

Lake Cities Community Church  
April 18, 2010  
Series: Prayer  
Pastor Craig Schill

## **“Mission Impossible”**

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**It was an impossible situation** – it looked like the missionary medical clinic would have to close. The hospital, located in the Ningbo Zhejiang province on the coast of China, had about 50 beds and was started by a man named Dr. William Parker. Dr. Parker, his wife and four small children came from Scotland to begin this work, and it was going well – the beds were full and people streamed for medical care. Along with medical help the people were hearing about Jesus and His love for them.

But then tragedy struck; Dr. Parker’s wife became ill and died; and shortly after one of his children became seriously ill. The grieving Dr. Parker understandably decided he had to leave the mission field for the sake of his children and he made plans to return to Scotland.

And so he prayed about what to do. To start, he approached a new young missionary who worked in the pharmacy, named Hudson Taylor. Would Taylor be willing to continue at least running at least the pharmacy so medicine could be given to the people? Hudson prayed about it and said, " After waiting upon the Lord for guidance I felt constrained to undertake not only the dispensary but the hospital as well, relying solely on the faithfulness of a prayer-hearing God to furnish means for its support." This was in September of 1859. Hudson Taylor was 27-years old.

But without the founder around financial support began to dry up. The bank account quickly dwindled to zero. Perhaps the hospital would have to close after all? The staff began to get very nervous. Conversations surrounded the logistic of transferring patients to other facilities. And then one day, they found that they were down to their very last bag of rice. The situation looked impossible. Realistically they needed (in today's figures) at least \$5,000 to just to keep the doors open a little while longer.

Who could they turn to for help? In 1859 they could not shoot off an e-mail to key donors. They could not even call someone – the telephone would not be invented for 17 more years! There was no way for them to get the word out about their financial crisis. All they could do was to pray, and rely on Hudson Taylor's "prayer hearing God."

We are beginning a new sermon series this morning, which I am calling, "Mission Impossible." The reason for the title is that we do not begin to seriously consider the possibility of prayer until we see the impossibility of our mission. As long as we think we can do it ourselves – we don't and won't pray.

If we have 10 bags of rice in our pantry – we feel pretty secure in our situation. If we believe deep down that we are smart enough, talented enough and gifted enough to "handle it" then chances are pretty good prayer will not be a high priority.

But... if you have come to the place where you know you can't do it – then you are ready to consider prayer. When you realize you know you can't fix your broken relationships. When you finally understand that you can't solve your financial troubles alone. When it hits you that parenting is an impossibility – you and I will at that point consider the possibility of prayer.

The same is true in the church. Worshiping? Growing? Loving? Sharing? Can we do any of these things in our own strength? Can we worship God with a pure heart? Can we submit to him joyfully? Can we wrinkle our noses and squint our eyes and force ourselves to grow in our faith? Can we love people who have offended us? Can we change a human heart and give someone faith? We must embrace the fact that we do not have a difficult mission, but an impossible one – and therefore we must consider the possibility of prayer.

### **You Can't Do It**

So, Our first point is simply this: “you can't do it.” Now we don't like this point, not at all. We do not like being told we cannot do something. Napoleon Bonaparte bragged, “The word impossible is not in my dictionary.” Walt Disney said, “It's kind of fun to do the impossible.” The Queen of Hearts said in Alice in Wonderland: “Sometimes I've believed as many as six impossible things before breakfast.” And who can forget the famous words of John Locke from LOST – “Don't tell me what I can't do.”

*But for the Christian it is just the opposite.* The Christian faith only begins to make sense when we embrace truth of impossibility.

Regarding the doctrine of salvation and the difficulty of rich people getting into heaven, Jesus said in Matthew chapter 19, verse 26: **“With people this is impossible.”** **“With people this is impossible.”** Can you save yourself? No – it is impossible. The writer to the Hebrews (11:6) said, **“Without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him.”** Apart from seeking God by faith – nothing you do can please God. In his incarnation Jesus modeled this for you and I. Jesus said, in John chapter 5 and verse 30 (this is Jesus speaking): **“I can**

do nothing on My own initiative. As I hear, I judge; and My judgment is just, because I do not seek My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me.

You can't do it – You can't save yourself. You can't please God. You can't accomplish anything of lasting value for the Kingdom of God in your own strength. You and I are like an empty glove. An empty glove has great potential – but it is weak; it has no strength in itself. If an empty glove has a mind to play the piano or paint a picture it will really struggle. Apart from Jesus Christ – we are just empty gloves flopping around getting more and more frustrated at what we cannot do for ourselves.

### **God Can Do It**

You can't do it – but let's move to our second point: God can do it! Regarding salvation we learned that Jesus said [Matt. 19:26](#) "With people this is impossible, but (he added) with God all things are possible." You can't, but God can – He can do anything He wants.. The angel told Mary: "Nothing is impossible with God." [Luke 1:37](#) regarding the birth of John the Baptist to an aged aunt. Paul said, [Phil. 4:13](#) I can do all things through Him who strengthens me. How much can Paul do? All things? But who is providing the muscle? God is – I do things through His strength. When we are depending of God's power – it is like a hand inside a glove. God works through us to accomplish his will – with skill, and power and effectiveness. But it is not our power – but God's power. When the cook told Hudson Taylor only one bag of rice was left, Taylor replied, "Then the Lord's time for helping us must be close at hand." Taylor knew that at our greatest point of weakness, God is most powerful.

## Prayer is the Key

You can't do it – God can do it, now consider the last point that PRAYER is the key to making the impossible possible.

