

# Receiving the Impossible

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Preacher: Lee Roberts

[ 0 : 00 ] We're back in Mark chapter 10 tonight. Let's do some brief review before we focus on Mark chapter 10 verses 23 through 27.

! Since Mark chapter 10 verse 13, Jesus has been teaching his disciples about who will get into the kingdom of God and who will be left out.! That is the same thing as receiving salvation from God's wrath for our sins and for receiving eternal life.

Mark chapter 10 verses 13 through 16 showed us that Jesus saves those who recognize that they are helpless and hopeless without him. Except for Jesus, every human who ever has lived, every human who is currently living, and every human who will live in the future deserves God's punishment because of breaking God's law.

As part of the plan developed before the beginning of time, God the Father and Jesus, God the Son, provided a way for the payment of our sin debt to God. We know that Jesus came to earth as a human, lived a perfectly sinless and perfectly righteous life, and willingly offered himself as the atoning sacrifice for everyone who puts their faith in Jesus alone for salvation.

Let's remind ourselves of what Mark chapter 10 verses 13 through 16 said. Here are those verses. And they were bringing children to him, that's Jesus, that he might touch them, and the disciples rebuked them.

[ 1 : 35 ] But when Jesus saw it, he was indignant and said to them, Let the children come to me, do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God. Truly I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it.

And he took them in his arms and blessed them, laying his hands on them. When we talked about those verses in detail, we reminded ourselves that children cannot survive on their own.

Children cannot get a job on their own to pay their own way. Children are totally dependent on parents or guardians to take care of them. Similar to children, true believers recognize that they are totally dependent on Jesus to save them from God's wrath.

Nobody can do anything to earn salvation. Two weeks ago, we covered Mark's account of the meeting between Jesus and the person we know as the rich young ruler.

That man was almost totally opposite of the children. He had worldly status. He had means to support himself. And he even had what people would have considered good religious standing.

[ 2 : 43 ] But in his heart, the rich young ruler knew that he was missing something. Let's read Mark chapter 10, verses 17 through 22. Those verses say, And as Jesus was setting out on his journey, a man ran up and knelt before him and asked him, Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?

And Jesus said to him, Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone. You know the commandments. Do not murder. Do not commit adultery. Do not steal.

Do not bear false witness. Do not defraud. Honor your father and mother. And he said to him, Teacher, all these things I have kept from my youth.

And Jesus, looking at him, 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.

Disheartened by the saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions. These verses show us that to receive eternal life, people must make following Jesus their top priority.

[ 3 : 52 ] That is a hard lesson to learn, and an even harder lesson to put into practice. That lesson is the opposite of what the disciples had been taught before they met Jesus. Jewish culture of the day taught that riches and status were signs of God's favor.

The rich young ruler seemed like a perfect addition to their little group, but the rich young ruler failed to join the group because he was unwilling to make following Jesus his top priority.

The young ruler valued his earthly wealth and status more than he valued receiving eternal life. The young ruler valued his earthly wealth and status more than he valued receiving the blessings that he would get from following Jesus.

Because of that, the young ruler actually was bankrupt. He lacked the only thing that matters for eternity, and that's a proper relationship with God. That proper relationship with God results from having a proper relationship with Jesus.

That background sets the scene for the passage that we'll look at tonight. Tonight's verses happened immediately after the young ruler walked away. The disciples were struggling to process what they had just seen.

[ 5 : 04 ] So let's read tonight's passage. Again, it's Mark chapter 10, verses 23 through 27. 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.

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. 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, but not with God.

For all things are possible with God. Here's the main idea for tonight's verses. Anyone's salvation is a miracle of God's grace.

Once again, anyone's salvation is a miracle of God's grace. Because we easily can become attached to worldly things, only God can overcome our tendency towards self-reliance and make us see our need for salvation.

[ 6 : 16 ] We just went back to Mark chapter 10, verses 13 through 22 for some review. But in this passage, Jesus goes back further than that.

The lesson Jesus drew from here is the tragic story of the rich young ruler. And it was first told to us in Mark chapter 8, verse 35. At least the things behind that were told to us that.

