



CANYON HILLS

COMMUNITY CHURCH

Series: Mark

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When Life Looks Impossible

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I hope you're encouraged to know that as we give and support ministry and the gospel work both here and around the world, there is something good going on in the lives of teenagers. I am so grateful for our youth pastors, Jon and Matt, and for all of you adult volunteers and leaders who involve yourselves in that ministry. We are hopeful that as God raises up the future leaders of his work in his church, the future directors of ministry, worship leaders, pastors, and elders are actually sitting amongst us right now. That should give us some hope, right there.

While you're giving, let me follow up on what I began last Sunday. I mentioned to you last week that I would talk to you about this this week. If you were here last Sunday, you'll remember that we made some pretty big announcements regarding the future of our church now, going forward. One of those announcements was that in just seven Sundays from now, all the service times are going to change.

We're actually adding a fourth Sunday morning service. I reminded you that for every service that goes on on Sunday mornings, it requires 221 volunteers. So, right now, just those volunteering in this room and all those in every other corner of this building right now... There are 221 other people doing ministry. In each service, it's a different 221.

So, now that we're adding a fourth service, this is an opportunity for many of you in this room for whom this is your church, this is where you call home, and this is where you invite a friend to come to church with you, but who still haven't figured out that place where you can serve or make a difference.

Maybe you're even wondering, "Do they even need me here at this church?" The answer is unequivocally *yes*. We need 220 of you from this service to be willing to say, "Hey, I want to get in the game. Tell me what I can do to help. Let me know where I can make a difference." Right inside your bulletin, there's a little flyer called "Count Me In." Church, we need you, especially those of you who aren't serving yet, to respond.

Let me tell you, there's nothing more boring than being a part of a church and not doing anything in your church. There's nothing more unsatisfying than that, and so we want you to enjoy and have joy from being a part of this church family, and a lot of times, the joy comes from rolling up our sleeves together and doing the work of the gospel together.

So, fill that out, and if you could even fill that out before you leave today, all we're going to ask is that you leave it on your seat. Before you get up and leave the room, just turn around and leave it on your seat. We'll collect those after everyone is gone and we'll begin the process of following up on you. Please... I don't even want to say, "Pray about it." You don't need to pray about this. This is not one of those prayer things. Just say, "Okay, I need to be a part of this church family," and that will help you get started. Thank you, thank you for that.

Let's get our Bibles open to Mark, chapter 6. This morning, I want to talk about this. How are we Christians supposed to process life when our fear and our faith have a head-on collision? What difference does our faith in Jesus make when those impossible situations that leave us feeling in way over our heads come into our lives? What difference does it make to be a follower of Jesus in those moments, and does our faith in God help us in those moments? If it does, how is it supposed to help us when we're facing these circumstances that have no human answers?

I think the passage we're going to look at right now gives us some real-time insight into how we can actually thrive as children of God, no matter what hits us. This is what we do on Sunday mornings. In case you're visiting today for the first time, we go through books of the Bible verse by verse.

We're working our way through the gospel of Mark, and we come to one of those scenes in the life of Jesus and his disciples that's a very familiar one. In fact, out of all the miracles we have recorded in the Bible, this is the only miracle of Jesus that appears in all four gospels. So, at the very least, what this should do for us is kind of let us know this more than likely had a tremendous impact on the people who were there that day when this very scene took place.

With that said, let's go ahead and stand for the reading of God's Word. We left off in verse 29 last Sunday, so we'll pick it up in verse 30.

"The apostles returned to Jesus and told him all that they had done and taught. And he said to them, 'Come away by yourselves to a desolate place and rest a while.' For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat. And they went away in the boat to a desolate place by themselves.

Now many saw them going and recognized them, and they ran there on foot from all the towns and got there ahead of them. When he went ashore he saw a great crowd, and he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. And he began to teach them many things.

And when it grew late, his disciples came to him and said, 'This is a desolate place, and the hour is now late. Send them away to go into the surrounding countryside and villages and

buy themselves something to eat.' But he answered them, 'You give them something to eat.' And they said to him, 'Shall we go and buy two hundred denarii worth of bread and give it to them to eat?'" By the way, that's a little less than a whole year's salary in that day.

