

The title of this morning's sermon is, *"With God All Things Are Possible, Right?"*ⁱ

We are working our way verse-by-verse through Luke's Gospel, and we find ourselves at **Luke 18:26**.

Do we have any Princess Bride fans?

Throughout the movie, Sicilian boss Vizzini repeatedly describes events as "inconceivable." When Westley, also known as The Man in Black, also known as The Dread Pirate Roberts is climbing a rope, Vizzini cuts the rope to kill Westley, but of course, because he's the hero of the movie, he clings to the cliff.

Vizzini says, *"Inconceivable!"*

The honorable swordsman, Inigo Montoya, says, *"You keep using that word. I do not think it means what you think it means."*

I mention this because when people take verses out of context, this quote comes to mind...and this brings us to lesson one...

Lesson One: "You keep using that verse. I do not think it means what you think it means."

I know this isn't really a lesson, but you get the point. And I thought, now you will remember this for the rest of your lives whenever someone uses a verse out of context. Perhaps you can even quote this to them.

Let me give you a few examples with some of the most misquoted verses...

On January 12, 2013, during the NFL divisional playoffs, the number 4 ranked Baltimore Ravens, who were 10-6, played on the road against the number 1 ranked Denver Broncos, who were 13-3. The Broncos defeated the Ravens earlier in the season and they were heavily favored to win this game too. The game went into double overtime before the Ravens upset the Broncos in what came to be known as "The Mile-High Miracle."

After the game, a very emotional Ray Lewis, the Ravens Hall-of-Fame linebacker, was interviewed. He said...

"No weapon formed against us shall prosper. No weapon. No weapon. No weapon. God is amazing. And when you believe in Him...Man believes in the possible but God believes in the impossible."

Here's what Ray Lewis was trying to quote...

Isaiah 54:17 No weapon that is fashioned against you shall succeed, and you shall refute every tongue that rises against you in judgment. This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord and their vindication from me, declares the Lord.

This is one of the best sounding verses in the Bible. Who doesn't want to believe every weapon and accusation against them will fail?

The context is God destroying Israel's enemies in the future. Ray Lewis made his team, the Baltimore Ravens, into the nation of Israel, and the team they were playing, the Denver Broncos, into Israel's enemies. Perhaps **every weapon** fashioned against the Baltimore Ravens referred to the Broncos' Pro Bowlers: quarterback Peyton Manning, offensive tackle Ryan Clady, cornerback Champ Bailey, and linebacker Von Miller. And maybe **every tongue that rose against** the Baltimore Ravens referred to the Denver Broncos' coaching staff?

Although Ray meant well, when he quoted this verse, instead of God vindicating Israel against their enemies so that his promises to his covenant people were maintained, Ray told the nationally televised audience that God wanted to give the Ravens victory over the Broncos.

I don't think Isaiah 54:17 is the most popular verse among athletes. That honor goes to...any guesses?

Philippians 4:13 I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.

Well-meaning athletes have been interviewed throughout the centuries after winning a big game and, like Ray Lewis, they are excited, they want to give God credit, and so they love to quote this verse.

When all star running back, Adrian Peterson, tore his ACL, he said, "This is a blessing in disguise. I'll come back stronger and better than I was before...[say it with me!] I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."

Philippians 4:13 is incredibly popular. You can find it on posters and other inspirational art, keychains, rings, buttons, t-shirts, stickers, postcards, bracelets, and handbags.

Philippians 4:13 is so popular, because, like Isaiah 54:17, it sounds wonderful. You will be able to do anything you've ever wanted to do. To many this verse is a blank check for whatever you want in life. It is a slogan of personal empowerment, a declaration of self-achievement, ambition, and accomplishment. It is a motivating motto for prosperity, advancement, and success.

Let me ask you something...

If Paul meant Philippians 4:13 the way it is commonly quoted – that God helps you win at everything – how would you picture Paul when he wrote it?

He was victorious, conquering the world, and his life could not be better.

Many people would probably be surprised to know he was a prisoner. From an earthly perspective it didn't look like he was winning. It looked like he was losing.

