

Mission: Impossible

21st Sun. after Pent. – 10/17/21 – Mt. Calvary Luth.

Text: Mark 10:23-31 Pastor Keith Besel

v. 26-27 [Jesus' disciples asked Him,] **“Then who can be saved?”** [To which Jesus replied,] **“With man it is impossible, but not with God. For all things are possible with God.”**

Introduction

- ⊗ How many of you remember the old TV show *Mission: Impossible*? And for those a bit younger, in recent years we've been able to watch and enjoy the movie version starring Tom Cruise.
 - ➔ The basic premise of the show is of course centered around the main character, a government agent who receives assignments or missions from his superiors that are so difficult; so dangerous that they are considered to be “impossible”.
 - ➔ At the beginning of each episode we find the agent listening to a recorded message that says, “Your mission, should you decide to accept it, is...”. And the recording ends by saying, “this message will self-destruct in five seconds”.
- ⊗ In our Gospel Reading today, Jesus talks with His followers about their ability to enter the kingdom of heaven. He describes it as something that is not only difficult, or even dangerous to accomplish, but actually “impossible” for anyone of the human race to accomplish.

I. Difficult for those with “stuff” to enter the Kingdom

- ⊗ But before the devil gets ahold of any of us and convinces us that because of that there's no reason for us to even consider a life or “mission” in “the kingdom of God”, which of course would give him a victory in his spiritual battle against our Lord, let's remember the greater context of this Gospel Reading.
 - ➔ Last Sunday we heard about a man who came to Jesus, asking what he “must do” to inherit eternal life (Mk. 10:17).
 - ➔ The man appears very sincere in his request. Chapter 10:17 says that he “ran up and knelt before [Jesus]”. That's not the kind of thing someone does unless he is truly eager to hear from the one whom he honors and adores. I mean, we certainly don't hear of the scribes or Pharisees kneeling before Jesus, do we?
 - ➔ He even addresses Jesus as “Good Teacher” (v.17). So Jesus started there in His response, “Why do you call Me good? No one is good except God alone” (v.18). Jesus takes this guy to the First Commandment; to the fact that there is no person and no thing greater or more important than the one true God. He wants this man to understand the true implications of whom he is addressing and what he is requesting. It's as if Jesus is asking, “How far are you willing to take this? 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 will be?”
- ⊗ So in love, Jesus reminds this man of the rest of the Ten Commandments – especially Commands 4-10 that talk about how we are to relate to our fellow man.
 - ➔ To our amazement the man says, “...all these I have kept from my youth” (v. 20). Even more surprising Jesus doesn't contradict or lecture this guy on the fact that we're all sinners and no one in history has ever kept the commandments perfectly.

- Instead, verse 21 says that Jesus “loved him, and said to him, ‘you lack one thing: go, sell all that you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me’ (v. 21).
- ✘ You see, Jesus’ “assignment” forces the man to acknowledge whether or not he can say with Psalm 119:14, “In the way of Your testimonies I delight as much as in all riches”. This was indeed a very difficult mission for the man, because our Reading last Sunday ended by saying that “he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions” (v. 22).
 - Our text begins there as Jesus turns to His disciples with a comment that makes the rubber hit the road for every one of us here this morning. He’s calling all of us to look at that man as if we are looking at our own reflections in a mirror and He says in verse 23, “How difficult it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!”
 - Unless you understand what the original Greek is saying there, it’s very easy for most of us to wiggle our way out of that statement addressing us personally. If I were to ask you if you are “wealthy” or even “rich”, I expect the majority would say, “No way!”
 - But the Greek word that is translated in verse 23 as “having wealth” is *xrāmata* (χρήματα) which simply describes a person’s possessions. In today’s language it would be more accurate to understand Jesus saying, “How difficult it will be for those who have ‘stuff’ to enter the kingdom of God”. I’m pretty sure that all of us have plenty of “stuff” right? In fact I’d venture to say with confidence that all of us are actually “over-stuffed”.
 - We have so much “stuff” in our lives – whether it is the physical variety or the emotional or schedule or priority variety of “stuff”. All of our “stuff” readily stands in the way of us embracing Jesus as the only thing that matters to us in life; it even stands in the way of us receiving Jesus’ free gift of salvation.
 - ✘ The disciples are amazed at what Jesus says, because I’m sure they also had their own share of “stuff”. I mean, isn’t the “wealth” you and I have a sign of God’s blessing; an indicator of one’s relationship with God. When we talk about our things, we’ve been taught to understand that all that we have – our possessions and relationships, even our money is a good gift from God. But 1 Timothy 6:10 says, “the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils”. So this text as it stands warns us all about the danger of allowing our riches; our “stuff” to get in the way of our complete devotion to God. Yes, our wealth; our “stuff” can actually hinder or even block our ability to trust in God.

