

## “So You Want To Be Rich?”

Scripture: Mark 10:17-31

Graphics: money

Big Truth: The people of the Panama Methodist Church are called to have no other gods before the Lord and to put Him first in all things. While that may seem like an impossible goal, God makes things possible which, to us, seem impossible.

Focus Phrase: What we think impossible, God makes possible when we put Him first.

### 1. Introduction

- A. In May of 1997, the impossible happened. Deep Blue, a computer, actually seemed to be "playing" chess with the world's greatest, Garry Kasparov. Stephen Levy wrote that, "...what really shook Kasparov, though, was a move that the computer didn't make. On Move 36 [in Game 2], Blue had an opportunity to shift its queen to a devastating position — clearly the smart choice. Instead, it took a subtler - but superior - tack that wound up to be near decisive in defeating Kasparov.

After the champ resigned, he rushed back to his Plaza suite, cranked up his own computers, and tried in vain to understand how a hunk of sand and metal could have understood chess so deeply. Apparently this puzzlement crossed into the realm of suspicion: The Kasparov camp was soon demanding to see Deep Blue's printouts. 'It was a masterpiece by computer,' said Kasparov second Michael Khodarkovsky. 'We would like to understand why it was possible.' (Eventually, a neutral arbiter examined the printout.) Later Kasparov blurted out his real complaint. 'Suddenly [Deep Blue] played like God for one moment,' he said." (Steven Levy, "Big Blue's Hand of God," Newsweek, May 19, 1997.)

- B. That move came to be known as the “hand of God” move to those in the chess world...essentially making the impossible, possible.
- C. Now, I’m not saying that the complexity of computers in the 1990s wasn’t something to behold...and may even have been well along the process of being able to process complex scenarios - faster than humans, even. I’m also not willing to say that God wasn’t working in this chess match - He probably was.
- D. But the impossible thing made possible in this story was not that a computer beat a chess master. The impossible thing happened, I think, when the human chess master had to humble himself to accept the possibility that he, indeed, was not God and was out-matched by a computer, made by human hands. In that humility, God was truly at work...making the impossible, possible.
- E. Whether it’s chess, or career, or sports, or hobbies, or wealth or anything else at which we try to excel or attain, the impossible isn’t that we’re good at those things or have an abundance of them. The impossible thing is that God calls us

to never let any of those things take a higher place than Him, and that those worldly things never stand in the way of us truly following Jesus.

- F. The title of our message today is ***So You Want To Be Rich?***
- G. In Mark 10, Jesus was teaching the crowds and disciples about the Kingdom of God and what it meant to follow Him. Along with being rich, Jesus also asked, “So you want to be the greatest? And...So you want to see?”
- H. Those were all barriers to the disciples being His fully-devoted followers. And in our story today, we’ll dive deep into what Jesus has to say about wealth, and trust in God, and what it takes to leave worldly things to follow Jesus.
- I. In the end, we’ll see that ***What WE think impossible, God makes possible when we put Him first.*** (write that down if you’re taking notes) (repeat)
- J. This has little to do with chess...but has everything to do with our priorities.
- K. Before we dive into reading the Word of God this morning, let’s prepare our hearts to hear and receive what the Holy Spirit is offering to us.
- L. **Let’s PRAY!**
- M. In your bible, which I hope you brought with you today, turn with me to Mark 10, starting in verse 17.

## 2. Scripture

### A. READ Mark 10:17-22

- i. Let me stop there for a moment. Jesus and the disciples were just about ready to start a journey that would lead them to Jerusalem. He’d be arrested, die on the cross, and be raised again on Easter morning.
- ii. Right before they left, a guy came RUNNING up to Jesus, knelt before Him, and asked, “Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?”
- iii. That’s a good question! “Jesus, just tell me **what to do.**” Give me a checklist of things, right now, that I can do. I like this guy!
- iv. We don’t know who this man was. We don’t know if he’d been trolling Jesus for a while. All we know, at this point, is that he wanted to be saved.
- v. Jesus started by asking, “Why do you call me good...only God is good.” So, first, it’s not about WHAT but HOW. Salvation - eternal life - is all about God and not about what WE do.
- vi. Then, Jesus listed off the 6th, 7th, 8th, 9th, and 5th Commandment from the 10 Commandments. And, the man said, “Cool! I’ve kept every single one since my youth!” (this’ll be EASY!)
- vii. And at this point, we’re like, “Sign this guy up! He’s GOT it!”

