

¹⁷As Jesus started on his way, a man ran up to him and fell on his knees before him. "Good teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?"

⁸"Why do you call me good?" Jesus answered. "No one is good—except God alone. ¹⁹You know the commandments: 'Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not give false testimony, do not defraud, honor your father and mother.'"

²⁰"Teacher," he declared, "all these I have kept since I was a boy." ²¹Jesus looked at him and loved him. "One thing you lack," he said. "Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me."

²²At this, the man's face fell. He went away sad, because he had great wealth. ²³Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, "How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God!"

²⁴The disciples were amazed at his words. But Jesus said again, "Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! ²⁵It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God."

²⁶The disciples were even more amazed, and said to each other, "Who then can be saved?"

²⁷Jesus looked at them and said, "With man this is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God."

ALL THINGS ARE POSSIBLE WITH GOD.

- I. God can cause a camel to pass through the eye of needle
- II. God can turn the heart of a rich man to Jesus
- III. God has made the impossible possible for us

Dear fellow recipients of the miracle of the camel,

This may sound like a strange greeting. I am sure that none of you have had a camel experience other than seeing one in the zoo, or over on highway 21 at the veterinarian's place or maybe you have been to a place where you had the opportunity to ride one. Camels are large animals. They were also very common place in Palestine during the days of Jesus and His disciples. They were the 18 wheelers of that era.

The reason Jesus used the example of a camel was to show the contrast between what a person is able to do compared to what God is able to do. The question under discussion here in the context was, "How does a person get into the kingdom of God." This question was raised as a result of a man who came to Jesus. He got down on his knees before Jesus and asked, **What must I do to inherit eternal life?**

What a great question. There are many important questions that come up in our lives. There are the basic questions of life. Food, shelter, clothing and employment are concerns which we all face in one way or another. Questions of health and safety along with questions concerning education and career confront us. But the overriding question is the one concerning eternal life. Where will we spend eternity? People have searched for answers to this question through the ages. Deep down in their hearts people realize that this life is only a prelude to the life to come. Sadly many people never find the answer.

There are those who even have the answer given to them, but they don't believe it. They analyze the answer with their reason and reject it. Jesus tried to lead the man who came to him down a path that first showed him that it is impossible to a man to save himself. He did this by pointing the man to the law. Reciting some of the commandments, He referred to the

fourth, fifth, sixth, seventh and eighth commandments. These are all from the second table to the law and deal with our relationship with God through our neighbor. The man's response is that he has kept all of these commandments since he was a boy.

This man had been living in a self-inflated bubble, hadn't he! He was sure that he had a straight 'A' report card when it came to keeping the commandments. The Evangelist Luke tells us that although he was still a young man, he had been chosen to be a ruler in the synagogue. As a ruler he presided at the services. He appointed or permitted suitable members to pray, to read the lessons from the scrolls and to give exhortations based on the Scriptures.

He was obviously a religious person. From all appearances he was doing a very good job of living his religious conviction. Indeed he was. He believed that his life was exemplary. He obviously was interested in continuing to pursue excellence in his religious life. He was a seeker of truth. He projected a glow of eagerness and enthusiasm.

It is also important to note that the man came to the right person for an answer to his question. Jesus is the Way, the Truth and the Life. However, the man came with the wrong mindset. This is shown in the way he asked his question. **What must I do to be saved?** He was laboring under the assumption that he could accomplish his salvation on his own, that is, he could earn his salvation by his own pious life and character. Obviously he did not come to Jesus with the thought that salvation is a gift of God's grace.

To show this man that God is interested in the heart of a person, Jesus told him that he did indeed lack something. ²¹**Jesus looked at him and loved him. "One thing you lack," he said. "Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me."** What Jesus is doing with this directive, is showing the man where the focus of his life was. God was not first in his life. We read, **At this the man's face fell. He went away sad, because he had great wealth.**

The line was drawn and the man was not willing to be led across it. He was wealthy and he was not willing to part with his wealth to follow Jesus. He had spent too much time gaining and keeping his wealth. He had earned the right to it. He was not about to give it away. It was his conviction that he needed this wealth. Besides his wealth had become the focus of his life with the result that he was not considering what the value system is in the kingdom of God. This is what prompted Jesus to say, **How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God.**

I have had a person tell me that the only reason we wanted him to come to our worship service was to get his wallet there. We were only after his money. My standard answer to such an attitude is, "No, God wants your soul and we don't want you to give a nickel until you want to give it and you know why."

When the man had first come to Jesus, he referred to Jesus as good. Jesus had asked, **Why do you call me good? There is none good but one and that is God.** If only God is good, then that man is not good as he thought he was. The reference to the law did not seem to flush out this truth so Jesus cut to the quick. Unload the baggage of your wealth. Give it to the poor. Then come and follow me.

The rich young man was superficial. He only saw the man Jesus. He missed the glory of God in the person of the Son of God, the Good Master. Out of compassion for him, Jesus asked him to look at himself from a different perspective. What was he to see? He was to see that he didn't measure up to the first and basic commandment. He did not love God above all things. Jesus put His finger on the man's idolatry. The man wanted to be a citizen in the kingdom of God, but not at the expense of giving up his own god, his wealth. He went away sad.

This becomes a teaching moment for Jesus. He says, **How hard it is for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God. It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.** The disciples were dumbfounded. **Who then can be saved** is their question.

From their point of view no one could be saved. It is impossible for a person, who makes wealth his god, to enter into the kingdom of God. Likewise, it is impossible for a person who has set anything in first place in his heart to enter the kingdom of God. We should be clear here that it is not the money or wealth that is the roadblock to the kingdom. It is the love of money that blocks the way.

The heart needs to be renewed. Man is not able to bring this about. It is impossible. But God can change the heart. We have doctors who can take a person's heart out and fix it physically but no one can fix a person's heart spiritually. This is impossible, as impossible as it is for us to get a camel through the eye of a needle. However, with God all things are possible. He can put a camel through the eye of a needle and He can save a rich man by giving him a new heart.

What is more significant is that Jesus has done this for you and me. He has held up the mirror of the law and shown us not just our sinfulness, but our sins. He has shown us that sin separates us from God and blocks our way into the kingdom leaving us with the only other alternative – going to hell. God brings us to the point of despair over our sins and leads us to His mercy. It is the road of repentant faith in Jesus as our Savior.

We come to Jesus confessing our sins with a contrite heart as we did just a few minutes ago. We come confessing our faith in Jesus trusting Him in His sure mercy to which He put substance when He lived as our substitute under the law and died as our substitute under the wrath of God.

God has made what was impossible for us possible through Jesus. Come to Him. Follow Him. Look forward to the heaven that He has prepared for you where the treasures of heaven are laid up for you and where you will enjoy the fullness of joy and contentment forever. Amen