"And he said to them, 'How many loaves do you have? Go and see.' And when they had found out, they said, 'Five, and two fish.' Then he commanded them all to sit down in groups on the green grass. So they sat down in groups, by hundreds and by fifties.

And taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven and said a blessing and broke the loaves and gave them to the disciples to set before the people. And he divided the two fish among them all. And they all ate and were satisfied. And they took up twelve baskets full of broken pieces and of the fish. And those who ate the loaves were five thousand men."

Father in heaven, we just thank you for your Word right now. We thank you for the fact that it is our authority for all of life and all of faith. We thank you, God, that it is powerful, powerful enough to save us, that it can divide between our spirit and our soul, and that it has a way of revealing our thoughts and fears and exposing our doubts.

God, we pray that you would use this Word today to teach us, to correct us where we might be off-track, to rebuke us where we might be rebelling in our hearts, and to give us hope and comfort where we may feel like there is none. God, have your way now. In the power of your Holy Spirit, we pray in Christ's name, amen.

I want to confess to you that passages like this are humbling to me because when I come to them, I'm always reminded of how much of God's daily grace I'm still in need of. I look at my own life and after all these years of theological training, preaching and teaching God's Word, and counseling people who are hurting, I still respond to certain trials and difficulties in my life with less-than-stellar faith.

Sometimes, it's a response of panic that I feel welling up in my heart, or the sense of hopelessness, that, "There's no way this is going to pass this time," or sometimes even anger, just getting mad that I still have to deal with this stuff or this issue in my own life. You could sprinkle all over the top of that just a little doubt to throw in.

I come to passages like this and I have to be grateful for the patient grace of God. He's always committed to finishing what he starts, even in my own heart and my own life, and I want you, hopefully by the end of today, to have this deep love and appreciation for God's patient grace in your life.

I want us to notice the wisdom in this story and I want us to glean from it how in the world we can actually thrive in the midst of those impossible odds that come into our lives. I think the very first thing we have to settle if we're ever going to face impossible situations in our lives is this very thing.

1. *We have to accept that God allows impossible circumstances to come our way.* We have to. We have to decide right now, before you leave this room, that God actually allows for incredibly difficult things to take place in our lives. We see this all over the Bible, don't we? Moses slams smack into the Red Sea with 2 million of his closest friends and the ruthless army of Pharaoh chasing after them to try and kill them all.

Joseph comes face to face with the false accusation of his boss' wife claiming he tried to seduce her. David goes to the battlefield to check up on his brothers who are in Israel's army, fighting against the Philistines. He goes to the battlefield and he finds his brothers, only for himself to be standing face-to-face with the nine-foot-tall Goliath. Make no mistake about it; Goliath had more hair on his knuckles than David had in his beard.

Right here in Mark 6, the disciples are tagging along with Jesus, listening to him teach, and before they knew it, it starts to get dark. Verse 31 tells us they're in a desolate place. Now, in our vernacular, a desolate place would be known as any place that doesn't have a Starbucks within two miles. That's a desolate place in our day and age, right? Maybe even one mile.

They're out in the middle of nowhere. It's getting dark. People are estimating there are at least 10,000 people: 5,000 men, and when you count the women and the children, there could be more than 10,000 people in this unplanned picnic, and the disciples have no food and no money to buy food. Jesus says, in verse 37, calmly, **"You give them something to eat."**

One of the things I keep in my head is this running list of the people I want to meet in heaven and ask them questions. I want to find the disciples who were there that day and I want to ask them what they were thinking when Jesus looked at them and said, "Go feed them! Give them something to eat." I'm thinking, "Is Jesus dehydrated? Is he delirious? Can he not see all these people? We are a long ways from anywhere!" I would love to know what they were thinking.

I think the point is that impossible situations we encounter in life, a lot of times, just sneak up on us. We don't always see them coming. We're just going along with what feels like a normal life, and without any warning at all sometimes, we find ourselves staring down the barrel of a heart-wrenching or maybe devastating situation.