Jesus drew from the tragic story of the rich young ruler because it elaborated on his statement in Mark chapter 8, verse 35. So here's what Jesus said in Mark chapter 8, verses 35 through 37.

For whoever would save his life will lose it. But whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it. For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul?

For what can a man give in return for his soul? The rich young ruler had come to the right person. Of course, that right person is Jesus. The rich young ruler had asked the right question.

[ 7 : 19 ] That question was, how do I inherit eternal life? He had received the right answer. Honor God, follow Jesus, and follow Jesus in complete trust like a little child.

Sadly, he did not respond correctly, and he walked away from the only true source of eternal life. When Jesus called this young man to give up his money, the man started to grieve because money was the center of his identity.

To lose his money would have been to lose himself. The rich young ruler walked away from eternal life because he was self-sufficient like an adult and not dependent like a child.

This story raises an alarming question. How can an adult stop being like an adult and become like a child? The answer is, it's a miracle, and only God can do that miracle.

And Jesus brings this lesson to his disciples in an opportune moment here. We'll look at tonight's verses in three sections, starting with verses 23 through 25 of Mark chapter 10.

[ 8 : 23 ] And in those verses, we see the commentary. So the commentary is the first section of our text tonight. That commentary comes from Jesus himself.

Here are Mark chapter 10, verses 23 and 24 again. 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.

And the disciples were amazed at his words, that Jesus said to them again, Children, how difficult it is to enter the kingdom of God. The disciples had been surprised when the seemingly hopeful prospect rejected Jesus' terms and abruptly turned and left.

The disciples were even more amazed at Jesus' words concerning the difficulty that the rich find in entering the kingdom. In their culture, as previously noted, it was assumed that wealth and power were signs of God's blessing.

Contrary to what most people of Jesus' day thought, and contrary to what most people of our day still think, the Bible teaches that wealth can be a stumbling block for receiving eternal life.

[ 9 : 37 ] People can be tempted to trust their wealth instead of trusting in God. And by the world standards, nearly everyone in the United States is rich. The World Bank and other sources state that the average global income is slightly more than \$1,000 per month.

Paul warned about the danger of trusting in riches in what we know as chapter 6 of his first letter to Timothy. Listen to 1 Timothy 6, verse 10.

He said, A few sentences later, Paul wrote about what to do and what to value instead.

Here are 1 Timothy 6, verses 17 through 19. Paul said, As for the rich in this present age, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy.

They are to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, thus storing up treasure for themselves as a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is truly life.

[ 11 : 04 ] By the time Paul wrote 1 Timothy, he had grasped the concept that Jesus taught in our Mark passage. But when the Mark passage first happened, the disciples were having trouble coming to terms with what seemed to be different than everything that they had been taught before Jesus came along.

In the Jewish religious system, it should be easy for the rich to enter the kingdom of God, not impossible. Here are a couple of examples of what the rabbis taught.

These examples come from apocryphal books. These books are a collection of Jewish writings done after the Old Testament was written. The first is Tobit chapter 12, verses 8 through 10.

And it said, 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, for almsgiving saves from death and purges away every sin. Those who give alms will enjoy a full life, that those who commit sin and do wrong are their own worst enemies.

[ 12 : 19 ] Now here's Sirach 3, verse 30, and it simply says, As water extinguishes a blazing fire, so almsgiving atones for sin.

So now do you get some idea of why the disciples thought it would be easy for the rich to enter the kingdom of heaven? Because we know the true gospel, we instantly understand how wrong those apocryphal references are.

However, the disciples had been taught those things their entire lives, and they had yet to see the true gospel in real life. Jesus had been teaching them about the true gospel, and he would continue to teach the disciples the true gospel.

But when the events in tonight's passage happened, Jesus was still on his way to his crucifixion and resurrection. Riches are a hindrance if they become the main things in life, and their power to captivate can only be overcome by God himself.

In becoming Christians, we begin to embrace new standards of value which are quite different from those which so often operate in worldly society. In Mark chapter 10, verse 24, Jesus emphasizes his teaching even more by broadening it.

[ 13 : 36 ] Look at Mark chapter 10, verse 24 again. 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.

