

The Impossibility of Salvation, Part 3

Scripture: Luke 18:24-30

Code: 42-234

Well let's turn in our Bibles to Luke chapter 18...Luke chapter 18 and we return to the encounter between the rich young ruler and the Lord Jesus Christ. This will be our third look at this very, very fascinating and important encounter, an instructive one as well. And I suppose if we were to title this we might title it, "How to Obtain Eternal Life," or we might title it, "The Impossibility of Salvation." Either title would work very well.

Just by way of introduction, it is widely believed today in contemporary evangelicalism, that leading people to salvation, leading people into God's Kingdom, leading people into eternal life is fairly easy if you develop the right approach....if you develop the right strategy, if you come up with the right method. And that means getting savvy about the culture. That means being good at understanding people's felt needs. That means being adept at grasping the hot buttons that trigger people's responses. And so in order to get people to accept the gospel, we want to make sure we understand what their felt needs are, what their aspirations are, what their longings and desires are. And we sort of move in in that direction.

Now you add to that the message has to promise them that all of their felt needs can be met, all of their dissatisfactions can become satisfactions, all their unfulfilled dreams can become fulfilled, all their failures can become success. And with those kinds of promises, they'll sign up so fast you won't know what to do with them all. Throw in a rock band and some cool music, just kind of make it seem like it's really part of the world and it's not a big step anyway and it should be pretty easy to get people to respond to the gospel. Speak only then of God's love and of the frustration of God if people won't accept His love and come to Him and how bad He feels when people don't do that. Make them even feel a little guilty for hurting God by not coming and put it all together, mix it up and should add hundreds, if not thousands to your congregation.

Oh by the way, keep the environment casual, non-threatening and fun and the message simple with a lot of stories.

Is it too obvious to suggest that Jesus wouldn't buy into that? In fact, what we have here in this encounter is the absolute opposite of all of that kind of thinking. What Jesus says in the text before us is that it is impossible for people to be saved no matter what strategy you might concoct to move them or manipulate them. No matter what approach, no matter what method, He says it is impossible for people to be saved by moving them in any human way. Let me read this text again. Look at verse

18. "And a certain ruler questioned Him saying, 'Good teacher, what shall 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 commit adultery, do not murder, do not steal, do not bear false witness, honor your father and mother.' And he said, 'All these things I've kept from my youth.' And when Jesus heard this, He said to him, 'One thing you still lack. Sell all that you possess and distribute it to the poor and you shall have treasure in heaven and come follow Me.' But when he had heard these things, he became very sad for he was extremely rich. And Jesus looked at him and said, 'How hard it is for those who are wealthy to enter the Kingdom of God for 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.' And they who heard it said, 'Then who can be saved?' But He said, "The things impossible with men are possible with God.' And Peter said, 'Behold, we have left our own homes and followed You.' And He said to them, 'Truly I say to you, there is no one who has left house or wife or brothers or parents or children for the sake of the Kingdom of God who shall not receive many times as much at this time and in the age to come eternal life.'"

The passage begins with a question about eternal life, ends with a comment about eternal life. It really is about eternal life. And it all began so hopeful, didn't it? For the last two weeks we have worked our way down through verse 22. And what have we discovered? Well we found a young man, a young man who is highly esteemed, he is a ruler. To be young and be a ruler means you have achieved as much as one could achieve in Jewish religious society. To be a ruler means you're the leader of a synagogue. You have been appointed to that responsibility because everybody admires you, everybody believes you are the most spiritual, the most religious, the most dutiful Jew, observer of the Law, keeper of the things of God. This young man, however, having achieved as much as he had in life, all the power and influence that comes from being a ruler in the synagogue, all of the esteem that comes from being a highly religious and righteous on the surface person has not brought him eternal life. And he comes seeking it. And by eternal life we understand, remember, a kind of life, not a duration of life. The Jews understood eternal life as that life which belongs to the one who is eternal, the life of God, communion with God, knowledge of God, the sense of belonging to God, of God's presence, the joy, the peace, the satisfaction, fulfillment, hope, assurance, certainty, security that comes with that. He knew he didn't have that. Therefore he lacked a real hope for heaven.

