

LET THE BIBLE SPEAK SERIES

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IMPOSSIBLE FOR MAN

Matthew 19:23-26

During the last 100 years many great accomplishments have been made by man. In the field of medicine, life expectancy has been prolonged. In travel, we have sent a man to the moon and back. Space travel is now common. In the field of electronics, we have opened up horizons that a few years back were thought impossible. Currently the knowledge base is doubling every year and a half. Astounding progress.

As a result of all this, many have the idea that there is nothing man cannot do. The sky is the limit.

However, the words of our text indicate the very opposite. In this context Jesus had declared that it was hard for a rich man to go to heaven. He even went so far as to say that it was easier for a camel to go thru the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter heaven. The disciples were astonished at this statement and asked "who then can be saved?" The reply "with men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible." (Mt. 19:24)

The statement by our Lord is a proverb, that expresses the improbability of the rich being saved. It certainly would have been impossible for a literal camel to pass through the eye of a literal needle. The idea, however, is to point out that riches often make it very difficult for those who possess them to be saved. Not that they can't be saved.

There are several reasons why riches of the world make it difficult for those who possess them to be saved.

1. There is a tendency among the affluent to feel that they have no need of God. They trust their possessions instead of God. Often faithfulness and riches are inversely related.
2. The rich often become indifferent to the needs of others. This is a result of the desire to have more themselves.
3. The rich often have a hard time accepting the simplicity that is in Christ. They tend to be worldly in their thinking as a result the gospel is unappealing to them.
4. The rich often allow their desire to corrupt them. They do whatever is necessary to gain more.

The purpose of our lesson is to show some of the things that are impossible for man. The things that he cannot do.

I. Man Cannot Overthrow The Work of God.

In Acts 5:27-33 the Jewish council were angered because the apostles had preached Christ in spite of their prohibition not to do so. They met to discuss ways of putting them to

death. Gamaliel, a respected doctor of the Law, wisely said..."Men of Israel, take heed to yourselves what you intend to do regarding these men. For some time ago Theudas rose up, claiming to be somebody. A number of men, about four hundred, joined him. He was slain, and all who obeyed him were scattered and came to nothing. After this man, Judas of Galilee rose up in the days of the census, and drew away many people after him. He also perished, and all who obeyed him were disposed. And now I say to you, keep away from these men and let them alone; for if this plan or this work is of men, it will come to nothing; but if it is of God, you cannot overthrow it--lest you even be found to fight against God."

He was never more right.

1. Pharoah tried to hold the Israelites in bondage contrary to God's will, and he failed. (Ex.5:14)
2. Sanballot, Tobiah, and Gesham tried to stop the rebuilding of the wall of Jerusalem. They failed according to Neh.4:6. "They perceived that this work was wrought of our God." (Neh. 6:16)
3. The Jews tried to rid the world of Christ by crucifying him. They failed. He arose the third day.
4. Later they tried to stamp out the church of the gospel by persecution (Acts 8:1-4). They failed.

Every man who has opposed the work of God has failed. If it be of God, man cannot overthrow it.

II. Man Cannot Get Away From God.

Psa. 139:7-10 "Where can I go from your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence? If I ascend into heaven, You are there; If I make my bed in hell, behold, You are there. If I take the wings of the morning And dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, Even there Your hand shall lead me And Your right hand shall hold me."

Legion is their name who have tried to run away from God. All have failed.

1. Jonah failed. Jonah 1:1-3 "Jonah rose up to flee unto Tarshish from the presence of the Lord."

He did not succeed. When the fish vomited him up, God was there and he was told "arise and go unto Ninevah..."

Heb.4:13 "Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight, but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of Him with whom we have to do."

Though men cry for rocks and mountains to fall on them, Rev. 6:16-17, though they attempt to flee from his presence Rev. 20:11--All will stand before him in Judgment Rev. 20:12-15.

You cannot get away from God.

III. Man Cannot Serve Two Masters.

Mt. 6:24 "No man can serve two masters... Ye cannot serve God and Mammon."
Mammon here refers to riches. To serve one is to neglect or turn one's back on the other.

Man has tried to serve both. The young man of our text wanted to go to heaven, but his riches prevented him from following Jesus. The same is true for many today.

1 Timothy 6:9-10 "But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil: which some coveted after, they have erred from the faith and pierced themselves through with many sorrows."

1 Timothy 6:17-19 "Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not high-minded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy; That they do good, that be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate; Laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life."

No wonder Jesus said it was hard for a rich man to go to heaven.

IV. Man Cannot Please God In The Flesh.

Romans 8:8 "So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God."

What is the meaning of this verse? Obviously not referring to the physical body, for if that were the case, no one could please God. Yet we know men in the body who did. Enoch did Heb. 11:5, and Jesus did according to John 8:29.

1. Some say that "in the flesh" refers to the unconverted state. The unregenerate individual. They conclude that everything a man does is sin. That is not true. Even though one is out of Christ, he may still do many things that are not wrong or sinful.

2. Those under consideration in this passage "mind earthly things." i.e. the things of the flesh Rom. 8:5. They are "carnal minded" as opposed to "spiritually minded." Rom. 8:6

While carnal minded they are opposed to God, and not subject to his law, and cannot be. Why? Because following the lead of the carnal mind, they engage in the works of the flesh Gal. 5:19-21 and while so doing they cannot please God.

V. Man Cannot Change His State After Death. Luke 16:19-31

Note verse 25-26 "And besides all this between us and you there is a great gulf fixed, so that they which would pass from hence to you cannot, neither can they pass to us that would come from thence."

Man Cannot:

1. Leave this world in a sinful state and be paid or prayed out of a lost state.
2. Nor will hell be vacated of its guilty millions, and its miserable inhabitants be received into heaven. That would be universal salvation.
3. Nor will a man have a second trial or chance that will be more favorable than the first ad Charles T. Russell states in Studies in The Scriptures Vol. I p. 143-53. That would be equal to a second change. But why cannot this be?

Because there is a "great gulf fixed". A broad yawning space. That space is "fixed" or made firm. It cannot be crossed or bridged. Our destiny is determined by the life we live. Not what happens after death.

4. Now is the accepted time--2Cor.6:2, Heb. 3:7
5. The dead are raised to "eternal life" or "eternal death" John 5:28-29.

VI. Man Cannot Avoid The Judgment.

Romans 3:23 "And thinkest thou this O' man that judgest them which do such things and doest the same that thou shalt escape the judgment of God?"

Criminals may escape the judgment of our judicial system. But none, will escape the judgment of God.

He has appointed a day for judgment according to Acts 17:31
All will stand before God and give account. Romans 14:20-21
God will bring every work into judgment. Eccl. 12:14

Thus in spite of man's wonderful accomplishments and in the face of his superior abilities, it is good to recognize the things that man cannot do.