

Possible With God

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[0 : 00] So in Luke chapter 18, we read these verses 26 and 27. They that heard it said, who then can be saved? And he said, the things which are impossible with men are possible with God.

The things which are impossible with men are possible with God. Now, of course, this is true in terms of practical and earthly things as well. We have plenty of instances in Scripture of the Lord doing miraculous things that by nature just couldn't be explained.

The parting of the Red Sea is one of the holding back of the Jordan. The instance when Elisha throws the stick into the water and the iron axe head swims and comes back up to the surface. There are plenty of cases where the Lord chooses to overrule the power of nature. We think of Jesus on the Sea of Galilee, for example, in the midst of the storm. He just calms the waves and the wind ceases and so on.

So the things which are impossible with men, even in nature, are possible with God. But really what is being spoken about here is salvation. It is the Lord's redeeming, saving of souls.

[1 : 08] Who then can be saved? And he said, the things which are impossible with men are possible with God. Now, the first thing that we notice here about what Jesus says is that it is impossible for men to save themselves.

It is impossible for a mere human being to somehow have done enough or to somehow earn their merit with God or to stand before God at the last day with their head held high and say, This was my life.

Wasn't it good? I did it my way. Look at all the things I have achieved. Look at all the people I have helped. What a blessing I have done to the world. Don't you think so, God? It is impossible for anyone to redeem themselves by their own efforts.

It is like we said with the children as to what? A ship were to sail up the Tower Bridge and try to get through the roadway that is there until and unless it is lifted, until and unless the way is opened, which the ship cannot do.

The bridge must do that. Those working the bridge must do it. The good news for shipping is that the bridge is designed in order to be opened.

[2 : 21] It is designed in order that shipping may get through. And God's scheme of salvation is designed in such a way that men and women and boys and girls should be able to get in, can get in, but only because of what he does and not because of anything that they do.

Who then can be saved? The things which are impossible with men are possible with God. Now the context, of course, of this verse that we read, if we go back to the beginning of the chapter, we've got three or four different instances here of situations where people are seen to be aware of their own lack of power.

We have, first of all, the unfortunate widow, which we've looked at on previous occasions, I realise, in the past. But here we have her aware of the fact that she does not have the power to obtain justice.

She does not have the power to be avenged of her adversary. The judge has that power. Avenge me of mine adversary. Verse 3. And he would not for a while.

Until he is moved, then there is no justice for this poor widow. Yet because this widow troubleth me, I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me.

[3 : 39] And the Lord said, hear what the unjust judge said. Shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with them?

You and I, we do not have the power to effect our own salvation, to change our own lives, in that sense. But we do have the means to go to the person who has that power.

We have been given the opportunity, we've been given the way to reach to the one who alone, who has the power to open the way for us. Shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with them?

Though it may seem for a long time as though those prayers are going unanswered. Though it may seem for a long time as though he is not interested. Yet God shall.

He says, he shall avenge him. I tell you, he will avenge them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, shall he find faith on the earth? When he comes, will he find people ready and believing and impleeding his own grace with their prayers?

[4 : 45] But this widow recognized she had no power in herself. But she went to the source of where power was to be had. And she pledged.

And she pleaded and prayed for that help. And pestered, you might say, in a sanctified way. The unjust judge who gave way to her at the human level just to make her go away.

God is not of such a petulant spirit. He is not going to do things just to make people go away. He has infinite patience. He can withstand all the nagging in the world for all eternity if he chose to do so.

But rather the Lord who is loving and gracious and full of compassion and desires to redeem and desires to save. Remember the Syrophenician woman that came to Jesus on behalf of her daughter.

And to begin with, he didn't answer her a word. And then eventually, after all her pleadings, and the disciples saying, oh, for goodness sake, do you want to make her go away? And Jesus finally says, oh woman, great is thy faith.

[5 : 48] Be it unto you as you have said. Be it unto you according to your faith. And so because she pleaded and because she kept on, her faith persisted.