And from the human side, everything seems so good...so much in place. He knew what he wanted, he wanted eternal life. It's the right thing to want. He felt the need deeply. He comes without embarrassment, discloses publicly in front of a crowd to Jesus that he lacks eternal life. That's an amazing admission of someone who would have been assumed to have had a relationship with God or he wouldn't have been put in the position he was in. He sought eternal life diligently. He came running. The other writers tells us in Mark and Matthew, Matthew 19, Mark 10 give parallel accounts that fill in many of the details. He came running and when he arrived he knelt and so there is a diligence, there is an eagerness, there is a humility here. He came to the right person. He came to the one who is himself eternal life and the giver of life. He asked the right question. All of that led us to

say from the human side he is the perfect seeker. He is in the perfect position to be led into salvation, at least from the human side.

This is everything that today's evangelical movement would love to see in people, somebody who wants a relationship with God. Somebody who is eager to have God involved in his or her life in a powerful and present way. Someone who is looking for joy and peace and happiness and satisfaction and hope and fulfillment and purpose and all of those things. Somebody who is willing to come with eagerness, who is willing to humble himself, someone who is coming to the right source, someone who is coming to God through Jesus and asking the right question. It all seems so very good.

And Jesus begins to test the true character of this seeker in verse 19 with His first comment. He says, "Why do you call Me good?" You called a rabbi teacher, but never in any Jewish literature do we find anyone ever calling a rabbi good teacher. Good was reserved for God. God alone is good. So when Jesus says that, no one is good except God alone, He is simply reiterating their current theology. And by posing this to the young man, He is saying, "Are you by calling Me good affirming that I am either God or related to God or come from God?" That is the obvious assumption. This is a good thing. He is coming to God through Jesus, whether He believes Jesus is God, might be God, or is a messenger from God. He understands that there's a connection there and so he comes seeking that which is a message from God through this man, Jesus, about eternal life. But if Jesus is truly good and truly connected to God, then this young man has put himself in a position to do whatever Jesus says if he's got any integrity. If he's legitimate, if he's honest, if he is asking with integrity, then whatever Jesus says because he is connected to God, the young man will do or should do. That then becomes the first test of his integrity or his sincerity.

Jesus moves from there to test it further by saying, "You know the commandments, you know what God has said. Do not commit adultery, do not murder, do not steal, do not bear false witness, honor your father and mother." And He rehearses for him some of the Decalogue, some of the Ten Commandments, the latter half which have to do with human relationships in order to test his attitude toward the Law both as a revealer of his sin and as a means of salvation. The young man responds to Jesus bringing up the Law in verse 21. He said, "All these things I've kept from my youth." From his perspective, he believes he has kept the Law. Very much like the Apostle Paul in Philippians 3 who said, "As concerning the Law, blameless." On the outside, superficially as far as people could see, he had done his best to keep the Law. Obviously there were times he didn't honor his parents. Obviously there were times in his life that he had taken something that was not his or he had told a lie and obviously he had lusted in his heart and therefore was a murderer at heart. Obviously there was hatred in his heart and there...I should say an adulterer in his heart. Obviously there was hatred in his heart, therefore he was as guilty as a murderer. So said Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount, defining these prohibitions all the way down to their true depth in the human heart.

But from his viewpoint, he had created the illusion that he was a law keeper. So instead of the Law doing its work of revealing his sin, he had twisted the Law into a means by which he had established his own righteousness. This is a problem. This is a problem.

The second problem was he still believed that salvation was by his own efforts, that by keeping the Law he could earn salvation. That the Law not only did not reveal his sin, but confirmed his righteousness and therefore the Law was the way to eternal life. And that's why he says, "What shall I do?"

Now Jesus brings this up because two things have to happen if you're going to receive eternal life. Number one, you must understand that you are crushed by the Law. You are a sinner under the Law. You have broken the Law. Therefore you are debtor to God who has established the Law. God now is your judge, He holds you under a curse which will result if that curse is not removed in eternal judgment. Jesus puts up a barrier immediately against this seeker and says, "Whatever it is that's going on in terms of your own heart, whatever it is you want, whatever felt needs you have, whatever things are not the way you would like them in your life, whatever elements are missing in your life, the issue here is do you see yourself as a sinner and do you see yourself as under the judgment of the Law? And do you understand by means of the Law you cannot earn eternal life?" He should have understood that since he had kept the Law since his youth and knew he didn't have eternal life.

All of this, of course, puts the sinner in a horrific situation. He is under divine judgment. He has no hope in himself to alter that because he can't earn favor with God by the Law. And does point to the cross of Jesus Christ where God placed Jesus on a cross to bear the sins of all who would believe in Him to pay the penalty for their sin and then by grace gives them freely the gift of forgiveness and salvation.

