

With God All Things Are Possible

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[0 : 0 0] As we continue then in this portion of Mark's account of the gospel, we have just dealt in the first part of chapter 10, the most recent incident of which Jesus has been involved with the rich young ruler, a devout godly man who has come to Jesus seeking what he must do to be saved.

And he's been asking in faith and he's been asking determinedly, you know, what must I do to be saved? And Jesus gives him the commandments and tells him what he's to do.

All these have I observed from my youth. And Jesus, beholding him, verse 21, loved him and said unto him, one thing thou lackest, go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven.

And come, take up the cross and follow me. And he was sad about sin and went away grieved, for he had great possessions. And there we left it last time around, a fortnight ago.

And this is now where Jesus takes up again. He looked round about on his disciples and on others and said to them, how hardly, how difficult shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God?

[1 : 1 3] And the disciples were astonished at his words. You see, the Jewish attitude to wealth and possessions was shaped by an almost Sadduceean attitude to God.

Now, the Sadducees, if you remember, there was the Pharisees and there was the Sadducees, and they hated each other. The biggest single difference between them was the Pharisees believed in a resurrection.

They believed there were angels, there were spirits, there was a heaven, there was an afterlife. The Sadducees believed this world is all I was. This is it. There's nothing else. And at its best, that meant that there was then an onus on people, an incentive to live righteously and faithfully, to be kind and merciful to the poor, and to keep God's laws, and to live the best that you could in this world.

Because God had given you this life, and he'd only given you this life. That was it. And when this life was over, that was all I was. The Pharisees believed in a resurrection. That was the big single difference, the biggest single difference between them all.

But people tended to have this idea, as to an extent probably, we still do as well, that if somebody is prosperous and rich and well-to-do, then this was an indication of God having blessed them.

[2 : 3 2] If they prospered in their life and in their business, well, the only person that could have caused them to prosper in this way must be God. So God must have blessed them. And the next step is, God must be pleased with them.

And the only reason God is pleased with them, sure, is because he must be a good, upright, devout, righteous person, honoring to God. So the conclusion was quickly drawn or kind of misconstrued that wealth and possessions and prosperity meant that you had the favor of God.

And if you had the favor of God, you must be a good person in good standing with God. It's almost like a kind of health and wealth gospel, except at least it put God at the center of it.

But, of course, they had exceptions. You know, nobody would have said that the publicans, the tax collectors, were pleasing to God. They were regarded as traitors. They were regarded as, you know, completely ungodly and a lost cause, although they were very rich.

Herod would be a very rich king. But, you know, nobody would pretend that he was in any way righteous whatsoever. So there were exceptions. But, by and large, people thought in terms of, you know, if you were rich, God must have blessed you.

[3 : 47] Despite the fact, you know, there was plenty of biblical evidence to suggest the contrary, to suggest that the wicked could actually be pretty prosperous as well. You know, Job 21, if you look at that chapter in your own time, Job struggles with the concept of why did the wicked prosper?

Why did they get so rich and blessed and seem to have such an easy time in this world? Jeremiah struggled with the same thing. Chapter 12. Righteous art thou, O Lord, when I plead with thee.

Yet let me talk with thee of thy judgments. Wherefore did the way of the wicked prosper? Wherefore are all they happy that deal very treacherously?

Thou hast planted them, yea, they have taken root. They grow, yea, they bring forth fruit. Thou art near in their mouth and far from their reins. It was a problem.

But it didn't alter people's, you know, pretty much attitude that riches and wealth meant blessing. Now, this health and wealth doctrine, at least as you say, had the benefit of ascribing blessing to God.

[4 : 54] There was plenty of biblical corrective. You know, like Psalm 37, for example, saying, you know, the wicked are prospering. I saw the wicked flourishing like a green bay tree, but, you know, God's going to bring him down, sort of thing.

But an awful lot of people didn't actually know the scriptures that well. It's almost like medieval times where they sort of trusted in the priests and the sacrifices. And they trusted that those who could read the scriptures and those who had time to spend on it, they would just keep people right and everybody else just sort of did the best they could.

They turned up for the festivals. They kept the synagogue on the Sabbath and they just kind of plodded along as best they could. They wouldn't be well versed in what was there in the Old Testament scriptures.

So the fact that their normal idea might not be as biblical as it should be wouldn't actually alter the cultural idea. Wealth and blessing means God is pleased with that person.

