

Mark 10:17-27

In the popular Disney cartoon movies Aladdin and The Return of Jafar, a lot of time and effort are concentrated in obtaining and possessing a small **lamp**, which serves as the dwelling place of a very powerful **genie**. I'm sure that most of you already know the story. The possessor of the lamp is entitled to **three wishes**, which he or she can use in any way they choose (with a few limitations - the genie can't make anyone fall in love with you, the genie can't kill anyone, and of course you can't wish for more wishes). Most of the owners of the lamp wish for **wealth, power, and influence** in one form or another; as well as a variety of other **selfish** things. One wish involves saving a person's **own** life, and yet another **unselfishly** takes into consideration the wants and needs of **someone else**. At any rate, the genie is there to grant you the three things which your heart most desires.

What about **you**? What are the desires of **your** heart - a special **car**, a special **home**, a special **friend**? Somehow, out of all the things there are from which to choose, I don't think any of us would ask for a **cross**. The cross was originally an object of **scorn** and **shame**. It was an instrument of **torture**, reserved for only the **worst** of criminals. Yet, as Christians, the cross has become the symbol of everything we hold **dear**, because it was on the cross where **Jesus died** to pay the **debt** for all our sins. It was on the cross where the Lord proved that **God Can Accomplish The Impossible**.

Our text for today gives us a good example of the way that the cross becomes a **stumbling block** for some people. We read, "*As Jesus started on His way, a man ran up to Him and fell on his knees before Him. 'Good teacher,' he asked, 'what must I do to inherit eternal life?'*" This man is a bit of a **mystery**. He had just heard Jesus' message in which Jesus had explained, "*I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it,*" yet he asks the question, "*What must I do to inherit eternal life?*" Hadn't he been **listening**? Or was it just that he didn't **understand** the words of Jesus?

Apparently the man thought that receiving eternal life had something to do with **goodness**. First of all, he seems to have come to Jesus because Jesus was a **good** teacher - one who had done all things **well**. He figured that Jesus offered a pretty good **example**, so maybe he could **learn** something from Him. We can't really **blame** him for that. He just wanted to be the **best** good person he could **be**! What if your livelihood and status in the community depended on your ability to

bake **bread**, wouldn't you want to offer the very **best** bread in town? And, if you heard about someone who baked a **better** loaf of bread than you, wouldn't you want their **recipe**? Well, this man was looking for Jesus' recipe for **righteousness**, so he could put it to use **himself**.

However, the man was soon to be **disappointed**. Jesus began by quizzing him on some of the Ten Commandments - the summary of God's moral law. But as if to pass those things off as being rather **simple** and **unimportant** the man replied, "*Teacher, all these things I have **kept** since I was a boy.*" In other words, I have been **good** in the **past**, and I'm even being **good** right **now**. Isn't there something **more** - isn't there anything **else**? Jesus replied, "***One thing you lack.***" Now, **that** was exactly what he wanted to **hear**! The sparkle must have immediately returned to his eyes, as he anxiously waited to hear about the **one thing** which he had not yet done - the **missing ingredient** in his recipe for righteousness - the **one thing** which would make his salvation **complete**.

However, the man's enthusiasm didn't last very long, for Jesus continued, "*Go, **sell** everything you have and give it to the **poor**, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, **follow Me.***' At this the man's face **fell**. He went away **sad**, because he had great **wealth**." Jesus **loved** this man, so He couldn't tell him what the man **wanted** to hear. Instead, Jesus told him what he **needed** to hear. The man's initial reaction was one of **sadness**. He couldn't give up the great **wealth** with which God had blessed him. Unfortunately, he had missed Jesus' **point**. Jesus didn't really **want** the man to **give up** his wealth. What He **wanted** was for the man to realize that his **wealth** meant more to him than **following Jesus** did - and that's **idolatry**! Here was a man who had centered his attention around keeping the **law**, yet he had never even grasped the real **purpose** for that law - nor had he grasped its far-reaching **scope**. He was a pretty typical Israelite, for the Apostle Paul would later tell the Romans, "*(The Israelites) are **zealous** for God, but their zeal is not based on **knowledge**. Since they did not know the righteousness that comes **from God** and sought to establish their **own**, they did not **submit** to God's righteousness. Christ is the **end** of the law so that there may be **righteousness** for everyone who **believes**.*" This man considered himself to be an heir of heaven by **his own** works. He thought he had found the way to **life** - but in reality, the way he had found would only lead to **death**. While this man thought he had kept the **entire law** perfectly, Jesus showed him in just one sentence, that he hadn't even kept the **beginning** of the law - the First Commandment. This man loved **money** more than he trusted **God**.

