

## THE IMPOSSIBILITY OF SALVATION

Series: Evangelistic Follow-up Sermon for Dillon Price Revival  
Limestone Baptist Church, Bedford, IN  
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May 17, 2009 at 10:30am  
Mark 10:17-27

### OPENING THOUGHTS

- **OPEN IN PRAYER.**
- In Acts 3:19-20 it says this:  
**19 Now repent of your sins and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped away.**  
**20 Then times of refreshment will come from the presence of the Lord, and He will again send you Jesus, your appointed Messiah.**
- Well what a week it has been for all of us! I truly feel like those times of refreshment came upon my own soul this past week. Evangelist Dillon Price has come and gone, but that doesn't mean that the revival is over. It's been four days now since the last service, but the revival continues on in our hearts.
- I think it would be a good reminder for us at this point to look at why we do revivals to begin with. The early church had seen much in its few months at this point in chapter three. Pentecost had come and gone and the church was born. Many miracles had been performed and yet even with all that was going on around them, there still settled in this sense of complacency – a sense that this freshness was starting to wear a little.
- It is at this point that God tells them they needed to repent and turn back to God, seeking Him out even harder. And then those times of refreshment would come upon them. And Jesus says the exact same thing to us this morning. I know that is what it was like for me this week. The Lord spoke clearly to my heart a number of things that need to change in my own life and I trust that He did in your heart as well.
- This week was all about spiritual growth, but if you are just checking us out for the first time or even if you've been here a few times now, I realize that there may be some of you here this morning who can't grow spiritually because you don't have the right relationship with Christ yet.
- So this morning, though I had planned on resuming our series in Acts, we'll put that off for yet one more week because I really feel deeply burdened in my heart that someone in here today needs this message I'm about to bring. I don't know who you are. I'm not even going to make any guesses. But I really feel the Lord has laid this on my heart.
- So take your Bible and open with me to Mark 10. Now we have looked at this passage before since I have been your pastor. And while I'm not accustomed to using the same scriptures for sermons in such a short time, for some reason, the Lord has really burdened me with this text this week. And try as I might, I can't help but preach this.

**READ MARK 10:17-27**

- By any modern way of thinking, this looks like the perfect candidate to receive eternal life, doesn't it? I mean, how often does someone just literally come up to you and beg you to know how to get saved? It does happen, but let's admit that it's pretty rare. Yet at the end of the story, this young man went away unsaved. What went so wrong here?
- Was Jesus out of His mind in what He told this young man? I mean, just glance at the text for a second and you see that Jesus never once told this man about grace or faith at all! He just preached Law to this young ruler. Did Jesus blow a great opportunity here? Shouldn't Jesus have just simply told this young man about faith and the facts of the Gospel and then led him in a simple prayer? That's how so many do it today, isn't it?
- I mean, Jesus made it so hard on this young man that it makes salvation out to be impossible, doesn't it? In fact, that's what I have chosen to title my message this morning – the impossibility of salvation. After all, look at how the disciples answered Jesus there in verse 26. They asked him, "well then, who in the world can be saved?" And that's a legitimate question, isn't it? But look at how Jesus answered them in verse 27. **27 Jesus looked at them intently and said, "Humanly speaking, it is impossible. But not with God. Everything is possible with God."**
- And right there in that verse, we have the key to this whole passage. Salvation is impossible for mankind on his own. Man cannot seek after God on his own and expect anything. The world in its own wisdom will never come to know salvation from Christ. Only when God is sovereignly at work in a person's life can that person ever be saved!
- And it can sometimes be really hard to tell when God is working in someone's life. Many of you will remember that I've shared this story with you before I remember, but I think it's worth repeating. Several years ago I was essentially working as a youth pastor without the title at a church plant in the New Albany, Indiana area. A young man named – let's call him James – James came up to me at church one night, begging me to tell him how to be saved. Much like this rich young ruler, he had a sense of desperation about him. And so I shared the Gospel with him and he prayed that night to give His heart to Jesus as Lord and Savior.
- Things really seemed to be going quite well. In fact, three months later, I baptized him in a swimming pool on our youth retreat in the Smokey Mountains. But it wasn't long after his baptism that he just stopped coming altogether. He went back to his own ways and utterly made a shipwreck of his faith.
- What happened to that young man? He seemed so eager to be saved and yet his "salvation" wasn't the kind that endured. What happened? That young teenager was a seeker for sure, but the seeking sure didn't last, did it?
- You see, I believe that God was not working in his life at that moment. Now I can't be dogmatic about that. Only Christ knows the heart. But the evidence of divine regeneration wasn't there.

