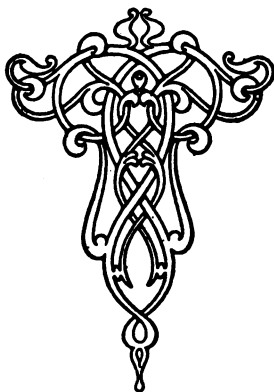


EVANGELISTIC SERMONS



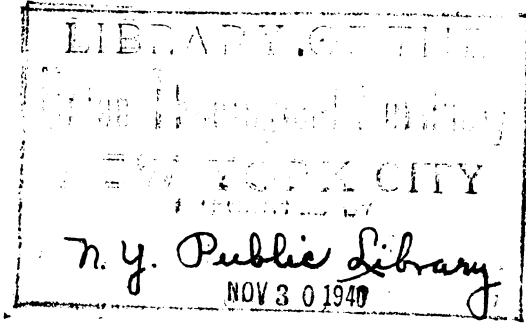
TOGETHER WITH PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS
FOR THE CONDUCT OF THE AFTER-MEETING



COMPILED BY THE EVANGELISTIC COMMITTEE
OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN THE U. S. A.

Presbyterian Board of Publication and Sabbath School Work

PHILADELPHIA : NEW YORK : CHICAGO : ST. LOUIS



COPYRIGHT 1909
BY
PARLEY E. ZARTMANN

XII

NO IMPOSSIBILITIES WITH GOD

HENRY COLLIN MINTON, D.D., LL.D.

First Presbyterian Church
Trenton, N. J.

XII

NO IMPOSSIBILITIES WITH GOD

"But Jesus beheld them, and said unto them, With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."—ST. MATTHEW xix. 26.

THESE words are found in the course of the conversation of our Lord with a certain rich young man who came asking what good thing he might do in order that he might have eternal life. The Great Teacher told him to keep the commandments. The young man, doubtless in all sincerity, inquired, which? In reply, our Lord gave him a masterful summary of the law. To this the rich young man, still sincere, replied that he had kept all these from his youth up, and inquired what he still lacked. Then the Great Teacher, with His divine insight, saw that it was time to expose the young man's weakness to himself. "Go and sell all that thou hast and give to the poor."

There has been much unnecessary effort in making general application of these words. The Great Teacher taught His pupils one by one. The Great Physician treated His patients each according to his special need. He made much of the personal equation; and while this was the particular treatment called for by this young man, it is proper for us to believe that for others, he would have applied entirely different tests.

However, this test was too rigid, and we read that the young man went away sorrowful.

Then we are told that Jesus turned to His disciples, and said: "How hardly"—that is to say, with what difficulty—"shall a rich man enter the Kingdom of Heaven." Thereupon, after the Oriental fashion, saying it over again in the concrete and pictorial way, he adds: "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God." This saying astonished His disciples, whereupon they inquired: "Who then can be saved?" The thing to observe is, that the impression made upon their minds was not that of great difficulty, but of sheer impossibility. In reply to their question, he spoke the words of the text: "With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."

Of course, the statement of the text is to be limited by the nature of things. There are some things that even the Omnipotent God cannot do. He cannot discover a shorter distance between two given points than that described by a straight line. God cannot make two times two equal five. He cannot construct a circle, the center of which is outside of its circumference. These would be contradictions, and Jonathan Edwards said long ago that a contradiction is not a thing. The same limitations hold true in the moral world. God cannot lie, for his very nature is truth, and for the truth to lie is a contradiction between the subject and the predicate. God can not do

wrong, for his very nature is infinite righteousness. God can not commit or sanction sin, for He is Himself infinitely holy.

