

Luke 18:27

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And he said, The things which are impossible with men are possible with God.

Analysis

And he said, The things which are impossible with men are possible with God. This verse is Jesus' response to the disciples' question, "Who then can be saved?" (verse 26) following His statement about the difficulty of the rich entering God's kingdom. The phrase "The things which are impossible with men" (ta adynata para anthrōpois, τὰ ἀδύνατα παρὰ ἀνθρώποις) establishes human incapacity. The adjective adynatos (ἀδύνατος) means powerless, unable, or impossible—total inability, not mere difficulty. The realm of human capability (para anthrōpois, "with men") has absolute limits.

The contrasting phrase "are possible with God" (dynata para tō Theō estin, δυνατὰ παρὰ τῷ Θεῷ ἐστίν) declares divine omnipotence. The adjective dynatos (δυνατός) means powerful, able, or possible—the root of English "dynamite" and "dynamic." The prepositional phrase "with God" (para tō Theō) parallels "with men" structurally but contrasts absolutely in meaning. What is categorically impossible in human sphere becomes possible in divine sphere. The present tense "are" (estin, ἐστίν) indicates ongoing, perpetual reality—this is always and unchangingly true.

Theologically, this verse establishes several foundational doctrines:

1. **Human inability:** Salvation is impossible through human effort, merit, or achievement (Romans 3:20, Ephesians 2:8-9)
2. **Divine sovereignty:** God accomplishes what humans cannot (Romans 8:3)
3. **Grace alone:** Salvation is entirely God's work, received by faith, not earned by works

4. **Hope for the worst cases:** No one is beyond God's saving power—if God can save the rich (who trust in wealth), He can save anyone.

This verse encapsulates the gospel: God does for us what we cannot do for ourselves.

Historical Context

This statement came immediately after the rich young ruler's departure (Luke 18:18-23). The man had claimed to have kept all commandments from his youth yet walked away sorrowful when Jesus told him to sell all, give to the poor, and follow Him. This interaction shattered the disciples' assumptions about salvation. In first-century Judaism, wealth was widely viewed as evidence of God's blessing and righteousness (based on Deuteronomy 28-30). If a wealthy, morally upright young man couldn't be saved, who could?

Jesus' response echoes Old Testament declarations of divine omnipotence. Genesis 18:14 asks rhetorically, "Is anything too hard for the LORD?" when announcing Sarah's miraculous pregnancy. Jeremiah 32:17, 27 declares, "There is nothing too hard for thee." Job 42:2 confesses, "I know that thou canst do every thing." Jesus applies these affirmations of God's general omnipotence specifically to salvation—God's power extends even to the impossible task of transforming human hearts and saving sinners.

Early Christian theology embraced this truth. Paul's conversion (Acts 9) demonstrated God's power to save even the chief of sinners (1 Timothy 1:15). His letters repeatedly emphasize salvation by grace alone through faith alone (Romans 3:21-28, Ephesians 2:1-10, Titus 3:4-7). The Protestant Reformation recovered this biblical emphasis after medieval theology had obscured it by mixing grace with human merit. The Reformers' sola gratia (grace alone) principle flows directly from Jesus' declaration that salvation is impossible with men but possible with God.

Related Passages

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

Study Questions

1. How does recognizing salvation as impossible with men humble human pride and religious self-confidence?
2. What comfort does this verse offer to believers praying for the salvation of seemingly hardened or indifferent family members?
3. How does this principle apply beyond initial salvation to ongoing sanctification and transformation?
4. In what ways does this verse challenge both works-righteousness (trusting human effort) and presumption (assuming God will save everyone)?
5. How should the truth that salvation is God's work shape evangelism, prayer, and expectations about conversion?

Interlinear Text

ὁ	δὲ	εἶπεν	Τὰ	ἀδύνατα	παρὰ	ἀνθρώποις
G3588	And	he said	G3588	The things which are impossible	with	men
	G1161	G2036		G102	G3844	G444
δυνατὰ	ἐστιν	παρὰ	τῷ	θεῷ		
possible	are	with	G3588	God		
G1415	G2076	G3844		G2316		

Additional Cross-References

Jeremiah 32:17 (References God): Ah Lord GOD! behold, thou hast made the heaven and the earth by thy great power and stretched out arm, and there is nothing too hard for thee:

Matthew 19:26 (References God): But Jesus beheld them, and said unto them, With men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible.

Luke 1:37 (References God): For with God nothing shall be impossible.

Job 42:2 (Parallel theme): I know that thou canst do every thing, and that no thought can be withholden from thee.

Genesis 18:14 (Parallel theme): Is any thing too hard for the LORD? At the time appointed I will return unto thee, according to the time of life, and Sarah shall have a son.

Daniel 4:35 (Parallel theme): And all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing: and he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou?

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