- He trusted in Christ with a superficial faith. It was a faith that was bogus. He came for whatever the reason – maybe it was peer pressure from his friends. He didn't really fit in all that well with others anyway, so maybe it was a way to try to get some love and attention. Whatever the reason, it didn't last. And I really believe that it didn't last because God had not created new life in that young man.
- His faith wasn't real. His repentance wasn't real. The Bible talks about a repentance that is shallow and is only a repentance of actions – not a change of heart. And that's what this young man had done. There was some change in actions, but no real lasting change in heart.
- And worse yet, he had fooled himself into thinking that he was saved and that he was ok forever now. He went back to his own ways and I can only pray that God would literally grab him from the pit and do a sovereign work in his life.
- You know, it occurs to me that churches all over are literally filled with people like that. The kind of people who don't have real, saving faith. Real, saving faith endures to the end. It is always combined with genuine repentance and Godly sorrow over sin. The Bible tells us there is a repentance that leads towards death. So many people have that false sense of salvation and are fooling themselves.
- The reality is that God is sovereign and if God is not at work in someone's life causing the transformation, then no salvation has come upon a person no matter how many times a prayer is repeated. As Jesus says, "humanly speaking, it is impossible." Salvation is not something we can ever achieve by ourselves. Apart from the sovereign work of the Holy Spirit, it's nothing but utter hopelessness.

### **BIBLICAL EXPOSITION**

- Now Jesus knows what is inside the heart of every man. We don't. And Jesus knew this young ruler in our text was not the real deal. He was a seeker by worldly standards. But God was not at work in this man's life. His desire for eternal life was only motivated by a desire to live happy and get that which his money could not buy.
- Now certainly this man had a few good things going for him. He certainly had a good motive, didn't he? It may not be the right motive, but certainly it's a good one. Look at verse 17 with me:  
**17 As Jesus was starting out on His way to Jerusalem, a man came running up to Him, knelt down, and asked, "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?"**
- Can't you just sense the desperation in this man's voice as he comes to Jesus asking how to get eternal life? Mark tells us that Jesus had set out on a journey and this man came running after Jesus. He didn't want to let Jesus get away. He knew that he didn't have eternal life. That's why he asked how to get it!

- And this is frankly something that is utterly amazing. This event is recorded for us in Matthew 19 and in Luke 18 as well. Luke tells us that this man was a ruler. And if you go into the Greek, you will find *archon* used for ruler and it tells us that this guy was a ruler of the synagogue.
- Now think with me about that for a moment. For a ruler of the synagogue to come up to Jesus and acknowledge that he didn't have eternal life and needed to know how to get it is quite astonishing. I think that's why Matthew's account of this story begins with the words "And Behold!" Matthew was stunned that this guy would come out in broad daylight, literally running after Jesus before He got away so that he could get this question answered.
- Now he came in broad daylight, so that means he was desperate. There was something in his life that needed filled. So many people sense that they have no joy, no peace, no real satisfaction, no confidence, and no settled hope in their lives. This young man was one of these people. His sense of desperation had led him to this point. And right or wrong, he had this sense of utter helplessness going for him.
- Not only did he have a good motive, but notice this man's attitude. Mark tells us that this guy ran up to Jesus and then knelt down before Him. Knelt down in Greek here is *gonupoteo* and it literally indicates a begging type of position. It's the type of position where you would fall on your knees, clasp your hands and literally start crying out for someone to do something for you – that's the idea being expressed here.
- And understand that he had the courage to do this in front of everyone! He could be risking everything he had by doing this in front of everyone. After all, everyone who would have been there would have known who this guy was by the way he dressed. Here was a leader in the local synagogue coming to Jesus and acknowledging he didn't have eternal life. This guy laid it all out on the line.
- He really was feeling hopeless and needed a solid answer from Christ. And not only did he come to a good place to get the answer, He came to the very Source of eternal life. The word teacher here in Greek is *didaskolos* and it acknowledges that this young ruler felt that Jesus was a teacher of divine truth. He goes on to call Jesus Good Teacher. Good in Greek here is *agathos* and it means that he saw Jesus as good in essence or nature. By saying this, he was acknowledging Jesus' essential goodness.
- This is not to say that he believed that Jesus was the Messiah or that He was God. But it does tell us that he recognized that Jesus was from God and at least a Prophet from God.
- Now with all of this going for him, what went so wrong? I mean, he had a pretty good motive humanly speaking. He was desperate. That's indicated by the begging. But I want you to note how Jesus handled this situation. What Jesus does next will no doubt shock many people. We teach that salvation comes by grace through faith, so why did Jesus say what He did? Look at verses 18-19 with me:

18 "Why do you call Me good?" Jesus asked. "Only God is truly good."

