

The Incomparable Possibilities

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[0:00] Mark chapter 10, I serve a wonderful Lord. Jesus Christ gives us so very much.! Not only did He die for us to give us salvation,! which is the greatest thing that He could have done for us, but He does so much more.

He gives us a guide in how to come to Him through His Word and through the Holy Spirit. He shows us how to live for Him and He shows us how to grow through Him.

We get the blessings of seeing Him as the Master Teacher. To read His words, to watch His interactions, to see Him capitalize on opportunities, it is transforming.

Not only to those in the first century that walked with Him physically in those days, but through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit of God to us as well.

The Word of God gives us a perfect picture of who Christ is and the difference that He makes. I want to encourage you, I hope I already have, but I want to encourage you to study the Word of God.

[1:12] Don't just find a verse or read a devotional thought. No, study the Word of God. Study the words and the movements of Jesus because it will challenge you.

It will inspire you. It will change you. I want to show you what I mean by that. Last week we looked at an account of a man that has been nicknamed the rich young ruler.

He's been nicknamed that because Marx tells us that he was a man with great possessions. That means he was rich. Matthew tells us that he was a young man. And Luke tells us that he was a ruler.

And if you put those three together, the rich young ruler, that's what we know him as. He's a man of moral character, of monetary privilege, but he has some flawed priorities.

And he's challenged by Christ on those flaws. And the reality is his love for money was more than his interest in Christ, and he walked away unchanged and sad.

[2:23] So how does Jesus respond to that? I want you to watch this. Because what we're going to look at today happens immediately after that.

So this man who was so dedicated to the law, a good man, a moral man, came to Christ. Christ told him to sacrifice more than he was willing to do that, and he walked away sad while the disciples saw the whole thing.

Watch how Jesus handles this. It's in verse 23. 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 man to enter the kingdom of God. And they were exceedingly astonished and said to him, Then who can be saved?

[3:37] And Jesus looked at them and said, With man it is impossible, but not with God. For all things are possible with God. And Peter began to say to him, See, we've left everything and followed you.

And Jesus said, Truly I say to you, There's no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands for my sake and for the gospel who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands with persecutions and in the age to come, eternal life.

But many who are first will be last. And the last, first. Mark Twain once said, It ain't those parts of the Bible that I can't understand that bother me.

It's the parts that I understand. It's not hard to understand what Christ is saying here. He's saying rich folks are going to have a hard time coming to Jesus.

Why? Because they often think they got all they need. To pursue a Savior, you have to know that you need one.

[5:05] And by the way, He's pursuing us when we think we're pursuing Him. But if people feel self-sufficient, they feel like they're enough. And wealth can make people feel like that.

It's delusional, but it can give them a sense of invincibility. And when people with need, they're open to find answers.

Whatever that need may be, whether it be medical, that'll change things for you. Occupationally, when your job changes suddenly, that's an eye-opener.

Directionally, what's my next step? What should I do? Financially, those things matter. However, if health is good, and finances are good, and life looks headed in the right direction, well, why change?

But I want you to notice that even with that, this rich leader walked away, and it says that he walked away sad. And the disciples watched him walk away, and they couldn't understand.

[6:18] They couldn't understand why Jesus said that to them. They couldn't understand why Jesus felt like that. The thought was that if you had a lot, that it was due to the blessings of God, that God was rewarding you.

Children, who really have nothing to offer the kingdom, except themselves, are welcomed in by Christ, earlier in this chapter.

Yet the rich, who seem to have so much more to offer, Christ challenges them. And that seems backwards. There was a common thought in this day that what theologians now call the Deuteronomic formula.

It's easy for you to say. The Deuteronomic formula. And the Deuteronomic formula is like a man-made summary of the law. And what it says is that if you obey God, he'll bless you.

And if you disobey God, he'll curse you. And so if, based on that formula, the rich man's got to be right. I mean, he's been blessed.