II. It is impossible to be saved on our own

- ✘ But it gets worse – or at least it appears to. Jesus goes on to teach His disciples a deeper truth.
 - “Jesus said to them again, ‘Children, how difficult 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’. And they were exceedingly astonished, and said to Him, ‘Then who can be saved?’ Jesus looked at them and said, ‘With man it is impossible’...” (vv. 24b–27a).
 - From our human perspective, no one is going to argue that it is impossible to get even the smallest camel through the eye of a needle. Not only is our stuff a huge “hindrance” to entering the kingdom, but Jesus uses the camel example to say that it is impossible for anyone to enter heaven on his/her own. And not just the rich! So, what then is the point of ever talking about salvation if it is impossible? That’s why the disciples asked, “Then who can be saved?” (v.26).
- ✘ All of our “stuff” in this world includes so much more than physical possessions doesn’t it? Satan of course knows this. So he uses what we think of as some of God’s greatest gifts to tempt us into turning them into his most powerful idols. In Matthew 10:37 Jesus said, “Whoever loves

father or mother...son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me". Yes, even our beloved family can become idols that we allow to get in the way of our relationship with God.

→ How many people leave a church where God's Word is taught properly to join a church that errs in some Scriptural doctrine just because they want their kids to have a "better" youth group; or because of the type of music they play; or because of the pastor's personality?

✘ This interaction of Jesus with the young man and then His disciples serves as a narrative example of the warning we heard in our Epistle Reading last Sunday from Hebrews 3:13, "...exhort one another every day...that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin" – any sin.

→ The truth is, no one can save him/herself. It is impossible. 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 as some churches falsely lead people to believe today.

→ It isn't that man does his part and God does His. Yet, I can't count the number of times that I've heard, even lifelong Lutherans, say something like this, "I sure hope I have done enough or been good enough to make it to heaven". Or at funerals, I often hear people say as they point to the casket or urn, "If anyone deserves to be in heaven it is him/her".

✘ So hear me well folks, the only part of the equation that you and I bring to the table is the impossible. All we bring is sin, evil and corruption. The only thing we supply to salvation is our complete and utter need for it.

III. God does the impossible!

✘ This is why Jesus looked at His disciples and said, "With man it is impossible, but not with God. For all things are possible with God" (v. 27).

→ So, are you willing to believe in the impossible? That's the Triune God's specialty you know. That's the whole story of what Scripture calls "The Gospel". It is the Good News that God does the impossible for you.

→ It all started when He created the entire universe in only six 24-hour days. He simply spoke and whatever He wanted to exist came into being. And, as impossible as it may seem, that same almighty God, limited Himself to human flesh and blood in the virgin birth of His Son, Jesus Christ.

✘ He's the only one who paid the price that was impossible for you and me to pay. Yes God died, in the person of Jesus, to pay for your sin, my sin and the sin of the whole world. No mere mortal could do that. But with God the impossible is possible.

→ If He wanted to do it, He absolutely could make a full size camel slip through the eye of the smallest needle. But that was only for the sake of an illustration. The far greater feat is that only God opens stone-cold hearts so that they now believe. That's what He did with every one of us here in this room, praise the Lord! You were born dead in your sin, but now you believe. Even with all of your "stuff" you are still saved!

→ It's what Martin Luther taught us to confess 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" (Meaning to the 3rd Article of the Apostles' Creed). Both your salvation and your conversion is all God's doing – the impossible is now a reality.

- ⊗ But the reality of this impossible truth done by God; the fact that you and I now have the assurance of our entrance into His kingdom in the final resurrection, doesn't mean that God's mission in and through us is over; quite the opposite.
 - ➔ This is the part where our lives as Christians find a bit of a connection to the *Mission: Impossible* shows and movies. Because the impossible has already been done for us, now we have a very active part in the rest of God's mission. And yes, it is many times very, very difficult – sometimes even dangerous, yet it is never impossible. As Jesus told the young man in verse 21 just before our text, so He calls you and me today, "...come, follow Me". In fact, in Matthew 10:38 Jesus says, "whoever does not take his cross and follow Me is not worthy of Me".
 - ➔ So, being a follower of Jesus is not about living the cushy life, surrounded by all of our "stuff" and just saying, "I believe in Jesus". No, because you believe in Jesus; because we have been saved by Jesus' impossible, saving work, now we, with all of our "stuff" – in fact, with our entire lives, are focused upon taking part in God's mission work. And sometimes it might entail persecution and difficulty and suffering.
- ⊗ But Jesus explains here in our text that the benefits are huge. In verse 30 He says that beyond the blessings of family and things and persecutions "in this time", that "in the age to come" we receive through Him and from Him, "eternal life!"
 - ➔ I think we Christians talk about eternal life so much that we might forget how really impossible it is for us to have. Eternal life means life without any decay or disease; life that doesn't grow weak throughout the years; life that is always good, always perfect; life that never ever, ever ends! That's impossible.
 - ➔ Yet that is God's mission in Jesus Christ for us! He did, and He does accomplish the Mission: Impossible.
- ⊗ And by the way, this promise from God will not self-destruct in five seconds; not ever! Amen.