Now, as I say, that at least puts God at the center. But the other side of it is very sinister, if you think of it. It means if you're a poor man begging in the street, well then, if the rich man is there because God is pleased with him, what does this say about the poor man?

[6 : 07] What does it say about the beggar? What does it say about those who are really suffering and for whom things go bad in this life? You know, John chapter 9 at verse 1, the man who was born blind and the disciples say to Jesus, Lord, who sinned?

Was it this man? Or was it his parents? They must have done something really to annoy God if this bad thing has happened to him. It's almost like a kind of pagan karma sort of idea.

If you do this, that happens sort of thing. And again, it's all got the focus in this world. As though this world is all that there is. Whereas God's plans and God's fulfillments and God's rewards and blessings are planned in terms not only of this brief blip of time, but of eternity.

And this is what is missed out on. This is part of the problem that the disciples, like everybody of their day, associated wealth and blessing with God's approval.

Also, however, there was almost the flip side of that coin, which is that the Pharisees, who did believe in a resurrection, and they made it their business to observe every little detail of the law and all the minutiae of keeping all the commandments and not doing this and not doing that and making sure you did this bit and did that bit.

[7 : 27] You couldn't actually keep all the regulations and details of the traditions of the elders unless, you know, you could make sure you didn't come into contact with an awful lot of stuff that daily business and life would require.

You would have to keep yourself apart from an awful lot of ordinary business and merchandise and all the rest of it. You couldn't engage with the riffraff in the marketplace.

You couldn't sort of give your time up to ordinary work and so on. So the only people that had leisure and opportunity to devote themselves to just studying the whole time of the scriptures and making sure they kept every little dot, jot and tittle of it were wealthy people.

The Pharisees tended to be wealthy laymen and because they had the wealth and the time and the leisure, they could give themselves to it completely. And so again, this reinforced the idea that righteous men were wealthy men.

And then that leads very easily to the misconstruction that so wealthy men must be righteous men. God must be pleased with them. So this is one reason why the apostles were, the disciples were astonished at his words.

[8 : 41] When he says, how hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God? This is completely at odds with what they would imagine. The disciples were astonished at his words.

But Jesus answered again and said unto them, children. And this diminutive, this affectionate term. The only other time, or one of the other times of Jesus using this, John's account of the gospel, remember, where they're out fishing on the Sea of Galilee.

And Jesus says, children, have you any meat? Have you caught any fish? And, you know, a likely translation or appropriate kind of colloquialism nowadays, lads, have you got in a bit?

And it's simply to say, listen, lads, don't get sucked in with the things of this world. How hard it is, how difficult it is for them that trust in riches to enter into the kingdom of God.

Now, trusting in riches is really just another way of what everybody thought. They thought, well, we have this wealth, or so-and-so has the wealth. The rich young ruler has the wealth.

[9 : 40] So that must mean God is pleased with them. That must be what it is. The very fact that possessing the riches must mean that he's okay with God. And they're trusting not so much in his life, or in his behavior, or in the way that he conducts himself, or in his faith.

Although the rich young ruler was a very devout, faithful man. But they're saying, he's got the wealth, so he must have the godliness as well. Trusting in riches. And a lot of people did it.

And a lot of people still do it nowadays. And we can fall into it, you know, even with church-related things. You know, don't we tend to say, well, if God is blessing this church, or this congregation, or whatever, then it must be booming.

It must be bursting at the seams. And we look at those that are big, big, going to say, oh, God must be blessing those. And we make the assumption that success and prosperity is the blessing of God.

And I'm not saying that's always a wrong thing to do in church terms. I'm saying that we do build our ideas of success and blessing and prosperity in a this world context.

[10 : 51] And part of the problem, Jesus said, of trusting in riches, is that it sucks you into the world and its values. It anchors your soul to this world.

Now, an anchor is a great thing if you're a boat or a ship that is likely to drift on the surface of the sea. It's not so great if you're trying to get up and get moving. You have to haul up the anchor first.

You have to loose the ties that bind you to the seabed. Now, likewise, if your heart is anchored to this world, it is much, much harder to let go of this world.

And eventually, we must all let go of this world. It is said of the diarist of the 18th century, Samuel Johnson, when he was shown round at a stately home or castle, and, you know, beautiful furnishings and paintings and the gardens so beautifully kept, and he's reported to have said, these are the things that make it hard for a man to die.

