will show compassion."

Moses is the original negotiator. Trying to get blanket salvation for a sinful people. National salvation. That's what Moses was going for. Group rate. And God says; *I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show compassion on whom I will show compassion."*

We don't like that answer. He said, I am that I am. In other words, I'm God of very God who owns everything. And then He says; *I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show compassion on whom I will show compassion."*

And the church has been fighting over this, ever since. Who is sovereign in salvation. Is it by man's free will, or by God's sovereign election?

In Exodus 32, 33, and 34, if you study what's going on there, whether you like it or not, God says, ALL iniquity will be punished. All of it. But in that truth there is also this other one. God will be gracious to some. Listen to the words again and tell me where man's will fits in here.

I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show compassion on whom I will show compassion." All sin will be requited. Some will

receive grace. God is sovereign over that. Not men. He chooses according to His pleasure.

Listen to John chapter 3. This is the account leading up to the most famous most quoted verse in all the Bible, John 3:16 We're all familiar with this story;

1Now there was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews; 2this man came to Jesus by night and said to Him, "Rabbi, we know that You have come from God as a teacher; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him." 3Jesus answered and said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God."

Nicodemus is trying to work up to his question. Jesus just answers it before he gets it out.

4Nicodemus said to Him, "How can a man be born when he is old? He cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born, can he?" 5Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. 6"That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. 7"Do not be amazed that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' 8"The wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going; so is everyone who is born of the Spirit."

Nicodemus had the same question that the rich young ruler had. Maybe we'll get to heaven some day and find out Nicodemus IS the rich young ruler. Same situation. Same question. Different circumstances, I'm just saying the possibility is there to show how close the parallel is.

How does a man get into heaven? Same question the disciples are amazed about. How does it happen. What is the mechanism? We need to understand, how does this work. How are men saved. Converted.

And Jesus says, you're born physically, but you're dead to God. Spiritually dead. Sin did that. What needs to happen is LIFE. Spiritual

life. It was the rich young ruler's question. What must I do to have eternal life. Spiritual life.

Jesus says you have to be born again. Spiritually. You're alive physically, obviously, but you're dead spiritually. Your spirit has to be quickened. Made alive some how. But how.

Nicodemus is tracking with Jesus. Dead spiritually but alive physically. How do I do that. How do I make myself alive spiritually? *“How can a man be born when he is old? He cannot enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born, can he?”*

5 Jesus answered, . . . That's really good news! Jesus is going to answer our question. What is the mechanics of how this happens??

“Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. 6“That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.

We're tracking so far. This makes sense. We're dead because of sin. Dead to God. Fellowship is broken. God is up there in His heaven. We're down here on this fallen, broken, rebellious planet. How do we re-connect??

7“Do not be amazed that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’

OK, ok! We're with you Jesus. It makes perfect sense. We have to be born again. Spiritually. Reconnected to God. Sin removed. Forgiven. Fellowship restored with our creator. Reborn. Spiritually. This is exciting stuff. Tell me how to do it Jesus!

8“The wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going; so is everyone who is born of the Spirit.”

Whaaaaaaat? What is that? I need to know how to DO this. I need to understand how it happens. The mechanics of new life. Spiritual life. Tell me how it works. I want some control. *8“The wind blows where it*

wishes and you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going; so is everyone who is born of the Spirit.”

You have as much control over your salvation, and anyone else's, as you do over the wind.

My barbeque grill is worn out. I'll have a new one before summer is over. But for now, if I've got a nice big steak to grill, I look at weather underground dot com and see if the wind is going to be over about 7 miles an hour at 6 O'clock. If it is, I won't be cooking outdoors.

In fact Pam called me about 9:00 this AM. We like to go to Pablo's for dinner on Fridays. But parking is bad at Pablo's tonight, and we know ahead of time, wind is forecast. So I took some ribs out of the freezer to roast in the oven.

There won't be any cooking outdoors. Why? Because I can't control the wind. Not at all. I can't control where it comes from. I can't control the intensity, or the direction. I can't turn it off for 20 minutes while I grill. Nothing.

And that's Jesus answer. You want to know the mechanics of how men are saved? How they are quickened from the dead? Need a formula. Need a sinners prayer to make it happen? 8 *“The wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going; so is everyone who is born of the Spirit.”*

That's utterly frustrating! Or is it? Or is it.

I read a book this week. By Florentino Toirac. [A Pioneer Missionary in the 20th Century](#).

I don't remember where it came from or how I got it. I was so impressed by the story I went to Half.com so I could buy one to send to Gary and keep my own copy. \$50 bucks. Apparently I have a valuable book that I don't remember where it came from. Amazon had copies for about \$28. Worth far more in my opinion.

It's an autobiography of a man born in Cuba. His family is in desperate darkness. A visitor that he never had seen before or will see again hands him a new testament, and leaves.

