

Salvation: impossible

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Preacher: James Dancer

[0:00] Now, we are always looking as a culture for that silver bullet. We're always looking for! that one thing that's going to fix us. That one habit, that one diet, that one bit of medical! advice is going to heal us, to level up, to optimise. If anyone's got a silver bullet, by the way, to get the kids to eat their food, please tell me. I'm open to that. I'm all ears. Where does that thinking come from? Probably some 19th century German philosopher, but I reckon it's about a builder. Can we fix it? Yes, we can! I can fix it. I just need, all I need is that silver bullet. It's kind of the air we breathe, isn't it? Believe in yourself.

That's very Disney, isn't it? Believe in yourself. The answer's in you. You just can do it if you put your mind to it. But isn't that so exhausting? Isn't that so exhausting? Because you're always looking for something else, because really, they don't always work, these silver bullets do they? This thinking so ingrained in us, though, it's possible to apply this to God, to heaven, to getting to heaven, to having eternal life. Doesn't every world religion have some form of that thinking? We saw a little bit of that in Judas' presentation, didn't we? Walking on our knees, trying to do enough. And the answer from the man on the street is probably something similar to that, isn't it? Be good. Now, over the last few weeks, we've seen what life is like with Jesus. It started with rest. It started with joy. And it still is. It still is rest and joy. But listen to Jesus. This is his call to us. If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross, like Jesus, and follow me. It's joyful. It's rest. It's mingled with sacrifice. Lose your life now. Save it later. And there's probably a part of all of us, I think. No matter how long you've been a Christian, if you're a Christian today, where we can still try and be a bit like Bob the Builder and try and fix it ourselves, we kind of think we've basically got it, we can do it. Jesus completely dismantles that for us today. We cannot fix it. Salvation by ourselves is impossible. You might know that. This truth, though, is not just for people who don't know this, but for people who know this, to know it all the more. Salvation is impossible. We're not good enough. Firstly, we're not good enough. Now enter the rich, young ruler. That's the man that we see in this passage.

That's what theologians call him. And if I'd had to characterise him, well, I'd say he's rich. He's not the kind of Andrew Tate kind of rich. He's the sort of David Atherbrook kind of rich. You know, Mr. Nice Guy. And something else, he's really keen. He's always optimising.

Have a look at verse 16 in your Bibles. Look at verse 16. Teacher, what good thing must I do to get eternal life? Now, do you know what? If you ask me that question and you don't know Jesus and you're exploring, I am so happy that you've asked me how to get eternal life.

That is a great question. Here's where he's wrong. What good must I do? Do. Look at Jesus' reply. Verse 17. Why do you ask me about what is good? There is only one who is good. Do you know what kind of goodness you need, Jesus says? God level goodness. He's the only one who is good. And he's saying, is that you? Are you perfect? Only perfect people can earn their way. That might be really new to you. That might be so brand new. And it's probably demolished your whole worldview. And turned it upside down. That's what Jesus does. He reverses things. He flips things upside down. But it's about to get a whole lot more radical.

[5:01] Okay? And by the way, if that's not you, if you've heard this before, which is most of us, that's kind of usually what we draw from this account. Jesus is much more nuanced. It's even harder than we might think. And that's what he's trying to get us to see. We can't even love God enough. This is where we're going to spend most of our time. We can't love God enough. I'll look at verse 17 again. Jesus sets before him a test. If you want to enter life, keep the commandments. Test. And he says, which ones? Which ones do I need to keep?

Again, what's the silver bullet? I can do this. So Jesus goes through the Ten Commandments, that amazing law that was given to God's people back in the Old Testament to flourish.

You shall not murder. You shall not commit adultery. You shall not steal. You shall not give false testimony. Honour your father and mother and love your neighbour as yourself. That's a summary. And he says, come on, Jesus. Come on. I've obviously done Commandments 6, 7, 8, 9, 5 in that order, if you notice. I've kept all these. What do I still lack? Where's the silver bullet? Now, you might know this guy, a really famous Christian called Ray Comfort.

He is great. Okay. I really recommend him. He asks people on the streets these questions. He has a model. He kind of models how he talks to people on this event. And he gets everyone to admit they're not good enough for heaven. And they fail the test. Actually, Jesus is even more subtle. He's doing everything he can to try and get him to pass the test, or at least help him to think he's passed the test. Look at the commandments he picks. Look at the commands he picks, right? The outward, loving neighbour ones. And that's very helpful for the rich man to pass the test, because he sort of has passed it. Okay, fine. He's not done it perfectly. Fine. But he'd say, well, yeah, I helped the old lady across the road. And I'm not a liar. Of course, I'm not a murderer. I'm Mr. Nice Guy. And it's so interesting that

Jesus doesn't actually correct him. He noticed that. He doesn't correct him here. Look at the commandments. The Lord. The Lord. The Lord. The Lord. The Lord. The Lord. The Lord. [7:39] The Lord. The Lord. The Lord. The Lord. The Lord. The Lord. The Lord. The Lord.

And he's doing that to show him he fails at that test. Verse 21.

Jesus answered, if you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions, give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come follow me.