The verse is about contentment. Paul meant that Christ would strengthen him to be able to handle any trial or situation he experienced.

I will use another athlete who did explain the verse well. During an interview, Kurt Warner asked Tim Tebow for his favorite Bible verse. Tim replied that it was Philippians 4:13 and then he defined it this way...

"I'd say the biggest thing with Philippians 4:13 is so many people, pastors included, believe the verse means, 'I can do a lot of things.' What I believe it really means, in context, is I can do all things, meaning I can handle all things. Whatever position God's put me in. Maybe it's poverty, maybe it's a sickness, my kid's sick, God's going to give me the strength to handle that. So, I think it's more talking about handling adversity than handling praise or accomplishing much. It's talking about, 'I can do all things,' meaning all negative things: I can handle them all because of Christ."

Tim had a tremendous college career. He was the first sophomore to win the most prestigious college award, the Heisman Trophy, and he was an important part of two national championship teams. If anyone could have misinterpreted Philippians 4:13 it was Tim, but he provided a good explanation of the verse.

I know I sound critical of people misusing this verse. You might be saying, "Pastor Scott, these athletes, such as Ray Lewis and Adrian Peterson, are simply trying to glorify God. How can you give them a hard time?"

I get it, but whenever people misinterpret Scripture, even if they do so well-meaningly, it is problematic.

People listening are left with nagging questions, such as:

- *Was God really that concerned with who won that game?*
- *Did the winning team commit more time to prayer than the losing team?*
- *Did the losing team have less faith, or have more heathens or atheists than the winning team, so God didn't favor them?*

Picture a young man watching his favorite athlete on television, and he thinks, "This is wonderful. I can also do all things through Christ who strengthens me! If I have enough faith, I will win at everything in life!"

Then what happens?

He loses and wonders:

- *Did I not have as much faith as that athlete on television?*
- *Was God pleased with him, but he is displeased with me?*
- *Was God unable to give me the strength I needed?*

Imagine something considerably more serious than a football game is at stake, such as a young man lying in a hospital bed dying of a disease. He asks to have Philippians 4:13 put on the wall over his bed. Someone walks in the room, sees it, misunderstands it, and says, "Wow, you have a lot of faith. That's great. You know Christ is going to heal you."

The young man understands the verse, so he replies, "*I don't know. What I do know is Christ will give me the strength I need for any outcome.*"

Like Daniel's friends when they were threatened with the fiery furnace. They said...

Daniel 3:17 Our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace...18 But if [he does] not, be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up."

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The reason I'm sharing these verses that are commonly misunderstood, is we have reached one of the other most commonly misinterpreted verses. Look at Luke 18:27...

Luke 18:27 But he said, "What is impossible with man is possible with God."

People love to loosely quote this verse and say, "With God all things are possible," which is how it's worded in the parallel account in Matthew 19:26.

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And I get why people say this. Not only does it sound really good, this verse makes God himself sound good. The other two misquoted verses, Isaiah 54:17 and Philippians 4:13, are about us, but this verse is about God. It exalts him. Who wouldn't want to say this?

But is this really what the verse is saying?

No, it is not. The verse sounds like it's saying God helps people do anything, but:

- It is impossible for God to help people sin.
- It is impossible for God to help people do anything against his will.

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So, if that's not what the verse is saying, what is it saying?

To correctly understand the verse, like we must do with every other verse, we must look at the context.

This morning's verses flow from last week's verses, so let's briefly review. Jesus was speaking to the rich young ruler who wanted to go to heaven. He was convinced he was righteous, so Jesus tried to help him see his sinfulness by exposing his covetousness...

Luke 18:22 When Jesus heard this, he said to him, "One thing you still lack. Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me."

We talked in detail last week that we don't all need to do this. It is descriptive for us, but it was prescriptive for the rich young ruler.

Luke 18:23 But when he heard these things, he became very sad, for he was extremely rich.

When presented with the choice between his possessions and following Jesus, he chose his possessions.

Luke 18:24 Jesus, seeing that he (the rich young ruler) had become sad, said, "How difficult it is for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God! 25 For it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God."

Now there are two applications for these verses. One application is obvious and the other is less obvious...

