

March 19th, 2023
Pinecrest Baptist Church
p.m.

Sermon Title: The Eye of the Needle
Sermon Text: (Matthew 19:24-30)

Just how hard is it for someone to believe the gospel, that Jesus paid it all, salvation is a gift, and that all men must do in order to be saved, is believe this truth, entrusting themselves to Jesus?

- Well for some it is very hard.... And maybe harder for more than we want to admit.

In verse 16-22 of this chapter we read one of the most tragic moments in all of Christ's ministry.

- A rich young man, claims to have kept the law His entire life, but still wants to know that He has eternal life.
- And of our course our Lord declares to Him, "one thing thou lackest,- sell all and follow me."
 - (Now that sounds like a massive instruction – but I tell you it was very simple. – Jesus said, trust me and come on.)
- And He went away sad.

It was a sad moment, but it was not an unused moment by the Lord... and that's what we want to look at this evening.

Jesus used the rich young ruler's rejection of Christ's call, to teach the disciples the conflict between human nature and the gospel.

*Note – This is a "big picture" moment between Jesus and His disciples. Our Lord uses this moment to deepen their understanding, and open their eyes to the real trenches that the Spiritual warfare is fought in.

The first things that Jesus points out to His disciples, as the rich young ruler leaves their presence, is the Hard Part of people getting saved.

I. The Hard Part of People Getting Saved – vs 22-25

*Note – Now we note that 3 of the four gospels record this event. Each of the writers, records the same thing with varying quotes of Jesus at the same time.

Mark 10:23 – "Children, how hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God?" Vs 24 – "And Jesus answereth again, and saith unto them, Children, how hard is it for them that trust in riches to enter into the kingdom of God?"

*Note – Mark presents the Lord's statement as a thought-provoking question. Matthew records it, as a plain statement- "Verily, I say unto you that a rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven."

*Note – What's going on here? Let's note the things that the Lord Jesus lays out for those disciples, that it might be laid out for us!

A. The Theology to Accept– "I say unto you, that a rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven."

*Note – Now there is no arguing with Jesus. The hard statements He makes is not meant to shock us, but to show us. Let's note what He declares!

1.) - What Jesus declares

a.) It is hard – “*duskolos*” – with great difficulty.

(1.) all three writers use the same word.

b.) “how hardly”? – Mark and Luke both insert the thought-provoking question, “How hard is it” for those with riches to enter in?

*Note – The Lord wanted them and us to think about this issue.

- But to go even further with it, He tells us how hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of heaven...He tells us “it is an abject impossibility.”

b.) (vs 26) – With men this is impossible – “abject impossibility.”

*Note – Now let's note the picture that Jesus gave to describe this impossibility.

Vs 24 – “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.”

*Note – Now let's dispel some customary thoughts:

- For years and even now there are many people who point to a particular “gate” that was supposed to exist in the wall of security surrounding either Jerusalem, or a customary wall that generally surrounded cities during that time.

- The idea is that there was/is a gate called, “the eye of the needle” in customs due to the fact that it was

small, and intended for single file entrance of men; and that the only way for a camel, or any other animal for that matter to enter through that gate was to shrink down, duck down, or kneel down, as well as be unloaded of all its burdens, in order to go through the gate.

- the reality is that there are as many historians that say no such gate ever existed, as there are that say it did.

- some say this pictures the fact that only Unburdened, shrunk down, and as small as a camel could make itself, is a picture of what a rich man must go through in order to enter the kingdom.

- the only problem is that that picture doesn't go far enough.

- Note how Jesus sums it up – verse 26 – “Impossible!”

Jesus is not painting the picture of a camel going through a gate on its knees; He is painting the picture of something not just of something totally impossible, but something totally implausible.

- There was at the time an old Jewish proverb that said, “Even in a man's dreams he doesn't see an elephant pass through the eye of a needle.”

- In other words it wasn't even a thinkable thing.

Jesus is painting a picture of an abject impossibility. Not something that is merely hard to do; but something that in fact cannot be done.

We are not talking about a gate, we are talking about an actual sewing needle.

- As a matter of fact the word that the writers use here is the word for a “sewing needle.”

- Note how Dr. Luke writes what Jesus said –

- Matthew and Mark use the phrase – “the eye of a needle.” – Luke states – “For it is easier for a camel to go through a needle's eye,...”

We know this because of the Disciples reaction. – You see a camel actually can kneel down and go through a man-sized gate.... – it can be done.

- but the disciples respond to something both implausible and impossible saying – “Who then can be saved?”

The Lord is opening His disciples understanding of the reality that salvation of the soul is a human IMPOSSIBILITY.

2.) - Why He declares it – (Deuteronomy 26-28)

a.) The mountain of blessings and cursings.

*Note – Deuteronomy 28:2-6 – *“And all these blessings shall come on thee, and overtake thee, if thou shalt hearken unto the voice of the LORD thy God. Blessed shalt thou be in the city, and blessed shalt thou be in the field. Blessed shall be the fruit of thy body, and the fruit of thy ground, and the fruit of thy cattle, the increase of thy kine, and the flocks of thy sheep. Blessed shall be thy basket and thy store. Blessed shalt thou be when thou comest in, and blessed shalt thou be when thou goest out.”*

*Note – Many of the Jews had come to believe that wealth was a sure sign of God's great favor, and God's great pleasure with someone.

- Reward for Obedience – Cursings for Disobedience

These were God's promises to the Nation of Israel upon entering the Promised land.