[7:26] He's got money. So apparently, he's been obedient. He's been right. He's rich. Yet Christ challenges him, but yet he was indignant with the disciples who hindered the children coming to him.

Just right here together. Again, that seems backwards. Well, the reality is there is no formula that is a guarantee that God will make you rich if you follow him.

There's not a formula like that. I don't care what the smiley preachers with big jets tell you. There's not a formula that says that. The reality is, as Christ is stating, the rich often find their security in their stuff.

And some believe they have all they need. They're self-sufficient. They don't need salvation. And that's why Jesus said what he did.

He said, 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. And I bet you've heard, as I have, about the eye of the needle.

[8:35] I remember growing up hearing about a gate somewhere over there in the Holy Land that was small and tight, and when people tried to get through it, they took a, they had to get their camel down, sometimes even grease them up, and get them down on their knees and push them through this little hole to get through.

I heard it referred to when I went to Bethlehem. There was something called the door of humility at the church of the nativity. And the person who's coming out of that gate there is a small person, by the way, because I remember when I went through that hole, I had to nearly get on my knees to get through that.

And I remember hearing somebody when I got to it say, it's like the eye of the needle. And then I heard about it again at Masada.

That's Herod's desert mountain retreat when we came to this tight squeeze there. That wall gets closer and closer together the further you go down that little entryway there.

And I remember the guide saying, that's the eye of the needle. That's neat. That's not what Jesus was talking about. The church of Bethlehem was not built in his time.

[10:07] The reason they built the church of the nativity was to protect the site of the nativity of Christ. And when you go down in the basement of that building, they'll show you, just to be honest, a weird little spot that is supposed to be where Jesus was born.

And I don't believe he went to Masada. There's nothing in Scripture about it. And I don't know why in the world he would have visited a Roman military fortress that overlooked the Dead Sea.

The truth is, as illustrative as those pictures are, I'll tell you what Jesus was really saying. Jesus was really saying that a rich man going to heaven is like Palestine's largest animal going through the smallest opening that you can think of.

Actually, the Babylonians would say something like this, but they would say it's as hard as an elephant going through the eye of a needle. But Jesus was relevant because the people what he was talking to didn't have elephants.

They had camels. What we got here is cultural idioms. And really, it's a hyperbole. It's a stretched comment that's meant to prove a point.

[11 : 28] Whether you feel comfortable with it or not, he does it again and again. In Matthew 7, verse 5, he says, that maybe you need to remove the log from your own eye without worrying about the speck in someone else's eye.

And in Matthew 23, 24, he tells us, you strain out the gnat but swallow the camel. Now, to be clear, they did strain out the gnats because if they had an open picture, there may be a gnat that gets in there.

So they would put cheesecloth over their cup. And when they poured it in, they would strain out the gnats. But they did not swallow the camels, at least not whole. But here he clearly means you have to put God over your stuff.

And when the disciples heard that, they were amazed and they were astonished, bewildered, literally stunned beyond measure. And they followed that up by saying, then who can be saved? What they're saying is if the rich guy who's been blessed by God in such ways like that can't be saved, then what about us? They don't have near as much.

[12 : 43] Jesus looked at him and said, with man it's impossible, but not with God, for all things are possible with God. Which brings us to his first teaching point. And that is salvation is impossible without God.

To be clear, we don't initiate it. We can't make it happen. Ephesians 1 tells us that he chose us before the foundations of the earth. We cannot purchase it.

We cannot earn it. Ephesians 2, 8, 9 says, for by grace you've been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing. It is a gift of God, not as a result of works so that no one may boast.

In other words, it's only by the grace of God. And because Christ was the perfect sacrifice and could, and thank God did, provide what we could not for ourselves, our only hope is found in the grace and the mercy of God.

We do not save ourselves. Salvation is impossible without God. The second teaching point that he gives us speaks directly to the rich, young, powerful man's problem, and that is surrender is required to follow Christ.

