



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

6420 Churchill Way | Dallas, Texas | 75230 | t 972.239.5371 | believerschapeldallas.org

The Sermons of Dan Duncan

Mark 10:23-24

Mark

“The God of the Impossible”

TRANSCRIPT

Good morning. If you were here last year and saw Mr. Rosen and listened to him speak you know he's a very interesting man, a very good speaker, and I urge you whether the rabbi shows up or not to come and it will be a very enjoyable time and enlightening time next Saturday morning. The passage this morning is Mark 10. We'll look at verses 23 through 34. You remember from last week the Lord had his dialogue with the rich young ruler and in the course of that discussion he had with that young man who showed a great deal of interest in eternal life; he came seeking eternal life. He came asking the Lord what good thing he could do to earn eternal life. The Lord told him, after this discussion had continued for a time, to sell all that he possessed, give the money to the poor and follow him. And that statement has troubled a number of people – a number of Christians – because it seems as though the Lord was advocating a kind of work salvation. So if you do one good thing you'll be saved.

And what the Lord was doing was giving to that man a work salvation. He wasn't advocating that as a way to salvation, but this was a man who had come to him with the idea that he was a good man, that he had kept the law. The Lord reminded him of the commands and he was convinced that yes, he kept all of them from his youth up. He was a keeper of the law. There was no problem there. But he wanted one more thing in addition to the law – some great act he could do that would really assure him that he was saved and would give him entrance into the Kingdom. And so the Lord, after having discussed these things with him, said okay – in effect – you want to come in by the law. You want to come in by doing something. Here's one thing for you to do. Give away everything you have and become a poor man and follow me.

And that was the thing he couldn't do. The Lord was seeking to show this man that you cannot, it is impossible to come to him and enter into the Kingdom by works. And this was the way he demonstrated it to that man because he walked away. He walked away very disappointed. And whether he got the Lord's point of view or not, the point that the Lord was making was it is impossible for you – and for anyone – to come by their deeds into the Kingdom of God. And so this man has walked away and we pick up the account in verse 23, and Jesus looking around said to his disciples, “How hard it will be for those who are wealthy to enter the Kingdom of God.” And the disciples were amazed at his words, but Jesus answered again and said to them, “Children, how hard 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.”

And they were even more astonished and said to him, “Then who can be saved.” Looking upon him Jesus said, “With men it is impossible but not for God. For all things are possible with

God.” Peter began to say to him, “We have left everything and followed you.” Jesus said, “Truly, I said to you there is no one who is left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or farms for my sake and for the gospel’s sake but that he shall receive 100 times as much now in the present age – houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and farms along with persecutions and in the world to come, eternal life. But many who are first will be last and the last first.” And they were on the road going up to Jerusalem and Jesus was walking on ahead of them. They were amazed and those who followed were fearful. And again he took the 12 aside and began to tell them what was going to happen to him saying, “Behold. We are going up to Jerusalem and the Son of Man will be delivered up to the chief priests and the scribes. They will condemn him to death and will deliver him up to the gentiles and they will mock him and spit on him and scourge him and kill him and three days later he will rise again.”

May the Lord bless this reading of his word and bless our time of study together. Let’s bow now in a word of prayer. Gracious Heavenly Father, we do thank you for the privilege we have to gather together and open up this magnificent account of our Lord’s ministry. And we pray that as we do so you would instruct us a teach us about many things; about the nature of salvation, about the life that is demanded of us. Remind us, as our Lord does, of the impossibility of life, but the fact that you make it possible and Lord to look to you and cling to you. Help us to do that. Help us to gain a sense of our responsibilities, but to see them not simply as that – as duties – but as privileges to serve you and give us the desire to draw close to you and to make sacrifices because we are reminded that there’s no sacrifice that we can make that can even begin to compare with the rewards and the blessings that follow upon them.

