

All Things in the Christian - Prof. John Angus Macleod

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[0 : 00] Let's turn now to the chapter we read in Mark's Gospel in chapter 10. We can read again at verse 26.

And they were exceedingly astonished and said to him, 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. All things are possible with God. Imagine this young man.

He was young. He was rich. He is standing. He was a ruler. And he began the day so well. He actually had a thought in his heart that you, I'm sure, would admire.

Here is somebody who's thinking about eternal life. Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life? A wonderful thing.

[1 : 23] Think of your neighbor. Think of those folks in the community. Which of them is thinking about eternal life? And yet here is somebody, and he's not only thinking about it, he's not only asking about it.

But this is something that's central to where he is at that point in his life. He wants to inherit eternal life. He wants the very best that God could give.

And he thought that Jesus was the answer. And he thought that Jesus was the answer. Again, what better? Imagine people in the community talking about eternal life and said, I know who has the answer to that question.

What must I do to inherit eternal life? Let's go to Jesus. I thought Jesus was the answer. But then when he comes to Jesus, Jesus turns his heart inside out.

He comes to him, and Jesus says, Why do you call me good? You're thinking about good as wrong. No one is good except God alone. And then he lists the commandment from the second table of the law.

[2 : 38] Not the first table of the law, which in some ways are harder to discern, but the second table, which are easier to see. And he quotes these to this man.

And this man says, All of these, teacher, I have kept from my youth. So he's turned his heart inside out.

Here's now, he's saying to the Lord Jesus, All these commandments you've mentioned, I've thought about them all my life. And I am now telling you to your face, Jesus, teacher, I have kept them all from my youth.

Jesus brought him to the place where he's open about his own heart, about his own commitment, his love for God's law, his love for God's commandment.

All of these I have kept from my youth. Jesus turned his heart inside out, and then he turned his world upside down.

[3 : 49] He says to him, Don't you love the phrase here? Jesus didn't turn away. He didn't say, Ha, really?

He looked at him, straight in the face. He loved him. And he said to him, One thing you lack.

Go sell all that you have, and give to the poor. You'll have treasure in heaven. Come, follow me. Sounds relatively easy.

No hard words in that sentence. It's a very simple command to utter. Just do this one thing. Just one.

Not even ten, not five, not two, just one thing. Go, sell everything you've got. Give it all to the poor, all the proceeds from it.

[4 : 57] You'll have treasure in heaven, I promise you. Then just come and follow me. When he heard that statement, his life was turned upside down, and he realized he couldn't do it.

He was disheartened by the saying, and he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions. would he have done it, would he have done it, if he only had a few possessions, I wonder?

Would he have done it, if he had been a poor man? Would he have given away, the little that he had, like the widow, who was putting in, the little mites, into the treasury tin?

would he have given away, everything he had, if he was poor? We're not told. What we're told is, that he couldn't give, his great possessions away.

He had so many, he couldn't give them away. He wanted eternal life, he was told, he could have treasure in heaven, he was told, he could be a follower of Jesus, and Jesus himself said it, but he went away, with great sadness.

[6 : 29] That's not what we're preaching on tonight. It's what follows that. He goes away sad, because of his wealth.

I wonder if that's the end of the story, for this rich, young ruler. I tend to think, that there's more.

And especially that phrase, he looked at him, and loved him. But look at what Jesus says, after this.

First of all, he labors home, and this is our first point tonight, the destructive hold of riches. The destructive hold of riches.

He looked around, said to his disciples, how difficult it will be, for those who have wealth, to enter the kingdom of God. The disciples are amazed. Children, he says to them again, how difficult it is, to enter the kingdom of God.

[7 : 32] especially for those who are wealthy. The destructive hold that wealth has upon people. Many people rich under God's blessing in the Bible.

Abraham, wealthy. Isaac, wealthy. Jacob grew in such wealth when he was with Laban. David, wealthy.

Solomon, incomparably, great wealth. Lydia, wealthy. Zacchaeus, wealthy. Many people are described as rich, and blessed by God.

Yet many, many more, are hindered, by the riches. They are dangerous. They have a way of deceiving people.

They have a way of distracting people, and keeping them from, as we're told here, entering the kingdom of God. What is it that wealth does?

[8 : 41] You, some of you, older ones, you lived in Barvis, and the areas around in this island. When this island was extremely poor.

You lived at a time when you didn't have running water. When you didn't have electric lights. When nobody hardly in the village had a car. When you would walk out to the pits to cut them.

