

Matthew 19:23-26: And Jesus said to his disciples, "Truly, I say to you, only with difficulty will a rich person enter the kingdom of heaven. ²⁴ Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God." ²⁵ When the disciples heard this, they were greatly astonished, saying, "Who then can be saved?" ²⁶ But Jesus looked at them and said, "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."

Intro: Last Sunday, we saw Jesus' encounter with the rich young ruler, and we noticed that in every Gospel where Jesus speaks with the RYR, He first invites the little children to come to Him! There's a great contrast here. The helpless, weak, & needy children are a huge contrast with the RTR, who is really the poor deceived slave! He thinks quite highly of himself, & sadly, he ends up choosing himself and his riches over Jesus.

"What must I do to have eternal life?" is one of the most important questions you could ever ask. Heaven & hell; life & death; eternal bliss & eternal suffering depend upon the answer to this most crucial, urgent question. Thankfully, in our text today, Jesus is asked this question directly by a man who's become known as the rich young ruler. Jesus' answer demands a humble faith & a radical obedience. This humble faith is best illustrated by Phillips Brooks' excellent definition of faith: "**Forsaking All, I Take Him** [Jesus]." & this radical obedience is found in Mark Dever's words: "Our generosity is measured not in how much we give but in how much we keep." Jesus calls His disciples to withhold nothing from Him: faith & obedience to Him demands everything from us. Jesus demands this same humble faith & radical obedience from all who would ever follow after Him & be His disciples. Jesus teaches that in order to have eternal life, we must do what is impossible with mere men: repent & believe in Jesus, treasure Him far more than anything else, & follow Him in obedience to whatever He calls us to do. Jesus is the good God Who demands perfection, provides perfection to all who follow Him, and is the Treasure of Heaven Who is so valuable that He is worthy for you to give up everything in order to gain Him.

Salvation for the rich (and everyone!) is difficult & even impossible apart from God, but God is able to do the impossible & save everyone who repents & believes & follows Jesus.

1. A Difficult Salvation

Matthew 19:23: And Jesus said to his disciples, "Truly, I say to you, only with difficulty will a rich person enter the kingdom of heaven.

Jesus tells His disciples it's difficult for a rich person to enter the kingdom of heaven: People love their money! But we are called to love God far more! We're tempted to love the security of money. But we're called to put our hope in God! We're tempted to love the comforts & pleasures of what money can give us. But we're called to find our comfort & pleasure in God! We're tempted to love the power that comes with having money. But we're called to display the power of God in our weakness! The phrase "follow the money" has become popular to describe how to find the heart of the matter when it comes to the motivations for wickedness, evil, & corruption. Jesus tells us our hearts will follow our money:

- **Matthew 6:19-21:** Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, ²⁰ but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. ²¹ For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

- **Hebrews 13:5:** Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you."

- **Matthew 6:24:** No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.

- **1 Timothy 6:10:** For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs.

- **1 Timothy 6:17-19:** As for the rich in this present age, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy. ¹⁸ They are to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, ¹⁹ thus storing up treasure for themselves as a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is truly life.

So going to heaven is hard for people who are rich. & when I think of rich people, I think of all Americans because compared to a large majority of the rest of the world, every American is rich. It's hard for us to enter heaven!

2. An Impossible Salvation

Matthew 19:24: Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God.

Jesus tells His disciples it is easier for the impossible to happen than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God! Camels are the biggest animal in Palestine. The eye of a needle is the smallest opening! Jesus is clearly saying this is impossible!

There's been a false story told about this verse, that there was a gate in Jerusalem called the "Needle Gate" & camels would have to bend down & unload all their cargo & crawl through the gate – so we must humble ourselves, unload all of our sinful baggage, unload our pride, and unload all that hinders us from entering heaven so that we might enter in. It's certainly true that we must humble ourselves:

- **Matthew 5:3-5:** Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. ⁴ "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. ⁵ "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.

- **Hebrews 12:1-2:** Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, ² looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith

- **1 Peter 5:5:** Likewise, you who are younger, be subject to the elders. Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble."

But there was no "Needle Gate" in Jerusalem in Jesus' day. A gate may have been given that name in the Middle Ages because of Jesus' Words here, but Jesus is not referring to a gate! Jesus' point is that it's impossible!

3. A Desperate Question

Matthew 19:25: When the disciples heard this, they were greatly astonished, saying, "Who then can be saved?"

a. Jesus' disciples rightly understand what Jesus is saying & wonder "can anyone be saved then?!"

Jesus' disciples get what Jesus is saying! This is impossible! & if the rich can't be saved, then who can be saved?

b. There was a kind of prosperity gospel influence on Jesus' disciples: Jesus' disciples may have had a little health, wealth, & prosperity false gospel influencing their minds! This man is young! This man is rich! This man has power & authority! Surely this is a sign that he's blessed by God! This man seems to be very obedient/moral!