And the Lord answered her at the last. Shall not God avenge his only elect which cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with him? I tell you, he will avenge them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man cometh, shall he find faith in the earth?

Or will we have given up by then? Will we have given up because it seems as though nothing is happening? It didn't happen the first time we pushed a button. The first time we bent our knees.

The first time we prayed and we looked around and nothing had happened. But God's response to us. God's answering and relationship of our prayer life. It's not like an auto bank.

It's not like one of these auto telemachines where you punch in the right numbers and you peep the button and ping out comes the cash that you want. Rather, it's more like a savings bank.

[6 : 47] Where you're scraping and saving your pennies and your money together. You've got a few more here. You make the laborious way to the bank and you hand it over and it disappears.

And you get your wee chitty backstabbed saying, yes, you paid it in.

But that's all you've got to show for it. And you gather again and you go back again. And you pay it in the more. And it keeps on being paid in. And you don't have anything to show for it physically. But all the time it's accumulating there with each little deposit.

With each trip to the bank. With each time you're scraping together the pennies and gathering the hard won, hard earned cash. And it's going in there and it's accumulating there.

And sooner or later, one day, there's going to be the payout. And you thought, where did all this come from? I didn't know I had all this. Well, it's been gleaned. It's been gathered. It's been a blessing has been building up.

And all the time, it's like, if it's not irrelevant to say it, God is like the benevolent bank manager who is receiving in all your petitions and prayers.

[7 : 49] And he's adding to them. He's adding his own largesse, his own interest, so that when it finally comes to bless you, when the answers to your prayers, it's not just the mere, meagre petitions that we made.

There's all this abundance coming out as well that we never envisaged. So that's the first instance there, the first illustration of that point, the important word.

Secondly, we've got the opposite of that. And again, we've made mention of this recently and previous weeks, the Pharisee and the publican. And the point again is that the one who goes down to his house blessed.

This man, verse 14, went down to his house justified. Rather than the other, for everyone that exalted themselves shall be abased. He that humbleth himself shall be exalted. The Pharisee

thought that he had what it took in order to purchase his blessing from God. He was a good man. He was a righteous man. God owed him. No, he didn't. The publican alone recognized he had nothing with which to plead. He had nothing with which to persuade God. [8 : 58] He did not deserve anything save wrath. But what he pleaded for was mercy. God, be merciful to me, a sinner.

He recognized that he had no power of himself, just like the unfortunate widow. He recognized that God alone had power to redeem, to save, to have mercy. This man went down to his house justified rather than the other, says Jesus.

The third instance then we have is of those bringing little children to Jesus. It says infants in Luke's account of the gospel. Other gospel accounts imply not only babies, but perhaps little children of toddler age, perhaps.

Because we have, where it says in Mark, for example, Jesus gathered them up and put his arms around them, put his hands upon them and blessed them. He gathered them up in his arms. So he brought them unto infants that he would touch them. But when his disciples saw it, they rebuked them. But Jesus called them up and said, suffer little children. Allow the little children to come to me.

[10 : 02] And forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom of heaven. Kingdom of God. Verily I say unto you, whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child shall in no wise enter their end.

Now, how is it that children receive such blessings? How is it that they would receive? Children receive with delight almost any present that you give them, at least until they open it. You know, even if all you get these socks at Christmas or a birthday or something, it's exciting until you open it. When children receive a present, they do so with delight. And so we receive the kingdom of God as a little child, knowing we haven't done anything to purchase this. We haven't done anything to earn this. This is from the grown-up that loves us, our mum or our dad or our auntie or our granny or grandpa. This is from somebody older, somebody stronger, somebody able to look after us, somebody who loves us.

This is a gift from it, and we delight in it. It's whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child shall in no wise enter their end. Such is the kingdom of God.

[11 : 10] This vulnerability, this helplessness, this consciousness of not being able to change the world, not being able to maybe look after the mortgage or the job or the bills or the payments.