So help us, Father, to gain some perspective on life as we look at our Lord’s instruction and be blessed greatly by it. Prepare us for the week ahead as we spend our time in study together that we might be built up in the faith and we might be prepared for what lies ahead, that we might be good and faithful witnesses before you. Thank you, Father, for the privilege, the blessing, of being called into this life and your family, for all the blessings that are connected with it – the blessing of prayer, the privilege we have to come before you not only at this time, but at all times to draw close to the thrown of grace and bring our petitions to you and bring our words of praise and thanksgiving to you. We don’t do that as much as we should. We confess that. Bless us that we might become more active in our prayer life. But as we pray now, Father, we remember those of our congregation who have needs and pray your blessings upon them. We pray for the sick and we pray that you give healing and encouragement and pray for Bob Nessick and pray that you would give him special encouragement and healing. And others, we pray for Glen Smith. We pray that you give him continued recovery from his surgery. Others, father, who are recovering, we pray that they would continue to do so. Give encouragement and give healing. Pray for those in financial need and those who have family problems. We pray that you meet those needs and give encouragement. Help them to look to Christ.

We confess, Lord, that we need your help at all times because even though periods of our life we’re not experiencing any noticeable difficulty, things are going well at work, we’re able to make provision for our family, we’re in good health, we tend to take those things for granted. Help us not to do that, Lord. We thank you for the health that you’ve given us and the provision that you make and help us to continue to realize it is a gift that we have out of your abundant treasury that you supply us with, and we thank you for that. So bless us in these ways, Lord, and bless us this evening as we come together to celebrate our Lord’s suffering and death, his resurrection and his coming again. We pray that you bless our meeting this evening, that it would be enjoyable and edifying and glorifying to you. We pray you bless our time now as we sing our final hymn and as

we spend time together in study. That it would be profitable. We pray these things in our savior’s name. Amen.

It certainly is an appropriate hymn to introduce us to our subject this morning which speaks of the all sufficiency of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. He uses even the trials of life to our benefit and he’ll never forsake us. There’s a story about Alexander the Great which tells that his coming to the city of Gordium in Asia Minor where the fabled King Midas had once held court. There he was shown a chariot that had been dedicated to Zeus with its yoke lashed to a pole by means of an intricate knot – the famous Gordian knot, a knot which no man had ever been able to undo. He was told that whoever could untie the knot would be lord of Asia. As the story goes Alexander pulled at the knot and yet it remained tight. Then he drew his sword and with one stroke severed the knot and he became lord of Asia.

Now I think there are times when as we consider the Christian life and all of its standards and its demands, it resembles a Gordian knot. It seems like a problem that we can’t unravel, something beyond us, something that’s impossible for us to master with its challenges that are really beyond us and the problems we often face in the Christian life that are like knots that can’t be untied. Just think about the life to which we’ve been called as Christians and our responsibilities. We’re to proclaim the gospel, which is a stumbling block to the Jews as we were reminded just a moment ago, which is foolishness to the gentiles. How can we possibly succeed with a message like that, with that kind of appeal to the world? That’s what we’re called to do, to take that message to a world that’s hostile to it. How can we continue in that ministry? How can we endure in that ministry?

Paul tells us in the same book in which he speaks of the attitude of the world toward the gospel in 1 Corinthians 4. He states that as a result of that ministry that he had and the apostles as a whole, they had become a spectacle to the world. They had become like a theater for the world. The world looked on them and ridiculed them as he goes on to state. They were fools for Christ’s sake. And we’re to take that gospel to the far ends of the world. We are to be willing to go out and become fools for Christ. That takes a great deal of courage. Nobody wants to be thought a fool. Where do we get that courage? Where do we get the humility to accept such ridicule? How is it that we are able to continue and maintain the kind of relationships that we are to maintain and to have just in our daily relations with one another? How do you love those who don’t love you? How do you maintain diligence at your job when your job has become somewhat dull?