[14 : 04] This was a good man. He was sincere in doing right. However, he was unwilling to let go of what God told him to walk away from.

He had a lot, but he didn't have Christ. A couple of weeks ago, we had a Utah church planner here. He was here for our midweek worship, and then right after that, we had a professor of missions in our pulpit. Actually, vice versa. The professor of missions was here first.

Both have a focus on trying to win some very sincere, good people to the Lord.

However, Latter-day Saints are caught up in a false gospel. Great efforts do not work. Great efforts do not work.

[15 : 16] No matter how many doors they knock on in their two years of committed service in order to make it in to the celestial kingdom, the reality is their sincere efforts do not work.

There are Muslims across the world. They're not all terrorists. They're not all horrible people. Many of them are very sincere about their prayer life and about their faith to Allah.

But until they walk away from that and realize their need for Christ Jesus, they're lost without him.

Sincerity gets you nowhere unless it's through Christ. Surrendered obedience is what God blesses. And you can find obedience surrender a lot in Scripture.

Matthew left a Roman tax booth to follow Christ. Do you understand what that means? That he sold himself to the devil, basically.

[16 : 33] He went and worked for the enemy and then had the gall to walk away from him. James and John left the Zebedee and Sons Fishing Company, dropped their nets to follow Christ.

Zacchaeus, another rich and revered man, climbed a tree like a little kid to get close to Christ. And then after meeting Christ and having a meal with Christ, generously paid back people he had wronged.

Saul left all that he had worked for. What had he been doing? He was mastering the law of God. He was guarding the traditions built around the law of God. But he had to leave it to follow Christ. Let me ask you, what is it that is hindering you from following Christ?

Is it your reputation? I mean, what are people going to say if you really sell out and get serious about loving Jesus?

[18:08] Is it your love for your habits? You got stuff you like to do that you're not going to want to give up doing? Your persuasions?

Something about your lifestyle? What are you holding so tightly to? To follow Christ means that we must surrender.

And that begins with an initial surrender to follow Christ. You have to know that you have a need in Christ. You have to admit that you're a sinner. You have to ask the Lord Jesus to forgive you of your sins. You have to commit your life to him.

There's an initial surrender there. And then it's followed by a daily surrender to follow Christ. Jesus said you must take up your cross daily and follow Christ. It's a daily decision to surrender to the Lord Jesus.

It is a one-time thing. But it's not just a one-time thing. It's a daily thing to live for God. We had a house dog one time that had a knack for catching squirrels.

[19:12] She's good at it. She never went hunting. She's just a hunting dog that walked up one day and chose us instead of us choosing her.

And I watched her corner squirrels in the yard. It was amazing. Fun to watch. And one night I let her out. And when I let her back in, she came in real quick with her head down low and went running right past me quickly and quietly and laid down on her bed.

And much to our shock, when I walked in there, she had brought a squirrel in. You see the shame on that dog?

Now let me just say that for those of you that don't believe a dog ought to be in your house, you are no fun. You're no fun.

You're no fun. You're no fun. Now listen, there's a rule. She had to surrender that squirrel to come in the house. She couldn't keep both.

[20:24] She couldn't do it. And my goal, honestly, was to get that up before anybody else saw it because if the wrong person in my house, and I'm not saying any names, if the wrong person saw that in the house, we might all be gone.

Let me ask you, what are you squirreling away that keeps you from surrendering to Christ?

That thing that you drop your head and hold on to and run quickly to hide that keeps you from being everything you could be for the Lord.

Surrender is required to follow Christ. His third teaching point is this. Reward is incomparable in Christ.

Peter, as well as the disciples, obviously, at least for a time, walked away from their careers, spent less time with their families, and put themselves in harm's way to follow Christ.

[21:44] And Peter said it was like leaving everything. That's what he said. He said, Lord, we've left everything. And Jesus responds by saying that the reward of following Christ is much greater than the cost.

Christ says, what you leave will come back a hundredfold. In Genesis, Abraham left his people to go to a land that he would be shown.

