

Impossibility of Salvation

Mark 10:23-31

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Introduction

The biggest travesty any church could do is to tell people that salvation is easy. We can just come to the front and say the sinner's prayer and viola we are saved. What happens is that many churches present their services to match people's felt needs. Such programs only serve to boost people's self-esteem and elevate their exaggerated opinions of themselves. Churches would throw in a rock band and some cool music, and it should be pretty easy to get people to respond to the gospel. They speak only of God's love and of God's frustration if people will not accept His love and come to Him. They even add that He feels bad when people do not do that. Then preachers spice up their sermons to make them even feel a little guilty for hurting God by not coming. Put it all together, mix it up and churches should add hundreds, if not thousands to their congregation.

Jesus refused to elevate man's self-opinion. He came to reveal how evil such self-importance is and show who we really are—utterly sinful and evil people. This is what Jesus refused to do with the rich young ruler. He refused to give in to his seeker status. We would like to think that this rich young ruler was the perfect seeker—the one who was interested in obtaining eternal life. He had the right attitude, asked the right question, and even met the right Person.

However, Jesus gave him the Law instead of grace. Jesus did not offer the gospel (good news) to the rich young ruler. He does not tell the young man to believe in Him and be saved. Jesus instead challenges him with the Law, or specifically, the second half of the Law. He challenged the young man to consider his relationship with other people: do not murder, steal, commit adultery, bear false witness, honor the parents, and do not defraud others. The young man said that he had kept (obeyed) all the law. He did not see himself as the Law-breaker. He had twisted the law into a means to establish his own righteousness. He did not understand the depth of the law that exposed the heart attitude. He also believed that he could earn his salvation, and those are the two problems that confronted him. Jesus stops him, and tells the young ruler that you cannot come to God based on some feelings.

Moreover, Jesus points out to the young man that he is a gross violator of the First Commandment. He tells him, "Alright, fine, you keep the law, so let us find out who you worship. Sell everything you have, give to the poor and follow Me." The young man left sad because he had much possessions. His god was money and possessions. His god was himself. He refused to give up pleasures for himself. He wanted eternal life and wanted the satisfaction of this world.

Jesus then makes a startling comment—salvation is impossible for man to achieve on his own.

Mark 10:23-31

23 Jesus looked around and said to His disciples, "How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God!"

24 The disciples were amazed at his words. But Jesus said again, "Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God!"

- Shocking statement
 - According to Jewish theology
 - The rich are blessed by God
 - The poor are cursed by God

Note: The Jewish religious system promotes a way of thinking that the very wealthy can easily get into the kingdom God because they can afford to buy the best lamb (spotless) and offer as many sacrifices as they can (morning and evening). The more they had, the more they thought that God was blessing them. It is a cycle.

Note 2: Sample of Jewish thoughts:

Tobit 12:8-9 Prayer with fasting is good, but better than both is almsgiving with righteousness. A little with righteousness is better than wealth with wrongdoing. It is better to give alms than to lay up gold. **9** For almsgiving saves from death and purges away every sin. Those who give alms will enjoy a full life,

Sirach 3:30 As water extinguishes a blazing fire, so almsgiving atones for sin.

From the Talmud: Alms-giving is more excellent than all offerings and is equal to the whole law,

- Disciples' reaction
 - Shocked!
 - They thought the wealthy had the best opportunity to get into heaven
 - If the rich cannot enter heaven, then nobody can!
- How hard is it to enter heaven?

25 *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."*

- It is so hard that a camel would go through an eye of a needle before a rich man can enter heaven
 - Common phrase in Jewish thoughts (extra-biblical)
 - There are quotes in Talmud about elephants going through eye of needle
 - Jesus uses camel since camel is largest animal in Palestine
 - It means impossible to do
 - Interestingly enough people have tried to downplay this statement
 - Some have thought Jesus was talking about a needle gate—50 feet from the larger main gate—nobody has found this
 - Jesus meant camel and He meant what He said
 - Salvation is impossible for the rich man
 - Salvation is also impossible for everyone
 - Why?
 - Sinners cannot change their heart
 - They can "feel" the need, but they cannot on their own power change their hearts

Jeremiah 13:23 *Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard its spots? Neither can you do good who are accustomed to doing evil.*

Jeremiah 17:9 *The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?*

Genesis 6:5 *The LORD saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time.*

26 *The disciples were even more amazed, and said to each other, "Who then can be saved?"*

- The disciples were so stunned at Jesus' word that His meaning of salvation is finally sinking in

Luke 14:33 *In the same way, any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be My disciple.*

Mark 8:34 Then He called the crowd to Him along with His disciples and said: "If anyone would come after Me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me."