How do you rejoice always, as the apostle tells us, when life’s a bit dreary and becomes a bit monotonous? How do we unravel that knot? And yet all of this and much more is what is expected of us in the Christian life. When I was in seminary I had a professor who was an Arminian. He didn’t like Calvin, didn’t like Calvinism. Never the less he made a statement that registered with me because it was very Calvinistic. He said, “The Christian life is a cruel life.” What he meant by that was humanly speaking it is an impossible life. If places demands upon us that we are not able to carry out in our own strength, in our own ability. How do you love your enemies? That’s impossible for the natural man to do. It’s impossible for the man or woman who’s been born again in and of themselves. How do you go to the far ends of the world and suffer and die for the sake of the gospel?

I think it is, in itself, a cruel life if that’s all we have, but that’s not all we have. And yet as you study and consider the standards and the demands of the gospel, I think we have to agree that they are beyond our strength and that’s why the words of our lord in Mark 10:27 are such a relief and give such encouragement and give us real perspective on life. The Lord says, “With men it is impossible, but all things are possible with God.” Those words, as one writer has put it, are the

antidote to despair and pride. Christian life is an impossible life, but the God that calls us to Himself is the God that enables us to serve Him faithfully. He is the God of the impossible. The impossibility of following Christ has just been illustrated by the impossibility of even coming to Christ with the disappointing departure of the rich young ruler. He had come to Christ seeking eternal life. He was an eager candidate for evangelism, but when the Lord invited him to sell all of his possessions and give the money to the poor and follow him, he couldn’t do it. The challenge was too great. It was his Gordian knot and so he went away sorrowfully because he was in bondage to things and he couldn’t break those bonds.

As he went away, perhaps still within the sound of the Lord’s voice, the Lord looked at his disciples and he said how hard it will be for those who are wealthy to enter the Kingdom of God. Hard because the security that wealth offers seems so great. The pleasures that it promises are so attractive and to risk all of that for a life of trusting in an unseen God and unseen promises seems to men to be foolish. It did to this rich man. He couldn’t see letting go of his riches and holding onto Christ. Wealth is such a colossal distraction that men of themselves cannot get beyond it. Even men who have an earnest desire to obtain eternal life cannot get beyond it and so the Lord says it’s hard. It’s impossible for the rich to enter the Kingdom, a statement that amazed the disciples. They were stunned by what the Lord said. It was the conviction within Judaism that material prosperity was a sign of divine blessing and that was some justification. You notice that as you read through the Old Testament because there you see that oftentimes the Lord showed his favor upon Israel by giving them material blessings. You see it in the lives of the patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob. God made them very rich men, as He promised to do.

You see it in the life of Job. He’s a very wealthy man and in a great test God takes it all away from him. But when he passes that test, what does God do? He blesses him two-fold. So it certainly seems that God’s blessings rest upon those who are wealthy. And then you read through the Book of Deuteronomy, the Book of the Covenant, it’s filled with the promises of material blessings. If Israel is faithful he will set them above the nations. The fruit of the ground would abound for them. The flocks and herds and their children would increase. Sickness and disease would be removed if they were faithful. So you do see God’s blessings in material things to the nation of Israel. But all of that, I believe, needs to be understood in light of the nature of the Old Testament age. It was an age of types and shadows. It was an age when the people of God were in immaturity, so they were taught with very tangible, visible things, spiritual truths. God illustrated those spiritual truths through material things such as lambs and altars and beautiful buildings and material prosperity. The danger was that rich men would become secure in their prosperity, trust in their prosperity in turn for more and that happened. That happened quite often as a matter of fact.

In Psalm 73, Asaph puzzles over the prosperity of the wicked. So while it’s true God’s blessings were witness to material prosperity that came to the nation it was also true that oftentimes it was the wicked who prospered and so wealth was not always a sign of faith, not always a sign of blessing. But the disciples couldn’t see that other side of things. For them wealth was a commentary on a man’s character, a sign of blessing. And here they saw a young, healthy, energetic rich man – a man with position, a man with religious interest. He’s seeking eternal life. They see this man not entering the Kingdom, turning away from the Lord very disappointed. And so they were wondering if he couldn’t make it with all of his privileges, all of his advantages, who can make it? They were amazed. They were startled.