The thought of the text is, the things which are impossible to man are not, because of that impossibility, necessarily to be regarded as absolutely impossible; God can do them. This is suggestive of God's power in Nature all about us. It is said that there is enough potential energy stored away in a cubic foot of coal to lift a thousand pounds a foot from the surface of the earth. It is an infinitesimal bit of physical force that lifts a tiny blade of grass in the spring time, in resistance to the universal force of gravity, up from the surface of the ground; but if you multiply that by the number of blades of grass in the meadow, and the number of meadows in the valley, and on the hill slopes and mountain sides, you begin to have some conception of the silent display of physical force in the vegetable world about us. Those grand old live oaks that constitute such a characteristic feature of the California landscape, stand, with their great, brawny arms supporting tons of avoirdupois, year after year, actively but silently resisting the omnipresent force of gravity.

In 1889, I chanced to be in Paris when the Eifel tower was completed, 987 feet high, with the flagstaff on top, 13 feet long, making an even thousand. Men passed by and exclaimed, "What an achievement of modern engineering!" And yet, if you will visit the Rockies or the Sierras, you will see those magnificent

mountain peaks, heaving their massive shoulders upward into the sky; and because we see them so constantly, we forget the mighty forces that hold them there. This magnificent architecture of the Almighty, holding hanging cliffs in mid-air, is a sublime object lesson of what men call physical force. We see it, or rather we see its effects, in the cyclone of the prairie, in the storm of the sea, and in the sweep of the stars through space.

And yet all this is nothing but what men call physical force. It cannot think a single thought. It cannot form a single resolution. There is nothing intellectual in it all. One spark of mind outshines the whole. Have you ever heard a great orator? Some one has said that this little world of our is not large enough for more than one or two real orators at the same time. You have felt the spell of a strange power that held you as its willing victim, and swayed your whole being as it would. This is a higher kind of power. There is personality in it. It strikes men with a finer touch and a greater force. It reaches the hidden well-springs of the soul. God's power is a moral power; a spiritual power. It is imperceptible in its processes and invisible in its work. "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh nor whither it goeth."

This divine power is the vital element of the Christian religion. Every day it does things which are impossible for man to do. No man can stay yonder

star in its course. No man can lift that mountain from its seat and hurl it into the sea. Much less can any man redeem himself from the power of sin. It is an *impossibility*. The cause must be greater than the effect. Only God can do it. One renewed man stands for more power, or rather, shall we not say, a higher kind of power, than all the shining systems in the midnight sky. One single John B. Gough, yesterday a dissipated drunkard in the gutter, and today a Christian gentleman, preaching the gospel of temperance into the lives of his fellow men; one single Jerry McCauley or S. H. Hadley, today a prince among the reprobates of sin, and tomorrow a reclaimed trophy of the saving power of God; one single Paul, the apostle, today going up from Jerusalem to Damascus, breathing out zigzag lightnings of hatred and persecution against the early church, tomorrow rising up and tremblingly inquiring: "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?"—and then going forth, by the grace of God, to live out the answer to his own question; one such man stands for a more magnificent display of the power of God than all the stars that have swung through space from the dawn of creation until today. This is the work of a higher kind of power. It touches men's moral sensibilities. It penetrates to their inmost soul. It lifts the level of human life and purifies the fountains of character.

Brethren, this is the basis of all our faith, and all our hope. If the power of God is not in our Christianity, then we may just as well quit our work and

throw up our hands in despair. I remember a few years ago, when Californians were disposed to laugh at the gentle earthquakes which caressed the foundations now and then, a friend of mine in San Francisco came home from his day's work at business, and while reading his paper in his library, his little boy came strutting across the room, trying to shake the very foundation of the house in which they lived. He told me that he asked his little boy what he was doing, and without a word of reply, he stepped in stately fashion across the room again. Upon repeating his question, imagine his surprise when his little boy answered, "Tryin' to det up anoder earhtwake." We may smile at Johnny's philosophy, and yet Johnny is not one whit more foolish than is the Church of Jesus Christ, if she is endeavoring to reach and remedy the evils of this world today, and to reclaim mankind from the deadly power of vice and sin and death, unless she has in it all the Almighty power of the living God. God, and not man, is at the bottom of the enterprise of redemption. He holds men's hearts in the hollow of his hand. Nations before Him are as but the dust in the balance. His hand is in all history. He sees the changes and chances, He orders the ups and downs—the ins and outs—all for the accomplishment of his own wise purpose.