Little children don't think in terms of those things. They think in terms that are much more innocent and simple. And Jesus wants us to receive the kingdom of God with that kind of simplicity.

You see, sometimes people get put off by wondering, oh, but what about the elect? And who's in the elect and who isn't in? What if I'm not in there? Maybe I shouldn't then be in a position even to ask the Lord for help.

Maybe he's going to shut the door anyway. That's like a little child lying awake at night wondering how on earth dad's going to have money for the mortgage or mum's going to manage her job or who's going to take care of the child care this week or whether or not there'll be bills to pay for the next load of school uniform or whatever.

These all may be genuine worries, but they are not the little child's worries. They are somebody else's concern. They don't have to worry about these things.

[12 : 21] Their world is far more contained, far more confined. They simply have to do the comparatively simple things that are required of them.

Their pleasures and their sorrows are at a far more innocent level. And yes, these things may be all genuine concerns, but the child cannot affect them one way or the other.

If there are shortfalls on the mortgage and going to the little piggy bank and eking out their few coppers and bringing it to mum or dad is not actually going to make a difference. And likewise, if there are major problems with other big things or jobs or whatever, the child is not going to be able to help that way.

The thing they can most do if they really want to help their mum or their dad is to be able to be the best little child for them that they can be.

To be loving, to be faithful, to be, yes, obedient, but also just to show love and affection and obedience. Yes, to be the best little child that they can be.

[13 : 25] They're not expected to become the adult. We are not expected to become God. We are not expected to purchase the salvation. We are not expected to lay down the sacrifice upon the cross.

We cannot do it. We don't have the resources. We don't have, in spiritual terms, the money to pay this debt. And nobody's asking you to.

Nobody's asking you to search the records of the elect to see if your name is there. Nobody is asking you to plumb the great depths of the mysteries of God's work of creation and providence. All that we are asked to do is to receive as a little child the things of God. Jesus says, ask and it shall be given.

Seek and you shall find. Knock and it shall be opened unto you. But you have to ask. I remember many years ago I was sitting in a deacon's court, a different congregation, many miles away, and there was an accusation.

[14 : 33] I think some funding or other was being discussed, whether or not it could be applied for. They held the congregation with something or another. Somebody voiced a few. Oh, there's this particular source.

You could tap into this one. Somebody else said, oh, yes, but they never give. Especially not the congregations. Oh, so-and-so got money from them. Yes, but they're not going to give.

Well, we can ask. And then this particular deacon chipped in and said, well, there's one thing for sure. If you don't ask, you definitely won't get it.

You might ask and you might say no. But if you don't ask, they're certainly not going to say, oh, we've just had a thought. We know who could use so many. There's this congregation. Let's go and investigate. See if they would like some and do all the like work ourselves.

If an application comes in, if a request comes in, they might deal with it. They might respond. But if you don't ask, you won't get it. Now, Jesus says, ask and it shall be given.

[15 : 35] Seek and you shall find. Not that it shall be opened unto you. Be as a little child. You're not required to be the adult in the relationship between God and sinners.

You're not required to be the father. You're just required to be the child. The son, the daughter. Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child shall no wise enter the end.

No matter what you try to do to solve the adult's problems, you can't do it as a little child. And we may think, God's got all these problems, these complicated things.

Well, maybe all that the Lord has may seem very complicated to us. But let me guarantee you, God has it under control. God is in sovereign lordship over all these things.

He's got plenty for the spiritual mortgage of our souls. The price is already paid. He's got the school uniform, as it were, for the children that are going to be with him in glory.

[16 : 45] He's already got them ready to be clothed in the robes of his righteousness. He already knows where their heavenly meal is coming from. He already has everything covered for them.

You, as a little child, do not have to worry about these things. Let the Lord deal with the things of the Lord. But let us do the things that are required of us.

Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child shall no wise enter the end. Allow the little children to come to me. And forbid them not. For of such is the kingdom of God.