So He stopped the seeker in his tracks, basically, by saying you cannot come to God based upon some feeling. You cannot come to God based upon some disappointment in your life, some lack of fulfillment. You cannot come to God because you want a higher power in your life, because you want God to invade your life, because you want a connection with the divine, because you want to engage yourself to the transcendent and spiritual world, you cannot come to God just to fill in the holes in your life. You cannot come for any of those felt-need reasons. Entrance into the Kingdom involves a recognition of your utter sinfulness and inability to earn favor with God.

And then in verse 22, remember, He moved to a second issue, putting up a second barrier. "When Jesus heard this...heard him say that he had kept the Law...He took him at face value for the moment." For the sake of argument, we'll leave that alone. "He said to him, 'Still if I grant you that, one think you still lack. If I take you at face value and say that you are a law keeper, there's one thing you still lack. Sell all that you possess and distribute it to the poor and you shall have treasure in heaven and come follow Me.'" And we saw last time that what He's really asking him to do is forsake

everything...everything. Are you willing to do that? Jesus doesn't ask everybody to do that. He doesn't ask most people to do that. But He asks everybody to be willing to do that. Sell all you possess. This would be the family estate. He was no doubt in possession of the great wealth of the family. It says he was extremely rich in verse 23. One of the other accounts, he had many possessions. He had a home and it's referred to in verse 29, as we'll see in a moment. He had a farm, as one of the other of the three accounts indicates. So he's talking about a huge estate. And to liquidate that and give all his money to the poor would be not only to alienate himself from all his riches, but it would be to alienate himself from all his family....his wife, his children, his parents, siblings. He would forsake everything...home, property, money, family and he would certainly lose his place in the synagogue following after Jesus. He would be out of the synagogue, unsynagogued. He would be seen as a rebel to Judaism. Everything was at stake.

Jesus puts up barriers in front of him. Stops him in his tracks at the point of his felt need. And said, "You must see yourself as a sinner, unable to earn salvation. You just see the Lord Jesus Christ as the absolute and all-consuming priority of your life, even if it costs you everything. Salvation as it's referred to in verse 26, "Who then can be saved?" entrance into the Kingdom as it's referred to in verse 25, or eternal life as it's referred to in verse 18, all mean the same thing, comes from acknowledging sin, acknowledging the need for divine forgiveness for one is unable to earn salvation, and affirms the willingness to leave present perishing priorities behind and follow Christ. Again it's all about deny yourself, take up your cross and follow Me. This teaching of Jesus is consistent through all His ministry.

So there he stands at the crossroad of eternal destiny. Luke 14:33, "Whosoever he is of you...says the old Authorized Version...whosoever he is of you that forsakes not all that he has cannot be My disciple." And Jesus told him, "If you're willing to do that...verse 22...you will have treasure in heaven." Heavenly treasure, far surpassing to any earthly riches.

So the test is clear. You've just said I'm good. You have said by that that I'm from God. Are you willing to do whatever I say because it comes from God? If you are, then you have to change your view toward the Law. You have to change your view toward everything in your life as to priorities.

Well it didn't take him long to respond. Verse 23, "When he heard these things, he became very sad." He was sad when he got there and now he's sadder. He didn't give it much thought. He didn't want to go away and meditate on it. He didn't ask for further clarification. It was crystal clear. He was very sad. It was not the sorrow of godly repentance, such as 2 Corinthians chapter 7. It was a sorrow unto death. Deadly sorrow. All his felt needs were so strong that's why he came. He really wanted God in his life. He wanted Jesus to lead him to God. He wanted peace and rest and joy and happiness, assurance, security, hope, heaven. But he wanted it in addition to, not in the place of...all his priorities. Matthew 19:22 and Mark 10:22 say the same thing, "He left." Walked away, turned around, disappeared. That was it. Never meet him again...never meet him again. Was he a real seeker?

No...no man seeks after God on God's terms, Romans 3 says. But the Old Testament prophet said, "If you seek Me with all your heart, you'll find Me." If it doesn't get all the way down into the depth of the heart, it's not a true seeking. His priority was really himself. And that's the problem with felt needs. It's all about the person who has the needs. The priority was fix me, make me feel better about life, make me feel better about myself, make me feel better about my future, make me feel better about dying, make me feel better about the life after death, make me feel better, I have these needs. His priority was not eternal life, his priority was not really the Kingdom of God, his priority was his riches, his position, his power, his influence, his religion, his relationships, his money. And he couldn't abandon it. And he didn't need to stand there for a long time, he had no power to let go of it. He wanted eternal life to some degree, but not to the degree that he would forfeit everything, sell all to buy the pearls, sell all to purchase the treasure. Very sad, but unwilling to confess his sin, unwilling to confess his utter inability to please God, unwilling to submit to the absolute authority of Jesus Christ, unwilling to exchange all his priorities. He would not...to put it in the words of Jesus in Luke 9:24, "He would not lose everything to save his life, he would rather save everything and lose his eternal soul." Jesus has no interest in temporary converts. They are so easily won and so easily lost.