And the Lord only strengthens his point with an almost humorous example of the impossibility of the rich entering into the Kingdom. Verse 25: “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.” C.F.D. Moule has

paraphrased this: “It is easier to thread a needle with a great big camel than to get into the Kingdom of God when you are bursting with riches.” Various attempts have been made to play down this proverb that the Lord has given. I think a very popular suggestion may be one that you're familiar with is to identify the eye of the needle with a small gate leading into Jerusalem, through which camels could only go by kneeling down and having their burdens unpacked and then crawling on their knees. That makes a nice picture – a nice illustration of the rich man with all of his wealth laying aside, giving it away and with humility coming before the Lord. But there is no proof of a needle-gate such as that. The evidence that would support such an interpretation is very doubtful.

And it misses the point. The Lord was deliberately using fantastic imagery here, what one writer has called a violent metaphor, to express the impossibility; the absurdity of the rich entering the Kingdom. He was impressing upon the disciples that salvation from start to finish is not a human achievement. For even the most disturbing of men, as men count deserving, it is an impossibility. And if it's an impossibility for the rich, then certainly it's an impossibility for the poor. For all men it is an impossibility. And the disciples got that point which supports that interpretation of this proverb. In fact verse 26 states that they were even more astonished – and I think we can read into that even more discouraged – because they asked who can be saved? And that's the question they should have asked. That was the question the Lord was seeking to draw out of them. That's the very question that the rich young ruler should have asked.

And the Lord responds in verse 27 by looking upon them, Mark says. It's the same word that was used earlier of the Lord when he looked upon the rich young ruler with love. He fixes his gaze upon them and he says, “With me it is impossible.” Men can't break the spell of riches. They can't see through the material realm to the spiritual realities. They can't do it. It's impossible, the Lord is saying and that word must bear that meaning. It's impossible. Paul says the gospel is foolishness to them and a person can't believe in what he thinks is foolish. It's an impossibility to trust in the things that you think are foolish and are wrong. We can't do that any more than a blind man can see the things to which he's blind. Left to ourselves, we are helpless, we are hopeless, but we're not left to ourselves. With men it is impossible, the Lord says, but not with God for all things are possible with God. That's the Gospel. That's the message – the good news that we have been given. What we cannot do for ourselves God does for us. As Jonah said, salvation is of the Lord and that's the theme that we see here. We see it throughout the Bible from Genesis to Revelation.

Salvation is God's word. He and only He can save us. We can't earn our salvation by works. The rich young ruler has just demonstrated that. And I think it's also demonstrated the fact that we can't convince men to be saved by our evangelism. That's something we can do by being clever, by being very inventive in the way we present things and being very emotionally caught up in the presentation of the gospel. We can't bring men to faith. We have the responsibility to preach the gospel. We must carry that word to the outermost parts of the world, but it's not a task that we can fulfill in and of ourselves. We can call men to faith but they will not come if God is not also calling them in His irresistible grace and His effectual call. Men won't believe unless He creates the faith in their heart and he promises to do that. And that must be so. This is what the Lord says. It is impossible with men. And as I said, that word must bear that meaning. If there's any ability within us, the slightest ability within us, the slightest bit of life within us, then it's not impossible. That is an absolute term. It is impossible with men.

Just like Paul's use of the term dead in the transgressions and sins in Ephesians 2. It must bear that meaning – dead, lifeless, no ability to do it of themselves or ourselves. With men it is impossible and yet men must believe. Paul writes in Romans 5:1 that we are justified by faith. Only by faith do we have peace with god. Only by faith can we receive the forgiveness of sins. So

if salvation only comes by faith, and yet salvation is impossible with men, then God must secure the faith it justifies. And that’s essentially what our Lord teaches elsewhere. In John 6:44 for example, “No one can come to me unless the father who sent me draws him.” And with basically the same thought he says in verse 65, “No one can come to me unless it has been granted him, gifted to him, given to him from the Father.” If the father doesn’t give, no one can come. It’s a work of God. Now I think that truth should do two things.