19 But to answer your question, you know the commandments: "You must not murder. You must not commit adultery. You must not steal. You must not testify falsely. You must not cheat anyone. Honor your father and mother."

- Despite all the good things going for him, this guy made three key mistakes in this text. Three major mistakes kept this guy from receiving eternal life and we would do well to notice what these mistakes were so that we can avoid them in our own lives.
- The first thing that I want you to note is that he was filled with pride. He had come to Jesus based on the wrong reasons. He was desperate and that may seem like a good reason to us, but nonetheless, his desire for eternal life was based on a felt need. There was something missing in this guy's life. He was hopeless and he came to Jesus to get the answer.
- But notice how Jesus answers him back. He came to Jesus calling Jesus a Good Teacher and Jesus turns that right back on him. Instead of giving any relief whatsoever to this man's felt need, Jesus turns the focus right back on God where it belongs.
- Jesus starts off by doing something He does so often in the Gospels – by asking this ruler a question. He asked him why he had called him good because only God is good. Now we know that Jesus was God and so Jesus could rightly be called Good. But what Jesus is doing is trying to get this ruler to see something. Only God is good and no one else is ever good. No human being can ever be good in nature. Only God is truly good. This young man didn't believe Christ was God. He was essentially saying man can be good apart from God's goodness. Jesus needed to correct that thinking that so permeated this man's understanding of mankind.
- Then notice that Jesus preached the Law to him. He just goes right down through some of the Ten Commandments and tells him that if he wants to get eternal life, well you know the commandments. Have you kept them? That's the gist of what Jesus was saying to him.
- Jesus literally slammed this guy up against the wall with the divine standard and assaulted his sinfulness. The point was to show this ruler just how inadequate his good works are in salvation. This man was filled with pride. He thought his good works were adequate. He thought he was good. He really had no clue of his own sinful state.
- Now this may shock many of you to see that Jesus preached Law before grace. But take it for what it is. We know that no one can ever be saved by following the Law because we have all blown it from day one. And that is exactly Jesus' point here. Jesus wants to bring this young ruler to the place where he knows that he has blown it according to God's standards. He was not there yet and this hindered him from being saved.

- This is something that we should all do when we share our faith. We should never tell someone about grace until we have shown them the Law of God. No one can rightly understand grace until they understand why they need that grace. And this guy needed a lesson in it if anyone did. Look at how he answered Jesus in verse 20.
- 20 "Teacher," the man replied, "I've obeyed all these commandments since I was young."
- Obviously the guy didn't get the point, did he? Even after Jesus took the focus away from man and put it back on God, the rich young ruler still didn't get the point of it all. He just responds back by saying he had kept the Law from the time he was a kid!
- And that brings me to the second major pitfall we see here. Not only was he filled with pride, but he did not confess his guilt. No true salvation can come when we refuse to admit our sinfulness and confess that to God.
- Now some have tried to say that this man was just being arrogant, but I disagree with that. I don't think there is anything arrogant here – just stubborn pride. He honestly thought he had kept the Law. He was looking at the outward aspects and there wasn't anything glaringly obvious there to be found.
- He had not murdered anyone. He hadn't cheated on his wife. He didn't steal from anyone. Those outward sins weren't there. But I'm sure he hated people. I'm sure he struggled with lust. The inward attitudes were there and that is just as bad as committing them outwardly according to Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount.
- This guy didn't get the point. The point of Jesus reminding him of the commandments wasn't so that he could brag that he had kept them all. They were meant to be a window into his own soul, so he could see just how wicked he really was inside of himself. He didn't understand that.
- Yet, even after this statement of pride, Jesus was still loving and compassionate with this man. Verse 21 says:
- 21 Looking at the man, Jesus felt genuine love for him...
- Just stop there for a moment. Will you note with me that Jesus didn't tell this man a whole list of reasons why he was wrong to answer how he did? That is so important. Jesus just had compassion on him. He loved him. This shows us the love of God. This young man was sincere and his spiritual quest was genuine. He was an honestly religious person.
- But nonetheless, sincerity will not gain you eternal life. There are millions of sincere Muslims around the world who wish to murder Christians everywhere. Sincerity will not grant you eternal life, beloved. There are many people caught up in the Mormon faith, who earnestly believe that they can become a god on another planet when they die. But they won't fare well in eternity because they have rejected the one true and living God. No matter how sincere they are, they are still bound for the fires of hell when they die.