Tim Keller: The disciples came from a culture that did not see wealth as evil, but rather as the reward for moral behavior. They accepted the view that if you live a good life, then God will reward you with prosperity.

One of Job's friends: Job 15:20, 29: All his days the wicked man suffers torment . . . He will no longer be rich . . .

There are unconverted, Jesus-haters who are rich, & there are unconverted, Jesus-haters who are poor. There are converted, Jesus-trusting, Jesus-lovers who are rich, & there are converted, Jesus-trusting, Jesus-lovers who are poor. The evidence that you are a converted, Jesus-trusting, Jesus-lover is not the size of your bank account or the fact that you are healthy & wealthy. The evidence is true faith in the true Jesus, the inner witness of the Holy Spirit, & the fruit of the Holy Spirit in your life!

Jesus' Words in Matthew 19 contradict the false prosperity gospel. The false prosperity gospel wrongly teaches that people who trust God & give lots of money to the church will be rich & wealthy. Their false gospel makes it even more difficult for people to go to heaven!

- **Gloria Copeland:** God knows where the money is, and he knows how to get the money to you.
- **Joyce Meyer:** If you stay in your faith, you are going to get paid. I am now living in my reward.
- **Creflo Dollar:** When the people of the world are broke, you are going to have abundance. When the people of the world are sick, you are healed - you are holy . . . If you take time to tithe and tithe correctly it's impossible to go to hell. Cause if you doin' all of that, tithing will keep you in heaven. It will keep you in the presence of God.

What does the Bible say? 2 Corinthians 9:7: Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.

John Piper: Jesus said, "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 19:24). Why would he say that? It is because riches are such dangerous things. They are not a blessing, usually. They are usually a curse. People are cursed with riches. They are destroyed by riches. And here, again, let me qualify a little bit: I don't mean it is sinful to make a lot of money. I just mean it is sinful to want to keep a lot of money. And it is suicidal to want to keep a lot of money — bigger barns and bigger cars and bigger houses and bigger portfolios and finer clothes, and everything is growing with your income so that your conscience is getting harder and harder because if you are a Christian at this point, your conscience is having to say: "It is okay. This is okay. This is the Calvary road. This is what it means to deny yourself. This is what it means to follow Jesus. This is what it means to die every day. This is what it means to have my treasure in heaven." And it doesn't. It won't work. So, your conscience has to be lacerated in order to keep from killing yourself. And so Jesus says, "It is hard for a rich man to gain the kingdom of heaven." Paul says, "Those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and pierce themselves with many pangs." And along comes a prosperity preacher who says, "Yes, the Lord really wants you to be rich. We should pursue riches. Following Jesus is the pathway to riches. Riches are the sign of God's blessing." I would just say those are in mutual contradiction with each other and, therefore, this is deadly. (John Piper does not receive one penny for all his book sales!)

4. The God Who Does The Impossible

Matthew 19:26: But Jesus looked at them and said, "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."

a. Jesus teaches that salvation is impossible with men, but possible with God: 1) Men are dead spiritually, hate god, & are unable even to seek God: **Eph. 2:1:** Dead in trespasses and sins; **Rom. 1:30:** haters of God; **Rom. 3:10-11:** None righteous, no not one; No one seeks God . . . **GOSPEL!**

2) Only God can raise dead men, grant them faith in Him, & cause them to love and seek God: God causes dead sinners to be born again; God gives the gift of faith; God draws people by His Holy Spirit! (**Ezek. 37; Lazarus!**)

- **Philippians 1:29:** For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake
- **John 6:44:** No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him . . .
- **Acts 16:14:** One of those listening was a woman named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth from the city of Thyatira, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message.
- **Acts 13:48:** And when the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord, and as many as were appointed to eternal life believed.

b. Jesus teaches that all things are possible with God: Nothing is impossible for our God! Will you trust Him?!

- **Genesis 18:14:** Is anything too hard for the LORD? (Sarah giving birth in her old age/barrenness)
- **Jeremiah 32:17:** Ah, Lord GOD! It is you who has made the heavens and the earth by your great power and by your outstretched arm! Nothing is too hard for you.
- **Luke 1:37:** For nothing will be impossible with God. (Mary giving birth to Jesus as a virgin!)

What seems impossible in your life that you need to grow in trusting God for? He will help you!

c. God did the impossible by saving us through His Son Jesus Christ: Jesus is the Rich Young Ruler Who did do what is impossible with men! Unlike the law breaking rich young ruler, Jesus did keep all of God's law from His youth both outwardly & in His mind & heart! Jesus did perfectly obey all of the ten commandments! Jesus did perfectly & always love the LORD His God with all of His heart, mind, soul, & strength! Jesus did perfectly & always love all His neighbors as Himself! And unlike the rich young ruler who would not give up everything for Jesus, Jesus is the Rich Young Ruler Who did give up everything for God & for us! Jesus gave up heaven! Jesus gave up all His riches & became poor so that we might be saved! Jesus gave up unbroken, glorious, all-satisfying fellowship with His Heavenly Father when He died on that cross: when He cried out "My God! My God! Why have You forsaken Me?!" Jesus was forsaken by God so that we shall never be forsaken by God! And He rose up!