The obvious application, which we talked about last week, is that it is harder for rich people to enter the kingdom of God. It is not impossible. Many of the greatest people in Scripture were wealthy:

- In the Old Testament, there were Abraham, Job, and Solomon.
- In the New Testament, there was Joseph of Arimathea, Lydia, and those who hosted churches in their homes because they were wealthy enough to have homes that accommodated large groups.

But we must acknowledge that there are certain temptations or struggles that wealthy people would face, that non-wealthy people would not face. This makes entering the kingdom of God harder.

The other application, which is less obvious, deals with the common thinking about rich people in Jesus's day...

The belief in Jesus's day is that rich people go to heaven. I looked at numerous commentaries about this and it became clear that there are two reasons people were convinced of this...

First, there was the belief that wealth is evidence of God's approval. The richer people were, the more righteous they must be. If people had money, God was pleased with them, and they were going to heaven. Think about it: if God was displeased with people, why would he give them so much money?

The second reason people in Jesus's day believed rich people want to heaven is that their money allowed them to be more righteous. They had more money to give and they had more money to offer sacrifices. Here's how John MacArthur explained it...

"The Jews believed that with alms a person purchased salvation (as recorded in the Talmud), so the more wealth one had, the more alms he could give, the more sacrifices and offerings he could offer, thus purchasing redemption."ⁱⁱⁱ

But Jesus dispelled this belief a few times. One of the most familiar instances is when he taught on the poor widow's offering. Quickly turn to Luke 21.

Luke 21:1 Jesus looked up and saw the rich putting their gifts into the offering box, 2 and he saw a poor widow put in two small copper coins. 3 And he said, “Truly, I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all of them. 4 For they all contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on.”

Jesus made the point that this woman gave more than the rich people, dispelling the belief that the richest were the most righteous simply because they gave more.

Go ahead and turn back to Luke 18.

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Now if you understand the common thinking of the day was that rich people go to heaven, you can understand how shocking it was when Jesus said it is hard for rich people to go to heaven. This is the opposite of what everyone thought!

And if rich people were expected to go to heaven, when Jesus said it was difficult for them to go to heaven, what would you expect the disciples to say?

“Then how are we going to get to heaven?”

And this is exactly what they said. Look at the next verse...

Luke 18:26 Those who heard it said, “Then who can be saved?”

They were thinking, *“If rich people could barely be saved, how could others, who lack this sign of God’s blessing, be saved?”*

Listen to how Warren Wiersbe explains their question...

“The disciples were shocked when Jesus announced that it was difficult for rich people to be saved [because] the Jews believed that riches were a mark of God’s blessing. They reasoned, ‘if rich people can’t be saved, what hope is there for the rest of us?’”ⁱⁱⁱ

With the disciples doubting that anyone could be saved, Jesus delivers this well-known statement...

Luke 18:27 But he said, “What is impossible with man is possible with God.”

If we consider the context we can correctly interpret this verse...

It is impossible for man to go to heaven:

- By giving enough money
- By providing enough sacrifices
- By purchasing salvation through some number of offerings

Instead it means...

It is only possible for man to be saved with God by divine grace.

And this brings us to lesson two...

Lesson Two: With God it is possible for man to be saved by divine grace.

We don't contribute anything to our salvation. At every point – beginning, middle, and end – we are completely dependent on God. This is what it means in Hebrews 12:2 where it says that the Lord is “the founder and perfecter of our faith,” or as some translations say, “the author and finisher of our faith.”

Essentially, the disciples were told the truth of Ephesians 2:8-9...

Ephesians 2:8 For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is NOT YOUR OWN DOING; it is the gift of God, 9 NOT A RESULT OF WORKS, so that no one may boast.

But here's the thing...

When the disciples learned that they were saved by grace through faith, and not by works, they wondered about their works. It was like, “Okay, we are not saved by works...but what about the works we have done? What about all we have sacrificed? What do we get for it? I sure hope we aren't doing all this for nothing!”

So, Peter asks this very question.

Luke 18:28 And Peter said, “See, we have left our homes and followed you.”