He left without knowing where he was to go. And God blessed him, or we wouldn't know his name. God blessed him. As he went. When Christ mentions family here, I want you to be clear about something.

He does not instruct us to tear up our families. That's not what he's doing at all. But I will tell you that following a clear calling from God can lead to some family strain.

To do what God would have you to do, some of your family is not going to understand when you sell out to the Lord Jesus Christ. And there is, there's that part that he mentions that I don't want to bring up, but I'm going to have to, about hardship and persecution.

[22:58] He says, that'll grow. Now, can I just be completely honest? Even though I'm preaching, I'm going to be completely honest, right? We know little about hardship and persecution in America when it comes to our faith.

Little about it. We enjoy tremendous freedom in this country to worship. I want you to hear me as well. Such freedom should never be assumed.

There are movements and cultural changes in our world today, in our nation today, that challenge convictions that Christians hold. And if the wrong kind of changes come to our country, following Christ can be much more costly.

It will not affect a lot of us, but it will affect the next generation. It'll affect my children.

It'll affect my children's children. And you can see that taking place in Christians' lives all over the world. I have friends, and we support missionaries that left their homeland and their extended family to live in much humbler means for the sake of the gospel.

[24:24] I remember when Kenny Dubnick told me that God had called him to go to Birmingham, England. He was pastoring a great church in North Carolina, very mission-minded church, and got so caught up in missions with that church that God called him to the mission field.

And I remember him telling me that they had just found a house with some land and were thoroughly enjoying where they lived, and they sold all of it to go live in an apartment with Pakistani Muslims in an effort to reach them for the Lord Jesus.

He sent me a picture of a mushroom growing out of his wall behind his refrigerator. I know missionaries serving in Southeast Asia that were given 24 hours to leave a country or to be imprisoned.

I served beside them twice. You can't now in that country. Folks, it's real.

And Jesus is saying, that don't go unseen. God sees that. And his reward for such is, in fact, a hundredfold.

[25:56] And he makes it clear that those rewards are in this life as well as in the next. Now, when he says a hundredfold, he means that what we leave is not even comparable to what you will gain when you follow Christ.

And he's not talking about monetarily. He's talking about something better than that. And then he ends in verse 31 by saying, many who are first will be last, and the last first.

In other words, what he's saying is, the ones that you expect to be the greatest may not be after all. They thought the rich young guy was pretty great, and they were amazed and exceedingly astonished when he came in last because he walked away sad with great riches.

In reality, it'll be the simple. It'll be the unrecognized. It'll be the ordinary faithful folks that should be, that shall be made first.

And if you don't see it now, you will. Something very interesting happens here at the peak of Mark.

[27:09] I've explained to you before, one of the strengths of going through a gospel like we are, verse by verse, even though it takes us a long time to do it, is to understand the whole landscape of how the Holy Spirit led Mark to write what he did.

We know that he wrote it based a lot on the witness of Peter. Mark was young. He was probably a teenager when Jesus came through. And so Peter shared with Mark, and historians tell us that, of that day.

And Mark shared much of what he learned from Peter. So we get a lot of it from Peter's perspective. And because of that, all of Mark chapter 1, verse 8, is ramping up to the great confession of Peter that's found in Mark chapter 8, verse 29, when he says, you are the Christ.

And then we get to Mark 9 and 10, and we're on the peak. We're on the peak of this gospel, and it's kind of a midstream peak, and it's where the transfiguration is, and we see the four stages of his glory divine, and we see the reaffirmation of who Christ is and what he's come to do.

And as we've been in Mark 9 and 10, I want you to notice the lessons in these two chapters.

Because once we hit chapter 11 with the triumphal entry, we will rush toward the cross and be there at Easter.

[28:50] But if you put yourself first, if you try to stop others from ministering, and that's what the disciples did in Mark 9, verse 38, or if you hinder people bringing children to Jesus, that's what they did in Mark chapter 10, verse 13, or if you tear up families for your own satisfaction, that's what he talks about in Mark 10, 1 when he talks about divorce.

