

**“THE VIEW THROUGH THE NEEDLE’S EYE”
(MARK 10:17-30)**

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INTRODUCTION: After Jesus told a rich young ruler to give away all of his possessions and follow Him, Jesus told His disciples, “It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.” (Mark 10:25) These words have baffled people for centuries. What did Jesus mean?

Timothy Keller says that some of Jesus’ sayings are like hard candy, you have to work on them and are rewarded with layer after layer of increasing sweetness. (Timothy Keller, *King’s Cross*, p. 124.) But this is one of those hard candy sayings on which a lot of people have broken their teeth.

There have been many attempts to soften Jesus’ words, but as we will see in a few moments, they miss the point. Jesus meant to say something shocking. He was using a comparison to make a point, but He meant what He said. He was not saying that rich people are bad or that money is bad. But He was warning us that money can blind us from seeing things God’s way.

So let’s be camels today. Let’s get down and look through the eye of a needle, and notice what we see in this passage of scripture.

I. Look to God for your hope (v. 17-22)

First, we see that we must look to God for our hope. A rich young ruler came to Jesus with a question. Verse 17 just calls him “a man.” But according to Mark 10:22, he was rich, and according to Matthew 19:22 he was young, and according to Luke 18:18 he was a ruler. Thus he is usually called, the “rich young ruler.” This wealthy man put his hope in his own goodness, and trusted his money more than he trusted God.

Notice the conversation, beginning in verse 17. He addresses Jesus as “Good teacher,” and asks, “What must I do to inherit eternal life?”

Jesus rebuffs him right away, asking “Why do you call me good? No one is good—except God alone.” Jesus was not denying that He was God. Rather, He was doing the reverse. Jesus was putting the thought in the young man’s mind of just who He was.

Jesus continued by giving the traditional reply of the rabbis to obey the commandments, as he listed some of the Ten Commandments in verse 19. In verse 20, the young man said, “Teacher” (notice this time he does not call Jesus “Good teacher,” because he does not realize Jesus is God), “all these I have kept since I was a boy.” When a Jewish boy reached age 13, he went through a ceremony called *bar mitzvah*, which means “son of the covenant.” At that time, he was considered a young man, responsible himself for keeping the law. So this rich young ruler is claiming that ever since his *bar mitzvah*, he has carefully obeyed the commandments. He is hoping in his goodness to get him to heaven.

Jesus blows this hope out of the water in verse 21. Notice Jesus does not do this in a mean-spirited way. He looked intently into the young man’s eyes, and Jesus “loved him.” Yet Jesus said, “One thing you lack. Go sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.”

Jesus said the rich young ruler lacked one thing, but Jesus didn't specify what it was. This man lacked for nothing, yet he had too much to give up. In the last half of the 20th century, the per capita income of Americans doubled in real money. Yet the number who reported being "very happy" remained unchanged at one third. Most of us, like the rich young ruler, lack for nothing, yet lack everything.

The rich young ruler lacked trust in God. He wanted to serve God, but hold onto His money. When Jesus looked at him (v. 21), He could see through to his soul, and see the lack of trust. Jesus could see that the rich young ruler trusted in his money more than his God. That's why Jesus said, "Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me." (v. 21)

Many Sunday School teachers will look at this story and point out that Jesus didn't tell all of his followers to give away their possessions, but He did tell this particular man, because Jesus could tell that his possessions had become his God. Then the teacher will ask the class, "So what has become your God?" Many people have made the decision to give up alcohol or credit cards or other addictions, because they found their hope in those things.

However, we don't need to move too quickly away from the possibility that what Jesus said to the rich young man about money may also apply to you and me. Many of us say, "I'm not rich. He wasn't talking to me." Not so fast. You say you aren't rich? Let's compare our wealth with nations around the world. The largest nation in South America is Brazil. Their Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita \$10,800. The largest nation in Europe is Russia. Their GDP per capita is \$15,900. The largest nation in Asia is China. Their GDP per capita is \$7,600. The largest nation in Africa is Nigeria. Their GDP per capita is \$2,500. What do you think it is for the USA? The Gross Domestic Product per capita in the USA is \$47,200! Don't say we're not rich! In the eyes of the world, we are rich beyond imagination. (*The World Almanac and Book of Facts: 2012*, p. 757, 763, 819, 826, 848)

How do you know that money isn't too important to you? Here's a good check list:

*If money isn't that important, are you able to give large amounts of it away?