You lived at a time when one pair of shoes would be in itself a blessing. You didn't have a whole wardrobe. You lived in houses that were thatched.

Not because they were quaint, but because that was all that could be afforded. It grew, and you could use it. You needed it weighted down with stones because of the storms in the area.

And inside the black house, poverty. Such poverty. And where could you go to be healed when you were unwell? How many doctors were in the area?

[9 : 49] Poverty. Poverty. When you went to school, what was the education system like? What was the heating in the school like? What was it like in those days of great poverty?

Poverty. Were more people following the Lord then? Well, one thing is for sure. We know a time of blessing when the poor were looking to God and riches wasn't holding them back.

See, the thing about wealth, it can deaden self-sacrifice. Something about wealth. If the Lord says, I want your heart for Christian service.

When you're wealthy, sometimes that wealth deadens the call to self-sacrifice. When you're wealthy, and the Lord's saying, come, I'll give you eternal life and treasure in heaven, and you look around at the world's offers of more riches, and you can't get away from it.

The world is offering such wonderful riches, and that in itself is so attractive that you can't see the light of His glory.

[11 : 15] It's dimmed because the glory of the world is even greater. Jesus, when He was tempted by Satan, He was told He would give Him all the glory of the world, the kingdoms, and all their glory.

You can have it all. And Jesus said, no. He's in the minority. The vast majority offered riches finds Him so attractive.

You may say to people, if you carry on this way, holding on to riches, you will lose heaven, and hell will be your destiny.

And it's as if they're numb to that teaching. Just numb to it. You beg them, and you say, but your house is lovely. You've got all this wealth.

You've got all these possessions. But you're going to have to leave them all behind. Like Job. Like his family. You're going to have to leave it all and go into the coffin with nothing.

[12 : 31] And it's as if you hadn't said a word. Anesthetized. Numb. Dead. Wealth as a way of ruling people's lives.

Ruling our time. Ruling our vocation. Ruling our commitments. How many things you do just because you've got a little or a great deal of wealth.

How is it affecting your life? What you do with your time. What you do with your holidays. What you do with your employment.

Your commitments. Your priorities. See, wealth has such an enormous destructive hold upon people.

The world has never been wealthier. Never been wealthier. Lewis has never been wealthier. The destructive hold of riches.

[13 : 46] And like this young man, people walk away sorrowful. Great sadness. Because they had great possessions.

And they couldn't bear to make the right choice and follow Jesus. the destructive hold of riches.

Secondly, the shocking limit of human ability. Jesus labors at home. How difficult it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God.

His disciples were amazed at his words. Children, he said, how difficult it is to enter the kingdom of God. It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.

They were exceedingly astonished. Exceedingly astonished. And they said, who can be saved? And Jesus said, he looked at them just as he looked not so long ago at the rich young ruler.

[14 : 58] He looked at him. Now he looks at them and he says, with man it is impossible. It's impossible. Get that into your head, into your heart.

It is impossible for the rich to enter the kingdom of God. Indeed, you'll notice in the way that Jesus puts it in verse 24, children, how difficult it is to enter the kingdom of God, whether you're rich or not.

It's not only difficult. The word difficult there is a very interesting word. It's something as if it was doubly hard, doubly fed, so full, you can't do it.

The picture here of a camel going through the eye of a needle. It's not possible. It's impossible. Don't I, don't buy into the idea of the needle gate in Jerusalem that a camel might just be able to squeeze through.

No. This is talking about something that is impossible. The rich cannot enter the kingdom of God. Left to himself, left to herself, a rich man and a rich woman, others too.

[16 : 27] will not be able to enter the kingdom of God. Left to himself or herself, they will walk away like the rich young ruler.

They'll walk away, sometimes like he walked away, desperately sad, gloomy, but more often, they walk away happy, gleeful, and they won't give a thought to what they're leaving behind by way of the gospel.

Jonathan Edwards has a lovely way of dealing with this. He says, would you be able to spin the planets and the galaxies? You know about the planets so near to us in our own solar system.

Could you keep them going? No. What about the galaxies with a hundred billion stars like our own and another hundred billion galaxies with a hundred billion stars in each one?

Could you make them spin? Of course you couldn't make it. I can move my finger, but I'm not doing a thing to the planets or the stars or the galaxies.

[17 : 49] I can't do it. I couldn't scatter the stars, says Jonathan Edwards. No. I couldn't drive the winds, not for a moment.

I couldn't fill the oceans with water, couldn't do it. And that's the truth about the gospel.

