

“Of Camels, Needles, and Rich People”

Mark 10:17-31

17 As Jesus was starting out on His way to Jerusalem, a man came running up to Him, knelt down, and asked, “Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” 18 Why to you call me good?” Jesus asked. “Only God is truly good. 19 But to answer your question, you know the commandments: ‘You must not murder. You must not commit adultery. You must not steal. You must not testify falsely. You must not cheat anyone. Honor your father and mother.’”

20 “Teacher,” the man replied, “I’ve obeyed all these commandments since I was young.” 21 Looking at the man, Jesus felt genuine love for him. “There is still one thing you haven’t done,” he told him. “Go and sell all your possessions and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.”

22 At this the man’s face fell, and he went away sad, for he had many possessions. 23 Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, “How hard it is for the rich to enter the Kingdom of God!” 24 This amazed them. But Jesus said again, “Dear children, it is very hard to enter the Kingdom of God. 25 In fact, 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!”

26 The disciples were astounded. “Then who in the world can be saved?” they asked. 27 Jesus looked at them intently and said, “Humanly speaking, it is impossible. But not with God. Everything is possible with God.” 28 Then Peter began to speak up. “We’ve given up everything to follow you,” he said. 29 Yes,” Jesus replied, “and I assure you that everyone who has given up house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or property for my sake and for the Good News, 30 will receive now in return a hundred times as many houses, brothers, sisters, mothers, children, and property—along with persecution. And in the world to come that person will have eternal life. 31 But many who are the greatest now will be least important then, and those who seem least important now will be the greatest then.”

For some, unexplainable reason, pigs and money go together. Think about it! As in piggy-bank. As in “bring home the bacon”; as in “living high on the hog”. And even though “you can’t make a silk purse out of a sow’s ear,” your mind’s eye will picture a pigskin pocketbook the rest of the day once you have heard the

proverb. Even in the life of the church, pork meet penny. The term “Steward” traced back to the medieval English “Sty- - - ward.” That’s right pig keeper!

Jesus talked a lot about stewards and stewardship. Unfortunately, for our purposes, the Hebrew word for steward had nothing to do with pigs, which after all, just isn’t kosher. Sorry, I just couldn’t help myself.

Oh, and the one encounter Jesus had with a pig farmer wasn’t exactly good stewardship at all ...(I promise this is the last one) all that deviled ham and nobody got even a bite. If you are not remembering the story Jesus cast the demons out of a man and they went into a heard of pigs and the pigs plunged down a deep hillside and drowned in a pond. **[NOTE 1]**

Okay, forget about the pigs ... stewardship of resources was an important topic to Jesus. If you get the Bible out and do a little research, you will find that one sixth of Jesus’ words have to do with money. In fact the only subject that Jesus talks about more than money is the kingdom of God. **[NOTE 2]**

Our text for today, Mark 10: 17-31 talks about the rich young ruler. As I read this passage two things stand out to me. First is verse 21. I hadn’t noticed before that Jesus looked at the rich young ruler, a man who was respected, and loved him. The New Living Translation has it, “Looking at the man, Jesus felt genuine love for him.” And because Jesus loved him, he told it like it was. What did Jesus see in this man? From the language Mark and the other gospel writers use to describe him it appears that wealth had not undermined his virtue, and power did not smother his respect for authority. He runs to Jesus and then kneels before the Master and claims obedience to the law. Maybe Jesus saw in him the potential of his drive and vision for the advancement of the Kingdom of God. But the rich young ruler still longed for spiritual satisfaction and the assurance of eternal life. Like most people who have not asked Jesus Christ into their lives as LORD and Savior he had a God-shaped vacuum in his life. So he comes to the right place but as we read the story we see that he had made two wrong assumptions. **[NOTE 3]**

First he assumed that goodness can be achieved. He commends Jesus for his achievement not his character when he calls Jesus “good teacher.” Jesus stops him short and reminds him that God gives goodness, righteousness and power as gifts, as part of God’s grace. Eternal life cannot be earned, only received!