When he's asked, treasure your stuff or treasure Jesus? Worship your things or worship Jesus? Love your possessions or love Jesus? He treasures, loves, and worships his stuff, not Jesus.

[8:50] So he's passed the loving neighbour test, basically, right? But the one test he's failed at, the most important one of all, he's completely failed.

And he can't bring himself to leave his stuff. When the young man heard this, he went away sad because he had great wealth.

Now, this is not a general call for all of us to give up our riches. This is Jesus' basic call to follow him, but tailored to the rich man.

This is what I mean. Jesus says, if you want to be my disciple, take up your cross. And then what does that look like for the rich man? Sell your possessions and come follow me.

Love me. Worship me. But he loved his lovely four-bedroom house. He loved his nice, high-earning job.

[9:56] He loved his Apple Watch. His plans for a new extension. More than Jesus. His credit card was more precious than Jesus.

And when you fail that test, you are way off. You are way off. So, look, our silver bullet culture that we're in.

You know, ask the average person on the street what's needed to get to heaven. Be good. And what do people mean? They mean be nice, don't hurt people, care for people, all good things. But even if you could keep all the outward-facing ones perfectly, those commandments, if you want to have eternal life, you've got to love God. If you think you can get to heaven by being nice, this is another way of putting it, whilst ignoring Jesus the whole of your life, you've completely missed it. You've completely missed it. Who is your God? Who is your idol? Who do you treasure?

[11:12] Jesus wants our hearts. And that's nothing a human silver bullet can fix.

Have you heard something like this before? That sounds really good for you, but do you know what my problem is with Christianity? It's how science and the Bible fit together.

It's the suffering question. It's fill in the blank. And if that's your problem, that's a real problem? As in, it's not a fake problem.

Okay, that is a real problem for you. And there are not easy answers to all these questions. Okay? I think we think there are some helpful answers, perhaps.

But do you know what? Our deepest problem, our deepest problem, not that those other ones aren't problems, but our deepest problem, deeper than we realise, I think it's a blind spot for us, is always that we can't give up what we love.

[12:17] Jesus just doesn't look like treasure to us. He's not someone we think's worth worshipping. And because none of us are perfect, it applies to all of us in this room, whoever you are.

So I want to ask you, asking myself too, what is rivalling your heart for Jesus? What rivals Jesus in your heart?

What would you hesitate to give up for Jesus? Another way of putting it. What is more satisfying and precious than Jesus?

It might be riches, and there's nothing wrong with money. But it can be an idol with a particularly strong gravitational pull, can't it?

God is someone we depend on, we need to depend on. Money is something that we also kind of naturally depend on. They can compete. Even if it's not money, how would Jesus tailor his call to follow him to you?

[13:40] Go, put all your alcohol down the drain and follow me. Go, stop living with that person you're not married to, and come follow me.

They're a bit more serious, but do you know what? They're actually a lot of the time very silly ones. A bit like the rich young ruler. Go give up chocolate for the rest of your life, and come follow me.

Go give up sports, and come follow me. Go give up that hobby, and come follow me. Go give up that dream of your children having the best education to be the most well-rounded child, go to all the best clubs, and come follow me.

Go give up a nice life in Farnham to plant a church in Iran, and come follow me. That's maybe what Jesus would say to me, and I would hesitate.

And it's crazy, isn't it? Because most of these things are good things, right? But they can be God things.

[14:52] They can be God things. And none of us can let go. This is Indiana Jones. I don't know if you've seen this. They just found a treasure.

I think it's the Holy Grail or something. And the character there, she's a lady there. She's Elsa. She has a choice. And she's there to hold on to Indiana Jones, to safety, or kind of get that bit of gold. It's like this. Do you know what she chooses? Well, she chooses the treasure, and she falls to her death. Our idols have an ironclad grip on us, don't they?

We cannot unshackle ourselves from them. And even when the most satisfying, most wonderful, most amazing offer of freedom stares us in the face.

Come have me. I'm the most treasured thing ever to you. We take one look at Jesus, and we take one look at our idol.

[16:01] Nah, I love this. When the young man heard this, he went away sad because he had great wealth. Do you know what?

Being good is the first hurdle, and we don't even get over that one. The problem is so extreme. It is impossible. Impossible. In fact, it's laughably impossible. Have a look at verse 23. Then Jesus said to his disciples, Truly, I tell you, it is hard for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of heaven.

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. Now, I've got Cheryl's really lovely embroidery here.

If you let me borrow. And I've got a little needle here that she uses. And you can kind of barely see it. It's so small, right? And have you seen how big camels are? They're huge, massive humps.

[17:09] It ain't getting through there. Okay? I promise you that. And it was so funny. Juan did a really good talk on this at Lounge. And we didn't have quite the budget for camels.

So he got a suitcase and a chair and was kind of wrangling. No, he can't get through. It was great. It's laughably impossible. It's laughable that people in our situation could even think they could enter the kingdom of heaven.

Verse 25. When the disciples heard this, they were greatly astonished and asked, who then can be saved? Who then can be saved?

And this is the point, you see, because this guy is the best. He's like top class Israel. The nicest is the nice.

