

The impossible command

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- [0 : 0 0] Now I'm thinking a long way back, as I often do, some of my illustrations connected to when I was at school, a long way back now. And I don't know if this was what happened when you were at school, but we were put into house groups.
- They're all I did, put into different houses. The same actually happens at Winchborough Primary there. Maybe it happens at some secondaries as well, put into house groups. I'm thinking when we had a different schooling system, but we were put into house groups.
- And we were named, we were given house names. We were given the four most impressive rivers in Yorkshire. We were called, mine was named after the River Calder.
- It was the Red House. I don't know, maybe you had that at school. And the whole idea, isn't it, with the house groups is that good work and behaviour is rewarded with house points.
- And bad work or bad behaviour is you, well in our school, you could lose house points. Each week, we had all the house points from every person were added up for the whole school.
- [1 : 0 3] And then the house with the most points that week, whatever it was, got four points towards the yearly total. We had that every week, the house point day. And the one that got the least only got one point.
- And they toyed it up over the year and you had the winning house at the end of the year. The house with the most points, the final Tuesday of the year would be announced the winner of the winning house of the year.
- So it's a good idea, isn't it? There's an incentive to work hard and to behave. Bad behaviour and not working well meant you let the team down if you lost house points.
- In many ways, there's something good about that because it's training children for the working world. That achievement happens because people work hard.
- If you're self-employed and you just decide to only work one day, one hour a day, you won't earn that much money. Students who get top grades and academic success in the main, it's because they've put in effort over the years.
- [2 : 1 4] It's the house point system in lower school is there to encourage a lifestyle that breeds achievement in adult life. In our passage this morning, we meet a man who clearly has respect for Jesus.
- He's a God-fearing man. He respects God's ways. We see that he falls at Jesus' feet in verse 17. And it's clear that whilst the world he lives in is obviously different, it's clear that there is similarities with our own, that he understands that achievement, that reward comes from working hard.
- He works in that world. From meeting a certain standard, he would know that that was the world that he lived in. Look at his question. He falls at his feet. Good teacher, what must I do, he says.
- The emphasis is on him. What must I do to inherit eternal life? You might rephrase that. What must I do to receive? What must I do to be rewarded with eternal life?

The point in the man's question lies, what is the standard I must achieve? How many house points do I need to get so that eternal life is given to me?

[3 : 36] This morning we'll get the answer to the man's question. What must I do to inherit eternal life? And we'll look at alternative answers which come out in the passage. What must I do to inherit eternal life?

Thinking about three answers. The first thing, first answer, I'm going to earn it myself. What must I do, I'm going to earn it myself. That's what this young lad thinks, that gaining eternal life is down to his effort.

What's really surprising is Jesus answers his question with another question. Verse 18, why do you call me good? Jesus answered, no one's good except God.

Alone, what we see is the question is Jesus is leading this man. He's leading him down the alley that the man is actually hoping for. Look, verse 19, Jesus says to the man, you know the commandments, you shall not murder, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal, you shall not give false testimony, you shall not defraud, honour your father and mother.

As Jesus reels off the list of commandments, now, you can picture maybe what's going on in the lad's mind.

[4 : 50] You can imagine perhaps the smile, a smug smile starting to grow. He knows that on the surface of what Jesus is saying that he's ticking every box. I must be the model Jew, thinks the man.

He announces with such certainty, given what Jesus has said, that eternal life must be guaranteed for him. Verse 20, teachers, he claims, all these I've kept since I was a boy.

It's just like he's been voted captain of the school sports team. He's floating with pride. He makes the standard his life is approved of. What do we think it takes to be given eternal life from God?

Eternal life, it's not a phrase that perhaps we use every day that much. Perhaps another way to think of it. If there is a God and there's a place you go after you die, to be with God forever.

It's a forever life with God. What does it take to go there? Clearly, this young lad thinks that it's about him living a certain way and meeting a certain standard.

[5 : 56] Everyone has a scale of goodness in their minds, what it means to be a good person. The majority of people, there's exceptions, but the majority of people would think that they meet that standard.

And there are others that we hold in high esteem that we also maybe have outdone us. Nelson Mandela, Florence Nightingale, you pick someone that you admire. Good people who benefited society.

There are also those, if we take ourselves as the measuring person, as the yardstick, who, there's people who are better than us and there's people who are not as good.

People who committed terrible crimes, perhaps. And what it leads to, what it really leads to is thinking that God approves of people based on what they do.

And the funny thing is, even though we might know the right answer, even as followers of Jesus, we can think that too. We can fall into the trap. I've prayed today.

[6 : 57] I've read my Bible. I've helped someone. God must be delighted with me. My kids are well behaved. I'm prospering in my job. God must be blessing me because I'm faithfully doing what he says and I'm being rewarded in my life.

I've not been angry once today. God must be pleased. We can think like that. But when we do, it bites us.

It does bite. Because we feel great when we're having a good day, but what about when we have the bad day? When we don't read the Bible. When we struggle to pray.

When we lose our temper. If we think that God's love is there in a greater way, when we have a good day, we'll be crushed when we have a death.