A loved one comes to you and admits that they're struggling with a life-threatening eating disorder. You're falsely accused of something and you have no way of proving your innocence. After months and years of treatment, the prognosis isn't good and you hear the words, "We're out of options."

The business you have spent your whole life, blood, sweat, and tears, building suddenly and almost overnight turns, and before you know it, you're facing foreclosures and the creditors are chasing you, draining your savings, and dismantling your whole life. Out of nowhere, suddenly you have suicidal thoughts. You've never thought those thoughts before, and now all of a sudden, they're popping into your head. Your spouse texts you and says, "I'm done. I'm out."

It's in these moments when what we believe about God comes flooding into our hearts. It's in these moments that every single one of us is a theologian. If my theology informs me that God's greatest concern for me is my dreams or my hopes for my life... If that's what I know to be true about God, then all I'm left with when I'm facing these impossible situations is to believe that God has abandoned me.

I have no other option but to be frightened, or worse, angry, at God, because after all, this couldn't have happened unless an unloving or uncaring God turned his back and allowed it to happen. This is not only very wrong theology, it's dangerously arrogant theology, because to believe that about God asserts that somehow, I'm a victim of God's injustice. It's an accusation against an all-knowing, all-powerful, all-loving, omniscient, holy God that he has done something wrong.

So, what theology do we need here? Let me answer that question with a question. What if the greatest concern of God for you and me is not our comfort? What if his greatest concern is not that we live a trouble-free life? What if his greatest concern for every single person in this room is our sanctification?

We all know Romans 8:28. We need to know it because it is foundational in processing the very stuff we're talking about this morning. You remember it. **"And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose."** I want you to stare at that verse anew right now and I want you to see it dripping with the sovereignty and mercy of God all over it.

If you notice there, it says, **"...all things work together..."** and then you go a little further in the sentence, **"...according to his purpose."** That is God's sovereignty. That means everything that happens in our lives is according to his sovereignty, even those impossible circumstances we find ourselves in.

Now, if that's where the sentence ended, we'd all be thinking, "Uh, you know what? If that's the way God is, I'm not sure I want that. I don't want that kind of God," but the verse doesn't stop there. It says he works all things together according to his purpose *for our good*, and there we find all of God's loving mercy.

You see, most of the time, we stop at verse 28. We read this verse and if we stop at verse 28, all this becomes is a really cool religious Hallmark card, because if all we got is, "He works together for our good," all the junk that goes on in our lives, all the scary moments and impossible situations... If he works it together for our good, the next logical question for us is, "What is God's definition of *good*? What does he consider good? Because what I'm going through doesn't seem so good." So, you have to read the next verse, Romans 8:29.

"For those whom he foreknew he also predestined..." There's his sovereignty again. **"...to be conformed to the image of his Son..."** There is his mercy. There is our sanctification. This is the ultimate will of God. This is the ultimate good of God, when he can take everything this broken, sinful world throws at us and mold it, massage it, and fit it into our life, into our path in a

way that it results in something good for us. The ultimate good is when God brings us closer to the actual image of Jesus Christ for our lives.

All over the Proverbs, we're told that many are the plans we make for our lives. We have lots of plans and dreams for how we want life to go, but there are so many proverbs that say, "**...but it is the purpose of the LORD that will stand.**" The ultimate purpose of God for every one of us is that we would become more and more like his very own Son, Jesus Christ.

Here in Mark 6, the God-man Jesus had every ounce of the sovereignty, wisdom, and power of God necessary to avoid this little picnic they were having with no food., but not only did he not avoid it, he led them to this place. He brought them there. In verses 30 and 31, it says the apostles returned from preaching and teaching and he says, "Let's go. Let's get the boat and let's go to a desolate place."

This is the very point we have to embrace. God sovereignly and mercifully sees to it that we come to situations that are completely beyond our ability to handle, and when we embrace the mercy and sovereignty of God as the twin pillars of our theology, as our basis and foundation for what we understand to be true about God...

