

ALL THINGS ARE POSSIBLE WITH GOD

Mark 10:23-31

Twenty-second Sunday after Pentecost (Series B)

October 20, 2024

Trinity Free Lutheran Church, Grand Forks, ND

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The gospel lesson comes from *The Gospel According to Mark*, chapter 10, verses 23 through 31. Please stand as you are able for the Gospel. From Mark 10, beginning at verse 23, we read in Jesus' name.

²³ And Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, “How difficult it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!” ²⁴ And the disciples were amazed at his words. But Jesus said to them again, “Children, how difficult it is to enter the kingdom of God! ²⁵ 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.” ²⁶ And they were exceedingly astonished, and said to him, “Then who can be saved?” ²⁷ Jesus looked at them and said, “With man it is impossible, but not with God. For all things are possible with God.” ²⁸ Peter began to say to him, “See, we have left everything and followed you.” ²⁹ Jesus said, “Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands, for my sake and for the gospel, ³⁰ who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions, and in the age to come eternal life. ³¹ But many who are first will be last, and the last first.”

Father, these are your words. Sanctify us in the truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

You may be seated.

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.

This is part two of what we started last week. Last week we talked about money, and how it can become an idol to us. This week the lectionary (or whoever created the lectionary) is not letting us off the hook yet. And I think there's some wisdom to that. If you were here last week, it's possible that you didn't like the sermon, or at least parts of it. If you did like it, you might not have been listening very well.

And I suspect sometimes, if you don't like a particular sermon, you might think to yourself afterwards, *Well, at least that's behind us, so I won't have to listen to him talk about that again for a while.* Sometimes I think that way as a preacher. Following a lectionary, that is, a schedule of Scripture readings designed by someone else, forces me to preach the whole counsel of God's Word. I can't just ignore the topics I don't want to talk about. But at least when I preach about something I don't want to, like money, I feel like I've done my duty, and I can go on to something else. Not so fast! Wisely, the lectionary makes us sit in it a little while longer. We need to spend a little more time hearing about money and how it can so easily become a false god to us.

I have heard people say, and perhaps you have heard them say it as well, that Jesus talks about money more than anything else. False. Those people don't know how to read a book. If you read the gospels, especially in Matthew, Mark, and Luke, you will see that Jesus talks about the Kingdom of God or the Kingdom of Heaven more than anything else. This passage is an example of that. In this passage, Jesus' real concern is how we can enter the Kingdom of God.

And, of course, whenever he talks about the Kingdom, he's really talking about himself, because he is the King. His parables or teachings about the Kingdom of God are about the way he rules over his Kingdom. And in the Gospel of John, it is quite obvious that Jesus talks about himself more than anything else. He keeps starting sentences with the words, "I AM." Now that might be an indication that a person is a narcissist. Except, with Jesus, he talks about himself over and over again because he knows that he is the Savior of the world, and we must trust in him to save us. He talks about himself so much, because he loves us and desires to save us.

When Jesus does talk about money, sometimes it's just an object in a parable, like somebody has a certain number of coins. He uses it as a prop to teach something else. And when Jesus talks about money for the sake of talking about money, it's not because *he* cares about it. He can pull coins out of a fish's mouth if he wants to (Matt. 17:27). He talks about it because *we* care about it ... a little too much, and he wants us to stop. God doesn't really care about money. I mean, he does, in the sense that he cares about all the little things that trouble our hearts. But of all the things in creation that God cares about, money and possessions are way down the list. If you have two dollars in your pocket, and another person has a million, God doesn't care, because he can still give you what you need. His Kingdom on earth does not consist of money, possessions, land, or buildings. It consists of faith and love. These are the things God cares about. He desires that we would be rich in faith and love.

So last week we heard about this rich man who came to Jesus, asking what he must do to inherit eternal life. The man thought he had kept all of God's commandments, so Jesus gave him another. He told him to sell all of his possessions, give the proceeds to the poor, and to come and follow him. It wasn't really the case that doing so would earn the man eternal life, but Jesus saw that this man's possessions had become his god. Even more than the poor needing help, this man just needed to be rid of his possessions. They held his heart captive. If a fire burned down his house and destroyed every possession in it, it would have been good for him. His possessions had become his god. So after hearing Jesus' instruction, the man went away sorrowful, because he had great wealth. And we don't know, exactly, what he was sorrowful about. Was he grieving that he could not follow Jesus? Or was he grieving that he had to give up his stuff? We don't know. We don't know what he did with his stuff when he got home. Did he submit himself to the lordship of his possessions? Or did he sell it and submit himself to the lordship of Jesus? We don't know.

This week we read the rest of the story. But it's not the rest of the story of that man. That's still a mystery. The rest of the story is what Jesus said to his disciples. While reflecting on it with his disciples, Jesus said, "**How difficult it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!**" (10:23). To the disciples, this sounded like crazy talk. Of all the people in the world, they thought the rich had the best chance of being saved.

This might not be how we think of it today. We are more likely to assume that the rich are, at best, extremely greedy. And, at worst, they might be criminals. Perhaps they got rich by defrauding poor people with bad loans or foreclosures. Maybe they're into organized crime. Maybe they overcharge their customers or pay their employees as little as possible, so they can get rich on the backs of the poor. Maybe they're evading taxes. Some of the time that's true, but certainly not always. But our society is more suspicious of rich people.

