

GC Adventist Possibility Ministries
Awareness Sabbath, April 2022
Sermon Manuscript
By Karen & Ron Flowers

When Impossible becomes Possible

Key text: The things that are impossible with people are possible with God” (Luke 18:27).

Jesus loves people—every kind of people. When the Son of God took humanity upon Himself to become our Savior, He joined right in with our earthly family, living, eating, praying, sleeping, working and worshipping with us (John 1:14; Heb 2:10). He showed that He loves and wants to be close to every one of us as His brother or sister (Heb. 2:11). He is especially glad when someone loves Him back and wants to be close to Him! Think of the best teacher you ever had and think also of your best friend. Then, imagine what it would be like to roll them into one; that’s what Jesus is like!!

Today on Adventist Possibility Ministries Awareness Sabbath, we will look at Jesus’ love for people, how He faced their challenges with them and turned impossibilities into possibilities.

Mountains Jumping into the Sea

The apostle Matthew tells about the amazing encounters of Jesus with people during His ministry. Many came to see, to listen, to be near One who loved people like He did (Matt. 4:24, 25). Jesus cared deeply about the crowds (Matt. 9:36), talking with them, praying with them, teaching them, and healing them. Sometimes, He fed them! One late afternoon, Jesus wanted to give supper to the large tired audience who had been with Him all day. A boy was willing to share a few bread loaves and small fish, but Jesus’ disciples still saw supper as an impossible task: “How far will they go among so many?” they asked (John 6:9).

Jesus once spoke this way of impossibilities: “If you have faith in God and don’t doubt, you can tell this mountain to get up and jump into the sea, and it will” (Mark 11:23)

Contemporary English Version). As far as Jesus was concerned, this supper for the 5000 was a mountain headed for the sea! He prayed over that lunch basket and His heavenly Father (who is also ours) made sure, for as long as Jesus kept passing out the food to the people, there was enough! The impossible became possible!

Meeting the leper. The times when Jesus met people by themselves, however, are very special passages of Scripture. They present the Savior, up close, personal, face to face, dealing with people's impossibilities. In our mind's eye we can imagine what that must have been like, to be able to look right into Jesus' eyes. One of these stories is told in Matt. 8:1-4.

Walking along a dirt road near Capernaum, with multitudes around Him, Jesus hears a muffled cry:

“Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean.”

The appeal came from a man with leprosy, an awful disease that makes your fingers and toes and nose so you can't feel them. Without feeling, these body parts get easily injured. Such people were considered “untouchables,” forced to live away from society lest others catch their condition.

We once saw an unusual film *The Gospel According to Matthew*¹ that presented this meeting of Jesus with the leper. In the film, everybody is fleeing from the diseased man, shouting at him to get away from them. But not Jesus. He does the very opposite: He *goes* to him. As Jesus approaches, the diseased man falls to his knees with his head bowed down. Jesus goes and squats in front of him; their faces are now close to each other. Very carefully and gently, Jesus reaches out to touch him and lift up his chin so that their eyes make contact. Jesus smiles and says kindly,

“I am willing; be clean.”

Then Jesus gently unwraps the grimy mask, the covering required by Jewish law to shield his mouth. As the healed man's nerve endings awaken and scaly patches of skin disappear, he starts leaping about with childish squeals of delight. He runs to Jesus, who is still crouching down, delighted with him. The healed man's love hug topples the two of them into the dust of the roadside; both are delirious with joy.

The lead actor in that film, Bruce Marchiano, who played the part of Jesus, wrote a book, *In the Footsteps of Jesus*,² in which he commented on this leprosy scene. It dawned on him, he said, how this diseased individual was a living breathing man with a name and a history, hopes, dreams and desires; a mother, father, maybe even a wife and kids. What if we saw someone from our family in such pain as this man was? We'd rush to him, hold him in our arms, weep and cry to God for him. He is still a human being, even though diseased and deformed. Marchiano decided then that he wanted to film that scene to convey to this man in every possible way that he was loved, and valued, and special to God.

The Hardest Work – the Heart Work

“The things that are impossible with people are possible with God,” Jesus once said (Luke 18:27). He saw possibilities in people. Jesus saw into human hearts as well as seeing their bodies, so He healed them in this hardest part—their innermost being, bringing God's rest and peace to their troubled lives.

The Capernaum paralytic. One day while Jesus was in a house packed with people listening to His teaching, four men so badly wanted their friend in Jesus' presence that they actually took an impossible route, they opened a piece of the flat roof to lower him down. Mark 2:3-5 records the unusual activity of these possibility-people. When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralyzed man, “Son, your sins are forgiven” (vs. 5).

