

Everything Is Possible for God March 29, 2020

Matthew 19:16-26

16 Then someone came to him and said, "Teacher, what good deed must I do to have eternal life?" 17 And he said to him, "Why do you ask me about what is good? There is only one who is good. If you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments." 18 He said to him, "Which ones?" And Jesus said, "You shall not murder; You shall not commit adultery; You shall not steal; You shall not bear false witness; 19 Honor your father and mother; also, You shall love your neighbor as yourself." 20 The young man said to him, "I have kept all these; what do I still lack?" 21 Jesus said to him, "If you wish to be perfect, go, sell your possessions, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me." 22 When the young man heard this word, he went away grieving, for he had many possessions. 23 Then Jesus said to his disciples, "Truly I tell you, it will be hard for a rich person to enter the kingdom of heaven. 24 Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God." 25 When the disciples heard this, they were greatly astounded and said, "Then who can be saved?" 26 But Jesus looked at them and said, "For mortals it is impossible, but for God all things are possible" (NRSV).

I thought about talking about the pandemic that has gripped the world. But, I am sure you have heard enough of that by now. What we need is spiritual nourishment, finding comfort from the word of God.

The Scripture today takes place during some trying times Jesus. He is on his way to Jerusalem where he will face torture and death. Back in chapter 16 Jesus is outside the area when he has the first passion prediction and tells his disciples that he is going to start his journey to Jerusalem. In chapter 17 Jesus returns to Galilee where he has the second passion prediction. In chapter 19 Jesus has left Galilee and is not in Judea. So, what is happening is Matthew shows the travel from being out of country, to going into the country, to now being in the region. Jesus is physically getting closer to Jerusalem. Now he is in the region where Jerusalem is located. His time is approaching. As this is happening, large crowds follow him and he continues with his teaching ministry.

In today's Scripture there is a young man that came up to Jesus and asked him a question. "Teacher, what good deed must I do to have eternal life?" First of all I'd like for you to notice the content of the question. This person thinks that eternal salvation is a condition upon one good deed. It is like he is saying "Tell me the one thing I gotta do." Jesus tells him what he already knows; he has to keep the commandments. The man asks him "Which ones? This question amazes me. Which ones!? How about all of them!?" Jesus is cool. Jesus does not freak out or yell "What do you mean which ones!?" Jesus does not call the person a fool, or stupid. Jesus sticks with the law and lists 5 of the 10 commandments:

- 1 = can't kill anybody (#6)
- 2 = adultery is a no no (#7)
- 3 = stealing is against the law (#8)
- 4 = do not bear false witness (#9)
- 5 = honor your father and mother (#5)

The 10 commandments are found in Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5. Jesus teaches a lesson of Leviticus. It is a lesson on moral holiness. The 6th commandment "love your neighbor as

yourself” is found in **Leviticus 19:18**. Jesus is not teaching something new and different. Jesus is teaching moral lessons that are taught in Scripture but not followed by humanity.

The man proclaims he has kept all of these. Now, let’s take a minute and face the facts. Most likely the man is like you me. He has not kept all of them. He has kept some, or most, but not all. If anyone says that they have kept them all, they need to take a better look at the last one Jesus cited “Love your neighbor as yourself.” The man’s goal is perfection. Jesus gives him a very difficult challenge. Jesus tells him what is required for perfection. He has to sell his possessions, give the money to the poor, and follow Jesus. What Jesus tells him to do is actually what the disciples have already done. The man could not take it. He could not handle the challenge. The Scripture tells us that he went away grieving. When he heard the word he was sad. His issue was materialism. He had possessions and he could not let go of his possessions. He could not let go of his stuff. The problem with possessions is a matter of hoarding wealth. When you hoard wealth, it is an attitude of selfishness. Being selfish is a matter of looking out for myself at the expense of others; it is more for me and less for you. The man held onto his possessions. In his mind he had a right to it because he earned it.

Jesus knows that God created everything and that God intends for commonwealth. God’s resources are intended for all. The man refused to share God’s resources. Jesus uses this real life situation for another opportunity to teach the disciples that is hard for the rich to enter heaven. Jesus does not teach against making money, or having money. Jesus teaches not to hoard it; share your resources and help those who have less. They are in need because of inadequate human distribution of God’s resources. It is like going to buffet and the people at the head of the line get more and more of all the good stuff while the people at the end of the line go hungry. The problem is not a matter of wealth, it is a refusal to let go of your stuff. People have different things that block their path to righteousness. You have to let go of the things that block your path to salvation.

The lesson is one of faith formation. We humans cannot save ourselves. It is impossible for us to save ourselves. People were thinking that salvation is based on deeds. The man was thinking “I can keep all of my stuff as long as I make up for it by doing the one good thing that is required. It’s OK for me to hoard wealth as long as I do the one good deed that I must do to have eternal life. Jesus taught the lesson early in his ministry back in **Matthew 6:19-21** “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth ... But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven ... for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” Your treasure is not you possessions. Your treasure is the kingdom of God.

What we learn if key to faith formation. We cannot save ourselves. Then the question is raised, if we cannot save ourselves how do we get saved? Jesus tells us that it is impossible for us to save ourselves but it is not impossible for God. Everything is possible for God.