First for the non-Christian, for the unbeliever it should shatter complacency about the gospel. I don’t think that this is a deterrent to the gospel at all. In fact I thin it’s just the opposite. A person really understands their condition. It should remove any kind of apathy toward responding to the gospel because it reminds us that our destinies are not in our own hands. We’re not in control of these things. We’re in God’s hands. A person who thinks that he or she can put off a decision about Christ to a later date, to a convenient time, is fooling him or herself. “Our later,” as one writer has put it, “Is God’s later.” All earthly and eternal circumstances are marked out by His design. There’s no room for apathy towards the gospel of a sovereign God. Things are not in our hands, they are in his and that means there is an urgency about the gospel and about these things. We are chosen by Him before we ever choose Him. And if we are to know that we have been chosen by him, then we must believe. That is the only way one can know and ultimately that’s not up to us and yet we must make that decision and the only way to do that is turn to Him and look to Him and to know that our destinies are in His hands and to cry out for His mercy.

It also speaks to those who have done that, to the Christian, because this is a great encouragement to us, an encouragement to evangelism. This is what one writer has called the great missionary hope. God will save His people and He will not fail and He’s going to save a multitude of people like the sands of the seashore, the dust of the Earth, the stars of Heaven. What an encouragement that is. He’s the God of the impossible. What it’s impossible for us to do He does for us and through us. And so we go out into our neighborhoods, into our communities, to the outermost parts of the Earth with the gospel in that great confidence that it’s His work and He will be faithful to it. But this is not only true in terms of missions and evangelism; it’s true in all aspects of the Christian life. From start to finish it is God’s work. We have our responsibilities and they are great, but we have been given the life of Christ through the presence of the Holy Spirit in us who always is at work in us both willing and doing for his good pleasure. Always at work in us.

And so as John Piper has written in his book *Desiring God*, “Christians leap like lambs over the truth that God has taken the impossible weight of new creation off their shoulders and put it on his own.” So it’s true. With men it is impossible, but not with God. All things are possible with God. That word possible is the antidote to despair. Now you would think that this would have been a great belief to the disciples, but it wasn’t. Peter couldn’t get his mind off the word impossible. That’s what impressed him and so he says in verse 28: “Behold, we have left everything and followed you.” Like that rich man, he was thinking in terms of deserving and earning God’s favor. He and the other disciples had made sacrifices. They truly had. They’d left their nets and their fishing boats, their businesses. They’d left the tax business. They’d left various forms of employment. They’d left the families. They’d been out with the Lord sometimes in harsh conditions. They’d been serving Him and doing so having made sacrifices.

But they’re wondering if with men it’s impossible. Are there no blessings to come? Has everything that they’ve done – have all of their sacrifices been for nothing? There seems to be something of a mercenary spirit in Peter’s words but he and the others, as I said, had made some sacrifices. They’d made great sacrifices. And the Lord doesn’t rebuke them – at least not harshly. The correction comes in words of great encouragement when he assures Peter that any sacrifice

made now will be far surpassed by blessings to come. In fact blessings in the present time, verses 29 and 30, we read: “Truly I say to you there’s no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or farms for my sake and for the gospel’s sake but that he shall receive 100 times as much now in the present age. Houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and farms along with persecutions and in the world to come eternal life.”

Does that mean, as we look at all those blessings – that 100-fold promise of blessings – does that mean that we can expect to get materially rich by living a sacrificial Christian life? If we give away the things that we have we can expect to get 100-fold in return and live quite comfortably? Obviously not. If you read the rest of the scriptures you know that’s not at all the Lord’s meaning. In fact, our Lord himself says about his own life, he says, “Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.” Why should we, as his people, expect anything different? In fact he says we’re to follow him and carry our cross just like him. The point that he’s making is not that we’ll become materially wealthy, but if by becoming a Christian we are deprived of our physical family, for example, it will be made up 100-fold in our new spiritual family, the church, with friendships that are far more meaningful than anything you can have in this world or our natural families. I think there is something of an exhortation to each of us that when someone comes into our church, he becomes spiritually bound to us and we have responsibilities to meet these kinds of needs and to take care of them.