Now it's out of that incident that Jesus teaches the disciples a crucial lesson. The story's over, the encounter ends, and that's how it ends. The hottest prospect apparently walks away without salvation and Jesus watches him go. But out of that, Jesus has something to teach us. We saw the human side. We saw the divine side. Now we get Jesus' commentary on the event. I suppose and I actually thought about it, I could outline the section from verse 24 to 30 and come up with an outline, but the more I thought about it the more I felt that this was just a dialogue, this is just a commentary from Jesus that needs to stand on its own ground in the conversational format that it comes in. So let's just flow through it and watch the principle of Luke 9:24, "losing your life to save it and saving your life to lose it" unfold.

Verse 24, "Jesus looked at him." One of the other writers said, "Loved him," also, "And said, how hard it is for those who are wealthy to enter the Kingdom of God." That's a shock. That is a jolt, really is. You've got to put yourself in their culture. How hard it is for those who are wealthy to enter the Kingdom of God? Are you kidding? They believed that wealthy Jews were wealthy because God had blessed them. Now this isn't any new theology...no, no. This theology is very well articulated by the useless friends of Job. You remember the story of Job. Job has troubles in his life and his friends pile on him this very same theology. If you've got trouble, God is giving you trouble because you're sinful. If you've got blessing, God is giving you blessing because you're righteous. Job, it's easy, it's simple, you have lost everything because you've got sin in your life. And they harangued on Job about that again and again. And Job said, "I examined my life, I looked everywhere there was to look and I'm telling you, there's nothing there. I'm not perfect, but there's nothing I'm not dealing with before God." And they kept espousing this theology. It's the same theology here. If you're poor and destitute and struggling, it's because you're sinful and this is what God gives you for your sin. And if you're wealthy and prominent and influential and you've reached the heights, it's because God is blessing you and

He blesses those He finds favor with.

In the Jewish society, the more wealth you had, the more they perceived God had blessed you, and therefore the higher ranking citizen you were in the Kingdom of God. The rabbis even taught that with alms you purchase salvation. So this statement is a jolt. It's a shocking statement to their sensibilities because they assumed a causal relationship between wealth and power and blessing from God. Current theology says you're rich, you're blessed because you found favor with God. You found favor with God because you please Him, you therefore must be a part of His Kingdom. Jesus completely counters that. How hard it is for those who are wealthy to enter the Kingdom of God.

And just how hard is it? I'll tell you how hard it is, look at verse 25. "It's easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of God." That's a familiar statement, isn't it? It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than a rich man to enter the Kingdom of God? That's a bizarre picture, isn't it? What a bizarre image. What a vivid image. This is proverbial, by the way, and probably was a relatively common statement. We have statements like it that are found in the Talmud. One rabbi named Nowmonie(???), he uses an elephant and when talking about something that is impossible says, "It would be easier to put an elephant through the eye of a needle," an elephant being the largest animal in Mesopotamia. In Israel the largest animal was a camel. It was a way to express something that couldn't happen. And it was hyperbole. It was vast exaggeration.

But some people have struggled with that and they've said, "Well wait a minute, then you're saying it's impossible to be saved. How can you say it's impossible for a rich person to be saved? I know a few rich people that are saved. How can it be? So maybe it means something else." So even in the early fathers, Origen, and Cyril of Alexandria many years ago, maybe the fifth century said, "*Kamelos* should be *kamilos*," and some scribe wrote down *kamelos*, camel, instead of *kamilos*, cord. And he was really saying cord meaning a thread and it's easier to thread a needle than to get a rich man into heaven. It takes a little work and a little effort but it can be done.

No, that can't be right because we have the proverbial usage of an elephant through the eye of a needle as a way in the Middle East in ancient times to express something that was absolutely impossible. And they were saying it because it was impossible. Others have suggested, it's talking about a Needle Gate, that in the side of the city wall in Jerusalem there's a little tiny needle gate, they call it a needle gate because it's small and people used to stuff their camels through the needle gate. Now you tell me why anybody would stuff his camel through a needle gate when he could walk about ten yards to the big gate and walk the thing through? And there is no needle gate, no one's ever found a needle gate anywhere in the history of the walls of Jerusalem.