Coming into the kingdom of God, a rich man, it is impossible for that person to enter into the kingdom of God and indeed for everyone else too.

You may find that you're being offered the gospel, the gospel invitation, and you're being asked perhaps to accept the gospel invitation.

You say, yes, I can do that. But along with the invitation comes the demand that Christ wants to be Lord of your life. God's love.

[18 : 52] And if he's not Lord of all, he's not Lord at all. And what is it that you and I say in response to that? It's impossible.

It is impossible. How do you apply that to conversions? How many of you folks here are from the Barvis district?

How many more are out there who are unconverted? Older ones, middle-aged ones, spouses, the children?

How many even in this community? How many down to Ness and over to Stornoway, over further to the west side?

how many across the mainland, across the continents? How many people? Can we see any of them being converted?

[19 : 57] Jesus says these shocking words, with man, this is impossible. It's impossible. Cannot be able in any way to convert anyone, to draw them away.

can't do it. Speak as sweetly as you can. Speak as gently as you can. Get the best techniques, get the loveliest IT, get everything going, but you won't be able to bring anyone to enter the kingdom of God.

You won't be able to break the hold of whatever it is that holds them back, especially riches. what about discipleship?

Once somebody does profess to be a Christian, can you make that Christian to grow as a Christian, to mature as a Christian, to hold loosely to the things of this world?

No, you can't. Can you call people to go out into the mission fields, not so much the mission fields far away, but the mission fields at home?

[21 : 16] Why is it that in the free church we have hardly a candidate for the ministry? Why is it that the theological institutes of education throughout the country are being starved of people for the ministry, for training for the ministry?

Where are they? people who are going to do it? It's impossible with man. The call to Christian service. On a Sunday night, my wife and I have developed this, what we think is a lovely practice.

She reads me a book, so she'll read and I will listen. At the moment, we're reading the book by Helen Rosevear, The History of Wick. Boy, that's inspiring.

Going all the way back to C.T. Stud, here are people, and they, they gave up so much to serve the Lord.

And I'm asking, where is it happening now? With man, it is impossible. The shocking limit of human ability.

[22 : 32] Sadly, there are times when the Christian church seems to be quite unaware of these words of Jesus. It is impossible. It is impossible.

And we think we can engineer things, manoeuvre things, get things right. No, no. It's impossible.

We're right to be like the disciples. Who then can be saved? With man, it is impossible.

And Jesus is looking at you, straight in the face tonight, and he's saying to you, about your loved ones, about your children, about your grandchildren, about your spouse and your next door neighbour, he's saying this to you, with man, it is impossible.

are you hearing these words? The shocking limit of human ability. Satan doesn't want to hear these words.

[23 : 43] He would much rather that we talked about human possibility. But the Lord, I believe, wants us to hear about human impossibility.

So the destructive hold of riches, the shocking limit of human ability, the glorious extent of God's ability.

All things are possible with God. Jesus looked at them and said, with man, it is impossible. Who then can be saved?

He looks at them, with man, it is impossible, but not with God, with God, with him, all things are possible.

All things are possible with God. And they all must always be interpreted within his context. So here, who then can be saved?

[24 : 47] Man can't do it. Can God do it? He most certainly can. Is his ability able to extend to this, that he's able to bring rich people into the kingdom of God?

Yes. Is he able to bring poor people into the kingdom of God? Yes. Is he able to bring them to grow as Christians, or will they always be scarcely saved, barely saved, so worldly?

No, he's able to bring them on. all things are possible with God. He can change the heart in conversion.

Of course he can. He can bring people to move from death to life. Are you a Christian tonight? Did you engineer your own conversion?

Did you bring yourself from death to life? No, you didn't. No, you didn't. You may have been running away, or you may have been content to sit in the pew, or content to sit at home, and the Lord took you, and he snatched you like a brand out of the burning.

[26 : 06] He breathed life into you by the word and by the spirit, and you found yourself looking into the face of God, and you couldn't keep your eyes on him.

You couldn't keep your ears away from his word. He changed your heart inside out. He turned your world upside down, but you didn't walk away.

You were converted. You were turned around. You were born again, and you cannot say it's because of me, or it's because of the minister, or it's because of the evangelist, or it's because of the technique.

No. With man, it is impossible. It's all God. With God, all things are possible. What about your discipleship, and you're growing as a Christian?

Those of you are Christians. What battles have you had? What temptations have you faced? What things are you thinking and doing? you were doing them when you first came to know the Lord, and you thought, I'll never, ever be able to break away from these things.