And the Lord does, through us and in other ways provide materially for us. The scriptures promise that he will supply our material needs. In Philippians 4:19 Paul writes: “And my God shall supply all your needs according to His riches and glory in Christ Jesus.” And he will supply them perfectly in a far better way than a world can do that. In a day of company downsizings and layoffs, when banks are going broke and insurance companies are on shaky ground He’s far more reliable than all of the world’s institutions. But there’s more to His promise of 100-fold blessing than this. Some Christians are led to lonely missions. They spend years away from other Christians. They’re alone ministering to people who are not saved, so they don’t have that experience of Christian fellowship to the degree that you and I might have it. Others have been thrown into prison for their faith and they have lived in lonely isolation and deprivation. What the Lord is saying is this is true of them. So I think Christ is speaking of more than the new relationship that we are given in the church in saying that he himself will make up for every sacrifice we make. Whatever companionship and affection that we lose in following him he will more than make up for it in his companionship with us.

Paul experienced that many times. One example that comes to mind in Acts 18 when in the city of Corinth he lived a very lonely period in his life after meeting with resistance from the Jews who would not hear the gospel, who rejected it. The Lord appeared to him in a night vision and he said to him do not be afraid any longer. But go on speaking and do not be silent for I am with you and no man will attack you in order to harm me for I have many people in this city. That doesn’t mean I have a lot of Christians here who will give you some support, he means I have my elect ones there. They haven’t yet come to faith, but they’re going to come to faith through your ministry to them. I have other sheep. I’m going to bring them into the fold through your ministry. That’s security from harm, physical harm, and from failure in the ministry. It’s not our mission, it’s his and he guarantees its success. And this is the greatest fellowship. That’s what he promises to us as we live in obedience to him and follow the road that he’s called us to follow. The rewards of sacrifice are great, 100-fold he says.

In December of 1857, David Livingston was making an appeal to the students at Cambridge University and in the course of his address he said people talk of the sacrifice I have made in

spending so much of my life in Africa. He spoke of the difficulties, the anxiety, the sickness, the suffering, the lack of conveniences, the dangers that he faced and experienced. And he said that they do make a person pause and they cause a spirit to waver, but he said only for a moment. All these are nothing when compared with the glory which shall be revealed in and for us. And then he said I never made a sacrifice. That’s the spirit of the apostle. He wrote in Romans 8: “I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.” The Lord was looking at the future glory when he speaks in verse 31 of that future day when there will be a great reversal, when many who are first will be last and the last first. The temporal sacrifices of today will become eternal rewards in the future. That’s what he’s assuring his disciples of and us as well.

In 1 Corinthians 15:41, we have the suggestion – a very clear suggestion, I think – that there are really degrees of glory in the world to come and I’m sure when that time comes for us we will be very surprised by those who are exalted and those who aren’t. We’ll meet people who aren’t in the forefront but who are serving the Lord in a very quiet way that are making sacrifices that the Lord will bring them reward someday. But again, the Lord’s promise is not simply blessings to come, blessings in the future, there are blessings in the present age as well and he’s underlining those blessings in the midst of suffering and that is what is so incomprehensible; so seemingly impossible. But that’s what our Lord promises. John Piper whom I mentioned earlier gives examples of this in his book *Desiring God*. He writes of Samuel Zwemer, a famous missionary among the Muslims who sacrificed much in his service to the Lord, but he spoke of a sacrifice as a joy. In 1897 he and his family sailed to the Persian Gulf and they worked among Muslims in Bahrain. Their evangelism was largely fruitless. The conditions in which they lived were very oppressive. He writes of temperatures soaring regularly to 107 degrees in the coolest part of the veranda. This is before air conditioning.