To rescue humankind from sin is the mission of the Savior (Luke 19:10). The longing in every heart for restoration, for peace with God, is really our primary need. Jesus knows this and addresses it first of all in the case of this paralyzed man. In this instance, Jesus went on to physically heal him also. Healing of physical infirmities may not always occur, though, even when we bring them to God. However, the gospel *always* provides forgiveness of sins—healing of the soul—to all who ask Him and believe in Him. Our bodies may have limitations, but when Jesus transforms our minds and hearts, every faculty and strength we have is spurred into action for Him. A healed heart is rich with possibilities!

Joni's story. Following a tragic diving accident in 1967 at the age of 17, Joni Eareckson Tada was left a quadriplegic. She spent years in rehabilitation, during which her teenage Christian faith was severely tested and tried. At first, she refused to accept reality; she doggedly pursued the ability to walk again through medical treatment and even faith-healing. Again and again, it proved fruitless. Pain, depression and despair threatened repeatedly to overwhelm and snuff out her young life. Ultimately, through the support of her family and friends, her trust in God matured and she felt herself being healed in spirit. She found she had abilities, even though limited. She could draw, holding a pen in her mouth. This, together with her voice, gave her a means to express emotions, feelings and convictions of a heart with ever-increasing gratitude to God. Self-taught, her artistic skills improved and drew interest. Opportunities emerged to share her spiritual experience with God, her questions, her suffering, her faltering, but now enlarging, faith. She stepped into each opportunity.

Now in her 70's, Joni is world-renowned for her autobiography *Joni: An Unforgettable Story*³ and other inspirational Christian books, as well as her global outreach to those with disabilities. She has recently battled breast cancer, bringing to bear upon this crisis also her

indomitable trust in God. A quote from her inspires our hearts with the possibilities that become open to us when we give our lives to God, “Each one of us is God’s special work of art. Through us, He teaches and inspires, delights and encourages, informs and uplifts all those who view our lives.”⁴

Enlisting Possibility-people

In the first letter that carries his name, the apostle John exclaims, “See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!” (1 John 3:1) Many modern translations put an exclamation mark after this sentence, for it really is an exclamation of the astonishing possibility-turned-into-reality that is ours in Christ: WE ARE CHILDREN OF GOD!! As God’s “possibility-people,” every one of His children is a walking advertisement for the Lord. Repeatedly, Jesus enlisted such people into His mission.

The Gerasene madman. One of them was once a devil-enslaved madman. This mighty transformational miracle of healing is described in Mark 5:1-20. This man lived on the Gentile-side of Galilee, the region of the Gerasenes, also known as Decapolis. It happened on the morning after a violent storm on Galilee when Jesus stilled the wind and sea (Mark 4:39). As the boat neared landfall on the now-calm sea, the disciples were surely still processing the miracle of the night. Suddenly, another “storm,” in the form of a demon-possessed man, approached them.

The passage is one of Mark’s longer pieces, with lots of detail about the frightening specter this man presented, the danger he posed to himself and others and the dialog with the demons: “No one could bind him anymore, not even with a chain. . . . No one was strong enough to subdue him” (vs. 3). This strongman was apparently known and clearly a terror to the community in his mental state.

A “legion” of demonic beings claimed to enslave the man (vs. 9). (The term comes from a Latin word signifying a Roman battle group of some 6000 – 7000). Not since the wilderness temptations do we read of Jesus facing a direct encounter with such a formidable evil force. This time though, the demons capitulate without struggle, pleading only to be allowed to escape into a large herd of some 2000 pigs.

Later, as Jesus prepared to embark from there, the healed man, now clothed and in his right mind (vs. 15), really wanted to go with Jesus. But Jesus enlisted him in mission instead.

“Go home to your own people,” the Lord told him, “And tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you” (vs. 19).

“So the man went away and began to tell in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him. And all the people were amazed” (vs. 20).

Everyone has something to do, something to share. Everyone who has encountered Jesus in some way—in the flesh, as many Bible characters did, or in the spirit now—through worship, prayer, listening to sermons or doing Bible-study—everyone has something to share as a result. Everyone can do something for Jesus.

The Samaritan woman. Jesus encountered the Samaritan woman at the historic Jacob’s well (John 4:4-42). Despite her problem-ridden life and her failed marital relationships, Jesus took an interest in her. So moved was she by His acceptance of her and His self-disclosure to her, she just abandoned her waterpot and hurried to gather as many as possible to come and meet Him.

“Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Messiah?”

“They came out of the town and made their way toward him” (vss. 29, 30). Jesus’ journey through town got extended to two days spent there, and they declared Him to be “the Savior of the world” (vs. 42). What an impact she made!

The apostle Peter. Consider Peter’s comeback from his tragic denial of Jesus. Before that awful moment, Jesus anticipated it and said to him, “Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift each of you like wheat. But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith will not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers.” (Luke 22:32). “*When you have turned back . . .*” Jesus saw possibilities for his overly self-confident disciple even among the darkest of impossibilities. What wonderful hope for Peter; what wonderful hope for us to know that Jesus is praying we will act on the possibilities He sees for us.

Paul, the former Pharisee. Let us not forget the apostle Paul. Think of the possibilities Jesus had in mind for him, even as Paul (then Saul) persecuted the church, overseeing the death of Stephen and driving fledgling Jewish-Christian believers from their homes and towns in his misguided religious zeal. When the arrogant Pharisee had been brought to his knees on the Damascus Road, the Lord revealed to Ananias, a disciple of Jesus at Damascus, the possibilities ahead for the blind pharisaical zealot, “This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before Gentiles and kings and the people of Israel” (Acts 9:15). Paul went from impossibility to possibility, from persecutor to proclaimer, planting in public meetings and private writings for the remainder of his life the banner of Jesus the Christ in cities, towns and territories around the vast inland sea called the Mediterranean.

Conclusion

Fanny Crosby’s was a “possibility” life. Born in Putnam County, New York in 1820, she lost her sight at six weeks of age. A slight cold had inflamed her eyes. With her family doctor

away, one who was really unqualified prescribed the use of hot poultices, which left her blind. Before she turned 1, her father died. Much of her childhood was spent with her Christian grandmother while her mother worked to support the family. Her grandmother taught her to believe in God and to pray and to memorize large portions of Scripture.

Early on, it became clear she was gifted at verse writing. Her first poem at age 8 declared her possibility thinking: “Oh, what a happy soul I am, although I cannot see! I am resolved that in this world contented I will be. How many blessings I enjoy that other people don't, to weep and sigh because I'm blind I cannot nor I won't!”⁵ Later in her life, a well-meaning individual expressed that it was a pity God did not give her sight when He gave all her other gifts. She quickly replied, “If at birth I had been able to make one petition, it would have been that I was born blind. . . . Because when I get to heaven, the first face that shall ever gladden my sight will be that of my Savior.”⁶

Fanny Crosby committed her life to Jesus in a full way at the age of 30 at the Methodist Broadway Tabernacle on 30th St., New York City. As the congregation sang Isaac Watts' great hymn, “Alas and Did My Savior Bleed,” the final line sank into her as her own testimony, “Here Lord, I give myself away; 'Tis all that I can do.” At the altar where she had been praying, she suddenly stood and shouted, “Hallelujah!” A blessed assurance swept over her. She expressed her feelings later in “Blessed Assurance,” one of her most loved and enduring hymns.

She would go on to write several thousand more hymns until her death in 1915. Our Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal (1985) has several, including “Pass Me Not, O Gentle Savior.” We'd like to sing this as we close this service.

Fanny had visited a Manhattan prison, where she had shared some words and had sung some of her songs to the inmates. Suddenly she heard one of them cry out, “Good Lord, do not

pass me by.” Here was man, she realized, who was truly suffering and felt disregarded. She went home and penned the hymn, “Pass Me Not, O Gentle Savior” to give voice to that cry.

In this hymn is the assurance we want to leave with you today: When you cry out to the Lord, you will not be passed by Him. As the third stanza implies: He will turn His face toward you. He will heal your wounded broken spirit. He will save you by His grace.

Notes:

¹Van den Bergh, R. (Director). (2010). *The Gospel According to Matthew* [Film]. Nest Family Entertainment.

²Marchiano, B. (1997). *In the Footsteps of Jesus*. Eugene, OR: Harvest House.

³Tada, J. E. (2021). *Joni: An Unforgettable Story*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

⁴Tada, J. E. (1994). *Secret Strength: For Those Who Search*. Colorado Springs, CO: Multnomah Books, p. 69.

⁵Crosby, F. J. (2011) *An Autobiography*. Kindle Edition. p. 11.

⁶Galli, M., & Olsen, T. (Editors). (2000). *131 Christians Everyone Should Know*. Kindle Edition. p.160.