He is sovereign and he is merciful. He's not just mechanically sovereign. He's not just unemotionally sovereign. He is mercifully sovereign. When those two things form the basis of everything else we know to be true about God, it's then that we will be able to face the impossibilities, the impossible moments, those circumstances in our lives that have no answers.

We will not only be able to face them, but we will actually be hopeful and ready to receive the sanctification and the transformation that is God's will for us. I would say if you are planning on falling asleep in this service, write that down and then go to sleep. We'll wake you up when it's over. You need to know that in God's loving mercy and sovereignty, he allows for these moments.

2. Be willing to give up on human solutions. We have to be. The whole Christian life, you guys, is an ongoing lesson, learning that God's ways are not our ways, and that is a hard lesson for a lot of us to learn, but I can tell you God is fully committed to helping us learn that his ways are not our ways.

We see it all over the Bible, don't we? Moses needed air support that day on the beaches of the Red Sea, but God gives him a dry road through an ocean. Joseph needed a good attorney to handle the accusations that were coming into his life, but God gives him a jail cell ministry. Young David needed backup to take on Goliath. God gives him four stones.

For the disciples that day, sending that many people away to Cracker Barrel for a late dinner wasn't going to work. They had no money, they had no options, they had no ideas, and they were right and honest, and Jesus doesn't lecture them. They said, "Jesus, we can't do this." They needed to come to that place where they were able to admit they couldn't fix this one. They

couldn't fix it, and Jesus was giving them permission to give up and stop trying to solve what was impossible for them to solve.

This is so hard for us. It's that moment when we realize all of our resources, ideas, and efforts haven't changed the situation. They aren't helping or fixing it, and yet this is exactly where God, in his mercy, takes us. When life looks impossible, God gives us permission to exhaust all of our resources and options, to do and say everything we can and know how to resolve the situation that is bringing all of this craziness into our lives. Yet when we come to that moment when we realize there's nothing else we can do or say, he gives us permission to quit fighting.

We're very familiar with the most famous psalm in the Bible, Psalm 23, aren't we? The psalm is about a person walking through the valley of the shadow of death. If you've never visited that valley, you will. We all do. What strikes me about this psalm and the psalmist's journey through this valley of the shadow of death is what he says about God. In Psalm 23, he says, "You are with me, God." There's his theology. There's the sovereignty of God.

He's in the midst of this dark valley. It feels like everything around him is dying. Not physically, but whatever the situation is, he feels like it's dark and going bad. He says, "But God, you are with me." He has the right theology. He knows God isn't up in heaven going, "How did you get there? Where did you make the wrong turn? Why are you in the valley of the shadow of death? Uh-oh, Jesus, how are we going to fix this?" He knows that's not going on in heaven. He says, "God, you are with me."

Then he says something interesting. I was made aware of this by one of our pastors in one of our recent staff chapels. The psalmist says, "**He makes me lie down in green pastures.**" He says, "You make me lie down." I don't know if that ever struck me before like it has recently. When I can't seem to walk anymore in this valley, God says, "Come over here and lie down."

That's not a metaphor for crawling under the covers and going into the fetal position for weeks on end. That's not what the psalmist is saying here. No, he's simply saying sometimes life comes to a point when you're walking through that valley of the shadow of death when God Jesus says, "I want you to come over here and rest from all of your efforts. You can't fix this."

The psalmist says it a different way. He says, "**He leads me beside still waters.**" When the current of our impossible situation is raging and we can't get over to the other side, God makes us lie down and he says, "Be still and know that I am God." It has been my experience that God usually waits until I'm at this point before he steps in.

I just believe some of you are sitting in this room this very minute because God has sovereignly arranged for you to hear those words. It may be that God wanted you to hear today that you've done everything you can. You've said everything you can.

You've tried everything you know to try to fix whatever this impossible situation is going on in your life, and God wants you to hear today, "Lie down. Be still. There are no human solutions

for this." That's a huge key to understand if we're going to face impossible situations in our lives, but there are more in this passage and they just keep getting better.

3. *Don't underestimate what God can do when we give him all we have.* Now, you've all heard that Christian cliché, "Let go and let God." I'm not usually moved by bumper sticker theology, but that's exactly what's going on in Mark 6. In fact, this week, I was wondering if this passage is where that little cliché was born.