I brought with me today a straw, a piece of wood and a hammer. How many of you think it is possible for me to hammer this straw into this piece of wood. You can't do it – it is impossible. But with the right force – such as a hurricane or tornado – a plastic straw could be drive into a piece of wood. Prayer takes a normally impossible task and by bringing the power of God to bear, makes it possible.

There are dozens of examples of this in Scripture, let me give you five. In Matthew 17, the disciples failed to cast out a demon. [Matt. 17:20](#) And He said to them, “Because of the littleness of your faith; for truly I say to you, if you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it will move; and nothing will be impossible to you. [Matt. 17:21](#) [“But this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting.”] They had plenty of faith in themselves and their own power – but little faith in God. And because they didn't see the impossibility of their task, they didn't consider the possibility of prayer. They neglected prayer.

Second example. When Jesus taught on how to evangelize the world – how the harvests were ripe – people were ready to trust in Him. What was his strategy? [Luke 10:2](#) And He was saying to them, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore beseech the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest. Who has the power to mobilize people for evangelism? God – how do we tap into the power of God – through prayer.

Third example. The Apostle Paul planted many, many churches and he really desired that his work not be in vain. He wanted the people to grow spiritually and not to be deceived by false teaching or to fight among themselves. What was his strategy? He prayed for them: Paul wrote: [Col. 1:9](#) For this reason also, since the day we heard of it, we have not ceased to pray for you and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, [Col. 1:10](#) so that you will walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God. Paul knew God had the power to establish them in their faith, and that through prayer God would respond.

As Paul did not want his churches to fail, number five, Jesus did not want his disciples to fail and lose heart. What was his strategy to ensure their faith would remain strong? Prayer. Jesus said to his disciples in the Garden, [Mark 14:38](#) “keep watching and praying that you may not come into temptation; the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak.” What is weak? Us! Where does the strength come from to avoid temptation come from? God through prayer. To Peter Jesus said: [Luke 22:32](#) but I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail; and you, when once you have turned again, strengthen your brothers.” Peter’s faith faltered during Jesus’ arrest and torture, but it did not fail completely like Judas’. Why? Because Jesus prayed him through the trial.

Last example – as Christians we are to love one another – which is not an easy thing to do. Where do we find the power to love? God’s power through prayer. Jesus said, [Matt. 5:44](#) “But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you. Paul said, [Phil. 1:9](#) And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in real knowledge and all discernment.

It is like one of my favorite sermon illustrations, that I have used two or three times before. The elephant and the mouse crossed a bridge together, and the mouse says to the elephant, "Boy we really shook that bridge didn't we?" It is not that we are passive – we have work to do – God partners with us; but we do not overemphasize our contribution, and we do not underemphasize God's role.

## **Application**

Application. I have two brief points of application this morning. First, of course, I want you to encourage you to pray consistently. Specifically I want you to commit to praying every day this week for the impossible situation you are facing. If you are already doing that great – but probably we are not all praying consistently. Let this sermon inspire you to pray consistently this week – the next seven days for your impossible situation – and let's see what God does.

About seven months into our church plant I realized that starting this church was an impossible task. We were going through some difficult challenges, and I knew I had to bring my weakness to God. This prayer is from my journal in October of 2007: "Dear Father. Help me to trust you. Help me to give my cares to you and not to collect and trust in myself. I give you our selection of elders. I give you our facility change. I give you our growth and lack of growth. I give you my insecurity and fear. I give you LCCC – it you want to close it down, it is OK with me. If you want to grow it, I am on board. I give you my sermons – bless them as a simple offering to you. I give you the selection of our next worship leader – give wisdom in that process. I pray for the people in my flock – guide them and help them, I pray. Amen." What is the impossible situation that you are facing?

Have you completely recognize you cannot do it, and confessed that God can, according to his will. Husbands and wives pray together. Teenagers - start a journal like I have to record your prayers and struggles.

Second, I want to encourage you to share your struggles or victories in prayer. I want to encourage you to share in your community life groups or your ministry team meetings. We are not alone in this quest to pray, and we need to encourage one another. I and I need nine of you to be willing to share with the congregation. Starting next week I want to begin to have one prayer testimony for each week we are studying prayer. If you have a prayer story you would be willing to share, please contact me to schedule you.

There was a man named Bill Berger who looked down at the pile of money in front of Him. It totaled to about \$250.00 That was a considerable sum of money back in 1859, equal to about \$5,000 in today's currency. Berger lived in London where his father has recently passed away and left him an inheritance. His desire was to give it away to missions. He described a "heavy burden" coming over him that compelled him to want to use his wealth for the Lord's work. He bowed his head and prayed for the Lord to help him to know where to send this money. God put a friend of his, Hudson Taylor, on his heart. Berger wrote a check and put it in the mail with this note: "The bill enclosed was for immediate needs, and would they write fully, after praying over the matter, if there were ways in which they could profitably use more?"

Bill Berger put that money in an envelope, addressed it to Hudson Taylor in Nigbo China – and four months later it arrived just as the last bag of rice ran out. Mission impossible was turned into mission possible because of prayer. Hudson Taylor said to the staff and patients – "Look at our God. Look at His power!!" He said, ""Where is the idol that

can do anything like that? Have they ever delivered us in our troubles, or answered prayers like this?"

What we have been doing this morning is answering the question "why?" Why do we need to pray? Because you can't do it; but God can do it. And God works His power through prayer. When we embrace impossibility of our situation, we begin to see the possibilities of prayer.