Because of such, Obviously someone wealthy had the privileged favor in the Kingdom of God! – at least in the mind of the Jews.

(Now remember, the law is our “school master” bringing us to Jesus.

- Remember that Paul spoke about this saying, “when I was a child, I spake as a child, and did childish things, but when I became a man, I put off childish things.

The Good Dr. Wiersbe points out that our Lord here is moving His disciples away from the idea that salvation is some kind of earned favor!

He is moving them from the childish doctrine of good behavior – good reward – bad behavior bad reward – to the childlike doctrine of trust!

*Note – The good Dr. points out that this is how we train children early on. Reward for obedience, and punishment for disobedience. – But then maturity comes, and life is lived based on “trust” and obey.

*Note – Now all of that being the case, Jesus said essentially that “believing a rich man can enter heaven much easier than another man, is as plausible and possible as your camel walking through the eye of a sewing needle.” – It is an abject impossibility.

- That is the Theology to Accept...

*Note – Then the disciples collectively ask the next obvious question.... If it is impossible to be saved, then who can be saved?

B. The Ideology to Answer – “Who then can be saved?”

1.) - “entering the kingdom of God” = “being saved”

*Note – Now here is another underscoring of an eternal truth.
- Jesus said “the rich cannot enter into the kingdom of God” - the disciples then asked, “who then can be saved” – understanding that “Salvation constitutes the entrance into the Kingdom of God.” – that is salvation.

2.) – “If the rich cannot – who can?”

a.) Answer – “NOBODY”

(1) the rich can’t

(2.) the poor can’t

- IT IS IMPOSSIBLE

Salvation is a “human impossibility” – “with men this is impossible.”

- abandoning the idea any man or woman can contribute to the saving of their soul, or merit the saving of their life, or “do” something in order to enter the kingdom of God, is the HARDEST part of the gospel for people to fathom.

Pagan religion, human morality, and fleshly sense has always dug its heels in some idea that those who are good will have a good afterlife, and those who are bad will have a bad afterlife.

*Note - Here the disciples, who have already confessed that Jesus is the Christ; who have already been “saved” are still stuck in the notion that somehow, Wealth means divine favor, which means at the very least they are on the verge of salvation; and that poverty means divine disfavor which does not bode well for those seeking eternal life.

(It is this concept, this ideology, of salvation being reward for favor, or still merited by making Jesus happy, that the Lord is trying to put to rest here.)

- In fact this is a little bit behind the background of the a few things the Lord preached to help us understand what He is saying...

- In Christ’s first synagogue sermon, Luke 4:18-19 – Jesus quoting Isaiah, and claiming that He is the fulfillment of that prophesy declares – **“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, To preach the acceptable year of the Lord.”**

- In Matthew 11, and Luke 7 – when Jesus sent messengers to John in prison validating who He is - He told them to tell John that “to the poor the gospel is preached”

*Note – In the common minds of the common men – “If the rich can’t get saved, we know the poor can’t!” – The Lord is emphasizing to these men that the gospel has nothing to do with rich or poor, favor or disfavor, merit or achievement.

- If it was hard for the disciples to get this – it should not be a surprise to us to find out that others have this same problem.

- The Hard Part for those Getting Saved

II. The Good News for Those who are Lost – “with men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.”

- 1.) Rich men can enter into the kingdom of God

What is implausible and impossible for man, is neither implausible or impossible for God!

- 2.) Any man can enter into the kingdom of God

*Note – Never fall for people who take this verse out of context, and try to apply to every situation and whim that comes their way.

“with God all things are possible” has to exclusively to do with His Saving Work in helpless and worthless men.

Preacher are you saying that all things are NOT possible, even with God? – Yep!

- There are some things God cannot do.
 - The scripture declares “it is impossible for God to lie”
 - God cannot approve of sin – that’s impossible.
 - God cannot ignore sin – that’s impossible.
 - God cannot accept man through any other means, except through Jesus – that’s impossible.
 - God cannot reject men who have honestly entrusted themselves to Jesus. – He has given His Word, and it is impossible for Him to lie.

- Any man can respond to Jesus in Trust! – the gospel is news to be received.

“Faith is not nodding to a group of theological facts – it is entrusting yourself to Jesus.” – Adrian Rogers

III. The First Prize for Saved People Living Like It. – vs 27-30

A. A Mystery to Examine – “Behold, we have forsaken all, and followed thee; what shall we have therefore?”

- Now the fleshly side of the reader will look at this and say – Peter is being shallow enough to say, “Hey, what are we going to get out of this?” – And that may be so.

- But we also may see this one sense and understand that there is in fact a deeper, and even more sacred way to examine this...

*Note – In one sense, there is a sacred presupposition here in the heart and mind of Peter. He did not ask, “We will have anything, since we have left all and followed thee?” – He had learned the nature of the Lord too well.

- He knew that Jesus was too right, too good, and too holy, to recompense men nothing for their service. – Furthermore, he may have sensed as well that service for the Lord in and of itself will result in some wonderful benefit. – It is too good not to; and very often too difficult not to result in something.

B. A Mastery to Expect – vs 28-29

Conclusion:- “But many that are first shall be last; and the last shall be first.”

Now here’s a summation:

When Christ said – “hardly” -- Hardly – it is not impossible for him to enter – it is impossible for him to enter on his own.

1 – the impossibility of human salvation

- 2 – “entrance into the Kingdom of God” = being saved
- 3 - material blessing does NOT equal being saved
- 4 - entrance is a gift – following brings reward