And then, as it were, by contrast again, we have the rich young ruler who had sought to do everything right. Not in the way of the Pharisee in the temple.

He wasn't self-righteous and puffed up with himself. He's genuinely seeking to do what is right.

What shall I do? Good master, what shall I do? To inherit eternal life.

[17 : 45] And he says, well, you know the commandments. And they are about to honor your father and your mother. Don't kill, don't steal. Don't commit adultery. Don't cross witness. Well, I've done all these things for my youth.

I've been doing this. And yet he senses that something is missing. All these have I kept from my youth up now in Jesus' hour of these things. He said, and yet lackest thou one thing.

Sell all that thou hast and distribute unto the poor. And thou shalt have treasure in heaven. And come, follow me. Now, the key thing sometimes, of course, that we focus on is the giving up of all his possessions.

And sell all that you have. Give it to the poor. And come, follow me. And that is true in one sense. You know, Jesus puts his finger on the thing which he is holding back. The man is holding back.

Do you have the faith, really, to live by faith? That's what Jesus is asking him. Are you willing to let go all these things? As Proverbs says, you know, wisdom is a defense and money is a defense. [18:46] But the Lord is in charge of all these things. Yet lackest thou one thing. Do you really have this faith? Sell all that thou hast. Distribute to the poor.

And thou shalt have treasure in heaven. Come, follow me. Now, I think I would suggest to you that the most important word in that entire verse 22 is the word me.

It's not just go off and be a wandering preacher. It's not just, well, sell all you have. Live in poverty. And then everyone will see how good you are. How old you are.

And you have made this tremendous witness. No, you're letting go of all these things. I'm following Jesus. Follow me. Recognize that I am where life is to be found.

I am where salvation is to be found. Come, follow me. Be with me. Abide with me. But when he heard this, he was very sorrowful for he was very rich.

[19:46] And it is not easy to let go of the comforts and the defenses that we have in this world if we are called upon to do so. When Jesus saw that he was sorrowful, he said, How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God?

It is easier for a camel to go through the needle's eye than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God. And they had heard, said, Who then can be saved? Now, remember that in those days in that culture, riches were seen as a sign of God's blessing.

It was assumed if someone was rich that God was pleased with them. God must be pleased with them. Because, look, God is in charge of all the resources of the world.

And he has chosen to bestow all these blessings and riches and wealth and good things on this person. They must surely be in the favor of God.

And, of course, if you were going to pursue the law and all its details and make sure you observed all the minutiae of it, there were things that you simply could not do if you were having to spend most of your working day at the day job.

[20:57] So, if you're going to pursue the story in the scriptures and keeping all the details, you have to be rich because you have to be not dependent on a daily wage. So, the rich were taken as being blessed in these two ways.

Firstly, they were those who were seen to be the recipients of God's abundance. God must be pleased with them because they're rich. They've been blessed. Secondly, it's usually rich men who were able to be Pharisees or rulers because they could give themselves to all the observance of the law and the study of the scriptures and the law and so on.

And they said, well, if that's the case, who in the world could be saved? If even these guys aren't going to be saved, who's left? And Jesus doesn't say, ah, well, there's a secret to this. He doesn't pretend that it's going to be.

He says, with men, this is impossible. You know, the things which are impossible with men are possible with God. With God, it is not impossible for the rich man to be saved.

Look at Abraham and Isaac and Solomon and all these other rich men in the past that the Lord blessed. We think of Lydia, the seller of purple, who had her own house and so on in Philippi.

[22:15] And her house became the first gathered church in the continent of Europe. The Lord blesses. Yes, he can. And there's nothing impossible with God if those riches are put at God's disposal.

If they are held back for the self, then we become like Ananias and Sapphira. Yes, oh, look, we're giving to God. We're keeping this way. We're keeping this back for us. But we're not telling anybody.