When we're crushed on our off days. We're crushed. How can God love me? How can he love me the way I've lived? Can I be sure of eternal life if I lived like this today?

[7 : 57] My kids are not well behaved. My job is really hard. Maybe I'm not a faithful believer after all. And we yo-yo. It causes that yo-yoing in life, feeling up and down between God loves me one day and the next day he doesn't love me as much.

Proud as punch when you hit the defined mark you've created for yourself. Defeated and broken when you miss it. If your answer is, I'm going to earn it myself.

I'm going to earn it myself with God. This is where we end up. That's where you end up if you make God's love conditional, his kindness conditional, his eternal life, his forever life conditional about your performance.

That's where we end up. So what must I do to inherit a life? You could attempt. You could say, I'm going to earn it myself. Second answer to the question that we get.

How do we get eternal life? We must realise we're helpless. Realise we're helpless. That's what Jesus wants the man to know. He wants this man to know that he is helpless to earn it himself.

[9 : 12] We get this beautiful, stunning verse. After the man has announced his apparent spiritual success, teacher, I've done all these things since I was a boy.

Look with me in verse 21. Jesus looked at him and loved him. He looked at him and he loved him. He loves this man. He loves him.

With all the attempts to try again life for himself, he loves him. He loves him with some home truths. He loves, you see, love, it isn't all cuddles and making people happy.

This is love from Jesus to the man. When Jesus, and it reminds us that when Jesus, he loves him with his words here. He loves him in his heart and it comes out with what Jesus says.

It reminds us that when Jesus speaks to you, he looks at you intently with the same emotion. That's why he speaks to you through his word.

[10 : 15] You know, this morning, there's no coincidence. It's not a coincidence that you're here and hearing this word, that you're hearing Jesus speak to you. And when we heard it read out, and when we're thinking about this passage, even right now, Jesus is speaking to you.

Jesus' loving gaze is right on you in the same way he looks at this man. No less. He loves you to, and he loves you to the extent that he'll tell you what you need to hear, even if it upsets you.

It's like, we don't often think like that, do we? But can you imagine, if you went out with, you've got your nice new suit on, you're going out to some function.

And just as you're going out, you accidentally, and without knowing, got toothpaste all over your suit, or a mark. And as you're way out, somebody saw you, and just let you go out with the toothpaste down your suit.

That's not a loving thing to do, is it? It's loving to point out the stain. It's loving, even though that might be upsetting, because it would, you'd be like, oh no, I'm a suit, I've got it.

[11 : 31] It's loving to point out the stain. It's loving to be told. What does Jesus say? He says to the man, one thing you lack, he said, go sell everything you have, and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven.

Then, come follow me. At this, the man's face fell, he went away sad, because he had great wealth. What Jesus does here, Jesus gives him an impossible command.

It's an impossible command, and it reveals his heart. He is unable, this man is unable, to depend on Jesus, because of his wealth. He loves his wealth more, and he can't let it go. Jesus wants the man, to realise his helplessness.

He wants the man, not to turn away sad, but to turn and walk towards him. So, what he wants the man to do, is to say to him, I can't do that, Jesus.

There's many reasons, why he might, why he might be able, to have to say, I can't do that, Jesus. I'll have nothing to, what will I live on? I love, or perhaps, I love my wealth too much.

[12 : 46] I can't do that. It's too hard. That's impossible. I can't give you everything. He wants the man, to ask the same question, the disciples ask a few verses later.

I can't do that. How then can I be saved? Because I can't meet the standard, that you're asking me to meet. I can't. What you ask is impossible.

But he doesn't turn to Jesus, in his helplessness. He turns away from Jesus, in his sadness. Jesus repeats, twice, how hard it is for the rich, to enter the kingdom of God.

The disciples are amazed, and he says it again, how hard it is, to enter the kingdom of God. It's easier for a camel, to go through the eye of a needle, than for someone, who is rich, to enter the kingdom of God. The point is, it is impossible.

Saving ourselves, is as impossible, as a baby changing its own nappy. It is totally helpless. And we are totally helpless.

[13 : 58] In order to receive, that forever life with God, that eternal life, we must realise, we are helpless, to save ourselves. It is impossible. No one is good enough, on their own, to meet what God requires.

Jesus loves this man, by showing him, his helplessness, and that about himself. Jesus loves us today, by showing that about ourselves, that we are helpless.

And so the question remains, doesn't it? Realise you are helpless, what must we do, to inherit eternal life then? The final thing, it is God, who makes the impossible possible.

It is God, who makes the impossible possible. That is the answer. The disciples, even realise, the impossibility, of Jesus' command. They realise, what Jesus has asked this man, that he can't do, he can't possibly do, and so they ask, the right question, the question, that the man should have asked.

Who then can be saved? Or how can I be saved? If it's impossible, who's able to receive, or inherit eternal life? Jesus gives them answer, Jesus gives the answer, to the man's initial question, with man this is impossible, but not with God.

[15 : 17] All things are possible, with God. The young man realised, that he was helpless, to save himself. That it was impossible, for anything he did, to gain that forever life, with God.