- Jesus loved this man. He was about to go to the cross to die for sinners just like this guy. Jesus was not wishing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. Yet repentance was the one thing this man refused to do. He would not repent. He saw no need for it because he really didn't view himself as that bad off. He refused to confess his guilt because he didn't see any in his life!
- Beloved, let's understand that the Lord Jesus does not take sinners on their own terms. You can be as sincere as you want to be, but when you come to Jesus, you come on His terms. As much as Jesus loved this man, He nevertheless refused to grant him eternal life upon the request of a heart filled with selfish desires.
- Now think about that for a moment with me. We don't like to think about Jesus rejecting people who want to be saved, do we? That just seems like the exact opposite of everything we have been taught! But that is exactly what Jesus did.
- Look at the rest of verse 21 with me:
- **21 Looking at the man, Jesus felt genuine love for him. "There is still one thing you haven't done," He told him. "Go and sell all your possessions and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow Me."**
- Essentially Jesus said this: if you want to have eternal life, then sell everything you have and come follow Me. Be My disciple. Imitate Me. Submit to My Lordship in your life. Become My slave.
- But this was just too much for this young ruler. Verse 22 tells us: **22 At this the man's face fell, and he went away sad, for he had many possessions.**
- This man had many possessions. And according to verse 23, he was rich. Here was a key leader in the religious community of the day and there was too much to give up to follow after Christ. This guy wasn't looking for anything too complicated. He didn't want any strings attached. He wanted what I like to call "drive-thru religion". He wanted just enough Jesus to guarantee eternal life and nothing else. Nothing too complicated. Just some fire insurance is all he needed. He wanted the goods with no strings attached.
- This was the third key fatal blow that this man committed. He refused to acknowledge Christ as Lord. So many people are like that today and Jesus has a stunning message for them. Just as this man was stunned at Jesus' demand, so too many people who call themselves Christians will be stunned when they die and Jesus declares to them that He never knew them. As was pointed out in the revival this past week, there are a lot of people who know of Jesus, but not that many who really know Him. And it is easy to fool yourself into thinking you know Him when in fact you don't know Him at all!
- Now just what exactly was it that Jesus was demanding? This young guy had everything money could buy. He had it all, so to speak. But he loved his money and would not give it up. It was in his way of coming to Christ and Jesus knew that. That is why Jesus demanded he sell it and give the money to the poor. That was the one thing he would not be willing to do to come to Christ. And that was Jesus' point. He had to get rid of that one thing that would keep him from coming.
- Jesus is essentially saying that if you want to come to Him for eternal life, you must be willing to give up everything that holds you back from coming after Him with all your being. Whether that is money or some other possession, if you aren't willing to submit your total life to Him as Lord, you cannot be saved. No one can give lip service to God by claiming Him as Lord and then refuse to live it out.
- Do you want a really simple way to think about the Gospel? Here it is. So simple, yet so profound. The Gospel is simply giving up all that you are in exchange for all that Christ is! Now think about that for a moment. Are you willing to give up all your possessions, your comfort, your money, your time, even your entire life just to come to Christ? That is what Christ demands of those who come to Him.
- This rich young ruler refused to do that. And Jesus refused to meet him on the grounds of his felt need. He cut right to the core of the issue and this man refused to come on Christ's terms. And that young ruler is in hell right now at this very moment because of that decision. What a shame to say the least.
- Verse 22 tells us that he went away grieving. Truly he was sincere. His quest was genuine in the sense that he wanted his selfish needs fulfilled. But it was not God-honoring. He had no concern for God's glory. He had no interest in coming on God's terms. He refused to give everything up to follow Christ.
- It is in that context that we see that the disciples were stunned. I mean, if ever there was someone ready to get saved, wasn't it this guy?!? And Jesus had just turned him away! Doesn't that seem like a failure to the world's standards? That's why they asked, "who in the world can be saved?" in verse 26. And Jesus' words that we saw in verse 27 at the beginning of this sermon are so profound. **27 Jesus looked at them intently and said, "Humanly speaking, it is impossible. But not with God. Everything is possible with God."**
- All things are possible with God. But salvation is totally impossible with man. Man is in a state of utter helplessness. That's what Jesus' point is when in verse 25 He says: **25 In fact, 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!"**
- Now understand that Jesus said this for the precise reason of showing just how impossible salvation is for a human to accomplish. That's the point. Man can't get saved on his own. Salvation is not the work of any man. It is entirely the work of God alone and no one else.

