### “For God, All Things Are Possible” by S. Finlan, at First Church

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**Hebrews 4:14–15**

14 Since, then, we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast to our confession. 15For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who in every respect has been tested as we are, yet without sin.

**Mark 10:17–23, 27**

17 As he was setting out on a journey, a man ran up and knelt before him, and asked him, “Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?”18Jesus said . . . . “You know the commandments: ‘You shall not murder; You shall not commit adultery; You shall not steal; You shall not bear false witness; You shall not defraud; Honor your father and mother.’” 20He said to him, “Teacher, I have kept all these since my youth.” 21Jesus, looking at him, loved him and said, “You lack one thing; go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.” 22When he heard this, he was shocked and went away grieving, for he had many possessions.

23 Then Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, “How hard it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God! . . . . But for God all things are possible.”

This story introduces us to someone we might recognize. The man who throws himself at Jesus’ feet is a very decent fellow. He’s devout, moral, he follows the Ten Commandments. But he’s got a problem. It’s not that he has money—a problem we might wish *we* had. His problem is that he has a *love* of money. This is why he is “shocked and grieving” at what Jesus says. He can’t separate himself from his money.

Although Mark doesn’t spell it out, I think this fellow wanted to become part of Jesus’ travelling ministry. There were stricter requirements for those who would be full-time evangelists than for disciples who stayed at home. Jesus asks him to give away his wealth—to enable him to refocus on a new life as a travelling evangelist.

So, although Jesus’ requirement in this case was due to the guy’s desire to be a full-time evangelist, I think the underlying question is relevant for all Christians—are you too attached to something material? Does something get in the way of your loyalty to God? Now this is sensitive territory, because these things we love are a source of real joy for us. Perhaps you have an antique or a collectible that you cherish, enjoy, and take care of. Is that a sin? No, but you may want to think about it.

First of all, think about it with *joy*, because it *does* bring you joy. Think of the positive feeling it brings you. Recognizing what it *does* for you, is part of thinking it *through*. Does it bring back memories of a happy moment or a relationship? These may be priceless memories. But can you retain the memory without the article?

Many are being forced right now to let go of all their material possessions. Even if no natural disaster is striking us, things can happen in our lives that lead us to discover what really matters, and what has *true* value. We re-awaken to the path that Jesus is leading us toward. We develop greater spiritual strength and personal resolve. We remember to cultivate gratitude, one of the really good spiritual habits. Even the most mundane activities can become meaningful if you apply spiritual value to them. They are *elevated* into higher meaning.

So look deeply. Recall what your values are. Look at the *meanings* that you give to the material things you cherish. Have any of them become a kind of idol in your life, something that gets in the way of God?

Now it’s time to recall the *promise* that is in the Gospel this week. “For God all things are possible” (10:27). So that even if you have made an idol out of one of your favorite things, you can reform its influence over you, take it down from being an idol. Ask God to help you to control its influence. If you have a *heart* for God, God will keep a-hold of you. God has not finished with you.

Ask God to help you activate your deepest values. There is so much potential within you, so much life, so much humor and wisdom. Can you activate it? Can you start fresh? Can you be empowered—with God’s help, of course?

As regards our obsessions, Jesus understands our struggles and our delays, our affections and habits. Hebrews says Jesus is able “to sympathize with our weaknesses” (Heb 4:15). It should help you to know that Jesus has sympathy for you. Further, he can help you with that tendency to love some *thing*, as long as you are still trying to do God’s will in your life, as long as some idol has not consumed you and gained control of your life. Jesus knows your struggle.

He lived a life like ours. Hebrews says Jesus “has been tested, as we are” (4:15).

Life tests us constantly, doesn’t it? Too much, in fact! We wish it would stop. Enough with the testing! The constant testing can wear us out! Who sees this, who recognizes that we are feeling the pressure of life? Jesus does. He knows the tediousness of being constantly misunderstood, even by one’s closest friends and family. He knows the fatigue of doing one’s best, and it never being enough.

If you’ve had that experience, you’re not alone. Regardless of what you think about Jesus’ identity, I want you to contemplate *this* point: Jesus *understands* you. . . . He knows what you’ve gone through. You can endure difficult trials and dragging delays if you know that you’re *understood*.

What we all long to hear is “Well done, good and faithful servant” (Matt 25:21 NIV), and not just hear the sentence, but somehow know that the person saying it really knows the *ways* and the *times* when we remained faithful. Jesus knows the hard work you’ve done, and the patience you’ve shown.

Of course, the world may never recognize it, and may never acknowledge you. The world often acknowledges people who don’t deserve it, and snubs those who *do*. Popularity is a very temporary and shallow measure, and a prophet has no honor “in his own country, and among his own kin” (Mark 6:4; Matt 13:57).

So, don’t expect praise. Don’t *need* praise or attention. Society can have quite an extreme attitude towards you, which can feel like either triumph or disaster. Kipling wrote a poem (“If”) in which says, “If you can meet with Triumph and Disaster, And treat those two impostors just the same . . . . you’ll be a Man, my son!” This is the *real* testing the life brings.

So don’t be too concerned what people think. Keep your inward focus on God. Keep your *heart* for God. Do what you can to help God to help you to curb your personal idols and develop better habits. God’s not finished with you yet.

Be patient with yourself and with others as you go through life. We are all in the classroom of life, learning the lessons of love.