

It is impossible to touch your elbow with your tongue. How many of you had to stop yourself from trying it right now? It almost seems impossible, when someone tells you something is impossible, to not try it. You want to prove that what might be impossible for them isn't impossible for you. Athletes do this all the time. Some were told when they were young they would never make it in their sport. That just pushed them to work that much harder. And if they made it they had the satisfaction of knowing they had done what someone told them was impossible.

Physically impossible tasks are fun things to try. But when we talk spiritual tasks then we run up against some truly impossible ones. There seems to be no shortage of people willing to try them though. These are the people who think they can get themselves into heaven. They think they can beat the odds, have all good things with no pain or trouble, and still not sin. Unfortunately the truth of the Bible is that there are just some truly impossible spiritual tasks.

The man didn't think that walking up to Jesus but he certainly felt it walking away. Impossible wasn't going to stop him. He wanted to do the impossible. He wanted to get to heaven saving himself and continue to have great wealth. The two are not necessarily opposed to each other, but Jesus makes clear there is some added difficulty. It's the gospel this morning that we look to and find out what's...

Impossible for you is possible for God
A place in heaven
Proper attitude towards wealth

The man was focused on getting to heaven. Give him credit for that. He was polite when he approached Jesus immediately getting down on his knees. He was wealthy and young. He had everything: money, a good life, property. He was deeply religious but still looking for something that he felt was missing. **"Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?"** His address of Jesus as a teacher who is good is not the same as seeing Jesus as God who is good. Jesus corrects him. **"Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone."** This man should recognize Jesus as God who is perfect. But he came to Jesus like he had probably come to other teachers looking for a way to feel good about himself.

By all measures this rich young man felt like he had lived an outwardly good life. Yet he was looking for something more. It was no accident that he had come to Jesus. Jesus turns this man's attention to God showing him what God says. **"You know the commandments..."** Jesus knew what this man would focus on to get to heaven. He would be looking at his life. So Jesus gives him things that this man would have felt he got right. **"Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not give false testimony, do not defraud, honor your father and mother."** Check, check, check. "No problems there Jesus, anything else?"

You might listen to this exchange and think you would've said the same thing. **"All these I have kept since I was a boy."** You follow the ways of the world, showing boldness and confidence when you feel you're right. If the commandments are the benchmark for getting into heaven then count yourself in because you've done many of them. You start to think maybe a place in heaven isn't so impossible after all. Or maybe you go the other way and think these commandments don't even apply anymore. Measuring lives according to the commandments seems so old. Better, newer ways of measuring are in and we definitely can meet those. Live life, love each other, be kind, and don't judge others. These seem like better measurements for a place in heaven. Check, check, check on those too.

There's just one measurement left Jesus says. **"One thing you lack."** Oh, one thing, no problem the rich young ruler perked up to hear. We draw close to listen. One more thing we have to do, we'll do it. **"Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven."** Wait, what? Maybe for you Jesus would say give up your money. Maybe for you it's being willing to lose the nice house or cars. Maybe for you it's being willing to lose your friends. Whatever it is, it makes you walk away from Jesus sad. You expected some kind of work, some action you could take, something you could do to get heaven. But Jesus knows it isn't one thing you lack. You haven't even kept the commandments you think you've kept. Heaven is impossible for you to reach as a sinner.

But impossible for you is possible for God. That's the good news Jesus gives. You're left thinking a place in heaven is impossible. God knows the only way it's possible. It's in one detail that's easy to miss. **"Jesus looked at him and loved him."** Jesus loved him and he loves you. He wants you to have a place in heaven and he made it happen. Jesus loves you and demonstrated how much he loves you by dying for you. Jesus kept perfectly all the commandments you couldn't. He did that for you because it was impossible. Jesus loved you and gave you what was impossible to earn, a place in heaven.

Being rich is not a crime. Being wealthy is not a sin either. Plenty of people in the Bible were wealthy and made it to heaven. Abraham, Job, David were all wealthy and all were welcomed into heaven. Yet it was impossible for them to earn or pay for their spot in heaven. God gave them as a gift what they couldn't earn for themselves. And yet during their lives each faced the challenges of having wealth. What seems impossible is the attitude towards wealth. Wealth presents special challenges that can keep people from having a good relationship with God. Of course what's impossible for us when it comes to attitudes toward wealth are possible with God.

At its most basic level getting to heaven isn't hard. God is pretty transparent about the relationship we need to have with Jesus to get in. But having that relationship while being wealthy can be extremely hard. **"Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God."** Jesus is directing this at attitudes about wealth. Wealthy people afford all sorts of luxuries. Many wealthy people live outwardly good lives. The disciples expected it was a given that a wealthy person would make it into heaven. But this rich young ruler faced the temptation of wealth. His sad attitude as he walked away showed that he trusted in his wealth more than God.

Whatever your income or wealth level you have an attitude towards wealth. If you're poor, what will your attitude on money be? You want more. You feel like you can never have too much. Why not want more money? If you're rich, what will your attitude on money be? You want to protect what you have. You don't want to give up any. Why not want more money? No matter where you fall between poor and rich, isn't Jesus saying to you that if you love wealth more than God or trust in wealth more than God you'll be sinning? That happens if you're rich, poor, or any place in between. **"How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God."** Wealth or lack of it and our attitude towards it seems to make a God pleasing life impossible.

Impossible for us is possible for God. Jesus was serious about the man giving away all his money because Jesus was serious about the man following him. **"Go, sell...then come, follow me."** Jesus wanted this man's soul. He wanted this man saved. Thank God Jesus was sent to us to save our souls. Would Jesus find that your wealth or lack of it keeps you from a relationship with him as The Savior. Praise God when Jesus does the loving thing and takes that temptation away by removing wealth from us if necessary. Thank Jesus that he in love takes your sinful attitude towards wealth away and calls you to follow him. Nothing is more valuable or important than Christ. A proper attitude towards wealth by us is impossible, but through Christ and God's grace it is possible.

It is impossible to sneeze with your eyes open. While you might not check now some of you will later. You might even find you can, I don't know. What I know you could try is your ability to get a place in heaven by what you do. Know that this will always be impossible for you. Wealth or the lack of wealth will always add temptation and make heaven that much more impossible. But by the grace and mercy of Christ Jesus sent from God the Father a place in heaven is yours. Whatever wealth you have here is a gift of God. A proper attitude and a thankful heart for the gift of heaven and God's gift of wealth is impossible for you alone, but with God is possible.