We're pretending that we've given everything to God. And the Lord sees right through that. Easier for a camel to go through a needle's eye. Now, I realize that some commentators, of course, have posited the theory that there was a little posthum gate, a pedestrian gate beside one of the big gates in Jerusalem, which was very tiny and thin and able only for a man to squeeze through.

And this was sometimes referred to as the needle's eye. And the thought of a camel trying to get through there. Oh, well, then that's the camel going through the eye of a needle. That's one theory. It's not how it should be applied.

Another theory also is that the Greek word, and remember the New Testament is written in Greek for camelos, and the word for a thick rope hawser for a boat is camelos.

[23 : 33] And if the vowels had slightly been adjusted, then maybe what Jesus is saying is if you think of a needle, instead of trying to put a wee, a wee thread through it, suppose you're taking a great big ship's cable and trying to stick that through the eye of a needle.

In some ways, that might be a more sort of, the metaphor might fit better, might fit more easily. But remember that neither Jesus nor most of his audience weren't seafaring people.

You know, it's not, the disciples are fishermen in Galilee, yes, but we're talking here about a great big ship's hawser, a great big cable that would be going on a seagoing ship. And that's less likely to chime with Jesus' largely land-based audience.

I would suggest to you that the metaphor intended here, the illustration intended here, is literally meant to be trying to imagine a camel, the animal, trying to get its way through a needle's eye. It can't be done. It is impossible with men. But the things which are impossible with men are possible with God.

[24 : 40] We might think, how in the world can God be the same one who has made the sun and the stars and those stars which make the sun look like a tiny pinbrick, because they're so vast, these huge, great constellations that are out there, billions and trillions of miles out there in space.

We can't even imagine the distances and the vastness of these planets and stars and so on. And at the same time, he is the one who, if you were able to dissect the amoeba, the single-celled organism, would find within it a whole new world of complexity and sophistication within that single cell.

And all the depth and the minute detail to which the eye of God has given itself at the low, tiny level. And then the vastness of the universe in the other level.

How can God be at both ends of the spectrum? Not only is he at both ends, not only has he done both ends, but he has designed it so. He has designed his scheme of salvation so that that which is impossible with man is deliberately meant to be possible with God.

It is not that sometimes, sometimes God will break the rules and sometimes, okay, I'll let this person in, but I shouldn't really. It's not that God is making special favors and changing the rules for his elect and also his saints.

[26 : 13] It's rather like to go back to the illustration of the children of Tower Bridge. That bridge is designed to open and close. It is designed that although the vast majority of its traffic will travel backwards and forwards across the bridge when and while it is closed, yet there will be those occasions when the very purpose for which the bridge was designed comes into operation and it opens.

And yes, it takes time. And yes, lots of tourists will stand and watch it. Yes, the ship will go through and then it will close again. The traffic will flow again. And for every soul that is saved, there will probably be thousands, perhaps millions that won't be.

Just like for every ship that passes through that power bridge, there will be thousands of cars going backwards and forwards while it is closed. But it doesn't go to the fact that when it opens and when a ship comes through, that is not an aberration.

That is the bridge doing that for which it was designed. When the Lord redeems and saves, when he does that which with men is impossible, he is not cheating.

He is not changing the rules. He is rather applying the mechanism of salvation for which it was designed in the first place.

[27 : 39] When the Lord first created the world, when he first brought the heavens and the earth into being, when he made man in his own image, he knew that man would fall.

He did not make him so that he had to fall, but he knew that given his opportunities, given the choice, sooner or later a man is going to fall.

And all those souls who will be lost will need to be redeemed so that being redeemed, they are being joined back to the Lord, is seen to be an act of his free grace and love that it is all of God and not of man.

So from all eternity, this arrangement was made between the Father and the Son in heaven's glory. In all eternity, the Father and the Son entered into this covenant that in the fullness of time, he would become human flesh.

In the fullness of time, he would be born of a virgin lady. In the fullness of time, he would live out that perfect life that we couldn't live, the perfect life that God requires, the sinless life, which every man, woman and child who is saved ought to have lived, but hasn't been able to.