In the ESV and NKJV Peter said, “See,” and in the amplified he said, “Look,” as though he was commanding Jesus. But my personal favorite is the NASB which says, “Behold.” Can you picture Peter saying to Jesus, “Behold!”

It's Peter, so you probably can picture him saying this to Jesus: “Behold how amazing we are!”

More than likely Peter's statement stemmed also from the account with the rich young ruler. Jesus told him, *“Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.”*

As Peter said, the disciples left even their homes to follow Jesus.

So, he wondered, and probably the other disciples did too, what was in it for them.

Although Peter shouldn't have said, “See,” “Look,” or “Behold,” there are two reasons I don't think his statement is that bad...

First, I believe God wants us to think about our rewards in heaven. He wants us to look forward to them and be motivated by them. I say this because of...

Matthew 6:19 “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, 20 but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. 21 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Jesus told us about these rewards, which tells me he wants us thinking about them. We should work for heavenly rewards, because that will ensure a heavenly focus. That's where our hearts will be.

For many people, their problem is that they don't think about heavenly rewards enough.

The second reason I don't think Peter's statement is that bad is Jesus didn't rebuke him for it. Instead, Jesus encouraged him and the other disciples that their sacrifices were not in vain...

Luke 18:29 And he said to them, “Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or wife or brothers or parents or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God, 30 who will not receive many times more in this time, and in the age to come eternal life.”

Jesus told the disciples that not just they, but anyone who has sacrificed for him will be rewarded. We know we are rewarded in the next life, but Jesus also said we are rewarded “in this time.”

What rewards might Jesus be referring to in this life?

We are not told exactly, but here are my best guesses:

- Joy during trials
- Spiritual growth
- Peace that surpasses understanding
- Confidence that God is working all things together for good
- Church family – perhaps you lost earthly relationships, but you receive a much larger family through the body of Christ

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Now let me ask you a question to set up the following verses...

Have you ever been talking about a trial you were experiencing, but then you learned about someone else’s trial and suddenly your trial seemed so small you were convicted you even considered it a trial?

For example:

- You were sharing about the bad day you were having at work, but then you learned about someone who lost their job.
- You were sharing about your Internet being down all day, but then you learned about the people in Maui losing their homes or lives in the fire.
- You were sharing about the rough day with your kids, but then you learned about someone who lost a child.

I use Outlook for email, and the other day my email went down. I think I lost messages from people and I spent almost three full workdays dealing with Microsoft, which meant I had to work late the rest of the week to get all my work done.

Then I heard about Alli Sorensen’s passing. I even thought about Pastor Nathan, Jill, Ed and Francine, having to quickly make the trip to TX and my inconvenience seemed pretty small.

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I mention this, because we are about to see a situation like this...

Peter was talking about all that he and the other disciples sacrificed, even leaving their homes, which sounds like a lot...until Jesus shares all he would be sacrificing...

Luke 18:31 And taking the twelve, he said to them, “See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written about the Son of Man by the prophets will be accomplished.

This is referring to Old Testament prophecies about Jesus’s crucifixion. The most familiar would be Psalm 22 and Isaiah 53.^{iv}

Luke 18:32 For he will be delivered over to the Gentiles and will be mocked and shamefully treated and spit upon. 33a And after flogging him, they will kill him,

Pause here.

Lesson Three: Jesus's sacrifice puts our sacrifices in perspective.

This is the sixth prophecy of Jesus's death just in Luke's gospel (Luke 9:22, 44, 12:50, 13:32-33, 17:25). But this is the first time he mentioned being turned over to the Gentiles. He's referring to his trials as well as his mocking and mistreatment. He provided much of the sequence of his rejection down to even being spit upon.

Spurgeon said, *"They plucked his hair, they smote his cheeks, they spat in his face. Mockery could go no farther. It was cruel, cutting, cursed scorn."*

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We might wonder, *"How could Peter be thinking about himself considering Jesus is about to go to Jerusalem to be crucified?"*

But how often do we think about ourselves considering Jesus went to Jerusalem and was crucified?