But when he realised, that helplessness, that the man's response, as we've said earlier, it shouldn't have been, to turn away in sadness, but it should have been, to turn to God, say I can't, and then immediately say, because I can't, can you have mercy on me?

Will you, will you save me? Because I can't do it. Because I can't save myself, will you save me?

Will you forgive me? Because I know, that I can't meet the standard. Even the question, themselves, even the answer Jesus gives, it leaves the disciples, questioning, have we done enough?

Where does that leave us? Peter, verse 28, this is, this is Peter's answer, to have we done enough? He says, we've left everything, to follow you. Have we done enough?

[16 : 28] It's really interesting, what happens here. Jesus does two things, in his answer. The first thing, he wants to assure them, is that from the question, from Peter, is, basically Peter, he said, have we done enough, we've done everything, to follow you, we've left everything.

The first thing he does, is he assures them, that their lives, that they're living, are the fruit, of his work in their life. That's what he reassures them. He says, truly I tell you, Jesus replied, no one who's left home, or brothers, or sisters, or mother, or father, or children, or fields, for me in the gospel, will fail to receive, a hundred times as much, in this present age, and in the age to come, eternal life.

He says, this is a great fruit, it's brilliant, what a fruit it has, in your life. But notice with me, he quickly follows them up, with a reminder, verse 31, but many who are first, will be last, and the last first.

You see, the point is, the point what he's making is, don't fall into the same trap. And don't fall into the same trap, and think that, your good work, of leaving everything, makes you first.

Don't add that, as another rule, that comes at the beginning. Don't think that, because you've left everything, that now makes you worthy. Don't, don't think that leaving everything, is what makes you worthy, of being saved, of gaining eternal life.

[17 : 57] Don't make leaving everything, as another box, to be ticked. The fruit in your life, brilliant, amazing. But, inheriting eternal life, still doesn't come from, even what you've done, as good as it is.

you also must still be last. You also must still be, helpless. Just like a child. Just like I wanted, from this man.

Life forever, with the living God, does not come from, a bunch of rules. It's not like karma, where if the good you do, outweighs the bad, then the scales will tip, in your favour.

It doesn't come from, anything we do. Our right standing, our right standing, and our assured, accepted standing, before God, is given as a gift, because of the person, and the work, of Jesus Christ, his perfect, righteous life, given to you.

We're accepted by God, because of what Jesus, has done at Calvary, at the cross. All of our wrongdoing, lands on Jesus' shoulders. The illustration, I've given, it's like a funnel, is over Jesus' head, and all the muck, of our sin, and wrongdoing, and shame, like a big, dirty cup, of mucky sin water, is poured, over his head, through the funnel, that stains him.

[19 : 16] And he's punished, he's punished, for all our mess, that is poured, onto him. But at that same moment, a funnel is placed, over our head, and we're washed, with his totally clean, sin free life, that's poured, onto us, and takes away, all our stains.

We're given his life. So that when we stand, before God, we're free of all the mess, all the wrongdoing. He accepts us, because what, what the living God sees, when he looks at us, he sees his, the righteous life, of his son.

He sees clean hearts. He doesn't, he sees, people, who have met, the standard, because of what, Jesus has done.

We're helpless, to gain life, for ourselves. But the impossible command, is made possible, by the death of his son. The death of the son of God. Rich and poor alike, young or old, whatever nationality, or race, whatever your background, every single person, must recognize, their helplessness.

Helplessness. You see, when we see the commands, God asks, the righteous, late life, that God requires, there's always the temptation, to think, I must try harder, to be more like that.

[20 : 42] And part of that is, there's part of that, there's a, a rightness in wanting, to be more like Jesus. But you see, the other thing, that the commands, of God do, is that when, when you see, what is required, is to, to recognize, that helplessness, by saying, I can't do, that perfect life.

I can't live like that. I can't be that perfect. I just can't. There is no way, that I can do that. Lord Jesus, save me.

Let's pray. Lord Jesus, we recognize, this morning, that, even now, even still, even though we know, this to be true, there are times, when, we have attempted, to gain your favor, by what we do.

And sometimes, we even believe that, that, you love us more, at certain times, and we seem to do, the right things. And we ask, forgiveness for that. Lord, we want to admit, and recognize, our helplessness, when it comes to, a forever life, with you.

There is nothing, we can do, that will gain, gain, gain the, the favor, the saving grace, that is needed, the righteous life, that is required, by you, to enter in, to eternal life.

[22 : 26] We can't do that life, Lord, it's impossible, for us to live, perfectly righteous. But yet, we thank you, that what qualifies us, to gain acceptance, into, the heavenly throne room, is not our lives, but the work of the, of the work of Jesus Christ.

The work of Jesus Christ, given to us, and all our mess, given to him. So that in his death, and his resurrection, it is paid for, completely.

So that when we come, and we say, and we ask ourselves, that question, what must we do? We must turn to Christ, as make that we can't, do anything, but receive his love, and forgiveness, knowing that he pays, for it all.

And so we say that, afresh, today Lord, we can't do that, save us, have mercy on us, save us for yourself. We praise you, and we thank you, that this is true.

We ask for this, and give you thanks, in Jesus' name. Amen.