

Matthew 19:26

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

But Jesus beheld them, and said unto them, With men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible.

Analysis

But Jesus beheld them, and said unto them, With men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible. This profound declaration comes at the climax of Jesus's teaching about wealth and salvation, spoken immediately after the rich young ruler departed sorrowfully, unable to forsake his possessions for eternal life. The Greek word *adunatos* (ἀδύνατος) translated "impossible" literally means "without power" or "lacking ability," emphasizing the absolute incapacity of human effort to achieve salvation. The root *dunamis* (δύναμις, power) with the alpha-privative prefix creates a word denoting complete powerlessness. The parallel phrase *para anthrōpois* (παρὰ ἀνθρώποις, "with men") uses the dative case to indicate the sphere or realm where this impossibility operates—the entire domain of human capability, wisdom, strength, moral effort, and religious achievement, without exception.

The contrasting phrase *para de theō panta dunata* (παρὰ δὲ θεῷ πάντα δυνατά, "but with God all things are possible") employs the emphatic adversative particle *de* (δέ) to create a sharp theological antithesis between human inability and divine capability. The word *panta* (πάντα, "all things") is comprehensive and universal in scope, a neuter plural adjective used substantively, excluding nothing whatsoever from God's sovereign power. The adjective *dunata* (δυνατά, "possible") shares the same root as *dunamis*, pointing to God's inherent divine power, might, and capability. This is not a blank check for presumption, not a prosperity gospel promise of health and wealth, but rather a declaration that God's saving power transcends all human limitations and impossibilities in the realm of redemption.

The phrase "Jesus beheld them" uses the Greek participle *emblepsas* (ἐμβλέψας), from *emblepō* (ἐμβλέπω), indicating Jesus looking intently, penetrating deeply with His gaze, perceiving the inner thoughts and troubled hearts of His disciples. This is not a casual glance but a searching, penetrating look that sees beyond external appearance to the confusion and dismay within. The disciples had just witnessed the rich young ruler's sorrowful departure after Jesus told him to sell all and follow—a command that exposed where the man's true treasure lay. Immediately following, Jesus made His shocking statement about the extreme difficulty (or impossibility) of the wealthy entering God's kingdom, using the vivid hyperbole of a camel passing through a needle's eye. Their question, "Who then can be saved?" (Matthew 19:25), reveals their deeply ingrained assumption that wealth indicated divine favor and blessing according to Deuteronomy's covenant promises. If the wealthy and blessed cannot be saved, who possibly could? Jesus's response revolutionizes their entire theological framework—salvation depends not on human advantage, achievement, status, or religious performance, but solely on divine power and initiative.

Theologically, this verse establishes several crucial doctrines central to biblical soteriology:

1. the doctrine of total depravity and human inability—salvation is utterly beyond natural human achievement, regardless of moral effort, religious observance, material status, or cultural advantage; no one can save himself or contribute to his salvation
2. the doctrine of divine omnipotence—God possesses unlimited power to accomplish His purposes, including the humanly impossible task of regenerating dead hearts and transforming rebellious wills
3. the doctrine of salvation by grace alone through faith alone—if salvation is impossible with men but possible with God, then salvation must be entirely God's work, not ours, received as a free gift rather than earned as wages or merited through religious performance
4. the doctrine of divine sovereignty in salvation—God's redemptive purposes cannot be thwarted by any obstacle, whether human inability, sinful rebellion, demonic opposition, or natural impossibility

5. the doctrine of effectual calling and irresistible grace—those whom God calls to salvation will certainly be saved, for His power overcomes all resistance and accomplishes His saving purposes.

Jesus's words deliberately echo the angelic announcement to Mary regarding the virgin birth (Luke 1:37), Abraham's encounter with God regarding Isaac's promised birth to Sarah in her old age (Genesis 18:14), and Jeremiah's prophetic affirmation of divine omnipotence (Jeremiah 32:17), establishing a consistent biblical theme of divine possibility overcoming human impossibility throughout the entire arc of redemptive history from Abraham to Christ.

