

Pentecost 21 / October 17, 2021

Mark 10:26-27

“Then who can be saved?” Jesus looked at them and said, ‘With man it is impossible, but not with God. For all things are possible with God.’”

Our gospel is the continuation of our reading last week. A young man approached Jesus to ask what he must do to inherit eternal life. He claimed outward obedience to the law, said he had kept the second table of the law and had faithfully loved his neighbors. Jesus said he lacked one thing and that he should sell his possessions, give the proceeds to the poor and follow Him; then he would have treasure in heaven. The man’s countenance fell and Mark says, *“He went away sorrowful for he had great possessions.”* Jesus commented, *“How difficult it is for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God.”* The disciples must have felt the rich had an inside track, because they were greatly perplexed and asked in wonder, *“Who then can be saved?”*

Who can be saved? Jesus said, ‘no one,’ at least by our own power and ability. Jesus answered, *“With man it is impossible.”* No matter how we exert ourselves to do good and how much we resist temptation and abstain from evil, we can never accomplish our own salvation. The young man who came to Jesus was probably a great neighbour. You would feel comfortable welcoming someone like him into your home! But his goodness wasn’t enough to bring him into the kingdom of God. In fact, his goodness was an impediment to entering the kingdom of God, because it blinded him to the sin within his soul. He saw no sin within himself and so he saw no need for a saviour outside of himself.

He should have known better! As a devout Israelite he should have known the words of King David in Psalm 51 *“Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity and in sin did my mother conceive me.”* As a student of the scriptures, he should have known that it is impossible for humans to atone for their own sin, or for the sin of others. In Psalm 49 Korah sang, *“Truly no man can ransom another, or give to God the price of his life...”* God sent Jesus to do what no one could do for her or himself. He sent Him to ransom our souls from sin and death, so we would receive what only God can give: forgiveness and salvation from sin and death. He is our Saviour and through Him and by the blood of His cross we receive forgiveness, are received into God’s kingdom and made heirs of eternal life.

Salvation is impossible for humans to attain. The wages of sin is death and death comes to everyone, because everyone sins and falls short of the glory of God. In ourselves there is no hope, but as Jesus said, *“All things are possible for God.”* All things are possible with God, especially the salvation of human beings. Human salvation is the very reason Jesus came into the world and partook of our humanity. He came to save us, not by words of wisdom, wise sayings, or by dispensing advice. He came to save us, by fulfilling the law in our place and offering Himself on the cross for the atonement of our sins. St. John wrote: *“He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins and not only ours, but also for the sins of the whole world.”* As St. Paul said, *“He is the Saviour of all people, especially of those who believe.”* This is what makes Jesus different from and superior to, any other human teacher or saviour. He is our God and Saviour!

Jesus was a great teacher, but when it came to the law, He didn’t teach anything different than other great moral teachers. The pagans knew the golden rule, *“Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.”* It is a maxim found in various religions and moral philosophies, throughout the world. It’s the moral law written on the human heart. People who say all religions are essentially the same, point to this as their proof. All religions are similar in their appeal to the moral law, but all religions are not the same, because Jesus is different than any teacher of the law. He is the fulfiller of the law, who lived a perfect live according to the law written on tablets of stone and on the human heart. He is the Saviour, who paid the debt for our sinfulness and moral failings through the blood of His cross. Jesus is much more than a moral teacher or human saviour. He is our God and Saviour.

Jesus’ interaction with the young man and subsequent conversation with the disciples, underscores the inability of humans to accomplish our own salvation and highlights our need for God’s salvation. We are prone to overestimate our spiritual condition apart from Christ. Writing to the Ephesians, but speaking to us as well and including himself, the Apostle Paul wrote, *“And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air.”* He says that before Christ came into our lives, we were dead, not physically but spiritually, in relationship with God. He says that before Christ made us alive in spirit in relationship with God that we *“were without God and without hope in the world.”* Much more than simply a “Good Teacher” as the young man called Jesus at the beginning of this gospel, Jesus is our God and Saviour, who has brought us close to the heart of God in forgiveness through the blood of His cross!

The young man who addressed Jesus at the start of this gospel didn't appreciate his spiritual condition or the impossibility of doing anything to inherit eternal life. He didn't see his need for a saviour and certainly perceive Jesus' nature as God's Son or see Him as our Saviour. He just wanted Jesus' advice as a good teacher. Jesus' advice was not what he wanted to hear. It was too expensive! The cost was too high! He wasn't prepared to give up everything to follow Jesus. He turned and walked away from both Jesus and eternal life. If we could truly appreciate our sin and perceive the serious effect it has on our relationship with God, we would better appreciate what a great gift He gives us in Jesus our Saviour.

Despite his sin and blindness to his spiritual condition, Jesus loved the young man. Mark says, "*Jesus looked at him and loved him.*" It must have grieved His heart when the young man counted the cost of following Jesus as greater than the benefits of following Him. He would have lost nothing following Jesus and would have gained brothers and sisters and mothers and fathers in time and life in eternity. Jesus said, "*There is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children...for my sake and for the gospel, who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time...and in the age to come eternal life.*" No matter what hardships we experience, we suffer no loss following Jesus. We gain, the fellowship of believers in time and life in God's kingdom forever.

How hard is it to be saved? Work it backwards from the cross. The cross shows the seriousness of human sin and the hopelessness of our spiritual condition. If Jesus needed to die on the cross for our salvation, sin must be a terrible thing. If sin is such a terrible thing what hope, what possibility, do we have of earning our own salvation by keeping the law, by serving the Lord, or by any other human means? As the Psalmist said the cost of redeeming a human life is too high and beyond our ability to pay. Left to our own devices we are without God and without hope in the world. But Jesus paid our debt of sin, became our Saviour through His sinless life and sacrificial death. As St. Paul said to the Ephesian jail keeper despondent at his sins, "*Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved.*" He offers salvation for all to receive. He gives salvation freely to all who believe.

Jesus counted the cost of our salvation and paid it gladly. Consider the cost! Our Salvation cost God His Son and Jesus His life. More than His life, our salvation cost Him the full expression of His divinity. He emptied Himself and took on the form of a servant. Our salvation cost Him the hardship of living in a world in bondage to sin, under the control of the devil and subject to death. Our salvation cost Jesus the suffering of the cross, the humiliation of being mocked, insulted and spat upon. More than anything else, our salvation cost Jesus the suffering of bearing human sin, the sin of the world. The cost was high, but it was a price He was willing to pay, because He loves us and every human soul! Nothing is impossible for God and the result is our salvation, offered for all to receive; received as a gift through faith in Him.

God bless us always with faith to believe! In Jesus' Name. Amen