Or if you rest in your riches instead of Jesus, that's what the rich young ruler did in Mark 10, verse 17. You'll be last. However, if you're one that gives others what they need, like a cup of cold water, Mark 9, verse 41, or that serves anyone and everyone, Mark 9, 35, or that brings children to Jesus, Mark 9, 36, or that comes to Jesus like a child, Mark 10, verse 13, or serves the Lord sacrificially to share the good news of Christ, our passage today, you'll be first.

In other words, put Jesus first, and you'll be first. Put yourself first, and in the end, you'll lose.

Jesus must come first. And when you put Jesus first, the possibilities are unmatched.

The rewards do not compare to anything else. You never really know what you get in Jesus until you give all that you are.

[30 : 53] And what you get, based on the words of Jesus, is 100 times better than you ever had before. And if you don't believe me, you just wait.

Or maybe you shouldn't wait. Give him your all, and let's see what he's up to for your life.

when I was 18 years old, I had felt a draw to ministry.

But I had seen bad examples. And I didn't want to be another one bad example. And I had a burning bush type experience in the shower of all places.

I'm telling you, I walked out of that shower and knew almost positively what God wanted me to do for the rest of my life.

[32 : 16] I was young in college and I was helping the church basketball team, high school basketball team.

I went to that ball game that morning and I went by my youth minister's house afterwards. And I told him, I said, before today, I felt like I was about 80% sure I was going to be in business somewhere, do something.

And I said, but now I feel like it's 90, I'm 90% sure I'm supposed to go into ministry. But I'm just not 100%. I mean, I had a great experience and I just, just, but I don't want to be like what I've seen.

I don't want to be like what I've seen. And he told me, he's wiser than he was, honestly.

Probably smartest thing he ever told me. He said, why should God give you that clarity without your complete surrender?

[33 : 33] And I got in the, hatchback Honda Accord 5-speed with no air. And as I drove out of that neighborhood, I said, from this day forward, Lord, I'm going to dedicate my life to ministry.

I'm going to try to prepare myself for you to use me until you tell me different. I'm all in. And God gave me a clarity and an understanding.

And he's blessed my life a hundredfold. Because I simply took him at his word.

Whatever you're squirreling away, let go of it. And let God do what he wants to do. With every head bowed, and every eye closed, I ask you this morning, I ask you this morning, if you, if you've ever given your heart and life to the Lord Jesus, has there ever been a time when you've admitted your need for him?

When you've admitted the sin that separates you from God and ask him to forgive you and to cleanse you and to come into your life? If that's never happened to you, I encourage you to follow him today.

[35 : 11] He'll meet you where you are. He'll change your life a hundredfold. Maybe you're here and you know you're a Christian, but you've never publicly acknowledged that. It's a barrier that you've had that just stood in the way, and it's become a hindrance to your walk, whether you realize it or not.

Jesus, by his example and by his commission, tells us that we ought to publicly acknowledge our faith through baptism. If you've never been baptized, I encourage you to come this morning and say, Pastor, I want to set up baptism. I want to be baptized. I believe.

Maybe you're here this morning and God's leading you to be a part of Pickens First Baptist Church. God's doing wonderful work in our church. I'm thankful for that. If God's leading you here, I'll never ask you to do more than what God tells you to do, but I never want you to be satisfied by doing less than what God tells you to do, so I just ask you to be obedient.

Maybe you're here and none of that applies to you. God's not. He don't have your all. You're holding on to things that keep you from having God's very best for your life.

And today is the day to give them up. You can do it at this altar. You can do it with me praying with you. You can do it where you stand. But today, let's don't walk away sad, holding on to what's too precious to us.

[36 : 38] Lord Jesus, lead us right now, I pray, as only you can, have your will and your way in our midst, O God. In Jesus' name, Amen.