Think about it. Jesus says to them, "You feed them," and they're looking like, "How in the world? We can't! That's impossible!" What does Jesus say? He says, in verse 38, "Go get everything you have. How much do you have? Go get it. Bring it to me." They go and they come back with two lousy sardines and five gluten-free loaves of bread. You know they were gluten-free. That's why they were left. Nobody would eat that stuff. Jesus is like, "What can we do with *that*? Not even God can save these things."

That's all he has. That's all they had. Ten thousand people... They're running through the area there and they collect that. Not much to work with. Now, Jesus has them right where they need to be. They give him what little bit they have and he doesn't ask them to do what's impossible for them to do. He simply says, "Bring me what you have."

"Moses, bring me your staff." "David, bring me your slingshot." "Noah, bring me your hammer and nails." You see, God will bring us to a place where all we have left is to bring him all we have left. Sometimes, all we have left is a little hope, and it's so little, we're not even sure we believe there could be a miracle. We're to bring him what little faith we have left, faith in ourselves to keep even wanting to do the right thing.

We're to bring him what little strength and wisdom we have, to do or say anything else we haven't thought of, to just bring him what little forgiveness we have for those who have hurt us, to bring him what little love we have for those who are so unlovable, and to even bring him what little desire we might have to just live another day. Some of you right here, right now, are at that place where God is saying to you, "Just bring me what you have left and leave it with me. Surrender it to me and then wait for me to start something you could never see coming."

I've seen the brokenhearted divorcee in our church after a horrific and long road to divorce. They're all horrific and they're all long roads to divorce. I've seen God mend and heal that person with loving friendships and a deeper, more satisfying intimacy with God and a brand-new unshakeable identity and security as a child of the King in his safe and secure arms. I've seen that happen.

We've seen that person who has ongoing chronic pain where there are no medications that take away the pain, but God inexplicably grants them endurance and perseverance and this new undoubted compassion for people who are suffering around them and they're capable of ministering to people to whom no one else could bring comfort and hope.

I've seen that person who it seems like overnight lost their career and who is in financial collapse, only to watch God slowly but surely turn it into something with greater peace and greater contentment that no amount of money or success in their past could have ever provided for them. I've watched the person whose life, whose past is littered with abusive relationships only to replace all of that garbage with genuine love, genuine laughter, and a life where the joy of the Lord is their strength.

I've seen the Christian parents who have watched their adult children turn their backs on Jesus. They have done and said everything possible to change that, only to finally lie down, surrender, and watch God carve out this unlikely path of return for their child that they could have never, ever seen themselves. God invites us to bring it to him because he has this weird divine way of taking our messes and turning them into messages. He has this supernatural way of taking our tragedies and turning them into testimonies.

4. *Give thanks for what we have.* When you're hanging by a thread, literally give thanks to God for the thread. This part of the story struck me new this week, because it's usually the last thing I ever think about when I'm in one of those situations. In verse 41, Jesus knew what he was holding. It says, "**And taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven and said a blessing...**" The other gospel writers say he gave thanks.

Now, in my history here at Canyon Hills, I have preached through all four gospels. I've preached through Matthew, Luke, John, and almost halfway through Mark, and this is the first time this ever struck me. Jesus takes this pile of inadequacy, looks up to heaven, and gives thanks. That is amazingly powerful, isn't it? I want you to hear something right now. This is a key. The DNA of peace is thankfulness. You ought to write that down, because if you don't need that today, you're going to need it sometime in the future. The DNA of peace is gratitude and thankfulness.

Paul understood this in those famous words in Philippians 4, "**...do not be anxious about anything...**" Really, Paul? Anything? He says, "**...by prayer and supplication...**" There's our prayer. Okay. Yeah, we know. Then there are those two little words, "**...with thanksgiving...**" tucked right into the middle of our anxiety and the peace that surpasses all understanding that comes from God. Paul understood that God delivers his peace on the platters of our thankfulness.