Jesus omitted a reference to the rich in verse 24. He broadened his teaching to include all people, whether they are rich, poor, or anywhere in between.

Jesus simply said, Children, how difficult it is to enter the kingdom of God. Right now, maybe those of you who have the King James or New King James may be thinking, Wait a minute, my verse 24 does mention the rich.

For example, here's how the New King James renders Mark chapter 10, verse 24. It says, And the disciples were astonished at his words that Jesus answered again and said to them, Children, how hard it is for those who trust in riches to enter the kingdom of God.

So why do the King James and New King James make a reference to those who trust in riches there in verse 24? Well, the answer is related to the manuscript that those translations are based upon.

[ 14 : 49 ] The newer translations like the New American Standard and ESV use older and better manuscripts, and those manuscripts omit a reference to those who trust in riches in verse 24.

If you have the New King James, you'll see a margin note that says, In you omits for those who trust in riches. And in you refers to the Nestle-Auland United Bible Society's critical text, which is a modern compilation of the Greek New Testament that's based on the oldest and most reliable manuscripts available.

Before we leave verse 24, notice something else about it. This episode is the only incident recorded in Scripture where Jesus addressed the disciples as children.

Some people, including John MacArthur, think that Jesus used the word children to highlight the disciples' spiritual immaturity. Others think that Jesus used the term as a term of endearment. Given the context, Jesus' use of the word as a term of endearment seems more likely. After all, Jesus used children in a very positive sense just a few verses earlier in Mark chapter 10, verses 13 through 16.

[16:09] After shocking the disciples with the earlier comment, Jesus then emphasized his teaching by using an illustration. Look at Mark chapter 10, verse 25.

Jesus said, 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. The Persians expressed an impossibility by using a familiar proverb stating that it would be easier for an elephant to go through the eye of a needle.

The Jews picked up that proverb and substituted a camel for the elephant because camels were the largest animals in Palestine. Jesus used a well-known proverb to make his point.

It's impossible for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, yet Jesus says that 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 that's why we say that anyone's salvation is a miracle of God's grace. John MacArthur wrote, some people unwilling to face the stark reality that the saying implies have attempted to soften it.

[17:21] Notice the similarity between the Greek words for camel and for a large rope or cable. Some suggest that a copyist erred by substituting camel for cable.

He points out that it is unlikely, however, that Matthew's, Mark's, and Luke's accounts all would have been changed in exactly the same way. Nor would a scribe make the statement harder, rather than easier.

He might change the wording from camel to cord, but not from cord to camel. But even a rope could no more go through the eye of a needle than a camel could. MacArthur continued, others imagine that the reference is to a small gate in Jerusalem's wall that camels could enter only with great difficulty.

But there is no evidence that such a gate ever existed. Nor would any person with common sense have attempted to force a camel through such a small gate even if one had existed.

They would simply have brought their camel into the city through a larger gate. The obvious point of Jesus's picturesque expression of hyperbole is that salvation is humanly impossible for anyone by any means, including the wealthy.

[18:34] Sinners are aware of their guilt and fear, and they even have a desire for a relationship with God, and they may desire that that relationship would bring forgiveness and peace, but they cannot hold on to their sinful priorities and personal control and think that they can come to God on their own terms.

And the young ruler illustrates that reality. Mark chapter 10, verse 24, told us that the disciples were amazed at Jesus's words.

The second section of the passage emphasizes that idea and more. Mark chapter 10, verse 26, shows us the confusion. The confusion is the second thing that we'll look at.

Speaking of the disciples, Mark chapter 10, verse 26, says, And they were exceedingly astonished and said to him, Then who can be saved?

We can imagine the amazed and surprised looks on the disciples' faces when Jesus told them how difficult it is for someone to enter the kingdom of God. But we have no need to imagine what they were thinking.

[19:43] Their thoughts came out in their question, Then who can be saved? The notion that prosperity is to be equated with godliness was deeply ingrained in the disciples.

Despite the Lord's blunt denial of this wrong idea, that idea still persists to this day. Those who teach the false gospel commonly known as the prosperity gospel, ignore the Lord's warnings of rejection, suffering, persecution, and other difficulties that the godly can expect in this world.