- viii. But Jesus knew something we don't...something the disciples didn't know, although they may have had some clues from his clothes or his language. This guy was RICH...wealthy.
  - a. Wealth in the first century was a matter of have and have not. There was no middle class, really. And resources were limited...so if you were rich, then you had money that others DIDN'T have. There literally was not enough to go around.
  - b. And if you HAD money, then you KEPT that money by withholding it from others...so that they COULDN'T have it or get it. See the problem?
- ix. So, Jesus said, "Sell what you own and give the money to the poor - those who don't have it." AND, then come and follow me.
- x. Listen: Sell what you own and give the money to the poor. You will then have treasure in heaven. Then, come, and follow me.
- xi. And in probably one of the saddest verses in all of scripture, we read, "When he heard this, he was shocked and went away grieving, for he had many possessions."
- xii. And the implication was that he was unwilling to give up what he owned to follow Jesus. Impossible, Jesus! That's impossible... (pause)

**B. READ Mark 10:23-31**

- i. There just isn't much that needs to be said about this teaching from Jesus. Sometimes, Jesus is cryptic and dances around the hard truth. Here, though, Jesus just said: If you're rich, and you rely on riches to get you through this world, then it is VERY hard for you to enter the kingdom of God. Ouch!
- ii. Why? Because God is God and we are not. God is holy and true. He created ALL thing. He is IN all things. And there is nothing that is higher than God. Jesus said that if humans put ANYTHING (turn to your neighbor and say ANYTHING)...if humans put ANYTHING above God, then God is unwilling to share first place with that things. He WON'T share it.
- iii. This is hard teaching. For some, who are NOT rich, the encouragement is that they're free to put God first because money isn't an issue. For those who HAVE money, it gets harder because the rich can lean hard into the money when needed to make things happen...to close the gap. Trust gets put in the ability to write checks and flip out some cash. Desperation is minimized and needs are few.
- iv. In fact, Jesus said, it's easier for a big camel to go through the tiny eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom.

- v. Now, that's preposterous, right? Right! Jesus was making a point with this proverbial statement. It's nigh to impossible...
- vi. At this point, the disciples were exasperated! **“Who then can be saved?!?!?”**
- vii. Ah ha! AH HA! **And THAT is where Jesus was leading this man, the disciples, and us to the whole time.** “Who then can be saved?” The answer? NO ONE. Not one. Impossible! Not the poor guy, not the rich guy, not the disciple, not the Pharisee, not the crowd, not the king, not you and not me UNLESS (want the Good News?) UNLESS we completely rely on the saving grace of God through Jesus Christ and Him crucified!
- viii. No matter WHAT we have or what we make idols, it's IMPOSSIBLE for us to save ourselves even if we're the wealthiest people on earth.
- ix. BUT, there is a way. There IS a person who holds the answer. His name is Jesus. And by no other name on earth or in heaven can you be saved.
- x. When Peter said, “Jesus, we've left everything to follow YOU,” he didn't say, “we left everything to follow this idea. Not a dream. Not a church. Follow YOU! In Jesus, not only would blessings be poured out now and you'd have enough here on earth, but eternal life - the thing the rich man so desperately wanted - eternal life is yours starting now, into the age to come.
- xi. Put yourself last, lowest, least for God and put ALL your priorities in relation to God...and GOD will do it all in your life.
- xii. What WE think impossible, God makes possible when we put Him first.

### 3. Application

- A. Christian leadership coach Steve May wrote this, “Jesus said, ‘With God, all things are possible’. We need to remember what this promise does and doesn't imply. First, it doesn't imply that all things are easy. Accomplishing the impossible typically takes extended effort. Second, it doesn't imply that all things are immediate. Reaching worthwhile goals requires a long-term investment of time. Third, it doesn't imply that all things will be painless. Personal sacrifice is part of the process. It may not be easy, immediate, or painless, but for those willing to step out in faith, for those bold enough to trust God to do the impossible, the reward will always be greater than the investment. —Steve May, The Monday Memo, March 19, 2007.
- B. As we sit with this teaching from Jesus, we get pretty uncomfortable. Who then can be saved, indeed!? For all intents and purposes, we are rich. And being rich, according to Jesus, is a huge spiritual problem. It's impossible.
- C. Yet, what we think impossible, God makes possible when we put Him first.
- D. Now, as far as resources go, there are people who can hear my voice who barely have enough and others who have way more than enough. This isn't about

how MUCH you have, but about where God is in relation to what you DO have.