Others have said, "Well if you reduce the camel to molecules and to a liquid, you could eye drop him through the eye of a needle. It can be done, it's a very difficult thing to do." That is not the point.

The point is, you can't do it. In Mark 10:23, let me expand on it a little bit, the parallel account Mark gives, "Jesus looking around says to His disciples how hard it will be for those who are wealthy to enter the Kingdom of God." Then he went on to say this, "The disciples were amazed at His words." Why were they amazed? Because they thought the wealthy people had the best opportunity to get in to the Kingdom of God because they could buy their way in. Jesus then went on to say this, Mark 10:24, "Children, how hard it is to enter the Kingdom of God." Now He makes a general statement. It's not just hard for the rich. It's not just impossible for the rich. It's hard for everyone, it's impossible for everyone. Wow.

Well we do remember there's a lot of sayings in the New Testament about how hard it is to be saved. Matthew 7 talks about a narrow gate and few there be that find it. And then Luke, you remember that there are many who will try to enter the Kingdom of God and will not be able. And that there are people trying to press their way into it. So we read about the difficulty of being saved, the difficulty of entering the Kingdom. Here we read about the impossibility of entering the Kingdom. Impossible...yeah, impossible.

Why? Because the sinner has no power within himself to change his loves, to change his priorities. He has no power within himself to abandon his self-righteousness. Look, certainly a sinner can feel his felt needs. Certainly a sinner can feel bad, sad, melancholy, depressed, certainly a sinner can say I wish I had a connection with God. Certainly a sinner could say I wish God would come into my life and fix me and make things better. I wish God could give me a better life, and a better wife, and a better family, and a better this and a better that, remove my depression and make me happy and not fear death, and not fear life after death. A sinner can feel all of that. But what a sinner cannot do on his own is abandon his own self-deceiving wretched, wicked heart and his own fallen nature. He cannot on his own power abandon all his sinful priorities. The imagination of a man's heart is only evil continually, his heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked. He can't change himself. It's Jeremiah 13:23 again, "The Ethiopian cannot change his skin. The leopard cannot change his spots. Then may we also do good who are accustomed to doing evil." We can't change ourselves and that is Jesus' point. Somebody seeking for purely human reasons, somebody coming just because they don't like the way things are in their life does not have the power to transform themselves. And so it can't happen anymore than you can stuff a camel through the eye of a needle. Everybody's in the same situation, particularly the rich who would be assumed not to be in that situation in a works system.

So if you bring the account of Mark in and you remember now, Matthew, Mark and Luke are giving us only pieces of the whole and we get the whole inspired treatment when we pull all of them together. This is shocking stuff because in a works/righteousness system, the obvious assumption is you can get there on your own. You can contribute. This is, by the way, the end of all works/righteousness systems, it's impossible. You can no more come to God on the basis of your own human deprivation,

human assessment of life, your own disappointments, you can no more come on your own, on your own merit than a camel can be stuffed through the eye of a needle, or for that matter, an elephant. It can't be done, and even if you're rich.

In the Jewish writings, Tobit it says, "It is good to do alms rather than to treasure up gold, for alms deliver from death and this will purge away every sin." That's what they believed. You can purge away your sins if you give enough money. If you have enough to give, you can purge away all your sins. So the rich gain the highest ground in the Kingdom. In Cyrac(??)says, "Alms will atone for sin." The Talmud says, "Alms giving is more excellent than all offerings and is equal to the whole law and will deliver from the condemnation of hell and make one perfectly righteous," how's that? You can be perfectly righteous and escape hell if you give enough money. So the rich, of course they can buy their way in. So what our Lord is saying is no one can do it on their own, not even the rich.

This is amazing stuff. In Matthew 19:25 it says they were amazed. In fact, it says they were very amazed, they were exceedingly amazed. And verse 26, in their amazement they heard what Jesus said, replied, "Then who can be saved?" If the rich can't be saved, who can be saved? Who can be saved? Well He just said nobody can be saved, not the rich, not anybody. And so they just throw their arms up. Then who can be saved?