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I don't think Jesus said this as a rebuke to Peter. There's no indication that's the case. But we can see that no matter what Peter said he and the disciples gave up to follow Jesus – and it was considerable – the moment we consider what Jesus gave up for them, what they gave up looks insignificant.

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The application for us is we might be tempted to think...

"Jesus, look at all I've sacrificed up for you! I have given up so much: friends, relationships, time, money, everything to follow you."

Of course, this isn't even true, but our pride can allow us to think these things.

But the moment we think about what Jesus sacrificed for us, it becomes clear we haven't sacrificed much at all.

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But after all he suffered, we see the incredible victory...

Luke 18:33b and on the third day he will rise."

Jesus triumphantly told his disciples that the story would not end with his suffering, humiliation, and death. He would rise again in resurrected glory.

Luke 18:34 But they understood none of these things. This saying was hidden from them, and they did not grasp what was said.

Notice the verse says the same thing three times: "they understood none of these things" is the same as "this saying was hidden from them," which is the same as "they did not grasp what was said." God could not be making it clearer that they did not understand that Jesus would be killed. It almost seemed like the furthest thing from their understanding.

Because the disciples did not understand, you could wonder why Jesus was telling them, or perhaps even think that he said it unnecessarily. But we are told that they would be able to look back and understand these things later...

John 16:4 [Jesus said] "I have said these things to you, that when their hour comes YOU MAY REMEMBER THAT I TOLD THEM TO YOU."

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As far as why this truth was hidden from them, there are two possibilities that I can see...

First, perhaps God is the one who hid it from them because they couldn't handle this truth yet.

The other possibility is it was hidden from them because they simply could not believe it. Think about Peter rebuking Jesus when Jesus earlier told the disciples he would die...

Matthew 16:22 Peter took [Jesus] aside and began to rebuke him, saying, “Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you.”

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If you briefly look back at Luke 18:31 it says, “Everything that is written about the Son of Man by the prophets will be accomplished.”

Because we know Jesus had his crucifixion in mind, I mentioned the prophecies relating to that, such as Isaiah 53 and Psalm 22. But there are also lots of prophecies about a ruling and reigning Messiah who establishes his kingdom and destroys his enemies. It was hard for them to reconcile these seemingly mutually exclusive prophecies. We know Jesus will fulfill these prophecies in his Second Coming, but the disciples didn't know that.

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Let me conclude with this...

In this morning's sermon I discussed three verses that are commonly misinterpreted. I will be the first to admit that there are some difficult verses in Scripture. There have been times I have looked at probably 15 commentaries to understand a verse, and I still wasn't convinced that I completely understood it.

But here's a quote I like that I have found to be truer the longer I study God's Word...

“The main things are the plain things, and the plain things are the main things.”

In other words, the most important truths God wants us to understand are simple to understand. Here's one of those truths...

John 3:16 For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

This verse is beautiful and profound, but so simple even children can easily understand it.

With God it is possible for man to be saved, because he loves us so much that he would give his Son to die for our sins so that we can have eternal life.

My prayer is that:

- If you are saved, you will grow in thankfulness for this truth.
- If you are unsaved, you will repent and believe in God's Son to receive eternal life.

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If you have any questions or I can pray for you in any way, I'll be up front after service and it would be a privilege to speak with you.

Let's pray.

ⁱ Done:

- John MacArthur
- Nelson
- EW
- Moody
- Wiersbe

ⁱⁱ John MacArthur, The MacArthur Bible Commentary, page 1161.

ⁱⁱⁱ Warren Wiersbe, The Bible Exposition Commentary New Testament volume 1: Matthew-Galatians, page 249.

^{iv} Here are a few of the prophecies from these passages...

Isaiah 53:3 He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not...5 he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed...7 He was oppressed, and he was afflicted...8 he was cut off out of the land of the living, stricken for the transgression of my people?

Psalm 22 is written in the first person, so we read it as though Jesus is speaking about his suffering...

Psalm 22:6 I am...scorned by mankind and despised by the people. 7 All who see me mock me; they make mouths at me; they wag their heads...14 I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint; my heart is like wax; it is melted within my breast...16 a company of evildoers encircles me; they have pierced my hands and feet.