In 1 Thessalonians 5, it says, "**...give thanks in all circumstances...**" Not *for* all circumstances; that's ridiculous. That's insanity. The Bible doesn't call us to say, "Thank you, God, for my loved one dying. Thank you, God, for the head-on collision I just got into with a drunk driver." No, that's stupid. He says, "**...give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.**" That unmistakable purpose and will of God for our sanctification... Give thanks.

5. *Believe God is more than enough.* I always thought the best part of the whole story was the leftovers. That's the part of this story, because it's in all four gospels, that I always enjoyed the most. Don't you think for a second that the twelve baskets of leftovers are somehow a coincidence. Somehow 12 apostles and 12 baskets just happened to work out like that? No. Jesus needed them to know that God is more than enough.

Ultimately, the impossible circumstances we face can lead us to that place of a deeper satisfaction in God. The impossible situations we come head-on with are many times leading us to a destination, reminding us that this life isn't all there is, that this isn't our permanent address. We're not supposed to be fully satisfied and content in this life because the next life, for those who are children of God who love him, it is not only eternal; it is perfect.

God uses these crazy things in this broken world, broken by sin, to bring us to a place of deeper satisfaction. It's that place where we actually eventually say, "Knowing what I now know about God and his all-satisfying grace, I wouldn't go back and change it for a minute."

We know we have begun to process impossible situations in our lives when we get to that place where we can say, "In spite of all the agony, sorrow, sadness, and disappointment, God has brought me to a place in my life, in my faith, and in my relationship with him that I would have never gotten to on my own. God is good. God is enough." Imagine that. That's where I want us to get. That's where I want to get.

Some of you sitting right here right now are staring down the barrel of an impossible, helpless situation. It could be in your home. It could be in the life of someone you love deeply. It could be in your very personal, direct life. It is sapping your energy and emotions and you're fearful, exhausted, angry, hopeless, or doubting, and there are no answers.

I wonder if, in God's mercy and sovereignty in your life, he brought you here this morning to give you permission to give up on all human answers, to bring him whatever you have left and surrender it to him, to give him thanks for what you do have, and ultimately to start down that path where you find out that God really is enough.

I'm going to ask you all to close your eyes just for a minute. Would you be willing to just say this to God right now? Are you willing? Are you capable of just saying, "God, right now, I thank you that you are sovereign, that you do have a purpose in my life, and that these crazy things that happen or that are happening are not because you've abandoned me, but because you are sovereign and merciful and your purpose for me is to make me more like your Son, Jesus"?

Are you willing to just say that to God right now? Would you thank him for that sovereign mercy he has over your life? Would you be willing, right now, to be thankful for whatever it is you have left, bring it to him, and let it go? Whatever faith, whatever strength, whatever hope, whatever wisdom, whatever little you have left... Bring it to him and surrender it. Would you be willing to just lie down and be still? Would you ask for God's grace to give you the peace that will allow you to just be still and know he is God?

God, you knew a million years ago who would be sitting here right now and you absolutely knew what some people sitting all around us would be facing and fearing. I pray, God, that in this very moment, you will begin that mighty, beautiful journey of walking with them through their valley. I pray, God, that you would make them lie down and remind them how still and peaceful it is when we just give you everything we have.

God, remind all of us today that you do not expect us to do the impossible. God, we're grateful for that. We love you and we thank you for being a sovereign, merciful God. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

There are people standing up here right now who know there are some of you who are not Christians. All the stuff you just heard kind of makes sense, but it feels like it's a little distant, a little far out there. That may be because there was never a point in your life where you stepped completely over the line to trust Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior. Your relationship with God isn't personal because that can only happen through your faith in Jesus.

If you want to talk to someone about that and just say, "Hey, what's the next step for me? How do I become a Christian? How do I know?" that's what they're here for. You also may be facing a really big, big thing this week and this sermon was good timing for you. If you would like any of us up here to pray with you before you leave, just make your way forward and just say, "Can you pray for me? I'm facing a big, big thing this week." You don't even have to tell us what it is. Just let us pray with you. We'd love to do that.

God bless you. I hope the rest of your weekend is awesome. We'll look forward to seeing you next Sunday.