Multitudes believe that they are offered wealth and health along with long life and happiness as the birthright of belief. The whole history of the church in a hostile world reveals the lie in such an idea. As we saw in our review of the previous Mark passage, wealth can be a barrier to the one thing necessary to enter the kingdom, that's helpless childlike trust in Jesus.

In the case of the young ruler, his wealth robbed him of God's greatest blessing, and that blessing is eternal life. Today, wealth continues to make rich people poor and the first last.

[ 20 : 57 ] Remember what Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians chapter 1, verses 26 through 31. Here are 1 Corinthians chapter 1, verses 26 through 31.

Paul said, For consider your calling, brothers. Not many of you were wise according to worldly standards. Not many were powerful. Not many were of noble birth.

But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise. God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong. God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God.

And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, so that, as it is written, let the one who boasts boast in the Lord. So far we've seen the commentary and the confusion. In the last verse of this section, Jesus will provide the clarification. So we'll look at the clarification next.

[ 22 : 16 ] That clarification comes in Mark chapter 10 verse 27. Jesus answered the disciples' question about who can be saved. Here is Mark chapter 10 verse 27 again.

Jesus looked at them and said, With man it is impossible, but not with God. For all things are possible with God. This verse is the key to understanding the entire passage.

Inheriting eternal life, entering the kingdom, and being saved are impossible for any human being, but not for God. Therefore, all must depend entirely upon God.

This text demolishes the idea that's often called decisional regeneration. That idea says that someone can just decide to go from being adult-like to being child-like.

In other words, someone can decide to be saved. But that doesn't match up with Scripture. The rich young man could not make himself a dependent child. Nothing he could do could fit him through the entrance to the kingdom.

[ 23 : 26 ] He was wrong to think that his moral attainments would be enough to get him into heaven. Jesus is saying clearly that salvation is the work of God and must be the work of God, not the work of man.

That's why he said, With man it is impossible, but not with God. If salvation was the work of man or the decision of man, no one would be saved.

Salvation is a miracle. Miracles are no problem for God after all, he made the world out of nothing and he needs to do a similar miracle again when he creates a child of God from a condemned sinner.

No human will ever become like a little child without a new birth. Jesus' answer to their question is one of the great theological affirmations in the Bible.

Salvation is something that man cannot accomplish. Left to himself, he will never make it into God's kingdom and inherit eternal life. Salvation is, has always been, and will always be a divine accomplishment through the perfect atonement and sacrificial death of God's Son.

[ 24 : 36 ] Salvation is something that is done for us, not something we do for ourselves. With men, entering God's kingdom and receiving eternal life is impossible and no one will be saved, but with God all things are possible and anyone can be saved.

R.C. Sproul said, Humanly speaking, no one can be saved, but with God salvation is possible even for the one who previously has entrusted himself wholeheartedly to material wealth.

It may be difficult, but the Holy Spirit intervenes in the lives of people and cuts through the hardness of their hearts. By God's power and grace, a camel can go through the eye of the needle in a manner of speaking.

Salvation is beyond purchase, beyond money, beyond price, and beyond all human standards of religion, morality, good works, or self-effort.

The disciples should have known that from Old Testament Scriptures. The Old Testament Scriptures showed that the basic principle of salvation rests on something other than money. And here are a couple of Old Testament Scriptures to show that.

[ 25 : 51 ] First up is Isaiah 55, verse 1. Isaiah 55, verse 1 says, Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters, and he who has no money, come, buy and eat.

Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. That's a verse you likely will never hear from the prosperity gospel preachers.

A similar passage that the disciples would have been familiar with is Micah 6, verses 6-8. Here are Micah 6, verses 6-8.

With what shall I come before the Lord and bow myself before God on high? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old?

Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?

[ 26 : 55 ] He has told you, O man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you but to do justice and to love kindness and to walk humbly with your God?

Notice that the Micah passage says that wealth has nothing to do with what God requires. But what is impossible with men is possible with God.

Salvation is God's idea planned by him before even time began, provided by him at infinite cost, and offered as the gift of God's grace.

As we saw when we looked at Mark chapter 10 verses 12 through 16, Jesus saves those who recognize that they are helpless and hopeless without him. That message is consistent throughout the Bible.