To leave behind this kind of wealth and estate and treasure, and so it's hard to let go. But we are taught consistently in Scripture that we must be ready to let go of the things of this world.

[12 : 09] It also, it causes you to assess everything in terms of the bottom line. What is the profit I can get out of this?

How can I best, you know, maximize my profits or my assets in this world? It causes you to regard everything in earthly, worldly, financial or business terms.

As somebody said, you know, long ago, to know the price of everything and the value of nothing. But also, it brings with it, great wealth brings with it, enormous responsibility.

Not many people are actually up to the responsibility that goes with great wealth. Because you will always be assessed by two criteria.

People will always think in terms of, first of all, how did he get it? And secondly, what did he do with it? Now, it has been said, of course, although it's only an earthly proverb, nobody ever made an honest million in their life.

[13 : 16] You can't actually become too wealthy in this world without having trodden down other people in the process. Well, that's just me. We leave that aside. But the fact of the matter is that how we acquire our wealth is one thing that we'll be assessed on, but also, more importantly, perhaps, how did we use it?

What did we do with it? Now, Jesus has said to the rich young ruler, this is what you should do with your wealth. You've got the opportunity to give to the poor. You've got the opportunity to improve the lives of others who have nothing by using what the Lord has given you.

And he went sadly away. Because the fact of just following Jesus alone wasn't so attractive to them as what he had. And Jesus says, Now, there are a couple of possible ways Jesus might have meant this.

The most likely is the literal sense. The camel was the biggest animal with which the Jews of that time would have to deal. They didn't really have much experience of elephants.

But other than that, camels are big creatures, big, heavy creatures. Now, you cannot physically fit a camel through a small space, let alone the eye of the needle. That is almost certainly what Jesus meant.

[14 : 42] Some commentators have suggested that, you know, in a city wall, there was a great big main gate through which all the main traffic passed. And then when those gates were shut at night, there was a wee postern gate beside it that one individual person could squeeze through if they had to, to get in and out of the city if they had to.

But it was easily guarded. And it wasn't easy to get a person through, let alone could you ever get a massive, huge camel through it. They said that this little postern gate was sometimes referred to as the needle.

And the door is the eye of the needle. So you're trying to force a camel through this tiny little way as though it's, you know, theoretically doable, but it's not perhaps impossible if it's a small camel.

But, you know, that's as maybe the other. The thing is that it's reckoned that by some that the Greek word, and remember that the New Testament is written in Greek, kameios, which is very similar to the word that you have for camel, also means a hawser or a cable of a ship, one of these big, massive, thick ropes that would haul in the sails or else be used for the anchors or whatever.

And as though you were trying to sort of thread this massive, thick cable through a tiny, wee eye of a needle. That's another possibility. But, you know, these are just sort of issues on the side.

[16 : 01] Almost certainly Jesus meant this literally. He meant you can't fit a whopping great camel through a needle's eye. It is impossible.

The disciples said, well, nobody can do that. So who in the world can be saved? If you can't fit a camel through the eye of a needle, nobody can be saved. Also remember, they didn't turn around and say, oh, that's okay, because we're not rich.

We're fine. So we can be saved. The poor can be saved. Those who are down in us can be saved. They didn't think that because remember that all of us are rich in comparison to somebody.

You know, rich is a relative term. If I think of myself as poor because I don't have this, this, and this, there'll be somebody else who'll look at me and think, no, he's rich because he's got that, that, and that.

We're all rich compared to somebody. So the disciples don't turn around and say, oh, well, that's okay. We're poor, so we'll be saved. They thought, well, who in the world can be saved then? Because rich is a relative term.

[17 : 01] Now, Jesus doesn't make any bones of it. He doesn't say, it's okay, guys. You'll be all right. Or look around you. Look at the poor. They'll be okay. Look at the beggars. Look at the suffering. Look at those who have nothing.

They'll be the ones to be saved. He said, no, with God, this is impossible. With men, this is impossible. But with God, all things are possible. Now, this is a verse we often pass over and don't recognize.

But it is a statement of doctrinal weight here with Jesus. It is impossible for men to save themselves. It is impossible for a human being to do anything that will get themselves into heaven.

Now, with men it is impossible to be saved. But not with God. For with God, all things are possible.

So there is no point us coming either towards the end of our lives or at any stage of our lives. And to say, well, I hope I'll be okay. Because, you know, I haven't lived a bad life.