*If money isn't that important, does it make you uncomfortable to think about living on less money than you are accustomed to having?

*If money isn't that important, does it get under your skin when you see people who haven't worked as hard as you, but they seem to be doing better?

This is one of the main reasons tithing is a great spiritual benefit to the believer. When we decide to regularly give away 10% of our income to our local church, and live on the remaining 90%, we are trusting God to provide. We are making a loud statement about where we place our hope.

Apparently this was more than the rich young ruler wanted to do. The HCSB says in verse 22 that he was "stunned... and he went away grieving." Why? Because he had great wealth, and apparently he was still trusting in it. Max Lucado says, "You see, it wasn't the money that hindered the rich man; it was the self-sufficiency. It wasn't the possessions; it was the pomp. It wasn't the big bucks; it was the big head." (Max Lucado, *The Applause of Heaven*, cited in *The Devotional Bible*, p. 1213.)

II. Look to grace for your salvation (v. 23-27)

Not only does this story teach us to look to God for our hope; it also teaches us to look to grace for our salvation.

After the rich young ruler left, Jesus used it as a teaching opportunity. Looking at His disciples, He said, “How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God!” The disciples were amazed at this statement, but were even more amazed when hammered the point home harder in verse 25: “It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.”

This is a puzzling statement for us today, but it was shocking in the first century. The rich are often criticized in our culture today, but not in the first century. Jesus’ words went against everything the disciples had learned. After all, Job, the man of integrity, was restored to twice his riches as before, according to Job 42:10. After all, Psalm 128:1-2 said, “Blessed are all who fear the Lord, who walk in his ways. You will eat the fruit of your labor; blessings and prosperity will be yours.” Jews in Jesus’ day thought that being prosperous meant that God had blessed you for your godliness. But instead, Jesus says it’s easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom!

There have been all kinds of explanations for verse 25. Some have said that it was not a literal needle. They claimed that in Jesus’ day, the walls of Jerusalem had very narrow gates, and it was hard to get a camel through, especially if it was carrying a large load. But if you took the load off and the camel got down on its knees it could squeeze through the gate. Other’s said that the Aramaic word for “twine” sounds like the Aramaic word for “camel.” They claim that Jesus was really trying to say that it’s hard to get twine through the eye of a needle, but if you suck on it and point it with great care, it’s not impossible. (Keller, p. 126).

All of these explanations miss the point. Jesus was not saying if you get down on your knees and humble yourself you can work your way into heaven. He was not saying if you try really hard and work with great care, you can get into heaven. No! He was saying it is *impossible* to get to heaven on your own.

In verse 26, the disciples asked, “Who then can be saved?” They were thinking that if the rich can’t get in, then we’re all sunk.

Verse 27 says that Jesus looked at them before He spoke. This was the same look He gave the rich young ruler. He looked into their souls, and said, “With man this is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God.”

There you have the solution to the riddle in verse 25. It’s impossible! There is no way a rich man or any man or woman can ever work their own way into heaven. It is absolutely, utterly impossible! But with God, all things are possible. We can’t get in by our good deeds; we must depend on God’s grace. Ephesians 2:8 (HCSB): “For you are saved by grace through faith, and this is not from yourselves; it is God’s gift.”

Remember when Jesus looked into the eyes of the rich young ruler? Verse 21 says Jesus “loved him”? Could it be that the reason Jesus could identify with this young man was that Jesus was a rich young ruler Himself? Yes! It says in 2 Corinthians 8:9, “For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.”

Jesus was the original rich young ruler. He gave up His riches in glory to come to earth and gave up His flesh on the cross as a perfect sacrifice for our sins. How can we think that we can pay for that ourselves? We must fall on His grace and mercy.

III. Look to the gospel for your reward (v. 28-30)

So the view through the eye of the needle shows us to look to *God* for our hope, and to look to *grace* for our salvation. There is one other thing; it shows us to look to the *gospel* for our reward.