"And I doubt not through the ages, one increasing purpose runs,
 And the thoughts of men are widened with the process of
 the suns."

Nations are but His children; ages are but as a day

on the dial plate of God. Destiny is His creature. Rome rises, and sits in pomp and splendor upon her seven hills, and when the day of her empire is done, the Rome of the Cæsars crumbles into ruins. An Alexander conquers the world, and, according to the doubtful legend of our childhood, weeps because there are no more worlds to conquer. His work is done, and Alexander passes off the stage of action. Napoleon, the man of genius, and the man of destiny, comes from one island of the Atlantic to do his mighty work of conquest, and when his work is done, he is carried off into exile upon another lonely island of the sea. The most insignificant instruments seem to be God's favorites in doing His mighty work. Moses was the greatest military leader of antiquity. Rescued from the bullrushes, taught for forty years in the universities of Pharaoh, and then for other forty years among the lonely flocks of his heathen father-in-law in the wilderness, after these eighty years of preparation, he begins the work of the emancipation of his race.

In the coal miner's cabin on the banks of the Necker, in Germany, a child was born, a chosen child of destiny. By and by, we see the peasant's son in the monastery at Erfurt, and his eye falls upon a page of the chained Bible, on which he reads the words: "The just shall live by faith." Then was the birthday of a new era in history. God was in Luther; Luther was in Germany, and the Reformation was begun. He turns the nations as the rivers of water are turned.

Talk of difficulties in Christian work! With God nothing is impossible. Man's impossibilities are God's opportunities. Forty years ago Japan was more hostile to Christianity than China. Today, the only peril is in Japan's making haste too speedily in the direction of things western. I have no argument with a man, himself not a Christian, who says he does not believe in foreign missions. I remember how, sailing down southward on the China Sea, I looked off from the hurricane deck of my steamer and I saw those brown, barren headlands of China, with its 350,000,000 or 400,000,000 steeped in superstition and idolatry and spiritual death; a vast desert, with here and there a little oasis of Christian missionary influence. And as I hummed to myself:

"From Greenland's icy mountains,
From India's coral strands,"

I could not suppress the thought that unless God is in this enterprise, unless the dynamic of the Supernatural and the resources of the Infinite are enlisted in the movement, it is a fool's errand, at the best. Good, old John Newton was once asked whether he believed that God was able to save a heathen. His reply was a text for many a sermon. It was this: "Ever since the grace of God has saved John Newton, I have never doubted its power to save any other living man."

This thought is pertinent here at home as well. If there is any man too wicked to be saved by the grace of God, then all men are too wicked; if there is any

man too good to be saved by the grace of God, then all men are too good. The sin that paralyzes is that of doubting the infinite love, the infinite patience, the infinite, changing power of the redeeming God.

There is a lesson in this for the poorest and the weakest of us all. We are as nothing. God must be everything to us. We can do anything only by linking ourselves with God. Lord Bacon says: "We must learn to master Nature by obeying her laws." We must not use God's strength; we must let God's strength use us. His grace is able to take us, wicked and depraved and useless as we may be, and by a power greater than that which quieted the storm, remold us into his own blessed image. This is the simple lesson of faith. We open our hearts to Him. We open our lives to Him. We let Him use us for His honor and for the help of our fellowmen. These hands of ours must do His tasks; these feet of ours must walk His paths; these brains of ours must think His thoughts; these hearts of ours must respond to His love, which kindles ours; these wills of ours must merge themselves in His most holy will. This is the lesson of life. This is the core of the Gospel. This is the call of the Christ. This is the way the cross and its atonement has opened up. This is the way that gives joy, and peace, and hope, along the journey, and that leads to safety and eternal life at the end.