- E. See, because the barrier that Jesus is getting at is the trust you place in your skill, your money, your possessions, and other things.
- F. All of it came from God. So often, when it comes to tithing, we hear that we're to give 10% to God in the local church. That creates a model that tempts us to believe that the other 90% is somehow mine. Truth is, it's ALL His...He just lets us use 90%...with the expectation that that 90% will be used for His glory and our good.
- G. So the question is not So You Want to be Rich? The question is, "What do I have to do to inherit eternal life?" Come and follow me is the invitation. The pathway TO it, is the hard part - sell your possessions and give to the poor.
- H. God is calling you to completely change your definition of RICH.
  - i. To be rich in this world is to have more than enough. And I would dare to say that most everyone who can hear my voice is RICH in this world.
  - ii. Yet, to be rich in the Kingdom is to have God's blessings that are sufficient now and the assurance of everlasting life forever.
  - iii. All the money in world can't buy God's grace and God's promise of eternity, because it's not for sale...and yet, it is so very costly to God.
  - iv. As our definition of RICH turns from the world's definition to God's definition, then we can begin the hard work of allowing the impossible - who can be saved - to be possible through God.
  - v. God could, in his power, give you, right now, \$100 billion. Check your banking app...(let me know if He does. We'll talk after worship.)
  - vi. But, church, that does NOTHING to keep you from a life apart from God and an eternity separated FROM God in hell. And, so, even though God COULD give you \$100 billion, why would He, when He knows your heart and my heart...and knows that the bigger the bank account, the bigger the barrier to overcome to putting your trust in Him?
- I. So, what do we do now? Let's get a couple application points. No matter what income or bank account you have, here's what Jesus is asking:
  - i. **#1 Give the spiritual seeds in your life room to grow.**
    - a. In Mark 4:18-19, Jesus said, "And others are those sown among the thorns: these are the ones who hear the word, but the cares of the world, and the lure of wealth, and the desire for other things come in and choke the word, and it yields nothing."

- b. God is speaking His Word over your life like seeds being planted in a garden. Your heart and soul are the soil of God's truth and grace. And it will grow, but only if you do the weeding of the things that choke it out.
  - c. Seriously examine your money priorities...your obsession with having enough or not, and your hoarding or spending. It's not just the amount of money that chokes out the seeds of truth, but the worry and fretting and obsession with money that chokes it out.
  - d. Do the weeding and put money in its place in your life. If you're struggling in this area, then reach out to someone older and wiser and just ASK them how to do it.
- ii. Then, **Give what the Holy Spirit is asking you to give for others**
- a. The best way to not worry about money is to get in the habit of giving it away.
  - b. Jesus wanted the rich man to take the focus OFF the possessions and ON to a good God. The pathway to DO that is to give so that others can have and be blessed.
  - c. Practically, in the church, that may look like giving to any one of our ministries that directly impacts others who have less than you do - Food Pantry, 5&2 Ministry, White Gift Fund.
  - d. But there's more. The needs aren't just physical, they're spiritual and emotional. Give to the church community and you give to build the community of love and grace for those who come...for everyone who engages with us online. For our staff who equip disciples to make disciples...who give everyone in our community the opportunity to believe in and follow Jesus.
  - e. Pray, "God what are you asking me to give and where and how much?" And then be faithful to that, as much as you are able.
  - f. You'll be amazed at how much less you have to weed when there are less weeds to worry about. Think about it.
- iii. Finally, **Give gratitude for all your blessings now and forever.**
- a. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you, God.
  - b. When you pray, give thanks. When you give, give thanks. When you weed, give thanks. When you have barely enough or more than enough, give thanks.
  - c. Praise God from whom all blessings flow. Praise Him all creatures here below. Praise Him above ye heavenly host. Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen!

#### 4. Conclusion

- A. Having a computer beat a human in chess may have seemed like the impossible was taken down. It really wasn't the hand of God.
- B. Breaking down the idols and barriers in our lives to true life in Christ is only made possible by the actual, moving hand of God. Without God making the impossible possible, we think we're winning, but actually, we're losing.
- C. William Cooper penned these words:  
The dearest idol I have known  
Whate'er that idol be,  
Help me to tear it from thy throne,  
And worship only thee. —William Cowper, 1731-1800.
- D. The easy road in this world is to buy worldly comfort and ease. It's very possible for us. We all have the means. We're all tempted.
- E. The hard road - the one that's impossible for us - is to attain the blessings and eternal life from God. That is only possible because God gives that to us.
- F. Because it's free, we can't earn it or buy it.
- G. Our response is to love God and others by giving all we have for His glory and the good of others.
- H. Jesus goes before us and shows us the way to eternal life...in giving, WE ARE ALIVE. God did that...God made the impossible possible for us.
- I. Praise God! As the praise team comes back up, let's pray...
- J. PRAY!