- In truth, this was an ancient saying, actually. When the Jews were under the Babylonian captivity and the Persians then took over, there used to be a saying around that time that if you wanted to show something to be impossible, you said that it was as hard as trying to get an elephant to go through the eye of a needle.
- An elephant was their largest animal. But in Israel, a camel was the largest. This would have been a common phrase in ancient Israel and the disciples would have understood exactly what Jesus meant. It is impossible for man to save himself.
- No one comes to Christ except that God draws him to Christ. Salvation is totally the work of God. It is God who chooses in eternity past who will come to Him. It is God who issues the inward call to salvation when the outward call is preached. It is God who creates new life in a sinner, causing them to be born again. It is God who starts, sustains and secures salvation to the very end. Salvation is totally the work of God. What is impossible for man is entirely possible for God!

### CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

- So what does all of this mean for us, beloved? If you are going to be a Christian, you must first count the cost to see if it is worth it to you or not. That is what Jesus was telling in such blunt terms to this rich young ruler.
- And so too Jesus tells you to count the cost today. Coming to Christ and following Him will cost you something. It will cost you everything really. Your whole life has to be in submission to Him. You become His slave. He becomes your Lord.
- You cannot come to Christ and expect to live how you want to live. You become a new person. You submit your will to Him. In fact, you must be willing to give up everything you have, deny every selfish and sinful desire you have, take up your cross and be willing to die for your faith and become a slave to Christ. You must give up your independence, give up your freedom, submit yourself to an alien will, abandon all your rights, be owned by, and controlled by the Lord.
- And if you are not willing to do that, you cannot be saved. The rich young ruler was not willing to do that. And beloved, that is what Jesus turned him away and refused to save him! Here was a desperate man, earnestly seeking after something to alleviate the felt need in his life. Yet he didn't calculate the cost and Jesus refused to accept him into His Kingdom.
- In Luke 14, Jesus is just overtly blunt in His teachings and He says that if you aren't willing to obey Him totally, you cannot be His disciple. Listen to what He says to you:

**26 "If you want to be My disciple, you must hate everyone else by comparison—your father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters—yes, even your own life. Otherwise, you cannot be My disciple.**

**27 And if you do not carry your own cross and follow Me, you cannot be My disciple.**

- This morning, if you have not yet come to Christ on His terms, then you are in terrible danger! You may even think that you are saved, but if you haven't come to Jesus through His way, you are only living a self-deceived life! Are you willing to give up everything you have to come to Christ? Christ will not take someone who comes half-heartedly. You must submit to Him totally and come to the place in your life where you are totally broken over your sin. It is when you do that, that you are ready to be saved.
- Most are not willing to do that. And there will be many people who are sincerely believing that they are Christians who will die and will be in hell because they were living a lie. Beloved, this morning Christ calls you to make sure you are not one of them!
- This rich young ruler was one of them sadly. He didn't come on Christ's terms. And he is in hell right now because of it! He tried to come half-heartedly. He tried to walk down that aisle and shake that preacher's hand. He tried to just go the route of saying a quick prayer and walking out that door. But it didn't work. Jesus knew this guy didn't want to come on God's terms. And Jesus turned Him away as a result.
- Now understand that if you walk down this aisle, I will never turn you away. I don't know your heart, but Jesus does! And I can share the Gospel with you and even lead you in prayer to receive Christ, but the truth is that if you come half-heartedly to Jesus and won't let Him run the show in your life, you're not really coming on His terms. And though I won't turn you away because I don't know your heart, Jesus does. And even though you might pray a prayer, Jesus will turn you away just like He did the rich young ruler if you won't come totally broken to Him.
- Listen beloved, there is life abundant and free in Christ. And Jesus will take all who come to Him in true obedience with a yielded heart. In fact, Romans 10:9 tells us:  
**9 If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.**
- If you will come to Jesus and confess with your mouth that Jesus is your Lord – that is to say simply that you come to Him with no strings attached. You come to Him on His terms, not yours. You come to Him with a yielded heart that is ready to allow Christ to run the show in your life. That's what it means to confess Him as Lord.
- And if you'll come to Him believing that God raised Him from the dead – that is to say that you believe that He is exactly who He said He was. You come to Him by simple repentant faith. If you are willing to do that, God will save you.
- Are you willing to come on God's terms? Are you willing today to walk down this aisle and give full control of your life over to Jesus Christ? Are you willing today to come to Christ by faith and stop trusting in your foolish works? Truly salvation is impossible for man, but it is entirely possible for God! Are you the one God is calling to salvation today?
- **LET'S PRAY.**