And this frees us from the love of money! This frees us to be extravagantly & radically generous for the glory of King Jesus! What does this look like? Craig Blomberg – *Neither Poverty Nor Riches*:

Craig Blomberg: I was challenged early in my adult life by two different pastors, one in the US and one in the UK, who each gave 25 percent of their total income back to the Lord's work and let that fact be known, not in any arrogant way, but simply to encourage others that it could be done . . . I have become convinced that the concept of a graduated tithe is both biblical and foundational for contemporary Christian stewardship. When we were first married more than eighteen years ago, my wife and I committed to begin with a tithe, based on the very modest income we had while I was a graduate student, and then to increase that percentage if God increased his annual provisions for us. Over the years God has blessed us richly and the percentage of our giving has grown . . . we were able to give over 30% of our income to our church and para-church organizations and individuals involved in Christian ministry. This was our fifth consecutive year topping 30% percent, following the principle of the graduated tithe . . . I do not assume that others making the same amount as our family would in general be able to give as much away. But when the American Christian average of total giving per family is below 3% of per capita income, surely we can do considerably better! So how does one do it? Obviously, by not spending money on the things so many Westerners do. We must remind ourselves and our children regularly of the lies, half-truths and pagan values on which is based the advertising that bombards us daily. With relatively minor hardships, our family has freed up considerable funds by doing with less of many items most Westerners routinely take for granted. We have refused to go into debt for anything except property and education, bought cars only that we could afford to pay cash for, bought other goods in bulk, at discounts, at garage sales and at thrift shops. We have not assumed that we needed the size or quality of lavish 'entertainment centre' items (television, video, stereo, CD player . . .) that most of our friends have. We have not heated or cooled our home quite to the extent that most North Americans do, or amassed the number or nature of clothes most Westerners seem compelled to accumulate. Even as simple a decision as not to eat out with the astonishing frequency of so many of our acquaintances has freed up enormous amounts of money. (On four different occasions in well-to-do suburban Denver churches, I have invited large, adult, Sunday-school classes to answer anonymously on note cards the following question: 'If you knew you would have 20% less income next year, what area of your current budget would be most affected?' The most common answer each time was 'Money for eating out'. I then raise the question, 'Why not voluntarily cut back, without being forced to, for the sake of Christian giving?') . . . 'Give me neither poverty nor riches,' prayed the writer of the proverb; but, since most of us already have riches, we need to be praying more often, 'and help me to be generous and wise in giving more of those riches away.'

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**Jesus Does The Impossibly Hard
Through His Body Scarred
So From His Presence We Won't Be Barred!**

It's hard for the rich to enter in
Love of money is gripping sin

This lust for wealth comes from within
May God show those like Benny Hinn
Who teach that money's how you win
That on God's Word they've put a spin
And though they teach this with a grin
They're leading millions into sin
With Christ alone we must begin
He's the poorest Who's ever been
No place for Him was in the inn
No home to live or rest therein
And on that cross they pierced His skin
He took the wrath of God for sin
And rose again so we can win
And follow Him Who's always been
By faith in Him we enter in
And though our paycheck may be thin
It's "Christ is all!" that makes us grin!

A camel can't fit in the eye
Of the needle if you try
It's impossible – that's why
To man this saying does apply
You can't be saved – on man rely
But God can do all things – no lie
And to all works that He would try
Impossible does not apply
For on that cross Jesus did die
And rose alive now seated high
To all impossible defy
In Him to all sin say goodbye
Behind His back all sins will fly
If to Him by faith you'll cry
In love to you He has drawn nigh
He chose you first – made you comply
Opened your heart – He did apply
His saving grace you can't deny
With gratitude we all must cry
"You chose us Father, how and why!"
We don't deserve this grace supply!"
To earn His love we must not try
He freely gives to those who cry
And like a child on Him rely
Just humbly trust, and He thereby
Will grant you joys far past the sky!

Christ Jesus Reigns Upon His Throne
To Save The Rich Is Hard He's Shown
He Does The Impossible Alone
Makes Camels Walk Through Needles Grown
He Died To Save, Our Sins Atone
Then Rose Alive And Moved That Stone
We're Justified By Faith Alone
All Sins Behind His Back Are Thrown
Leave Everything To Him We've Flown
Give All For Christ Without A Groan
With Joy We Gain, Our Minds Are Blown
For He Repays Beyond What's Known
Eternal Life Upon His Throne
In Us His Word And Joy's Sown
We'll Judge, Our Reign He Will Condone
By Him We're Loved And Fully Known
He Is Our Treasure, Bone Of Bone!