[29 : 01] That life is put in their place. And the Lord sees that perfect life of his Son, and it is acceptable. And for all the sins they have committed, that price is paid with the perfect sacrifice of that perfect life, of his perfect Son upon the cross.

It was intended from all eternity. It is not, as some atheists have said, cosmic child abuse, the killing of the Son at the behest of the Father.

It is not, oh, a mere tragedy, and oh, a failure of God's plan of salvation. No, it is that which he has intended and designed from all eternity, that the things which are impossible with man may be possible with God.

and bound up, as we see at the closing part of the book that we read. It's not for nothing that we went on to verse 34. Because when Jesus has been talking about the cost, yes, of following him, he then goes on to talk about the reason how we are able to be saved.

Because he shall be delivered unto the Gentiles, verse 32. He shall be mocked and spitefully entreated and spitted on and misses them having their fun, as it were.

[30 : 22] with God in the flesh. When they have God in their power, this is what they do. And they shall scourge him and put him to death. And the third day he shall rise again.

And they understood none of these things. We can't really get our head around these things and we know it with hindsight. They couldn't get their heads around it either. But the day would come when their eyes would be opened by God's Spirit.

We'll deal with that a wee bit more, Lord willing, in the evening. But for now, it should suffice us to see verse 33 is there for a reason. They shall scourge him and put him to death and the third day he shall rise again.

This is how, this is the means by which the things which are impossible with men are possible with God. Men cannot live the perfect life anymore since the fall.

men cannot lay down a perfect life as a sacrifice or even their own sins let alone the sins of others. Only God can do that. Men cannot redeem themselves let alone one another.

[31 : 28] There is nothing that man can do to save himself. The things which are impossible with men because of verse 33 they shall scourge and put him to death the third day he shall rise again are possible with God.

But they are only possible if Jesus Christ is God. It doesn't work if he's just oh a good teacher that we should follow his example or if he's just a guru whose teaching should be honoured or if he's just a prophet less than some other prophets and other prophets come after him and oh if he's only these things then the whole thing falls.

It is only because he is God in the flesh that that perfect life and that perfect sacrifice atones. If he is a mere man then our salvation continues to be impossible.

For the things which are impossible with men are possible with God but only with God. Not with better men or more good men or whatever no they are impossible with men regardless.

but are possible with God. It is he who gives us our salvation. Philippians 2 verse 13 we read it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.

[32 : 57] This is what the Lord does and the response he calls for is in the preceding verse wherefore my beloved as you have always obeyed not as in my presence only but now much more in my absence. Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling but it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.

If the work of God is the spring springing up on the mountainside then the outworking that by which we respond is like the stream flowing down the hillside.

It comes from the original spring. The things which are impossible with men are possible with God. We see it with the importunate widow. We see it with the publican who goes down justified to his house.

We see it with the little children who are the expression of the kingdom of God and whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child shall in no wise enter there.

We see it with the rich young ruler who wants so much to do what is right but who bulks at the cost and the following of Jesus along.

[34 : 05] Go, sell what thou hast, distribute to the poor thou shalt that treasure in heaven come and follow me. And there, as I said, is the key word not only in the verse but perhaps in the entire passage.

Follow me because he is God, because he is the perfect sacrifice, because he is the means by which the gate swings open wide as it has always been designed and intended to do.

It may shut for many but it will open for the Lord's own. You don't have to worry in terms of whether your name is written in some, you know, ancient heavenly record that you have no access to.

All you need to know is the invitation that is there. Come unto me, heavy laden and weary, and I will give you rest. All that the Father giveth me shall come unto me and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.

These are the promises of Christ who does not lie. Who then can be saved? The things which are impossible with men are possible with God.

[35 : 16] That is where you must come. It is to whom you must come that the unfortunate widow did like the little children do like a publican does and like those who are prepared not to turn away sadly but instead to let go of the world and follow him.

it is possible with God. Let us pray.