The second assumption was that price and cost are the same. In effect he asked Jesus what the price of eternal life was and Jesus told him the cost. Price is written in dollars, cost is spelled out in VALUE. No price tag can be put on eternal life! It can’t be bought, ...but it costs our all! His wealth and power represent a cost he is not willing to pay. If we look at our society it seems that it is a price most of us will not pay either. The prevailing economic attitude is summed up in the bumper sticker, “The one who dies with the most toys, wins!” Yet none of our “toys” are coming with us. There are no u-haul trailers or trucks in heaven! The

only choice we have in this matter is deciding to whom we shall give the things in our lives as inheritance. Even if we plan on leaving everything to the kids, we are still giving it away! **[NOTE 4]**

The other thing about this passage that jumped out at me as I read it this past week was the fact that Jesus' disciples were amazed, even shocked, by what Jesus said. Now it wasn't the words because the camel going through the eye of a needle was a common cliché to express things and/or ideas that were ludicrous or ridiculous. The thing that amazed them is that Jesus used it to refer to the possibility of the rich going to heaven. You see Jewish law and its interpretations made wealth a special sign of God's favor. Look at some of Israel's kings like David and Solomon and how riches and wealth are interpreted to be God's favor on their lives. True piety, according to the Jews consisted of practicing prayer, fasting, and alms-giving. The poor could pray, but only the rich had the food to fast and the money to give. Jesus was taking some ideas that were tradition, established beliefs, and was basically trashing them.

Think back to something that you always thought was true that was debunked or proven wrong? The first thing that comes to mind is remembering how shocked and upset I was when my parents told me that Santa Claus and the Easter Bunny were fiction. I was shocked and upset! That's how the disciples are feeling!

Verse 23 reads, "How hard it is for those who trust in riches to enter the kingdom of God." Then Jesus likens the possibilities of the rich making it to heaven with the possibility of a camel making it through the eye of a needle. The disciples were truly flabbergasted, surprised, amazed and shocked. Their mouths were probably hanging open. So they innocently ask Jesus, "Who then can be saved." If the rich can't, who can? In their minds they were saying, "If you take away the rich, who they believed were the ones blessed by God, who is left?" And Jesus gives them the answer.

How would you respond if Jesus said to you today, ... "What you need to get to heaven is to 'Go, sell everything you have and give it to the poor?'" Would you, could you do it? What would you say? You see the trouble with reading this story to people in the United States of America, us, is that few of us would identify ourselves as "rich." But the fact of the matter is that by the world's standards, we are rich. We live in warm homes, air conditioned homes, can freely go to the grocery store to buy food when we want, anticipate going to the closet (or for some of us the pile of clothes on the floor in our room) and pick out what clothes we want to wear. Most of us commonly spend money on cars, coats, insurance, retirement plans, schools, sports, cable TV, books, magazines, videos, streaming, fast food. You might not think of it this way but all of those things are luxuries! I will bet very few of us do not have a recliner or very comfortable chair in our

homes. But it is so easy in getting caught in the trap of things. Riches is one of life's greatest addictions and seductions. Nothing is ever enough. A man of some wealth overheard a lady remarking, "Oh if I only had fifty dollars I would be content." He thought about that for a few minutes. If the lady only had \$50 she would be content. He thought to himself, "I can help her out." So he walked up to her and handed her a \$50 dollar bill with his best wishes. She was very overt in her show of gratitude. She really appreciated the gift. As she walked away he heard her mumble under her breath, "Why on earth didn't I say \$100?"

I have a shotgun, it works, but it kicks hard. It only has a bead on the front of the barrel so it hurts my cheek when I shoot a slug, so I think I need a new gun. The poor may speak of wanting a gun to hunt for food, but seldom of needing one.

I'm pulling out from a car repair place when a beautiful new Chevy Silverado drives by. All I have is a 2004 Suburban so I think to myself. I need a new truck. The poor speak of wanting a car ~~but~~ seldom of needing a new car. Riches breed the need for more. If that weren't true they wouldn't be professional athletes averaging (anywhere from \$3 million for an NFL player to \$4 million for a Major League baseball player to \$11 million for the average NBA player) And these athletes have gone on strike ~~not too long ago~~ to get more money! **[NOTE 5]**

It is difficult for the rich to put their full trust in Jesus and to put God first above all! It is difficult because we don't have to rely on Him to survive because our money pays for our survival and comfort. We need to feel the need for Jesus!

Before my sabbatical this past Summer, I was tired, I was working a lot of hours and I had three or four people calling me at all hours needing prayer, help, etc. and I was not doing well on getting a Sabbath. I would get home late and tell Amy, "I need a vacation." The poor will say they would be thrilled with a vacation, but seldom of NEED. You see, we never or I should say, rarely, reach a place when we have all we want. Sure, we say we have all we need, but there's always that but I could use a new vacuum cleaner, or I'd really like a better shotgun, faster snowmobile, warmer boots, or a better-looking outfit or coat lurking just beneath the surface. A quote from Earl Wilson is appropriate here: "The loudest sound known to man is the first rattle in a brand new car!"