He reads it and believes. His whole family believes. They spread the news everywhere. Churches are started. He dedicates his life to serve God full time. Anywhere you want Lord, and God sends him to Haiti which is in thick darkness spiritually.

And everywhere he goes, first on foot because he's destitute, and later on his mule Ponchito, it's like the wind preceeds him and people are saved. Churches are started. Nationals are trained. It's truly an amazing story.

He had no control over any of the conversions, other than telling them what God had done in His Son on the cross for their sins, and thousands were saved. This was in the late 1930's and early 1940's. It's a compelling story and I couldn't put the book down. 535 pages of God's Sovereign providence.

It's also interesting to us how easy it was for people who had nothing to be saved. They've got nothing to lose. They witness the power of God over the demons surrounding them. They believed. Just like a great wind.

We can't make it blow. All we can do is faithfully explain the possibilities purchased by Jesus at the cross. Sovereign God must do the rest.

This has unlimited implications for missions. You see that, right. We'll come back to that for a minute at the end.

Well, that's our introduction. The verses are simple enough. Now that we have the groundwork.

So the disciples are having a "what just happened here" moment watching the diminishing form of this man get smaller and smaller and then disappear into the crowd.

23And Jesus said to His disciples, "Truly I say to you, it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven.

Not helpful. If you're a disciple, that doesn't compute.

For an entire lifetime they've been taught that being rich was proof positive that God approved of you and was smiling down His satisfaction on you with those very riches.

Not only that, but everyone knows, rich people can buy better animal sacrifices. What's more pleasing to God? A perfect ram on the alter, or a turtle dove?

God says, don't bother cutting the birds in half on the alter. There's nothing but feathers. Little sacrifice, little favor. Big sacrifice, big favor. Or so the jews taught.

The disciples thought there was great benefit for the rich man to approach God. Jesus says, nope, just the opposite is true. *23And Jesus said to His disciples, "Truly I say to you, it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven.*

I just read a 535 page book about that phenomenon. In Haiti, the people are destitute. It's easy for them to enter the Kingdom of God. Thousands did. They've got nothing but a grass thatched roof hut with a dirt floor and they all sleep on the dirt in a pile. But for this rich man it's hard.

How hard, Jesus?

24"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."

Beginning in the 19th century some time there has been a lot of balderdash about what Jesus means here. There's a small gate the jews called the needle gate and you'd have to take your load off of your camel and get him to go down on his knees while you sort of push him through

and then reload him on the other side.

Have you heard that version? Or one like it. Not impossible, but really really hard.

So, the so-called needle gate didn't exist until around the 11th or 12th century. About the time of the Crusades. (which we need to have again btw, but that's another session).

And jews are very bright people. To this day, they don't drive their truck with a 15' 6" load under a bridge with a sign that says 14' 6" over it. They're smart that way. Go three blocks down and use the bigger gate.

What we have here is an axiom that can be traced to Persia well before Christ. They said, elephant through a needle, but it works just as well with a camel.

And the axiom means just what it sounds like it means. It's impossible. Period. Your chances of getting a camel through the eye of a needle are the same or better as the odds for this to happen. It meant impossible then. It means impossible now. It's impossible for rich people to be saved.

That's bad news for us, folks. Because by the worlds standards, every one of us is rich. That's a problem.

25When the disciples heard this, they were very astonished and said, "Then who can be saved?"

An inside joke. The reason the disciples were astonished is because they're Arminians and Jesus is a Calvinist. Look it up.

It's the default position for all of us. We begin this deal thinking we did it. We were in control of our destiny, and we heard a gospel message, and we believed it, and we made a decision.

Ever get Billy Graham's "Decision" magazine in the mail. I did for

years in the 1970's. You went down the isles in the coliseum in Los Angeles with a whole bunch of other people and you got in lines and you signed a card with your address about your "decision" and that magazine would start coming to your house.

It's still the default position today. What I'm teaching in this pulpit this morning is not popular in evangelical christianity, although, it's making headway in the 21st century. It was the position of the reformers and the puritans.

Jesus said, you're in control of your spiritual destiny like you're in control of the wind. Jesus said you're in control of your spiritual destiny just like you can put a camel through the eye of a sewing needle.

I didn't write this stuff folks. It's in the Bible. The disciples were astonished too! *25When the disciples heard this, they were very astonished and said, "Then who can be saved?"*

This is foreign to our natural senses. This is illogical. That we have no control over our own spiritual destiny in regards to salvation. This is crazy talk to proud people who think they're smart enough to figure anything out. The disciples thought this was altogether nutty. Insane. A rich guy wants to be saved and you sent him packing.

26And looking at them Jesus said to them, "With people this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."

And there's your answer. God does it. Jesus spoke to the wind and said, Peace, be still. And it vanished. God makes the wind blow. Or not blow.