And there were great tragedies in 1904, both of his young daughters died within eight days of each other. And yet, 15 years later he looked back on this period of his life and he wrote the sheer joy of it all comes back. Gladly would I do it all over again. That’s hard to understand. That’s hard to imagine. But in the greatest hardship, in the greatest disappointments and griefs of life, God gives joy. It’s an impossibility, humanly speaking, and I think the world doesn’t understand that. We have difficulty understanding it. But God does the impossible. Now if we’re not experiencing things like that in our lives it’s because we’re seeking our joy, our fulfillment, our security in what might be good things, but not always the best things. Maybe our spiritual pursuits are more casual than earnest. We don’t want to sacrifice our time, our entertainment for time with the Lord and study and in prayer in an attempt to seek his will for us and his road for us. We don’t want to make those sacrifices and yet the Lord is inviting us here to let go of those things and to enter into that fellowship because whatever sacrifices we can possibly make of our time or whatever, is more than made up, more than compensated, in the blessings of fellowship with him. A hundred fold he says.

Livingston was right. We have sacrificed nothing in our service for him. But Peter wanted to talk about sacrifices. He wanted to talk about all the things that he and the other disciples had given up for the Lord and so now the Lord will tell them of the sacrifice that he would make for them and in doing so he gives us the true measure of sacrifice. How much have we really sacrificed in our life for him? The measure of that is to look at what he sacrificed for us. Look at the cross and that’s what he directs our attention to. It was the time of the Passover. The Passover was drawing near and so the Lord and his disciples set out with a group of pilgrims for Jerusalem. Everything in this book is now moving toward that destination and what would occur there. They’d

been to Jerusalem before but the disciples recognized that there was something different about this journey. There was an atmosphere about it that disturbed them. Mark writes that the Lord began to walk out ahead of them, walk alone with a deliberate stride and an urgency and purpose to meet his destiny in Jerusalem.

Some have seen in this a fulfillment of Isaiah 50:7: “For the Lord God helps me, therefore I have not been confounded. Therefore I have set my face like flint and I know that I shall not be put to shame.” The Lord is inflexible in his resolve to do his father’s will in Jerusalem. We see that as he begins to march ahead of his disciples. Throughout the gospel, there have been attempts to turn him away from that, to turn him off the road from Jerusalem, to cause him to not go to Calvary, to turn away from it. But his face is set like flint to go there. It’s a vivid picture that Mark gives to us. He’s the only one who gives this picture to us. He was alone. He was walking by himself because only he could walk this road. Only he could make this sacrifice. It’s not something we could do for ourselves. Only he is qualified to make the sacrifice that he would make in Jerusalem. And the picture of him walking ahead of them evokes the image of the Savior leading his people with purpose, leading them to triumph, because their destiny was bound up in his and this image of leading his disciples reminds us of the good shepherd leading his sheep.

There’s something so solemn in the Lord’s bearing that it arrested the disciples attention and cast a shadow over the group. They didn’t see the shadow of the cross, but they evidently perceived something perilous ahead. That, or maybe they simply recognized in his inflexible determination to go to Jerusalem his power and his authority. But there was something awesome about it to them. Whatever it was it made a deep impression because Mark writes they were amazed and fearful. And it prepared them for what he had to say to them as he took them aside from the rest of the pilgrims and then informing them of what lay ahead in Jerusalem. This is the third prediction of the cross that Mark records and it’s more detailed than the others. In verse 33 he says, “The Son of Man will be delivered up to the chief priests and the scribes and they will condemn him to death and will deliver him up to the gentiles and they will mock him and spit on him and scourge him and kill him and three days later he will rise again.”

There are seven details that he gives or eight or six, depending on how you count them up. But there are a number of details in the Lord’s statement here which shows he had a clear understanding of what awaited him in Jerusalem. His sufferings and death would not take him by surprise. He knew everything that was going to happen and so we might ask the question how do we account for that knowledge? It’s not just that he has this vague impression that the Jews are hostile to him. If he goes up to the capital something bad might happen. Now he knows in detail what is going to occur when he arrives. So how do we account for that knowledge? Well we account for it from the fact that he is the son of God. Then how do we account for the death of such a person as the son of God? How do we account for him suffering so and dying? The only way we can account for that is our own sin.