For example, consider what Jesus taught in the parable about the Pharisee and the tax collector. Here are Luke chapter 18 verses 9 through 14.

[ 27 : 55 ] Talking about Jesus, it says, He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and treated others with contempt.

Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus, God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector.

I fast twice a week. I give tithes of all that I get. But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven but beat his breast, saying, God, be merciful to me, a sinner.

I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other, for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted.

When sinners, by the work of the Spirit, reach the point where they desire to repent and be saved, having acknowledged their guilt, they can only cry out to God and ask him graciously to forgive their sins and save them from judgment through Jesus Christ.

[ 29 : 10 ] Their only plea, like that repentant tax collector, is, God, be merciful to me, the sinner. Other New Testament passages show that salvation is a work of God alone.

One of the first such passages that comes to mind is Ephesians 2, verses 8 and 9. Here are Ephesians 2, verses 8 and 9.

For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

Listen to what Paul wrote to the churches in Galatia. These verses are Galatians 2, verses 15 and 16.

He said, We ourselves are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners. Yet we know that a person is not justified by the works of the law, but through faith in Jesus Christ.

[ 30 : 10 ] So we also have believed in Christ Jesus in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified.

In Romans, Paul reminds us that Old Testament believers were saved by grace as well. Romans chapter 11, verses 1 through 6 use the example of how God preserves 7,000 men during Elijah's time to show that in the present and the future, God also will save his people.

Here are Romans chapter 11, verses 1 through 6. Paul said, I ask then, has God rejected his people? By no means.

For I myself am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, a member of the tribe of Benjamin. God has not rejected his people whom he foreknew.

Do you not know what the scripture says of Elijah, how he appeals to God against Israel? Lord, they have killed your prophets, they have demolished your altars, and I alone am left, and they seek my life.

[ 31 : 21 ] But what is God's reply to him? I have kept for myself 7,000 men who have not bowed the knee to Baal. So too, at the present time, there is a remnant chosen by grace.

But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works, otherwise grace would no longer be grace. Romans 11, verse 6 is the verse to focus on there.

Listen to Romans chapter 11, verse 6 again. But if it, speaking of salvation, is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works, otherwise grace would no longer be grace.

Anyone's salvation is a miracle of God's grace. The disciples were slow to understand that because when the events in our passage tonight initially happened, the disciples still were struggling to free themselves from the worldly works-based Jewish system that they'd grown up in.

But the disciples, other than Judas Iscariot, eventually did understand Jesus' teaching. Listen to what John later wrote in 1 John chapter 2, verses 15 through 17.

[ 32 : 34 ] 1 John chapter 2, verses 15 through 17 say, Do not love the world or the things in the world. For if anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.

For all that is in the world, the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world. And the world is passing away along with its desires.

But whoever does the will of God abides forever. The young ruler loved the things of this world and he proved that the love of the Father was not in him.

Now listen to what Peter later wrote in 1 Peter chapter 1, verses 3 through 11. Here are 1 Peter chapter 1, verses 3 through 11. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

According to His great mercy, He has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

[ 33 : 53 ] In this you rejoice, though now for a little while if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith, more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

Concerning this salvation, the prophets who prophesied about the grace that was to be yours searched and inquired carefully, inquiring what person or time the Spirit of Christ in them was indicating when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories.

If you already have trusted in Jesus' sacrificial death on the cross as payment for your sins against God, rejoice that you have salvation and eternal life.

If you have yet to trust in Christ alone for salvation, but you now realize that your sins against God deserve eternal punishment, you can be saved. Romans 6, verse 23 reminds us, for the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

[ 35 : 24 ] Come to Jesus for salvation and be astonished in a good way. Hold on to the truth that's contained in Mark chapter 10, verses 26 and 27.

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, but not with God, for all things are possible with God.

Let's pray. Father, thank you for this reminder that we are totally dependent upon you and your son for salvation.

If we ever start to think that we did something to deserve that salvation, use this passage and other passages like that to help us see that it is all of you and not of us.

Lord, help us be more willing to share this truth with others and let us rejoice in our salvation. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.