And His answer in verse 27, so straightforward. "But He said, 'The things impossible with men are possible with God.'" Or if you want the language of Matthew 19:26 and Mark 10:27, the parallel accounts, "With men it is impossible...with men it is impossible." No human being has the power in himself to make this exchange. No human has this power in himself to forsake himself, to forsake his pride, his selfish desire, no human has that power. No human has the power to forsake his sin...to forsake his efforts at meritorious conduct. No person on his own can make the exchange. It's impossible with men. And that is what our Lord is saying, "It is impossible." No one can be saved on his own...it doesn't matter how strong the felt need.

But here's the key. "The things impossible with me are possible with...whom?...with God...with God." Why? Only God can change the heart, true? This is a sovereign work of God. It cannot be done by any human being. No matter how much felt need you might feel, you can't make that exchange on your own. It is a mighty regenerating transforming work of Almighty God. They're possible with God. In fact, in Matthew 19:26 and Mark 27 it says, "All things are possible with God." Only God can change the heart. The world is full of people who want change in their life and modern day evangelicalism plays on those people with little regard for the fact that only God can really save. And so we try to tweak and twist and turn and manipulate and motivate people as if we can somehow get them to do what's impossible. We are spending all our times trying to stuff camels through needles. It can't be done, only God can save and God only saves when He moves people to come under the power of the Law to strip them bare as sinners, unable to earn their salvation and when they come under willingly the submission to the lordship of Jesus Christ so that they willingly forsake all to

embrace Him, that is a work of God. Never hesitate to put those barriers up for those are the barriers that God must take the sinner over.

Again if you want to see this in clear terms, John 1...John 1. In verse 11 it says that He came to His own and His own did not receive Him, came to His own people, Jewish people, they did not receive Him. Verse 12 then says this, "But as many as received Him, as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name." Some believed and received and became children of God. But then verse 13 immediately says, "Who were born...who were regenerated not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." This didn't happen on any human basis. Blood, the will of the flesh, the will of the man, all speaking of human power. No one receives Christ, no one becomes a child of God having believed on His name by his own will, it only happens by the will and the power of God regenerating that person. So there is the death of all legalistic systems, all self-effort, all works/righteousness, all Palagian, Arminian approaches to salvation.

If you look at John 3 and verse 3, Jesus is having a conversation with a legalist, Nicodemus, a Pharisee, a ruler also of the Jews, very much like the rich young ruler, prominent, highly esteemed, and he's got the same question. He wants to understand the Kingdom too. He wants to come into the Kingdom as well. Jesus knows that, even though He doesn't say that, He knows his heart. And so in verse 3 Jesus answered and said to him, the question he hadn't verbalized but was in his heart, "Truly, truly I say to you, unless one is born again, he can't see the Kingdom of God." How you going...the young man says...how do I inherit the Kingdom of God? And this...this man, Nicodemus, was also a ruler, very parallel to him says essentially in his heart...how do I get into the Kingdom of God? And Jesus says it's going to take a new birth. It's going to take a birth from above. You must be born again, *anóthen*, from above. And then Nicodemus says in verse 4, "How can a man be born...how can I do it?" And he's speaking in the metaphoric language of Jesus. "I can't enter a second time in my mother's womb and be born..." He's simply carrying the metaphor out. He knows exactly what Jesus is saying. He's saying I can't do that, I can't give birth to myself. I can't regenerate myself. I can't do it. It's impossible, anymore than you can put a camel through the eye of a needle. I cannot do it.

"No you can't," Jesus answers in verse 5, "Unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the Kingdom of God." It is the work of the Spirit. The Spirit of God from above has to give you this power because...verse 6, "That which is born of the flesh is flesh," all that is from the flesh is more flesh...the will of man, blood, the flesh, all those human representations from John chapter 1, lead nowhere. Flesh, more flesh, flesh, more flesh, more flesh, that which is born of the Spirit is Spirit. If you want to catapult into the spiritual realm, God's realm, the realm of the Kingdom, eternal life, it is the work of the Spirit. "So do not marvel that I say to you, you must be born from above, *anóthen*, you must be born from above." It comes from God and God alone. And you know what? It's a sovereign work, verse 8, "The wind blows where it wishes, you hear the sound of it, don't know where it comes

from or where it's going." Is that true? You can't see the wind and you can't control the wind. It comes from wherever it wants and goes wherever it wants. "So is everyone who is born of the Spirit." It is a sovereign work. The Spirit comes when He wills on whom He wills and does what He wills. This is what John 6:44 calls the Father drawing, "No man comes to Me except the Father draw him." "You're saved by grace through faith, that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God, not of works lest any man should boast," Ephesians 2:8 and 9. Jesus teaches here the great massively critical truth that no one can ever escape the bondage of sin except by the power of God. No one can ever make the exchange of life's priorities except by the power of God. No one can give birth to himself. No one can transform himself. It's a work of God.