How much do **you** trust God? How much would you **give up** if Jesus asked you to do it? Would you change your way of **eating**? Would you move to a **crowded apartment** in a poor neighborhood, and never know where your next meal was coming from - if that was how Jesus **wanted** you to serve Him? Would you give up your **freedom** and **independence**? Would you give up your **happiness**? Is there **anything** you would withhold from Jesus - and if so, what would it **be** - your **computer**, your **car**, your **house**, your life's **savings** - how about your **family**, or maybe even your **life** itself? We've grown very attached to **all kinds** of blessings from God, haven't we. Like the rich ruler in our text, sometimes we aren't sure we want to **give up** those things for the sake of our **Savior**. So, like the rich ruler, we **fall short** of fulfilling God's **law**.

This is where the **cross** of Jesus frequently becomes a point of **contention**. We Christians don't **like** to hear that we are **sinners** - that we **fall short** of God's expectations - that we are **unworthy** of God's love, and **undeserving** of eternal life in heaven. But the fact is, we **are** sinners, we **are** unworthy of God's love, and we **are** undeserving of eternal life. Even Jesus' **disciples** had a hard time recognizing this, as we see in the final words of our text. We read, "*The disciples were **amazed** at His words. But Jesus said again, 'Children, how **hard** 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.'* The disciples were even **more** amazed, and said to each other, 'Who then can be saved?' Jesus looked at them and said, 'With **man** this is **impossible**, but not with God; **all things** are possible with **God**.'"

When man looks at **himself** to provide salvation, it's not only **hard** to be saved - it's **impossible**. That's what the man in our text was doing. He was looking to **himself** and his own **works** for salvation, and he thought he had been doing a pretty **good job**. But when Jesus showed him how **far** he really had to go, the man went away **sad**. Our reaction should be a **different** one. When God's holy law exposes us as **lost** and **condemned** sinners, it's time to stop looking at **ourselves**, and to start looking at our **Savior**. Instead of walking **away** from Jesus like the rich ruler in our text, let us walk **to** Jesus for **forgiveness**. We need to lift high the cross of **Christ** before our eyes, and see the **salvation** which Jesus earned for us there.

Nothing is more **important** - nothing is more **valuable**. I asked before what you would be willing to give up if Jesus asked you to do it. But you know what?

Jesus isn't asking us to give up **anything!** **He** is the one who did all the **giving** - even to the point of giving up His own **life**. For us, that puts the cross of Jesus in a completely **positive** light. Knowing what Jesus accomplished on the cross, we will **cling** to the cross, **display** it boldly, and **wear** it proudly. For the person who really **trusts** Jesus, it won't be so difficult or painful to do **whatever** Jesus asks of us.

Maybe you've encountered some times in your life where you thought, "It **can't** be done. Or at least, **I** can't do it." Five hundred years ago, people would have said, "You **can't** go against the Roman Catholic Church - they're too **rich** - they're too **powerful**. They'll **squash** you like a bug." Yet, five hundred years ago Martin Luther **did** just that. The church had been teaching salvation by **works** for centuries. But when Luther discovered that the Bible really teaches salvation by **faith** and **not** by works, he started to **fight** - to fight for the **truth** of God's Word. The odds against him were **overwhelming** - one **man**, against a whole **army** of the pope's theologians. The situation looked **impossible**, but Martin Luther had **God** fighting on his side, and with God, **all things** are possible.

When things look **impossible**, sometimes people think it would be nice to have a magic lamp with a **genie** inside, in order to simply **wish** our problems away. But as nice as that sounds, magic lamps and genies aren't **real** - they're only **make-believe**. And yet, in reality, we **can** do all things - because we have something even **better**. We have a **God** - the **true** God - a God who doesn't promise to give us everything we **want** - but rather, a God who promises to give us everything we **need** - and with our God **all things** are possible.

He already **proved** that for us through the reforming work of Martin Luther. But even more important than **that**, He proved it for us through the **cross**. As Christians, you and I share a goal which is **impossible** by man's standards - the hope of actually receiving **everlasting life** in heaven. But through our Lord Jesus Christ, that **impossible** hope has become a **reality**. Through His perfect life, Jesus earned **forgiveness** for all of our sins - and when He offered that perfect life on the **cross**, Jesus **paid the debt** which we owed to our God, and He **saved** all sinners - including **us**. **God Can Accomplish The Impossible** - and **God Has Accomplished The Impossible**. Don't give up that God for **anything** which this world has to offer. But rather, fear, love, and trust in God **above** all things. Amen.