[27 : 21] Has the Lord dealt with you? Has he reached into your life? Has he ever left you to yourself? Yes, there are times when he does. When he does leave you to feel your own meagerness and poverty, your weakness of strength, the thorn in the flesh comes, and you're left there staggering, and then, just like with Paul, you hear these beautiful words, my grace is sufficient for thee, and he draws you, and he draws you forward, and you find yourself giving up things that were a hindrance to you.

You find yourself giving up the riches, holding loosely to them, ready to die, ready to leave it all behind.

How many people do you know who are indeed the Lord's people? They were rich, they are rich, but they're not living for their money.

They're not living for the love of money. They hold loosely to these things, knowing that they'll have to let them go.

There may be sins that you're dealing with and the Lord, by grace, is giving you strength to deal with. Other people you find impossible to love as a Christian, and you hear the Lord saying, go and love that person.

[28 : 57] Go and look at them. Love them in my name. Give them a cup of water. Go and visit them. Do it in my name.

And they may have hurt you. They may have hurt you so badly, but you still say, I will. Maybe not straight away, but the Lord keeps drawing you, and you say, how I managed to do that is only by the grace of God.

I find it shocking sometimes when Paul says, I labored more than all of them, his fellow apostles. Yet, he says, not I, but the grace of God.

He couldn't deny what God enabled him to do in Christian service. Are any of you ready to go and be God's servants, to be elders, to be deacons, to be preachers of the gospel?

Who's going to tell people in your community and in the days to come, who's going to be in these pulpits, in these schools?

[30 : 17] Will it be you? Is the Lord calling? Is he calling you at least to pray that others might come?

God can do it. Boy, he can do it. He can call people. I'm reading the biography by Elizabeth Elliot of Amy Carmichael, this young Northern Irish lady who ends up there in India and Donavur and gives her life to children that were not harsh, not biologically, but her heart yearned to rescue children of another race from the most awful bestial things and she gave her life to it.

Who? Who could do that for her? Elizabeth Elliot who wrote the book? Who gave the grace to Elizabeth Elliot to bear the widowhood that followed the death of her husband?

God does. God does. Your minister, he could tell you stories, I'm sure, about God doing the impossible.

And we need to talk about God doing the impossible in conversion, in discipleship, in mission. The destructive hold of riches, the shocking limit of human ability, the glorious extent of God's ability, finally, the wonderful testimony of God's grace.

[32 : 13] Look at this. Jesus looked at them and said, with man it is impossible, but not with God. for all things are possible with God.

And then Peter, he speaks, he began to say to him, look Lord, we left everything and followed you.

See, the rich man, he walked away from Jesus to his wealth. Peter says, he and his fellow disciples, he says, to come to think of it, we left everything to follow you.

Just think of that. It's as if he's thinking a fresh thought at this moment. He began to say to him, sir, we, Lord, we have left everything and followed you.

I wonder if Peter had ever realized so clearly how different he was from that rich young man. When he saw the rich young man walking away and Jesus saying, it's impossible for the rich to enter the kingdom of God.

[33 : 32] Who then can be saved? With God, all things are possible. And Peter says, you're right. You're right. We, he says, we have left everything and followed you.

What did they leave? Well, Jesus mentions it. There's no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands.

They left their homes. They left their relations. They left their spouses. They left their families. all great cost.

In Mark and Matthew, they always have this addition, they left their fields. Big things in the first century. In Luke, it's all about personal relationships.

They left all their personal relationships behind. They weren't the priority. We have left everything and followed you.

[34 : 39] The rich man went away. He had so much wealth and he left Jesus. Peter and his fellow disciples, they had all these things.

They had lands, they had homes, they had relationships, but they were not as important as following Jesus.

We need to recover that, what they left. But what did they receive? Look at what Jesus says. Truly I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands for my sake and for the gospel who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands with persecutions and in the age to come eternal life.

What did they receive now? they receive now many times more than they left. It was the Hudson Taylor who said, I have never managed to engage in self sacrifice as a Christian.

When I try to sacrifice, I find that God gives me more than I would ever give away. And that's the story here.

[36 : 04] We've left all and Jesus says, yes you did. That took a miracle. But more than that, when you left, you were blessed.

You left all of these things and you receive a Christian family. You receive Christian fellowship. You receive Christian love. You enjoy Christian contentment in poverty, and in want.

And with persecutions, yes. You, when you become a Christian, a break happens with the life that you had before.

God calls you with this powerful, powerful, life-changing call. And you break with the hold of the things of the past.