But in ancient Israel, it was the opposite. They were a much more theistic society. That is, pretty much everyone believed there is a god, even though it turned out that many of them didn't understand the true God. But they almost all believed in a god. And there's this natural feeling

that, if there is a god, he must be behind everything that happens to us. They thought, *If something terrible happens to me, I must have done something wrong to provoke his wrath.* That's why, in another place, the disciples were so confused as to why a man was born blind. They asked Jesus, "Who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" (John 9:2). They couldn't understand why God would punish the child for the sins of the parents, and they couldn't understand how someone could sin so badly before they were born, that God would blind him. But they assumed there had to be some reason. So Jesus corrected them. God doesn't work that way. If you ever think that God is punishing you for something, know this: if God actually worked that way, your punishment would be so much worse. But that's how the Jews thought of God.

The other side of the coin is that they also thought, *If something good happens, God must be rewarding me for something.* You know, like, "Somewhere in my youth or childhood, I must have done something good" (*The Sound of Music*). So the disciples looked at this rich man. He kept all of the commandments, or, at least, it seemed like he did. And he was wealthy. He must have been a pretty good guy for God to bless him like this. So when Jesus says, reflecting on this man, "**How difficult it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!**" they can't believe it. And Jesus goes on, "**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**" (10:25). Jesus is talking about a real needle, and a real camel. I have enough trouble getting a string of thread through the eye of a needle. But what Jesus talks about here is just absurd. Think of a camel. Think of a needle. It's easier to thread that camel through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to be saved.

So what is Jesus saying? Is he saying that being wealthy is sinful? No; it's not. Perhaps he is saying that wealth is such a powerful false god that it will ensnare everyone who has it, and none of them will be saved. That's a little bit closer, but it's not the whole truth.

The disciples were exceedingly astonished at this. It's not just difficult; it's impossible. They say, "Then who can be saved?" (10:26). It's like, *if the rich man can't be saved, then what hope do the rest of us have?*

And Jesus flat out declares that it's impossible. "**With man it is impossible**" (10:27). It is impossible for that rich man to be saved. It is impossible for those twelve disciples to be saved. It is impossible for me to be saved. It is impossible for you to be saved. It is impossible for your children to be saved, for your parents to be saved, for the people you hold most dear to be saved. It is impossible for good people to be saved. It is impossible for the person who literally sells everything and gives it to the poor to be saved. It is impossible for the rich to be saved. It is impossible for the poor to be saved. It is impossible for everyone in between to be saved. "**With man it is impossible.**"

Jesus is breaking down the whole system of rewards and punishments. God doesn't work that way. He doesn't work that way on earth, and he doesn't work that way in heaven. You don't get what you deserve. You get what God graciously desires to give to you. And that is good, because if we get what we deserve, we will all be condemned.

Or to put it another way, we get whatever our god is able and willing to give to us. If money and possessions are your god, you will get whatever they are capable of giving you. Perhaps you will be wealthy and comfortable for a while. But, then again, maybe you won't. Money and possessions may not love you in return. Maybe popularity is your god. Perhaps you will have good friends who laugh at your jokes and do favors for you. But, then again, maybe they won't. Maybe government is your god. Perhaps your people will get elected, and perhaps they will keep the promises they made. But maybe they don't get elected. Or maybe they do, but they don't

keep their promises. Or maybe they keep their promises, but it turns out to be a disaster. Or maybe you are your own god. You trust yourself. You think you can work for whatever you want. You think you can fix whatever needs fixing. You think you know best. But if you trust your own wisdom, then you are limited to the benefits of your wisdom. That's quite foolish. And if you trust your own strength or goodness, you are limited to what you can do. And that's not much. And the common weakness of all of these gods is that they are unable to save us in the end. They cannot make us righteous. They cannot save us from death.

But if Jesus Christ is your God, then you get whatever he is willing and able to give you. And that's a lot. This is salvation by faith. You get the benefits of the God you trust in. So we trust Jesus to save us. Consider what he has done for you. And consider what he has promised to you. God does not judge you based on your works anymore. What you have done, and what you have left undone is irrelevant at the Judgment Day. The only things that will matter there are what Jesus has done. Jesus is the judge, and he took your sin in his body when he was crucified. He put that sin to death, and he rose innocent and triumphant. His resurrection is your absolution.

It is impossible for your possessions to save you. Do not trust in them. But it is also impossible for you to not trust them. And this is the real problem. The rich man went away sorrowful, because it was impossible for him to change his heart. He couldn't make his heart stop trusting his false god. And the same is true for us. Whatever your false gods may be, it is impossible for you to turn your heart away from them. **"With man it is impossible, but not with God. For all things are possible with God"** (10:27). And that's why we don't really know what happened to that rich man. God may have turned his heart. And it is possible for God to turn our hearts and save us from our false gods. We should pray that he will. Whenever we pray, **"Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil"** (Matt. 6:13), we are praying that God would lead our hearts away from our false gods, and that he would keep us for himself. This is impossible for us to do, but he can, and he will.

So what do we do with this? Do we just throw up our hands and say, "Well, if I'm going to be saved from my false gods, the true God is going to have to do it, so I should just enjoy my false gods, since I can't rescue myself anyway"? No. That's foolishness. Both of these things are true: God commands us not to have other gods, and he is the one who saves us from them. His command is true, and it is good for us. We should not chase after false gods. We should guard our hearts through prayer and the Word of God. We should be vigilant, lest our hearts be pulled away. And when we are pulled away after the false gods of this world, we should confess that sin. Seek forgiveness through the blood of Christ. Pray that our Savior would again rescue us from temptation. And he will. "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need" (Heb. 4:15-16). Our hearts are so easily drawn away, and we become enslaved to false gods that cannot save. And we cannot free ourselves. But our Savior is an expert in such things. And he is so much stronger than our false gods. After all, what are they? Nothing. That's why we call them "false." Seek Jesus. Seek his infinite mercy. And by the power of his innocent blood, he will rescue and forgive you. **"For all things are possible with God."** Amen.

Now may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus (Phil. 4:7). Amen.