In verse 28, Peter said, “We have left everything to follow you!” He was saying that they had already done what Jesus asked the rich young ruler to do. Then Jesus gave them some words of encouragement, saying anybody who left their family or their business for Christ and the gospel would receive a hundred times as much in this age, and in the age to come eternal life.

Jesus was not preaching a prosperity gospel, but He was saying that there is a reward for giving up possessions for the sake of the gospel. Jesus was using hyperbole again here, just as he was with the riddle about the camel through the eye of the needle. Obviously, nobody is literally going to get a hundred mothers and fathers. But Jesus is using the figure of speech to stress that our needs will be more than met, when we focus on the gospel of Jesus Christ instead of on money.

You see, there is only one earthly investment we can make that reaps rewards in heaven: the investment in the lives of people. That’s because the only thing we can take to heaven is other people. The Bible teaches there will be rewards in heaven for Christians. Paul specifies rewards for believers in 2 Corinthians 3:12-14; Hebrews 11:6 says that God “rewards those who earnestly seek him.”

The rich young ruler went away sad because he loved his riches more than the gospel, but there were many rich people in the Bible who looked to God for their reward: people like Abraham who tithed to Melchizedek (Genesis 14:18), Solomon who used his riches to build a temple to the Lord, the Ethiopian eunuch who was the treasurer to the queen of Ethiopia but found his greatest treasure in trusting Christ (Acts 8:26-39), and Lydia, the wealthy dealer in purple cloth who met the apostle Paul at Philippi and opened her heart to the gospel, and opened her home to the apostles (Acts 16:13-15).

CONCLUSION: Many Christians have learned the view through the eye of the needle. They have learned to trust God with their finances.

This week, I asked people to share on Facebook how tithing had blessed them. Susan said,

“In 2005, [my husband] Scott was working for Lockheed Martin in Marietta, GA and was a full time stay at home mom. Rachel was 6 and Daniel was 1. Lockheed Martin mechanics had gone out on strike. Anyone that has ever been part of a union knows strikes can last for a few days, a few months and sometimes longer. At the time, he was driving a 1988 Oldsmobile we had purchased from his mom. The day after LM went out on strike, we pulled into the parking lot of the church we attended back home. The oil light came on and the engine locked up!

The next day, Thursday, we had the car towed to the shop of a gentleman we went to church with. After working on it for most of the day, the mechanic called to tell us the car needed a new engine which would run about \$2,000.00. What were we to do? We

were not in a position to buy a new or used car, so we told him to order the engine. We decided we would put the new engine on our credit card and pay it off when we got our tax return, which we had filed a few weeks earlier. We didn't want the credit card bill but felt we had no other option.

On Friday, I got home from picking Rachel up from school and found a letter in the mail from the IRS. We automatically assumed "Great, we're being audited!" I ignored the letter and placed in the counter. On Saturday, I decided "Well, better deal with this!" so I opened the letter to see what the IRS had to say. The letter stated we had made a \$2,000.00 error on our tax return so our return would be \$2,000.00 MORE than what we had anticipated! That's just a God thing and one of many stories we have because we have been faithful to tithe."

Jennifer said,

"Tithing isn't about the money and never has been. God knows our hearts and knows that money ties to Everything and if we trust him with our finances then we will trust him with our entire lives. God doesn't need our money, he needs our complete trust and faith in order to use us how he intended in the first place. A few weeks ago I made exactly \$50 for the week. Scared? You bet. I was tempted NOT to tithe at all because that \$5.00 makes a difference to me. I was so tempted, in fact, that I felt so horrible, I decided to tithe \$10 to show God I was more than willing to give him everything I had and I would trust him. So with \$30 and no way to pay one bill and it seemed no business coming in, somehow I was at ease. Not happy, but calm. That Thursday, I got several orders for my jewelry and ast minute hair appointment and it was the EXACT amount I needed to pay that one bill. No more, no less because that was All that I needed. How amazing is he? Tithing is and always be about trusting God with our lives and giving it to him and to teach us faith and to be closer to him."

Jesus said in the Beatitudes, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God." (Matthew 5:8)_So how about you? Can you look at money through the eye of a needle, with a pure heart, trusting God alone? When you do, you will see God!

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