[18 : 04] And these are the good things I've done. And these are the bad things I've done. Well, I hope that the one will outweigh the other. And at the end of the day, if they don't, oh, well, wink, nudge. I hope the Lord will have mercy on me.

It doesn't work like that. With men, it's impossible to be saved. You haven't done anything to merit your salvation. I haven't done anything to merit my salvation.

I am saved by the blood of Christ and nothing else. It is God who has delivered and redeemed and saved me. And likewise, it is God who has redeemed and saved every one of the saved apostles, every one of the patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, all those who are redeemed, the saints of the Old Testament, the saints of the New, every believer since then is saved only by the grace of God and the blood of Christ.

With men, it is impossible to be saved. But not with God. For with God, all things are possible. Now, the thing is as well, that God is no man's debtor.

Nobody can say, oh, well, I've done this much for the Lord. I've done that much for the Lord. Although, Peter comes a wee bit closer. He says, oh, wait a minute, though. Hang on. We've left everything and followed you.

[19 : 23] Though we have left all and have followed thee, Jesus answered and said. And notice what he says. He doesn't say, you're right, Peter. You're okay. You're in. He says, there is no man that hath left house or brethren or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands for my sake and the gospels.

But he shall receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses and brethren and sisters and mothers and children and lands with persecutions and in the world to come eternal life.

But many that are first shall be last and the last first. And there's that wee warning, that wee almost kind of sting in the tail to Peter. You know, you may have been one of the first to follow me. But, you know, many that are first shall be last and the last shall be first.

Also, we should notice that Jesus is not talking about the leaving behind of sins. Nobody's going to be able to say, oh, well, I used to be a really bad tempered addict and I used to be an adulterer.

I used to be this and I used to be this. But now I've left all that to follow Christ. So I should be okay. We're not talking about leaving behind sins. But rather, all these things that Jesus is listing here are things which are perfectly lawful loves and indeed duties.

[20 : 41] Because if you left your house, there's nothing wrong with having a house. You leave that behind for the gospel's sake. It's a duty, a burden, an honor, a love, legitimate love, your home.

But you leave that behind to follow Christ if you do that. It says, our brethren, our sisters, our father, our mother. You know, these are lawful, legitimate loves.

Lawful, legitimate relationships. Almost duties. You have duties to your father and mother. Duties to your home. Duties to maintaining your family and so on. It kind of might surprise some people how far down the list wife comes.

You would think, oh, surely wife should be top of the list when Jesus is talking. I would suggest to you that one reason that wife comes so far down the list is not because they were compared with in importance.

But because Jesus himself is talking from his perspective. Jesus doesn't have a wife. Some of his disciples perhaps didn't have wives. He's talking, I would suggest to you, first and foremost, from what he has also left.

[21 : 45] He has left his home in Nazareth. He has left his brother, his mother, his father, we assume, his earthly foster father. We assume to have been dead by then.

He didn't have a wife. He didn't have children in that sense. Some of his fellow, his apostles did and so on. But this is the list that he gives. These are legitimate loves.

Legitimate relationships. And it's not a case you say, oh, well, that's it. I'm throwing these over and I'm following Jesus. But it is rather a case of putting Christ before all these things.

There is a hierarchy in duties and in relationships. And Jesus mentions this. You know what he says about marriage, for example, previously.

He says, you know, for this reason shall a man leave his father and mother and cleave unto his wife, for the queen shall be one. Now, what he's saying there is, as the law also recognizes this man, when you are, you know, unmarried, your father and mother, your parents are your next of kin.

[22 : 53] If they are dead, it might be your brothers or sisters. If you become married, your spouse becomes automatically your next of kin. They go to the top of the list of your kin, of your relationships, of your responsibilities as well.

What he's saying is if you're going to follow Christ, you're going to follow the Lord. He has to come ahead of all of these things. It's not illegitimate to have your home or your family or your job or the things you love.

It's saying, I would suggest to you, that if you're putting Christ first, there may come times when you may be called upon to choose which of these comes first, which of these is going to take priority.

And it may be, for example, in someone's life, maybe they are lawfully, legitimately, perfectly, honorably in love with somebody, but either they are converted or the other person is converted or well, and one partner isn't.

And then you say, well, do I love them knowing that they will take away from my love for Christ or do I keep myself for Christ? And then hope and trust that if the Lord wants me to have somebody else, there will be somebody who shares my love for Christ or do I risk going into a relationship that will draw away some of the love for Christ or not?