Jesus requires us all to give it all away. At least in our minds we should be willing to give it all away! Our relationship with Jesus must come first! Giving to "The poor" means giving in a way that makes a difference to those in need. Our giving should be done in such a way that it glorifies God by changing other's lives for the better! **[NOTE 6]**

Jesus' answer to the disciples' question, "Who then can be saved?" is that with men it is impossible, with God all things are possible! Who or what are you depending on? For most of us, we don't have to depend on God for food, for clothes, for most of our "comforts." So it takes a little more effort to depend on

God for all our spiritual, emotional, and physical needs. It takes more thought and intention for us to remember that God is in charge and we are not! A commitment to Jesus and living His way and a commitment to riches are NOT compatible!!

Stephen Olford tells about when the British government sought to reward General Gordon for his brilliant service to China. Gordon declined all money and titles but accepted a gold medal inscribed with the record of this 33 engagements. This became his most prized possession. But after his death the medal could not be found anywhere. Eventually it was discovered that he had sent it to Manchester during a severe famine, directing that it should be melted down and used to buy food for the poor. In his diary under the date of its sending were these words: "The last earthly thing I had in this world that I valued I have given to the Lord Jesus Christ" —Stephen Olford, *The Grace of Giving* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Bookhouse, 1972).

Remember the first time you made or bought all the Christmas presents for your parents and sibling by yourself? Remember how good it felt to know you had been able to give them something? That is the kind of childlike delight Jesus wants us to feel every day. Once you start giving things away and experiencing that joy one of the greatest gifts you will receive is discovering how much more you have when you give to others. **Without the weight of possessions and the burden of a lifetime of "stuff", slipping through the "eye of the needle" into the kingdom of heaven becomes possible!** [NOTE 7]

What are you going to do about it? Please ask yourselves what difference does this make? What changes can I make? And then, write out your "I will ..." statement. Mine is, "I will think first what money can I give before what can I buy this week!"

I heard this quote from the movie *Tombstone* and I think it is precisely what God desires to hear from us when we've realized that we are most valuable to God, when we have nothing to offer but ourselves and our lives and our love. Wyatt Earp is coming to terms with retirement, with an end to his time as sheriff. As the movie comes to a close Wyatt is tired, he looks old and worn out and he enters a room where his fiancé is and says, "I have nothing left ... nothing to give you, ...no pride, no dignity, no money. I don't even know how I'll make a living. But I promise I'll love you the rest of my life."

Let's pray that to God right now. Dear Lord, we have nothing to give you! We are sinners, all of us. We have no pride, no dignity, no money that means anything to you. But we promise to love you the rest of our lives! Teach us Your ways. Fill us with Your Holy Spirit, that we might be able to serve you, love you, and witness to those around us. Help us point others to you! Show us how to give, how to live, and love the way YOU do. We ask in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord and our Savior ... AMEN

Sermon Notes for “Of Camels, Needles, and Rich People”
Based on Mark 10:17-31 given October 26, 2025 at Doster Church

- I. Stewardship of resources was important to Jesus. One Sixth of all the recorded words of Jesus have something to do with money.
- II. First thing that stood out, “Jesus felt genuine love for (the rich young ruler).
- III. The man made two wrong assumptions:
 - a. Goodness can be achieved (only God is good)
 - b. Price and Cost are the same (Price is written in dollars and cost is spelled out in VALUE. Eternal life can’t be bought but it costs our all)
- IV. Jesus’ disciples were amazed/shocked at it being difficult for the rich to get in heaven. The answer is: Everyone who has given up much for Jesus’ sake and for the Good News. “Humanly speaking it is impossible but not with God. Everything is possible with God!”
- V. We need to feel the need for Jesus and His Word and the power of the Holy Spirit. Do we consistently trust and rely on God (in your actions)?
- VI. A commitment to Jesus and living His way and a commitment to riches are NOT compatible. Without the weight of possessions and the burden of a lifetime of “stuff”, slipping through the “eye of the needle” into the kingdom of heaven becomes possible!
- VII. What are you going to do about it? What change will you make? What difference does this make? Write down your “I will ...” statement.