Mother Teresa looks bad compared to him. So they're thinking, if he can't be saved, what hope is there for us? Verse 26.

[18:20] This is where Jesus has been building up to all along. Verse 26. Have a look at it if you can. Jesus looked at them and said, with man, this salvation, this is impossible.

This is impossible. Don't just need one more silver bullet. One little rung on the ladder extra to get to the top. You are right at the bottom.

I am right at the bottom of the Grand Canyon looking up, having tried everything to get out, and we've strided and we've tried and we've tried to be good enough.

Actually, all the sides of the Grand Canyon are dripping with oil. You can't get out. And you slump down and you just think, this is impossible. This is impossible.

And you know your fate. Do you feel this? Do you feel this? Do you feel the complete and utter laughable impossibility of salvation with you?

[19 : 35] If this is your first time feeling this, I want you to hang in there, okay, because there is hope. But the big thing we all need to grasp today as we walk out those doors is that feeling of impossibility for all of us?

Because this is the heart posture of the current disciple. And I want to say, I think this is what Jesus is saying, this actually is discipleship.

This is discipleship. And this is a really surprising thing for me this week. You know, this book is kind of not just written for people like the rich young ruler, who's not really heard this stuff before. It's written for current disciples, isn't it? Right? And the most eye-opening thing I've seen in my study this week is that Jesus doesn't actually land this teaching for the rich young ruler. Where is he? He's gone off.

Who's he land it for? He lands it for the disciples who already follow Jesus. And he says to us the same way, Christians of 1, 5, 10, 30, 50, 70 years plus, actually this is the core posture running through all discipleship to know more than ever that salvation is impossible for you.

[20 : 59] This really shapes how I think of that thing, that thing, discipleship. What do you think of when I say that word? It's about what we do, how we act, how we think, how much we have to lose our lives now for Jesus, sacrifice.

And do you know what? That's actually, that's most of it. That is actually most of it. But there's a kind of posture running through it all, overarching it all, and covers everything that says this, I still know that salvation is completely impossible for me as a Christian.

How do you know this is your basic posture? Maybe how much we repent of sin? Is there anything in your life that you think that you need to repent of?

Does your sin put you in the Grand Canyon? Or just in a little ditch? And my idols aren't that hard to break from. Maybe you're not astonished by Jesus anymore.

Yeah, he saved me. Underlying that, perhaps it wasn't that hard for Jesus to save me. Now, talking from personal experience here, it's so easy to think that we can basically do it.

[22 : 29] We can basically do it. We're basically good enough. Do you know what I mean? We basically have things in check. We're basically mature now even, you could think.

It's so dangerous because when you start to think like that, well then, why do you need Jesus? Our basic posture with life with Jesus is, it's impossible with me.

I'm not remotely good enough. With Jesus, I am the bottom of the Grand Canyon. I cannot, cannot get out by myself. That's the mature disciple who knows that, who that covers everything and everything they do and say and think and sacrifice for.

But here's the hope because once you know that and come to terms with that day by day, it also makes being saved by Jesus all the more sweeter because when you're at the bottom, you're unable.

Would you know what happens in this passage? The next bit of verse 26 is a rope that dangles down in front of your eyes and you can get out and that rope is Jesus and when he comes down to that lower place, he offers to save us there and we can't save ourselves and look at this, verse 26, just go away with this ringing in your ears.

[24 : 07] Jesus looked at them and said, with man this is impossible. But with God, all things are possible.

Don't butcher this verse. It's not saying England can win the World Cup. They put their mind to it. Salvation is impossible but even salvation is possible with God.

Jesus comes down to rock bottom to the desperate, to the broken, to the helpless and he says to each one of us in that complete pit of despair, you haven't done enough but I have.

You haven't done enough but I have. I've been good, I've loved my father perfectly, I've worshipped and adored him, I've walked that cruel cross for you to forgive, to rise for you, to give you life, to ascend for you, to pour out my spirit, to give you a new heart.

And I'm going to make salvation possible for you by dragging you out of this impossible situation by myself. He doesn't help us help ourselves.

[25:18] He does a miracle and gets the camel through the eye of the needle and he saves us. Listen, are you striving?

Are you working? Are you earning your way? Are you trying to do enough? Are you walking on your knees? Are you looking for that silver bullet?

And it never comes. Come to Jesus. Come to him. He's the silver bullet. And when we come with our hands empty and we drop that file of good deeds and we abandon that silver bullet we're trying to shoot and we come with nothing in our hands that we bring, only to the cross that we cling, Jesus brings us salvation that was completely impossible, now made possible.

Isn't that great? And doesn't that salvation, this is what I want you to understand, doesn't that salvation feel all the more wonderful because you know what he saved you from, how impossible it was.

That's how you keep clinging to him, treasuring him, trusting him, our basic posture as disciples before the king.

[26:45] Let me pray. Amen. Lord, we want to recognise that we can't do enough, we can't do enough good and we want to recognise that that's just the first hurdle, Lord, that we can't even get over that and we can't love you and treasure you.

Well, thank you for the Lord Jesus, thank you for him making the impossible possible for us and we pray that we would feel that impossibility. That will be our basic posture.

We pray that in Jesus' name. Amen.