[24 : 16] Now, these are hard things. These are difficult things. They're not light and easy. It's not very important to say, oh, yes, this is what you should do. For every single one of these testings and trials, there is a breaking of the heart.

There is a tearing almost of the very soul and the fabric of our identity. But what Jesus is saying is there is no one that has made those decisions and that choice who will lose out because of it.

He shall receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses, brethren, sisters, mothers, children, and lads with persecutions. Persecutions.

Think for the example of Paul there. Now, Paul, no doubt, when he was converted, his Pharisee family and background would have shut their doors against him, would have rejected him and probably disowned him.

But he could travel throughout, you know, Syria and Turkey and Greece and what have you. And wherever he went, there would be churches of believers who would throw wide their doors to him, who would welcome him.

[25 : 26] There would be mothers in God. There would be children in the Lord. There would be those who he had brought to faith, who regarded him as their father in God. There would be sisters in Christ and brothers in Christ.

There would be children in Christ and brothers in Christ and sisters in Christ and sisters in Christ and sisters in Christ.

And when he comes first, then God is no man's debtor. We shall receive abundant recompense in this world.

But persecutions with it. There's one commentator that's put it, you know, with this persecutions that comes the honesty of Jesus. Jesus, the gospel is never offered as a bride.

It is not a case or a quid pro quo. Well, you gave up this, so I'm giving you that. It's not all in this world that we get our settlement, that we get our reward or whatever.

[26 : 44] It's never a bride, but it is always a challenge. The Lord is saying, this is the potential cost. But somewhere along the line, you may be called upon to decide whether I am more important than your home, than your children, than your family, than your husband, or your wife, or your son, or your daughter.

You may be called upon to decide exactly where I come in the priority of your life. Friends, Christ must always come first. Because whoever we put above Christ, we have made that thing or that person into our idol.

We have made that thing or person into effectively our God. And we may try to tell ourselves, oh yes, but I want to have Christ and this person.

I want to have Christ and keep all the things of this world. What the rich young ruler wanted to be told was, yes, keep these commandments, do this, this, and this. You can follow me.

You can keep your wealth. You can do everything as well. You can have it all. And heaven too. But Jesus put his finger on the one thing that can't ignore was this young man than faithfulness to God.

[28 : 00] Somewhere within each of us, there will be that thing, that quantity, that aspect of our lives, which is a potential threat, a potential obstacle, which we love so much.

That if Jesus said to us, this is what I want you to let go. We might argue, oh Lord, come on, why? Why do I need to let this go? Why can't I just have this and? Why can't it be a both and?

Why does it have to be an either or? Can't possibly make sense that you want me to let go of this. And when we've done all our ranting and raving and screaming and shouting and arguing with the Lord, eventually we still have to decide whether or not he comes first before this particular thing or person or aspect of our lives.

I'm not saying it's always going to be everything right down the line. Jesus is going to say, got to get rid of that, got to get rid of that. But there may come a time when he calls upon us to choose.

The gospel is never a bride. But it is always a challenge. And Christ must always come first. If he is not the Lord of all.

[29 : 14] Then in a very real sense, as the saying goes, he's not the Lord at all. But many that are first shall be last. And the last shall be first.

Now these verses are rich promises. But they are also a warning both to Peter and to all the other disciples and to us. That it is God's judgment which ultimately matters.

Who is going to be last? Who is going to be first and so on? And not last. We are not to look to the rewards of this passing world. But to the blessings of eternity.

We look at this world and we say, oh, God is obviously blessing that person in their job or their career or their congregation or their life or their bank account. And we think God must be pleased because look at this success.

Look at this blessing. And in that sense, we're no different from Peter and the rest of the disciples. We assume because there is success, blessing here in this world, God must be pleased.

[30 : 13] God sees not only this tiny little section of time. God sees eternity. The last shall be first.

And the first shall be last. We cannot say, oh, so that means so and so is first. That means so and so is last. These things we leave with the Lord. They were going in the way.

They're in the public road up to Jerusalem. And Jesus went before them and they were amazed. And as they followed, they were afraid. And he took again the twelve and began to tell them what things should happen of them, saying, Behold, we go up to Jerusalem and the Son of Man shall be delivered unto the chief priests and unto the scribes.