It's not that you still don't love your wife. or your husband, or your children, or your mother, or your homes, or your fields. But they will never have the top place in your life.

[37 : 14] No. But God will make it up. He'll give you a hundredfold. Can I ask, have you received a hundredfold?

Since you became a Christian, are you discontented with what the Lord has given you? Or are you yearning for what you left behind?

Is your mind filled with the thought, I wished I'd never followed Christ with all the things that I lost? Or are you saying, it's richer every year?

The love, the community, the fellowship, the presence of God in my brothers and sisters in Christ, there's something here that is so precious.

Yes, persecutions. Persecutions, strangely, are part of the gift.

[38 : 29] Persecutions are part of the things that the Lord puts. In many ways, they test and they convince you, even though it hurts, I cannot turn back.

I won't turn back. I won't turn back. Even though Job's wife wanted to be anything but a good wife, when he was suffering so much, he wouldn't listen to her.

He wouldn't listen. And that's maybe your experience too. naked came I from my mother's womb.

Naked shall I return there. And that's fine. I have a hundred fold. Now, but then he goes on to say, and in the age to come, eternal life.

Eternal life. When do you get eternal life? life. If you're reading John's gospel, the emphasis is you have it right now.

[39 : 48] You move from death to life now. You've got life now. And what is that eternal life?

Knowing God through Jesus Christ. That makes life worth it. love. But if you're in Matthew, Mark, or Luke, they include sayings of Jesus that talk about life to come.

Because you see, what you have now is so special. But there is a consummation. It's a consummation.

see, any of you who have lost loved ones, they're there in glory tonight.

Well done, good and faithful servant. Enter into the joy of the Lord. Even now, they are tasting of life to a degree of consummation.

[41 : 00] And on the morning of the resurrection, oh, what life. What life to have a pure soul and a body that will never hold us back.

Looking, thinking, loving, obeying, like God's own Son. life indeed.

Of course you'll never lose. And why will you not lose? Because God does the impossible.

Remember I said in introducing one of the Psalms, when you put your foot on that road, who will enable you to keep on going till you reach home?

maybe there are some of you who have yet to profess their faith in Christ, and you're listening to this foolish, foolish thought that says, but if I begin, I don't know if I will be able to continue.

[42 : 17] I don't know if I will be able to continue. continue. Of course you won't be able to continue.

But you're not being asked to do it in your own strength. Kept by the power of God. He takes you, he holds you, and there's nothing more precious than that.

God, listen, you never lose by following Christ. He gives you grace to leave behind what needs to be left behind by way of priority.

He'll give you grace to grow as a Christian beyond your wildest dreams, and he'll give you grace to serve him with your lips, with your ears, with your eyes, and with your feet.

And maybe, just maybe, from some of you, there will be beautiful feet who will be heard by others as they come with the sound of the gospel.

[43 : 30] A death has come into your own community. Who will tell the people who will die next? Will it be you?

Ah, you think, it's impossible with man to write, but not with God. With God, all things are possible.

May the Lord bless his word. Our heavenly Father, we entrust ourselves to you, the God of the impossible. people.

The work that you begin, you will bring it to completion. Those that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength.

You are the one Lord who is not only mentioned in the poem about the footprints. You are the reality. You are the one who always carries us, even when we think we are walking ourselves.

[44 : 39] You are the God, the beautiful God of the impossible, because of what you have done in and through Jesus Christ.

Lord, bless to us your word. We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. Let's close now by singing Psalm 138 and page 180 and sing Psalms.

Psalm 138, just three verses in conclusion from verse 6. Page 180. Although the Lord God dwells on high, the lowly person he protects, whereas the proud and haughty one he knows afar of and rejects, although I walk a troubled path, your tender care preserves my life, you raise your hand against my foes, your right hand saves me from their strife, the Lord will certainly fulfil.

For me the purpose he commands, you love and Jewish forever, Lord, preserve the works of your own hands. See that last line?

Preserve the works of your own hands. It's God's work. Let's sing these verses to his glory. Amen. Amen. Amen.

[46 : 08] Amen. Amen. Amen. Although the Lord God dwells on high, the lowly person he protects, whereas the proud and hearty one, he knows afar, rough and rejects.

Although I walk a strong path, your tender care preserves my life, you raise your hand against my foes, your right hand saves me from their strife.

The Lord will certainly fulfill for me the purpose he commands.

Your love endures for forever, Lord, preserve the works of your own hands.

Now may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

[48 : 16] Amen. Amen.