Let me state this doctrine for you simply, from the Psalms. 115:3 *But our God is in the heavens: he hath done whatsoever he hath pleased.*

God is sovereign. He's in heaven. He does what pleases Him. Including electing those He will quicken from the dead.

Like it. Hate it. Show me all the "who-so-ever will" passages. Try to reconcile it. Whatever.

Let me digress for a quick moment and just say, all of these different schemes that try to reconcile God's sovereignty with man's free will end up costing God His sovereignty.

I was listening to a radio preacher last week in the chow hall parking lot waiting for Pam, telling how when he was a 17 year old boy he believed and was weeping as he gave himself completely to God, and God who lives outside of time, saw that, and wrote his name in His book.

God saw him repent and elected him, based on that. The 17 year old boys smart choice. That caused God to write his name down.

Sovereignty always loses when man tries to reconcile something God didn't make us smart enough (YET) to understand.

Me, I'd far rather have a Sovereign King. A completely righteous and trustworthy Sovereign King. I don't have to understand Him. I know He's got my back. I'll leave the rest to Him.

Let me show you just one incident of God working sovereignly in someone's heart. It's in Acts 16. Turn there if you like. It's very quiet. Very unspectacular. Paul's in Phillipi;

vs. 13 And on the Sabbath day we went outside the gate to a riverside, where we were supposing that there would be a place of prayer; and we sat down and began speaking to the women who had assembled. 14 A woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple fabrics, a worshiper of God, was listening; and the Lord opened her heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul.

Just like that. Somebody flipped a switch in Lydia's heart. Someone quickened her from the dead. How did that happen. *The Lord opened her heart to respond.* The Lord made Lydia, who, even though a worshipper of God, was spiritually dead, she came to have eternal life.

This was nothing new to Paul. Let me read you a couple more little snippets from Acts. Paul's tired of getting beat up and he's having second thoughts about going on to Corinth. And in Acts 18:9, 10

...9And the Lord said to Paul in the night by a vision, "Do not be afraid any longer, but go on speaking and do not be silent; 10for I am with you, and no man will attack you in order to harm you, for I have many people in this city."

God says, I've got a whole bunch of elect people in this city that are going to respond to you, Paul. Go forward.

Similarly in Acts 13. The Jews reject the message and Paul turns instead to the Gentiles;

vss...47"For so the Lord has commanded us, 'I HAVE PLACED YOU AS A LIGHT FOR THE GENTILES, THAT YOU MAY BRING SALVATION TO THE END OF THE EARTH.'" 48When the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord; and as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed.

See the progression there. Salvation. For men. Impossible. . . but . . . *as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed.*

We'll get to the Great Commission, eventually. It's in Matthew 28. Maybe this time next year? But I want to visit it just for a few moments as we close out our thoughts on the mechanics of salvation.

What Jesus has described here in our passage this morning, the impossibility of salvation, has everything to do with the great commission. Everything.

Jesus will commission 11 doubtful men to take the gospel message to every man on the face of the earth, and it's impossible for men to hear. The commission is to take the gospel to dead men who have no spiritual capacity to respond. Dead men who are deaf.

Mt. 28:16 But the eleven disciples proceeded to Galilee, to the

mountain which Jesus had designated. 17When they saw Him, they worshiped Him; but some were doubtful. 18And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, “*All authority . . . stop right there. All authority.* What's the difference, if you please, someone, anyone, between authority and sovereignty?

“All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.

our God is in the heavens: he hath done whatsoever he hath pleased

Is there an echo in the room? What Jesus said in Matthew 28 sounds just like what the Psalmist said about God.

19“*Go **therefore** and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, 20teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.*”

Go therefore. Why is the therefore there for? Because of God's sovereignty, not in spite of it. Because of it. Go.

I said I would return briefly to missions at the end. People argue that if God's already made His choices in eternity past, it's pointless to go and evangelize. Why would we do that? They're chosen anyhow. Somehow they'll figure it out. I don't need to do it.

No, no. Jesus says Go, ye, therefore. And the therefore refers back to His sovereignty. His authority to do this impossible thing called salvation, to whomever, whenever, and wherever He pleases.

So, here's a bizarre scenario, just to illustrate what we're talking about. Jesus snatches me up, like Philip after the Ethiopian eunuch, and transports me right into the middle of an ISIS center in Syria. And as long as we're creating fiction, while He's at it He makes me like supergirl. Impervious. No one can hurt me.

And I start preaching the gospel in this place where your life expectancy if you hear and believe, is about 5 minutes or less. Does any one

believe?

It's a multiple choice question based on Acts 13 *and as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed.*

- a. nobody believes because Acts 13:48 doesn't work any more.
- b. *and as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed.*

Predestination and election are NOT the reason we don't go, they're the reason we DO go. God is still in the business of doing the impossible, any place, and any time, and any way it pleases Him to do it.

There's even people in Tonopah, just waiting to hear the message. I know, that sounds like crazy talk. Believe it.