

**Grace, mercy, and peace are yours in abundance through faith in our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.**

<sup>17</sup> As Jesus started on his way, a man ran up to him and fell on his knees before him. “Good teacher,” he asked, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?” <sup>18</sup> “Why do you call me good?” Jesus answered. “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 give false testimony, do not defraud, honor your father and mother.’”

<sup>20</sup> “Teacher,” he declared, “all these I have kept since I was a boy.” <sup>21</sup> Jesus looked at him and loved him. “One thing you lack,” he said. “Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.”

<sup>22</sup> At this the man’s face fell. He went away sad, because he had great wealth. <sup>23</sup> Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, “How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God!”

<sup>24</sup> The disciples were amazed at his words. But Jesus said again, “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 man to enter the kingdom of God.”

<sup>26</sup> The disciples were even more amazed, and said to each other, “Who then can be saved?”

<sup>27</sup> Jesus looked at them and said, “With man this is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God.” **This is God’s Word for God’s people.**

**Dear Friends,**

A leader of a foreign country’s army has an incurable disease that slowly eats away at his skin. Then he hears about a miraculous cure and so he doesn’t hesitate to go and find out if he might find freedom from his affliction. That is the story of Naaman who we heard about in our Old Testament lesson. He went to Israel and Elisha, God’s prophet, sent for him. Elisha told Naaman to wash in the Jordan River seven times and his leprosy would be gone. It was such a simple thing to do, but the Jordan wasn’t the cleanest of rivers and Naaman became indignant because he had expected a much more elaborate cure. He left, but a servant helped him to see his lack of faith. When Naaman followed the direction of the prophet of God, he was cleansed and he was overjoyed. What at first seemed foolish, did the impossible – it cured him. But we must remember it was not by the power of the water in the Jordan River but rather by the power of God.

Today as we consider the gospel lesson before us, Jesus talks about some impossible situations but he explains how, **“The Impossible becomes Possible.” “Not by Human Standards,”** but **“Only by God’s Standards.”**

**I.** Jesus had just blessed the little children that had gathered around him and now a man approaches Jesus with a question. The other gospel accounts of this event describe this man as being young and a ruler. This means he was probably around 30 years old and a ruler in the synagogue. Thus he was respected by the people and could have been known by many in the crowd. His question was, **“What must I do to inherit eternal life?”** A pretty good question until you consider why he asked it.

When the young man asked this question he wasn't really looking for God's grace. He felt he was leading a good life and he was well on his way to achieving heaven all on his own, but something was missing and he just couldn't put his finger on it so he asked Jesus. He thought Jesus might help him find the one thing he had to do yet to obtain eternal life.

Jesus knew what was in this man's heart and so he started with the Law; specifically with the second table of the law that deals with our relationships with each other. Did you note the young man's response? **"All these I have kept since I was a boy."** His response indicates that his understanding of sin fell somewhat short. Either he didn't think all his actions were sins or he didn't realize that we sin in thoughts, words, and actions – not just by actions alone. But the young man's statement shows how he felt his standing before God was pretty good. So Jesus now gets to the root of the problem and accommodates the young man's request. He gives him something to do.

**"Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me."** Everything – the house, the car, the boat – and after you sell it, give all the money to the poor. That certainly is an application of the second table of the Law – to help your fellow man in a most generous way, but Jesus was really getting to the heart of this young man's problem and that was his sin of idolatry – his sin against the First Commandment. To **"Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind."** (Mt. 22:37).

The young man was shocked. That was not the answer he had expected to hear – to give up everything he loved and held dear – no way! He had heard enough and he left disappointed. His sin against the first commandment was exposed and his self-delusion of keeping the whole Law was shattered, but the love of his earthly possessions still had a firm hold on his heart and he rejected the love of Christ for items that can so easily disappear.