- This is actually the right question
- This is completely new to them—Jewish theology does not allow for this type of thought

27 Jesus looked at them and said, "With man this is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God."

- Salvation is impossible for man to achieve on his own
 - A sinner cannot save himself by his own power
 - No matter how strong a felt need is for you
 - You cannot buy your way into heaven
 - You cannot enter heaven by doing good works
 - You cannot even enter heaven on your own decision

John 1:11-13 He came to that which was His own, but His own did not receive Him. **12** Yet to all who received Him, to those who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God— **13** children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.

- Beautiful correlation between this verse and **Luke 1:37**

Luke 1:37 For nothing is impossible with God.

- Virgin birth is impossible
 - God intervened to make this possible
- Human salvation is impossible
 - Only God can provide regeneration

John 3:1-8 Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a member of the Jewish ruling council. **2** He came to Jesus at night and said, "Rabbi, we know You are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the miraculous signs You are doing if God were not with him." **3** In reply Jesus declared, "I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again." **4** "How can a man be born when he is old?" Nicodemus asked. "Surely he cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb to be born!" **5** Jesus answered, "I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. **6** Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. **7** You should not be surprised at My saying, 'You must be born again.' **8** The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit."

- Nicodemus and rich young ruler amazing parallel—both want the kingdom of heaven
- Jesus said that he must be born again from above
- Nicodemus understood what He is saying—This is impossible, I cannot do this on my own...I cannot regenerate myself
- Right, you cannot because it is the work of the Spirit
- It is His sovereign work—the Spirit comes when He wills on whom He wills and does what He wills
- Salvation is wholly the work of God
 - Only God can change the heart
 - God saves people when He moves people to come under the power of the Law
 - He does this to strip us bare before Him

- He brings us under the Lordship of Christ
- And willingly forsake all to follow Him
- The rich young ruler could not do it on his own—he did not have the power to change

Luke 18:13 *But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, 'God, have mercy on me, a sinner.'*

28 *Peter said to Him, "We have left everything to follow You!"*

- Jesus' words finally sink into their minds
 - This is the pearl of great price...the hidden treasure in the field
- They left everything—their family, their jobs, and their security to follow Jesus
 - Except Judas Iscariot who was still following money
 - In contrast with the rich young ruler and other followers

Luke 9:57-62 *As they were walking along the road, a man said to Him, "I will follow You wherever You go." 58 Jesus replied, "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay His head." 59 He said to another man, "Follow Me." But the man replied, "Lord, first let me go and bury my father." 60 Jesus said to him, "Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God." 61 Still another said, "I will follow You, Lord; but first let me go back and say good bye to my family." 62 Jesus replied, "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God."*

- However, there is still some personal glory seeking in Peter's phrase

Matthew 19:27 *Peter answered Him, "We have left everything to follow You! What then will there be for us?"*

- What's in it for us? What is our reward?

29 *"I tell you the truth," Jesus replied, "no one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for Me and the gospel*

30 *will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age (homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and fields—and with them, persecutions) and in the age to come, eternal life.*

- Our Lord is gentle!
- You are leaving everything for Me and the sake of the gospel
- You leave your earthly family, jobs, everything—then you gain a heavenly family
- You are not losing a family, you are gaining a true family
- This present age—now
- Age to come—eternal life—heaven
- Everlasting heaven with all its glories

31 *But many who are first will be last, and the last first."*

- Everybody will be equal
- The blessing now and for eternity will be equally the same for all believers
 - Example: **Matt 20:1-16**—vineyard workers at different times being paid the same wage