Historical Context

This statement occurs in the context of first-century Palestinian Judaism, where wealth was commonly viewed as a sign of God's blessing and covenant favor, rooted in Deuteronomy's explicit promises of material prosperity for obedience (Deuteronomy 28:1-14). The prosperity theology prevalent in Second Temple Judaism taught that material abundance demonstrated divine approval and covenant faithfulness, while poverty suggested divine disfavor or judgment for sin. When Jesus stated that the wealthy would have extreme difficulty entering the kingdom, the disciples asked in genuine bewilderment, "Who then can be saved?" (Matthew 19:25). If the wealthy and blessed cannot enter the kingdom, who possibly could? Jesus's radical teaching upended this entire theological framework, revealing that wealth could actually be a spiritual impediment rather than evidence of blessing.

The rich young ruler represented the absolute ideal of religious achievement in first-century Judaism: young (suggesting vigor and potential), wealthy (suggesting divine blessing), morally upright (claiming to have kept all commandments), religiously observant from youth (suggesting lifelong covenant faithfulness), and earnest in seeking eternal life. According to dominant rabbinic theology, such a person stood at the pinnacle of spiritual achievement. Yet despite keeping all commandments externally and maintaining scrupulous religious observance, he lacked the one thing necessary—complete surrender to Christ and willingness to forsake all competing loyalties for God's kingdom. His sorrowful departure after Jesus's command to sell all and follow demonstrated that wealth had become his

functional god, an idol he could not relinquish even for eternal life. This narrative powerfully exposed both the futility of works-righteousness as a path to salvation and the enslaving power of materialism.

The historical setting also reflects sophisticated rabbinic teaching methods of Second Temple Judaism. Jesus employed hyperbolic imagery (the camel and needle's eye) to provoke thought and challenge assumptions—a common pedagogical technique known as *mashal* (parabolic teaching). The phrase about God's unlimited power was rooted in Old Testament theology, particularly Genesis 18:14 ("Is anything too hard for the LORD?") and Job 42:2 ("I know that thou canst do every thing"). First-century Jews would have recognized these echoes, understanding Jesus's statement as a declaration about God's covenant faithfulness and saving power through the Messiah. The broader context involves escalating tension between Jesus and the Pharisaic establishment, who had developed an elaborate system of laws and traditions designed to merit divine favor through meticulous law-keeping—precisely what the rich young ruler exemplified. Jesus's declaration that such achievement was "impossible" as a means of salvation struck at the heart of Pharisaic works-righteousness and challenged their entire religious system.

Related Passages

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Study Questions

1. How does understanding salvation as impossible with men but possible with God change your approach to evangelism and discipleship?
2. In what areas of your life are you relying on human possibility rather than trusting in God's power to accomplish what seems impossible?

3. How does this verse inform your understanding of the relationship between human responsibility and divine sovereignty in salvation?
4. What "impossibilities" in your spiritual life need to be surrendered to the God for whom all things are possible?
5. How does this teaching about divine possibility challenge modern self-help philosophies and prosperity theology that emphasize human potential?

Interlinear Text

ἐμβλέψας	δὲ	ὁ	Ἰησοῦς	εἶπεν	αὐτοῖς	παρὰ	
beheld	But	G3588	Jesus	them and said	unto them	With	
G1689	G1161		G2424	G2036	G846	G3844	
ἀνθρώποις	τοῦτο	ἀδύνατόν	ἐστίν	παρὰ	δὲ	θεῷ	πάντα
men	this	impossible	are	With	But	God	all things
G444	G5124	G102	G2076	G3844	G1161	G2316	G3956
δυνατά	ἐστίν						
possible	are						
G1415	G2076						

Additional Cross-References

Jeremiah 32:27 (References God): Behold, I am the LORD, the God of all flesh: is there any thing too hard for me?

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.

Luke 18:27 (References God): And he said, The things which are impossible with men are possible with God.

Mark 10:27 (References Jesus): And Jesus looking upon them saith, With men it is impossible, but not with God: for with God all things are possible.

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:

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.

Psalms 62:11 (References God): God hath spoken once; twice have I heard this; that power belongeth unto God.

Numbers 11:23 (Parallel theme): And the LORD said unto Moses, Is the LORD'S hand waxed short? thou shalt see now whether my word shall come to pass unto thee or not.

Zechariah 8:6 (Parallel theme): Thus saith the LORD of hosts; If it be marvellous in the eyes of the remnant of this people in these days, should it also be marvellous in mine eyes? saith the LORD of hosts.

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