

THE CAMEL & THE NEEDLE

Thursday, March 23

Reading: Mark 10:17-31

Mark 10:24 *The disciples were amazed at His words. But Jesus said again, "Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! 25 It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God."*

This story of the rich young ruler is told in each of the first three gospels but only Mark records that Jesus had love for this man. The man was interested in eternal life but his question was wrong. He asked, "What must I DO to inherit eternal life?" Jesus wanted him to realize that all his good works and "law-keeping" were not enough. He lists all the Ten Commandments that deal with human relationships except one - "You shall not covet." This was the very one that this rich man was breaking! Jesus' call for him to sell everything and follow Him proved that his possessions were more important than his spiritual position. He went away sad and lost!

Jesus' teaching shocked the disciples. They had been taught that riches were a sign of God's blessing. Thus this rich young ruler had to be a godly person! But Jesus replied that wealth is often a deterrent to salvation. People would rather trust in their own abilities than surrender everything to the Lord. If this man was not saved, the disciples wondered if anyone can be saved. Jesus responds that salvation is impossible by human means but it is possible through the love and grace of God.

POINTS TO PONDER:

1. "Easier for a Camel to Go Through the Eye of a Needle." Some have suggested that "the eye of the needle" was a small gate in the wall of a city. A camel would have to unload all its baggage and kneel down in order to get through this gate. There are several problems with this interpretation. One, there is no evidence that a gate of this sort ever existed! Two, this interpretation would destroy Jesus' whole argument. This view states that a camel COULD actually get through this small gate; but Jesus said it was impossible! To hold to this 'gate view' is in fact to believe in a "works-based" salvation - if we unload our "baggage" and scoot through on our knees we can be saved. So we are again left with the ridiculous picture of that poor camel trying to squeeze through a literal needle's eye. This was Jesus' point all along! There is nothing we can do to earn salvation. There is no trick, no action, no works that will earn us eternal life. But "what is impossible for men is possible with God." Are you depending on anything other than the grace of God for your salvation?
2. "We Have Left All and Followed You." Peter's implied question is "What about us?" They had done what the rich young ruler refused to do to follow Jesus. What would be their reward? Jesus informs them that discipleship has rewards and sacrifices. God will bless the faithful but there will also be persecutions. Following Jesus is not a life of leisure and riches. To focus your Christian life on "what you get" is to be like the rich young ruler who trusted in his stuff instead of Christ. Instead of seeking prosperity, believers are to seek to serve God. Jesus said those who seek first place will be last, but those who humbly follow Christ will be exalted (see also Matthew 23:11-12). We have the blessings of being in God's family here on earth and life with Christ for eternity. Where is your focus? Is it on what you can get or what you can give?

READING THE STORY: Luke 16-21