The young man walked away. But then, you know what? He didn't really have a choice, in one sense, because he couldn't do it on his own. He couldn't do it on his own. Unless the Spirit of God had broken him over the law and bowed him beneath the lordship of Jesus Christ by a work of divine regeneration, he didn't have the power to change. So when the young man walked away, Peter is there with the others and he speaks...I think not only for himself but for them in verse 28.

"And Peter said, 'Behold, we've left our own,' you see "homes" in italics. I don't know why they put that in there. It's not...that word's not here. "Our own things." Another way, "We have left everything we own and followed You." You see, we know what He was saying to the young man because this is exactly what Peter understood Him to be saying. Peter is saying, "In contrast, here we are, Lord, what we got left? We walked away from our families. We walked away from our jobs. We walked away from our synagogues. We walked away from all of our relationships. We walked away from the esteem and the relationships that we had all our lives. We walked away from every bit of it. We dropped everything and followed You. We have forsaken all. We have denied ourselves, willingly taken up our cross to follow You."

So he puts himself and the others as over against the response of the rich young ruler. We did exactly what he refused to do. We did that. We followed You. Matthew 19:27, "We have forsaken all and followed You." And he's saying that for the group, for the Apostles, for sure, as I'll show you in a moment. But for others of the disciples who were now following Jesus in true faith, with the exception of Judas, they had come to Jesus genuinely and forsaken everything. Judas hadn't because he was still holding out for the money, as we'll unfold later. They had come because He drew them. They had come because the Spirit of God transformed them, regenerated them. Peter says, "We've done exactly what he wouldn't do." And according to Matthew 19:27, he then added, "What shall we have, therefore? Or therefore, what shall we possess?" What's in it for us?

The Lord didn't rebuke Peter. That was an honest and justified question. In fact, He gives him a wonderful, marvelous answer. "We did what he wouldn't do. Here we are, we left everything. What shall we have?" And He said to them, verse 29, "Truly I say to you, there's no one whose left house or wife or brothers or parents or children for the sake of the Kingdom of God who shall not receive

many times as much at this time and at the age to come, eternal life."

The Lord says, "I know you have, Peter. You have done that. You have done what's impossible with me because God has granted you regeneration." This is exactly what Jesus meant when He talked to the young ruler. He couldn't have meant anything else, it's exactly what Peter thought He meant and Jesus affirms that that's exactly what He meant...that's exactly what I'm talking about, He says, leaving house, wife, brothers, parents, children, leaving everything. In one of the other gospels it says "farms, properties." When you come to Christ, you leave it all behind, all the priorities are changed and you love Him with all your heart, soul, mind and strength and you want Christ to such a degree that you would let go of anything and everything. But like Job who was restored with far more than he ever lost, Jesus says, "If you've left that, you will receive many times as much at this time and in the age to come, eternal life."

This is the great exchange. You get the pearl of great price. You get the treasure hidden in the field. All you have to do is sell all the chief stuff you have in this life.

There's one other dimension of this that's really fascinating. Turn over to the account in Matthew 19:28 because Jesus also said something else that Matthew records...Matthew 19:28, that I want to sort of end on. Verse 28, "Jesus said to them," verse 27, "Peter says, 'Behold, we left everything, followed You, what shall there be for us?'" And verse 28, "Jesus said to them, 'Truly I say to you, you who have followed Me,...now look at this...in the regeneration when the Son of Man will sit on His glorious throne, you also shall sit upon twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.'" And then He goes on to say what Luke recorded about leaving house, brother, sister, house, father, mother, children, farms, for My sake and receiving many times as much and eternal life as well. But here in this verse 28 He adds another dimension. In Luke 18:29 He said, "At this time, you'll receive many times as much at this time, all the good things that come our way by spiritual blessings in this life, and also in the age to come, the future, we will receive all the blessings of eternal life, including the treasures in heaven. That's the final state, in heaven, where all heaven's treasures will be ours." But here He's introduced another element. This is a reference to the Millennial Kingdom. This is a reference to the Kingdom of the Lord on earth, it's called the regeneration. "Just as you have been regenerated spiritually, given a new birth, there will be a regeneration of this earth when the Son of Man will sit on His glorious throne." This is the *palingenesia*, the *palingenesia*, the rebirth of the world, paradise regained, the glorious Kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ. You're not only going to be blessed with spiritual riches in this life, and everything you need My God supplying all your needs, holding back nothing from you, you can cast all your care on Him for He cares for you. Not only will you receive all the joy, the hope, the peace, the satisfaction, the fulfillment spiritually, all that you need in this life, not only all of the treasures that are stored in heaven, but you will also participate in the future regeneration or rebirth that happens to this earth. Just as you've been granted a rebirth, you will participate in the rebirth of this earth.