There are times when I have to admit I'm somewhat like the rich young man. When it comes to the second table of the law, I'm tempted to say I do a good job of keeping it, just as many of you would too. I'm a good husband. I've never cheated on my wife. I pay my bills on time. I don't steal. I'm good to my mother. I like to forget or ignore the times when I might have had lustful thoughts and sinned against the 6<sup>th</sup> commandment. Or had thoughts of revenge against someone who had wronged me. Or not honored those in authority and I'm afraid the list could probably go on and on, and include many things I don't even realize are wrong.

I also love my possessions (they're not valuable like the man in the story – but they are valuable to me). And even though I am surrounded by God's Word, it is very easy for other things to take priority in my life and to crowd out time for personal devotions and prayer. I know it's probably the same for you. Our lives are just so busy it is easy to forget about Jesus. But the command Jesus gave the young man is also the command he gives to us, **"PUT ME FIRST! KEEP ME AT THE CENTER OF YOUR LIFE AND FOLLOW ME!"**

Don't worry about your possessions – that's all they are and they can't get you to heaven. Only Christ brings you a treasure that truly lasts forever – a treasure you can count on that doesn't wear out or break or is easily taken away. So "Keep Christ at the center of your life."

Listen to his Word, follow him by letting his Word guide you in your lives, and receive the blessings he has reserved for you, especially the treasure of heaven.

That treasure of heaven is ours already. We have the assurance that Christ has paid for the times we have sinned, especially those times when we have not kept him first in our lives. Christ not only paid for those sins but brings us forgiveness through faith. The very same faith that brings us the sure hope of eternal life. When we follow Christ we don't have to worry that our salvation is somehow incomplete – that something still needs to be done. His resurrection assures us that everything needed has been done.

The rich man did not have that peace of salvation. He clung to his human standards and because of that the impossible remained impossible, but Jesus has changed that for us. As we look to God's Standard we see the impossible becoming possible.

**II. “How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God!”<sup>24</sup> The disciples were amazed at his words. But Jesus said again, “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 man to enter the kingdom of God.”<sup>26</sup> The disciples were even more amazed,”** The disciples were amazed. They recognized this was an important lesson Jesus was trying to teach them but the main point Jesus was trying to make escaped them. Was he telling them you could only get to heaven if you are poor? Some have taken verse 25 all by itself and have tried to use it to say you have to take a vow of poverty to work your way to heaven. But that's not the main point of this section. Riches and money are not evil, but they certainly can be distracting and lead a person away from God – even convince a person that they are in control of their own lives and their own salvation.

The key to understanding this portion of scripture is the disciples question and Jesus answer. **“Who then can be saved?”<sup>27</sup> Jesus looked at them and said, “With man this is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God.”** God demands that we be perfect (Matthew 5:48) but we can't measure up because we have all sinned and fallen short of God's glory. (Romans 3:23). Just as a camel can't go through that little hole in the end of a needle, so it is impossible for anyone to save themselves. But God makes the impossible possible. **“God made him who had no sin [Jesus] to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”** (2 Corinthians 5:21). God demands we be perfect and he makes us perfect through faith in his Son, Jesus Christ.

In Luther's explanation to the 3<sup>rd</sup> article of the Apostle's Creed we are reminded that this is all God's doing, “I believe that I cannot by my own thinking or choosing 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 one true faith.” God has done the impossible for us. He has changed our unbelieving heart to a heart of faith and he continues to keep us close to him through his Word. Never doubt the power of the Word because it is the power of salvation for everyone who believes (Romans 1:16).

When Elisha told Naaman to go and wash in the Jordan it seemed foolish and he didn't want to do it. The rich young man didn't want to follow God's Word either. One man changed his mind and was overjoyed by what followed, while the other went away disappointed.

How about you? My prayer is that you will continue to embrace God's Word, believe it, follow it, and receive the blessings of salvation. I pray that you will not only stay close to your Savior but joyfully serve him. The closer you stay to your Savior, the more you realize that the Lord has taken the impossible and made it possible for you. Amen.