And they shall condemn him to death and shall deliver him to the Gentiles. And they shall mock him and shall scourge him and shall spit on him and shall kill him. And the third day he shall rise again.

Now we are so used to thinking of Jesus' enemies as being all one entity. That we miss the fact that Jesus is talking here, first of all, about the leaders and rulers of his own country and religion.

[31 : 23] The chief priests and the scribes. The rulers of the temple. The very pinnacle of Jewish temple society. The very people who ought to welcome a Messiah. Who ought to identify with a rising Jewish star as Jesus was.

But rather they shall condemn him to death. He'll be delivered unto them. Remembering the betrayal. And they shall condemn him to death and shall deliver him to the Gentiles.

And that can only mean the Romans, of course. It doesn't mean the Persians or the Greeks or whatever. In the context of Palestine, first century Palestine, that means the Romans. There is then a cooperation between the Jewish rulers and the Romans.

Who are normally at loggerheads with each other. But they are cooperating with the betrayal and death of Jesus. And very unusually so. This is the third time in successive chapters that Jesus is reiterating this point to his disciples.

Now, of course, it's in verse 32 that it comes in here. But, you know, verse 31 is not inapplicable. The last shall be first, the first shall be last. Why do I bother even saying that? Well, for this reason.

[32 : 31] That it may help in remembering the reiteration point that in Mark's account of the gospel, we have it at 8.31, 9.31, 10.31.

8.31, 9.31. The 10 is actually 32. But it's easier to remember if you think it is. If you're looking for it. Oh, chapter 8.31. Oh, look there. He's talking about it.

And his delivery up to death. And then he's rising again. Then again, it is at 9.31. Again, in the successive chapter. And he's prophesying again his death. Chapter 10.

Okay. It's technically 32. But if you find verse 31, you'll find 32. So it's comparatively easy to remember that way. These three times he is hammering home the point on the journey up to Jerusalem.

They can't say they haven't been told. And yet here he is, spelling it out for them. And the third day he shall rise again. They're getting it, but they're not getting it.

[33 : 29] Because here we have James and John asking. Saying, well, Lord, okay, it's coming close. It's coming close. When you come into your kingdom. When you come into your kingdom, Lord.

Can we sit on your right hand and on your left hand? Do whatever we ask for you. And Jesus says, you don't know what you're saying. You know not what you ask. Can you drink of the cup that I drink of and be baptized?

Or the baptism that I am baptized with? They say, we can. Now, as some commentators have pointed out. At least one of those two disciples would have been right at the cross with Jesus' mother.

Looking up at the crucified Jesus. And could not have missed the fact. That as Jesus goes through what he must go through.

To enter into his kingdom. On his right and on his left are not James and John. But two bloody crucified thieves. Breathing out their last.

[34 : 30] This is the shame. The suffering. The agony. And they're saying, yes, yes. We can go through it. And then looking at it. And seeing the real cost of the kingdom.

That they blithely want to enter into. Now, there's an awful lot in this passage. An awful lot in this section here.

One of the things that I would suggest that we recognize here. That whilst the disciples, you know, the other disciples then, they get annoyed with James and John.

And we think, well, how could they possibly have been so insensitive? You know, Jesus is talking about his death, his resurrection. And here they come in and say, well, Lord, while you're at it, can we sit on the right hand and on the left while you come into your kingdom?

And on the one hand, you know, forgetting that whilst, yes, Jesus may take up various different positions of reigning and judging in heaven. He is described, as I've mentioned in the past, he's described as sitting on the right hand of the Father in glory.

[35 : 33] Which, apart from anything else, means that on his left hand is the Father. If he is at the Father's right hand, then the Father is at Jesus' left hand in glory.

It is an incredibly bold request. They say, well, actually, God the Father, just move us out slightly. And I'll take up this position. And my brother on the other position.

And we think, how can they possibly do this? How can they possibly ask this kind of request? We won't be able to finish tonight the depth of this request here.

But I'd just like us to recognise one thing. And that is that with all this ambition and this sort of cringable, you know, authority that they're asking for here.

We want to curl up with embarrassment and the idea that Jesus has just been talking about his crucifixion. Here they are making this request for themselves. How can they possibly be so heartless?

[36 : 36] How can they possibly be so ambitious? We've got to remember that the apostles, like all followers of Jesus, they are flawed individuals. This ambition that they seek for themselves, it is nevertheless, whilst it's looking at a kingly messiahship, an earthbound messiahship, it is also a faith-filled request.