In Acts chapter 3 verses 19 to 21, this is called the times of refreshing, the times, the *kairos*, the fixed epoch, the era of refreshing or rest which will come upon the earth when the Messiah reigns and rules here and Satan is bound and the earth rests from the power of the curse of Satan. Also it's called in Acts 3 the times of restitution, or restoration when the Kingdom is restored. And you remember in Acts chapter 1, Jesus spent 40 days with the Apostles after His resurrection before His ascension, 40 days, and it says that in those 40 days He spoke to them concerning the Kingdom, the coming Kingdom. And at the end of it they said this, "Will You at this time restore the Kingdom to Israel?" Now that's an important statement. "Will you at this time restore the Kingdom to Israel?" And did Jesus say, "Where did you get that kind of crazy idea? What do you mean, Israel's no longer going to receive the Kingdom, that's all for the church. We erased Israel." That's an amillennial view. The church becomes the Israel, the replacement. It doesn't say that. Forty days of teaching about the Kingdom and their question at the end of the 40 days, "Will you at this time restore the Kingdom to Israel?" He must have been telling them for 40 days that a Kingdom would be restored to Israel or He would have said, "That's a stupid question. Didn't you get it? Of course there's a Kingdom for Israel." And in that Kingdom the twelve tribes will be identified and have significant places under the reign and rule of Jesus Christ. And over the twelve tribes will sit the twelve thrones of the twelve Apostles. And you can argue whether number 12 when Judas is omitted is Mathias by lot, or the Apostle Paul...probably Mathias. That's the Kingdom, that's the earthly millennial golden age of the Messiah. So what do you get when you give up these passing earthly riches? You get all spiritual blessings in the heavenlies in Christ Jesus at this time, you get all the treasure of heaven in eternity and you get a place of blessing and rule in the glorious earthly paradise of the golden age of Messiah. The Messiah will rule the earth, as Psalm 2 said, when Israel will be converted and restored to her land and her glory, when truth dominates the world and righteousness and peace, when joy abounds, when the Holy Spirit's power will be in full demonstration, when the curse will be lifted, life will be long. If you die 100 years you die a baby. When the animal kingdom will be changed so that a child can play with snakes and a lion and a lamb lie down together, when the earth will produce food like never before. When the deserts blossom like a rose. When healing and health are dominant. Jerusalem is exalted. And Satan is chained, along with his demons, for the duration of that Kingdom. This is referred to as when the Son of Man will sit on His glorious throne, the throne promised through David to David's Son, the great Messiah. He will return. He will set His feet on the Mount of Olives. He will establish His throne. He will reign for a thousand years. And what will you get, Peter? You and your pals, the Apostles? You will get to be in that Kingdom and you will sit on some thrones under My rule and you will rule and judge the twelve tribes of Israel. What a promise.

Who's going to be in that glorious Kingdom? Daniel 7:18 says the Old Testament saints are going to be there. First Corinthians 6:2 says the New Testament saints are going to be there. We're going to be judging the world in that Kingdom. And here it says that the Apostles and all who follow Christ are going to be there. All the saints then of all redemptive history are all going to be gathered into that glorious Kingdom to enjoy all the bounty of paradise regained.

So you think He's asking a lot to have you give up your cheap, earthly priorities to receive all that heaven can give you now in the Kingdom and throughout eternity? That's the choice. May God's Spirit overpower your human ability and grant you the grace and the regeneration to come on God's terms. Let's pray.

Father, we thank You for our morning, the power of Your truth and its clarity. We thank You. By grace You saved us and by grace You have promised us these immense blessings. Eye hasn't seen, ear hasn't heard the things that You've prepared for those who love You. It can't even enter into our hearts, we can't conceive it that You love us so much as to pour out all spiritual blessings at this time and in the future the glories of reigning with Christ in His Kingdom for a thousand years and beyond that the treasures of eternal heaven. O Lord, do by Your power in every heart here what man cannot do for what is impossible with us is possible with You. And we'll give You the praise in Christ's name. Amen.

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