They would go to Jerusalem, the City of the Temple, the place where sacrifices were made. There they would celebrate the Passover and there he would offer himself up as the Passover lamb. He knows what lies ahead in all of its detail and yet he continues on – continues willingly, voluntarily, setting his face toward Jerusalem like flint. As he said in John 10: “I laid down my life for the sheep. No one has taken it from me, but I lay it down on my own initiative.” That was his sacrifice for his disciples. That was his sacrifice for us, a voluntary sacrifice, a sacrifice of infinite love for his sheep. But the end was not death, it was life. Three days later he says he will rise again. For all of the shame and the suffering of his death, his death was not a defeat, it was a victory. And the resurrection is the announcement of that victory. We should never regard the

cross as a defeat and the resurrection as a victory. Instead the cross is where the victory was won. It was where God's wrath was exhausted and His justice was satisfied for every one of our sins. Everything was taken care of at the cross. He declares that. He says it's finished. All the work is done. That's where Christ obtained the forgiveness of sin for all who believe in him.

And that's where the Gordian knot, so to speak, of the Christian life was severed. Where God's impossible demands were made possible for us; where not only forgiveness of sin but the power over sin was obtained and the gift of the holy spirit was guaranteed. And the resurrection was the proof of all that, the proof that Christ had achieved his mission, that his sacrifice had been accepted and all of the blessings that he had secured at the cross would be given to the believer. As Paul declares in Romans 8:32: “He who did not spare his own son but delivered him up for us all, how will he not also with him freely give us all things?” If he's done the greatest for us, he's given his son for us, what more would he give to us? Because he's given his son for us he has pledged to bless us and keep us secure. Nothing can ultimately frustrate his good purpose for us. The God of the impossible is on our side working all things for our good. And Jesus has pledged to shepherd us through all the difficulties and dark valleys of this world and never let us go. He's ever with us.

So when we are plagued with evil thoughts, when we are tempted to sin, when our faith is weak and our resolve is slipping, when we began to feel drawn from the womb and we long for the things of this day and age rather than the things to come – as we so often are – then we are to look to our Lord. We're to cling to him. We're to say help me, Savior and he will and he does. We'll always find Christ a faithful and all-sufficient savior, sufficient to meet all our needs and bring us through this world and into the next and to present us to his Father perfect and faultless. This is the week of Passover when the Jewish people celebrate their national deliverance from slavery in Egypt, salvation from the angel of death because of the blood of the lamb that was placed upon their doors. What we know to be true is that Christ is our Passover. He's the deliverer. He is the lamb slain from the foundation of the world who has saved us from sin's penalty, who is saving us from sin's power and will certainly save us for the glory to come and bring us safely there. And we should think about these things this week, at this time, and remember who he is, what he's done, our security in him and take great comfort in that. Rest in him and continually look to him as our Savior. We are plagued by sin and plagued by weakness, bring it to him. Ask for his help and he will always give it. He is our Savior, the all-sufficient Savior.

Do you know him as such? Do you know him as your Savior? Have you believed in him? Do you want the God of the impossible for you rather than against you? Then if I you want him for you, you must come to him through His son, Jesus Christ. Thank him for what he's done on the cross, thank him for the sin that he has taken away. Trust in him as your Savior. And should you do that you will receive forgiveness of sin, future eternal glory and an ever-present companion. May God help you to do that. May He help each of us to look daily, continually, to the Lord. Shall we stand now for the benediction?

Our Gracious Heavenly Father, we do thank you for the great privilege that we have to study your word. Thank you for the great privilege we have to be members of your family. It is a work of grace because of ourselves we could not do it. With men it is impossible. So we thank you for that and pray that if there be any in attendance who don't know Christ as Savior that you might alert them to the impossibility of them coming in their own strength and remind them that they must look to you, cry out for your help, your salvation with the confidence that you will always give it, that you in no wise turn away those who come to you. We pray that you help all of us to do that which we should do. We pray these things in our Savior's name. Amen.