

Impossible for Us. Possible for God
by Rev. Frances Savill
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Luke 18:1-31

When you think of the portrait of Jesus, what do you see? How do you think of Him? Often, we picture Him on the cross and remember His death for us, but the gospel of Luke is about so much more.

How do you picture Jesus' life?

How would you describe Him?

Would you want to have dinner with Him?

Would you want Him to meet your family and friends?

Dallas Willard describes Jesus like this:

"One of the most outstanding features of Jesus' personality was precisely an abundance of joy. This He left as an inheritance to His students, "that their joy might be full (Jn 15:11). And they did not say, "Pass the aspirin."

For He was well known to those around him as a happy man."

"Jesus was and is a joyous, creative person." (The Divine Conspiracy p. 64)

Do you see that?

Hear this description of God:

"Out of the eternal freshness of His perpetually self-renewed being, the heavenly Father cherishes the earth and each human being upon it. The fondness, the endearment, the unstintingly affectionate regard of God toward all His creatures is the natural outflow of what God is to the core." (Divine Conspiracy p. 64)

Do you see that when you think about Jesus?

Think of all the people who came to Jesus.

A sinful woman crashed a dinner that Jesus was at; she washed Jesus' feet with her tears and dried them with her hair.

Matthew, the tax collector; when Jesus called him to be His disciple, Matthew's response was to follow Jesus, and then to host a dinner party inviting all his sinning friends so they could meet this remarkable man, Jesus.

A Synagogue leader came to Jesus to ask Him to save his daughter.
A woman pressed through the crowd that gathered around Jesus, to touch Him.

Crowds gathered to hear Him speak, all kinds of people came to Him.
Children wanted to be near Him.

And in this joyous, creative man Jesus, who people loved to be around, was life, abundant life, and He offered that life to everyone.

Abundant life is lived in the kingdom of God, and the easiest way to share in that life is to follow Jesus.

The gospel shows us that some people were right there, ready to follow Jesus, others not so much.

In Chapter 18 verse 9, Jesus began with a parable about some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and treated others with contempt.

Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus: "God, I thank you that I am not like other men..." Then he lists all his righteous ways, all that proves he is better than everyone else. The Pharisee did everything right except that his own righteousness kept him from having compassion and love for his neighbor.

This is such a great illustration by Jesus of the problem with the Law. The Law was to help people love God and love their neighbors, and the person in Jesus' parable displays none of it. There is no love of God, and certainly no love or compassion for anyone.

How could a man or woman who prayed like that turn and follow Jesus, and be part of Jesus' community that welcomed all and had compassion for all?

It was as if Jesus was inviting him to a great feast, the finest food, the kingdom banquet, life abundant was being offered for free, but the man checked the guest list and saw all the wrong people were invited, he couldn't possibly eat with them. Nor did he want any meal that was free – surely, he would pay, he would insist on paying with all his good works, and careful law-keeping.

In verse 18, Jesus is approached by a ruler, a man of power and means. This man is very much like the Pharisee in the parable, but he is also wealthy. He brought wealth and righteousness to the table. But all that he had, his wealth, his position, his own righteousness, kept him from being able to follow Jesus.

It is like he was hungry for the kingdom meal that he could see Jesus served. He knew there was something more to life abundant. And he wanted to come in and dine, but as he tried to go through the doorway, he was holding too much in his arms.

Jesus told him the way, set down what you have, give it away, and then you'll be able to enter. But the man refused.

Contrasting these two people are the tax collector of the parable and a group of children.

The tax collector would presumably have been quite wealthy. But his wealth didn't blind him to his need of forgiveness. His wealth didn't cause him to treat others with contempt. He knew his wealth wouldn't save him, and all he could do was cry out to God for mercy and help.

A man like that welcomed Jesus with open arms and an open heart and found the mercy of God he cried out for.

Children don't bring anything to the table, they aren't going to impress Jesus, and they aren't going to try.

They heard there was a feast, life abundantly was being served up by an amazing person, Jesus, and they flocked to the table with a healthy appetite for learning Jesus' way.

When Jesus saw the wealthy ruler very sad, not able to set aside his wealth to receive Jesus and the life He was offering, Jesus said; "How difficult it is for those who have wealth to enter the Kingdom of God!"

Those who heard this said, "Then who can be saved?"

Jesus answered, "What is impossible with people is possible with God."

With God all things are possible!

God's goodness, the persistent invitation of this incredible man Jesus, the love and healing, and joy and goodness that flowed from Him, the relentless tenderness of the Holy Spirit, doesn't give up on any.

What Jesus wants to give us all is a treasure greater than we can imagine, life in abundance.

The invitation awaits our response.

Thanks be to God.