These apostles are recognising Jesus is going to come into a kingdom. This is the Messiah. We believe in him. And we are certain that he is going to come and reign and be the king of kings and lord of lords.

And boy, we want to be part of that. It is a faith-filled request. It is a request, though, of loyalty and love. And yes, it's cringable.

And yes, it's really bad, the timing. And it's so almost greedy, it sounds like. And completely missing the point of what Jesus is talking about. But the apostles, the disciples, like believers everywhere, are flawed individuals.

We think of Thomas, and we think, oh, doubting Thomas. Oh, how terrible. Jesus says, you know, oh, Thomas, you've only seen because you have touched and believed. But blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.

[37 : 53] And we think of Peter denying Jesus. We think, oh, we would never do that. We don't know ourselves until we are put in those situations. The whole reason Peter denies Jesus is because he has loyally gone into the very lion's den of the chief priest's house.

And to sit with those around the fire and to be there. Neither than any other disciple was willing to go that night. And Thomas, who we think, oh, doubting Thomas. In John 11, remember, when Jesus is going to go to Lazarus and he delays.

And then finally he decides, like, I'm going back into Judea. And the disciples said, look, they're trying to kill you, Lord. Don't go back into Judea. He says, we've got to go. And Thomas says to the others, if you look it up in John 11, it says, come on, let's go that we may die with him.

Expecting death themselves. And it's Thomas who says, if he's going, we're going to go. Even if we die, we die with him. This is the loyalty and love of these disciples.

It is not an either or. Either they are saints of the Lord or they are flawed, fallen sinners. They are flawed, fallen sinners. And they are saints of the Lord.

[39 : 06] See, most of us, most of us may be conscious of the worst of our own sins. But most of us, likewise, are unaware of habits or temperaments or character defects, which may be glaringly obvious to others.

But, you know, most of us, if we're confronted with them, say, you know, you're very, you're very such and such. You're very temperamental or you're very impatient or you tend to do this habit or whatever. No, I don't.

Because we're not aware of it. We don't recognize most of the character flaws or defects in ourselves that are so obvious to everyone around us.

We may be conscious of explicit sins. But we're not conscious of flaws in the way that others can so easily see them in us.

And our tendency is simply to deny them. But they are nevertheless real. They are real in us. The flaws, the defects, the failures, the character defects in each of us.

[40 : 13] And it is not that we have these things despite being followers of Jesus. The fact of the matter is we are all these things. And we are followers of Jesus.

Jesus. And the Lord loves his children just as they are. He does not want them to remain with all their rough edges and their flaws and their defects and their sins.

He wants to ripen them and shape them and mold them for glory. But the fact of the matter is that every single one of God's children has their defects in them.

James and John and Peter and Thomas and Andrew and all the apostles and every single one of us. We can all think of believers and saints.

We have known, oh yes, they were very godly. But you know, boy, they had some temper. Or so-and-so, she could be really gnarly. Or didn't get on the wrong side of so-and-so because they had such a temper.

[41 : 13] Or they were very bad at this or very bad at that. All these little defects, every single one of us has them. And we are not believers despite them.

We have become believers by God's grace with all of these defects. And God in his process of sanctification, yes, he is sanding down these rough edges.

And yes, he is molding us into vessels fit for holy use at last. But he does not wait for us to be shining and gleaming perfection before he loves us.

He loves us and calls us and saves us whilst we are yet sinners. And whilst we are still, in one sense, in enmity with them and very difficult to live with in terms of other people, this is what James and John are like.

They are defective apostles. But they are apostles nonetheless. They are sinners who are nonetheless saints. We are each of us, fallen and flawed souls, saved by grace if we are saved at all.

[42 : 29] If, my friend, you are waiting until all of these rough edges are smooth, until all these defects are worked through, until you are like a saint of the Lord before you are ready to cross that threshold and commit to Christ, don't wait that long.

With men, this is impossible. But with God, all things are possible. He will reach down to where you are, flaws and defects and all, and draw you to himself and enfold you in his own place, complete with all your character defects, complete with all your flaws and failures and temperaments, and sins too, which must be confessed.

that he will wash you clean in the blood of his own sacrifice, in the blood of his own cross. These are his apostles, and they are failures in so many ways.

We seek to be his children, and we too are failures. Thank God, it is for sinners, that the good news is said.

Thank you.