

FACING THE IMPOSSIBLE

"Then said Jesus unto his disciples, Verily I say unto you, That a rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven. And again I say unto you, It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God. When his disciples heard it, they were exceedingly amazed, saying, Who then can be saved? But Jesus beheld them, and said unto them, With men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible." Matthew 19:23-26.

Never before have men faced such impossible things as now confront them. Looming up before them are insuperable obstacles that defy all power to remove and all patience to overcome. Nor is this sad calamity restricted to any department of life, for no matter what aspect of life is considered the same despairing cry of "impossible" proceeds from it.

In view of many existing conditions, it is no wonder that the spirit of defeatism has swept over many. Faced with such things the sad tendency is to hold up the hands of surrender, to give in to existing conditions, to make the best of the serious affair. Some tell us that it is the spirit of the age and the sign of the times. They say the Word clearly tells us that in the end time "the love of many will wax cold." But that does not excuse Christians for being cold or conquered in their Christian experience. Because conditions are impossible Christians should not capitulate to them. On the contrary, the very fact that things are in such a deplorable condition is a ringing challenge to the Christian to face them, to fight them, and to overcome them. It is for Christians to do the impossible thing.

One reason they are not doing so is because they have forgotten and forsaken the Lord. Need we not confess this great fact that we have turned from the Lord and have forgotten Him in the misery of existing conditions. We do not devotedly walk with Him and delightfully talk with Him as we should. Other things have crowded the Lord out of our lives and away from our thoughts. Do we face impossible conditions which cause us to despair? Our God is the God of the impossible. He can and loves to do the impossible thing. If the Christian had not forgotten the Lord, he would not be so utterly powerless as he is today. "With God all things are possible."

Others of us have not so much excluded the Lord from our thoughts but have doubted the ability of the Lord to do the impossible thing. The voice of doubt cries, "Can God?" and because there is no manifestation of the Lord's intervention it is concluded, "He cannot." His power is not considered adequate to extricate from the maze of perplexity which exists. It is believed that God cannot cope with the situation.

Many, on the other hand, act as though God is disinterested and unwilling to do the thing that they require. We are constantly in danger of measuring our God by our circumstances instead of measuring our circumstances by our God. If only we would look to God, the things that beset would fade into insignificance in the light of His presence and power.

God has always accomplished the impossible thing for His people. Consider when the children of Israel were delivered from Egypt and had made their way to the Red Sea. The enemy pursued them until it seems that the destruction of the Israelites was certain. They did not know where to look. Before them was the Red Sea, on either hand were mountains and behind them was a foe that was bent on destruction. What were they to do? They could look one way and obtain help but it seems that this is the last thing that man wants to do. They could look up. God could do the impossible thing. On that stormy night when, as far as human outlook was concerned all seemed lost, Paul stood in the midst of that ship's company with the confession of triumphant faith, "I believe God." He linked human impotence with Divine omnipotence by faith. He looked up and saw the God of impossibilities and believed Him. So, we need to believe God, have faith in Him, believe in His presence, His power, and His promises.

There came to Jesus a man, young, rich, of good social station, who had kept himself unspotted from the world. He realized that he had not yet attained to the highest good, which was eternal life. Eternal life is the true satisfaction of the soul, and has been the quest of all noble spirits. He had listened to Christ, and his soul had vibrated to the truths Christ taught, and the ideal of life He had drawn. He was prepared to accept a more exacting requirement. But Jesus opened his eyes to the straitness of the gate. "Go and sell that thou hast, and give it to the poor." That searched and exposed the inward state of this man's soul. He hungered and thirsted after righteousness, but his deeper hunger and intenser thirst, his controlling passion, was for what his wealth and position and authority gave him. He made what Dante called "The Great Refusal." He went away sorrowful for he had great possessions. Jesus turned to the disciples with a sigh. Read Matthew 19:23-24. This is to say, it is impossible. Salvation is possible only on the terms laid down by the Saviour Himself.

1. Consider the rich in worldly possessions.

Jesus did not condemn the acquisition and possession of riches. He declared riches to be, when honestly gained, an achievement, and when unselfishly administered, a stewardship. But He lays His emphasis on their peril. By counsel, by parable, and by keen appeal He entreated men to beware of the perils of wealth. Riches make a man feel secure, so that he sits high in pride, and they engender his vanity, while they corrupt his conscience. Riches tend to desecrate the soul.

2. Consider the rich in natural gifts.

We know how enriching are those natural gifts with which some are endowed from their birth. The dower of beauty, or of a gracious presence, or of manly upstanding strength, the possession of a voice of compelling charm in speech or in song, the endowment of a personal fascination which wins the hearts of all within its influence, these are no mean riches. Yet how often do we see those who are endowed with them refusing the strait gate.

3. Consider the rich in intellectual power.

We are reaching a higher and more difficult surrender. There is no subtler or more stubborn pride than that of the man whose strength of thought, whose power of intellectual apprehension, whose mastery of the problems of human lives amount to genius. Think of the scholar who has attained the first rank in some branch of learning; or the thinker who has analysed and expounded a method of thought; or the poet whose words have quickened men's pulses, and given them power to dream new dreams. How rich they are! How naturally they stand self-poised!

4. Consider the rich in self-righteousness.

This is the most perilous of all riches. Jesus won men to leave all, rise up and follow Him, to lay their gifts at His feet, and to use their powers in His service, even though the world thought that they all became poor indeed. But the men who most often foiled Him were those whose riches was their self-righteousness. Pharisee and Sadducee, ruler and scribe, gave no heed to His call.

We need not wonder that the gate is strait. But the gate is not too strait for any man who will enter it unburdened. Because men cling to their riches of worldly possessions, natural gifts, intellectual power or self-righteousness they go away sorrowful.

I. Salvation Is Needed By All.

1. All are under the dread burden and condemnation of sin.
2. All are under the wrath of God.
3. All need to be saved (Isaiah 53:6; Romans 3:10,23; 5:12).

II. Salvation Is Impossible With Man.

1. He cannot blot out his own sins.
They are written on the memory of God.
2. He cannot atone for his own guilt.
The price is too great for one who is poor and needy and without strength.
3. He cannot change his own heart.
It is deceitful and desperately wicked. He cannot alter it any more than the Ethiopian can change his skin or the leopard remove his spots.
4. He cannot purchase salvation with his own works. Romans 3:20; Hebrews 11:6.

III. Salvation Is Possible With God.

1. The offense is against Him. Psalm 51:4; Luke 15:18.
2. He loves the sinner although He hates the sinner's sins.
John 3:16; Romans 5:8; I John 4:10.
3. He laid our sins on Jesus.
Isaiah 53:5, 6, 10; John 1:29; II Cor. 5:21; I Peter 2:24.
4. He is mighty to forgive and to save.
Matthew 19:26; Isaiah 45:22.

IV. This Salvation Is Offered To You.

1. By the invitations of Christ.
2. By the promises of the Word.