

Twenty-first Sunday after Pentecost
October 21st, 2018
Pastor Matthew Ude

Mar 10:23-31 NKJ ²³ Then Jesus looked around and said to His disciples, "How hard it is for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of God!" ²⁴ And the disciples were astonished at His words. But Jesus answered again and said to them, "Children, how hard it is for those who trust in riches to enter the kingdom of God! 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." ²⁶ And they were greatly astonished, saying among themselves, "Who then can be saved?" ²⁷ But Jesus looked at them and said, "With men *it is* impossible, but not with God; for with God all things are possible." ²⁸ Then Peter began to say to Him, "See, we have left all and followed You." ²⁹ So Jesus answered and said, "Assuredly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My sake and the gospel's, ³⁰ "who shall not receive a hundredfold now in this time-- houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions-- and in the age to come, eternal life. ³¹ "But many *who are* first will be last, and the last first."

Then Jesus looked around and said to His disciples, "How hard it is for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of God!"

In our prayer for this day we said, "Put away from us all things hurtful and give us those things that are beneficial for us." We are asking that Jesus would remove from us all those things that would distract us and lead us away from him, but that whenever it will not be distraction he would give us the things we need for this life. What are these things that hurt us? We might think of disease and suffering, but actually Jesus shows us that the riches of this world are often more harmful to us.

The riches of this world are like a weight tying us down and keeping us from the things of God. We pile up riches around us and sit in our own filth, delighting in worthless things, rather than salvation.

²⁴ And the disciples were astonished at His words. But Jesus answered again and said to them, "Children, how hard it is for those who trust in riches to enter the kingdom of God!

It's not just the rich that have difficulty entering the kingdom. Jesus makes it clear here that the things of this world tie down the hearts of all people.

I can tell you from much personal experience that the very poor, the middle class, the very wealthy all people are just obsessed with the things of this world. Those who don't have envy and covet the things that others have. Those who have hoard and store and protect.

It is easier for a Camel to go through the eye of a needle

What is Jesus talking about? This is one of those phrases that again people will argue back and forth about. Perhaps you've had pastors who tell you this is talking about a special small door in the city gate that is really small and thus hard to get a camel through. Others will say no he's clearly talking about an actual needle.

It's clearly an idiom. It's an idiom we are never really going to understand. Imagine 200 years from now people arguing over a phrase like "the bees' knees." The exact meaning and origin of the phrase we will never know but the truth that Jesus meant to convey is beyond any doubt for it comes in the very next line, "with man it is impossible."

He is not talking about something that is difficult, but something that is impossible. The Rabbi's had a similar expression, "even in dreams an elephant cannot go through the eye of a needle." It's so impossible that people don't even dream about it.

With man salvation is impossible! But thanks be to God who gives it to us freely through His Son Jesus Christ.

²⁶ And they were greatly astonished, saying among themselves, "Who then can be saved?" ²⁷ But Jesus looked at them and said, "With men *it is* impossible, but not with God; for with God all things are possible."

The disciples are amazed. The culture of that time assumed that riches were a sign of God's favor. That's not really surprising. They had Job, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, David, Solomon and many others as examples of heroes of faith. All of whom were richly blessed by God. It would have been very natural for them to think the wealthier you are the closer you are to God.

So for Jesus to say, "it is impossible for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God." Would be as if someone told a buddhist, "it is impossible for the dalai lama to enter bliss." If he can't, then no one can. This is exactly the reaction of the disciples and exactly the reaction that Jesus was leading them to.

Even though many of us have been taught from childhood, "you can't earn salvation." We still have a tendency to confuse our own merit and earthly wealth. I doubt that there is anyone among us who hasn't thought some version of "I earn this, I deserve this."

Santa Claus is a good example of this. If you want to use Santa Claus in your Christmas celebration go ahead, I'm not going to try and tell you it's wrong. But think about what message you might be sending your kids. Santa Claus basically comes down to you were good therefore you earned these gifts which were dropped off by a fat elf. Wouldn't it be better to tell your

kids these gifts are a sign of our love for you, which you didn't earn but we freely give to you? Just as the Father loved us all and gave us the gift of His son.

We constantly build up and reinforce this ideology of work, earn, deserve. We want to believe we are in control. We want to be proud of ourselves. But if it is not true in earthly things and it is not. How much less true it is in spiritual things.

With man this is impossible but all things are possible with God. With Man it is impossible to remove from our hearts the things that keep us from salvation, but God can remove them for us.

Then Peter began to say to Him, "See, we have left all and followed You."

Jesus no sooner finishes removing this ideology of works and riches, than he runs into another problem: The pride of those who have "gone without."

At the end of our text from last week, people might very easily be left with the idea that the way to get into the kingdom of heaven is to sell everything. "Didn't Jesus say we should sell all that we have and give to the poor?" And then we would, "have treasures in heaven." Thus many have taken a vow of poverty, lived in caves, etc as a way to earn salvation.

That is pretty much exactly Peter's reaction. And yes Jesus is quick to reassure Peter and the other disciples that they will lack for nothing. **Whoever has given up . . . for my sake. Shall receive 100 fold in this life . . . "**

How shall we understand this? Isn't this Santa Claus theology again? Do the right thing and God will reward you with money etc.

This is not at all what Jesus has in mind. With these words Jesus simply means to reassure us that He will take care of us and give us all good things in this life. But notice that Jesus immediately follows this statement with two others:

1. With suffering

Yes the lord will provide all that we need but we should never think that we won't have suffering in this life. Those who are his do not belong in this world. As long as we are the children of God we will suffer.

2. The first will be last and the last first

Yes Jesus reassures the disciples that he will provide from them. But they need to be careful not to think too highly of themselves for "leaving all." This is the very place where in the gospel of

Matthew we have the parable of the workers in the vineyard. They we have the example of those who worked hard all day long, and therefore they thought they were better than those who worked for only an hour. Jesus reminds them and us that, even if we work our whole life we still cannot earn salvation, thus we should not put ourselves first thinking we deserve more

Even the wisest among us often set our hearts on the useless things of this world. We pray that God through the power of His word may tear away from us the things we love in this world. In this way he might set our hearts to love the riches of Christ, teaching us to trust that He will provide everything we need now and in eternity.

AMEN