

The Difficulty of Riches
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Original: 7-21-24

Text: Mark 10:23-27 (see also Matt. 19:23-26; Luke 18:24-27)

Gospel of Mark: [Bibliography](#) or [Manuscripts and Greek Exegesis](#)

UBS 4th Edition Paragraph Topic: The Rich Man

Central Idea of Message: Love of riches is a serious hindrance to Christian faith.

Introduction: Episode 52. Most people throughout the centuries have equated wealth with the special blessing of God. Jesus came along and taught the opposite, showing that riches often prove to be a serious hindrance to a person placing faith in Christ to save them because of their refusal to place him ahead of their wealth.

So it was with the rich young ruler in the previous episode, who had walked away in despondence after Jesus told him the cost of discipleship. Here is more of what Jesus had to say about the difficulty of riches.

I. Graphic Hyperbole (vv. 23-25)

A. Highly improbable (v. 23)

1. Just after the rich young ruler walked away disappointed at the condition Jesus laid out
2. Jesus now looks around at all those remaining, presumably at least the twelve disciples, and declares something to be highly improbable
3. Entry into the kingdom of God will be extremely difficult for the wealthy
 - a) **The *kingdom of God* is a phrase used to describe the collective, saved people of God from all eras (cf. John 3:3-5)**
 - b) Not impossible, but very hard!
 - c) Why?
 - (1) **The wealthy often love their riches and possessions more than they love God**
 - (2) **The wealthy often don't want to let go of their riches**
 - (3) **The wealthy often put their ultimate trust in riches rather than in God**

- d) This statement by Jesus should have sent shivers up Judas' spine, because he desperately wanted wealth and would have betrayed his own mother to get it!
- B. Amazed disciples (v. 24)
1. The Twelve were stunned by the words of Jesus as they looked at him with "a look of blank astonishment" (Robertson 1:352)
 - a) **Much of the astonishment experienced here by the disciples was because they, and most Jews of their time, and many people today, viewed wealth as a tangible expression of God's special blessing**
 - b) **Jesus came exploding many myths, and this was one of them, as he set out to turn the world right side up!**
 - c) **And yet, we have Christian individuals, and even groups, which perpetuate the myth of the Jews' at Jesus' time who claim that wealth is a tangible expression of God's special favor**
 - d) Remember what many of us have said for years about what the world thinks is right and choosing or believing the opposite!
 2. For good measure, and to insure that nobody had misunderstood what he had just said, Jesus emphatically repeated himself
 3. "Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God!"
 - a) Jesus addressed all those standing around as "children," as if to magnify the necessity of becoming childlike in faith, loyalty, and dependence on him immediately!
 - b) **This statement should put everyone on notice that admission into the kingdom of God requires far more than muttering some words or being dunked in some water!**
 4. At this statement, and the fact that it was repeated, everyone standing around probably had some doubt about whether or not they would make the cut!
 5. I want to repeat what I have said many time before
 - a) Jesus never used any "bait and switch" tactics to gain followers!

- b) **It is frightening to consider that many people who think they are going to get into heaven are not**
- C. A camel and the eye of a needle (v. 25)
 - 1. "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"
 - a) Camels are very large
 - b) Needles are very small
 - (1) Luke uses the word for a surgical needle in his narrative (Luke 18:25)
 - (2) A needle is *not* a small gate for foot-traffic but a sewing device used with thread
 - c) **Jesus cited the largest animal in Palestine passing through the smallest opening known in Palestine to introduce an absurdity**
 - 2. **Jesus employed a ridiculous comparison [hyperbole: deliberate exaggeration to stress a point] to emphasize how highly improbable it is for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God**

II. Impossible and Possible (vv. 26-27)

- A. More astonishment (v. 26)
 - 1. The Twelve were astounded
 - 2. Their question was, "Then who can be saved?"
 - a) Exactly!
 - b) At that very moment, they likely doubted their own salvation
 - c) When it comes to eternity, it is better to be sure than unsure!
- B. God makes the impossible possible (v. 27)
 - 1. "With men it is impossible"
 - a) No man can stuff a live camel through the eye of a needle!
 - b) **Salvation [entrance into the kingdom of God] based on human achievement is an effort in futility, meaning an absolute impossibility!**
 - c) **Jesus here teaches that salvation is completely beyond human merit - no works, no deeds, no good karma will be sufficient!**
 - 2. "But not with God; for all things are possible with God"
 - a) God is a miracle worker!

- b) If God can cause a live camel to pass through the eye of a needle by squeezing one or expanding the other, nobody is beyond his ability to transform into a kingdom citizen!
- c) If you think you know somebody beyond God's power to change them, you are wrong!
- d) Saul of Tarsus
 - (1) Was as mean, zealous for the Law of Moses, and as vindictive as anybody who ever lived!
 - (2) Was like the next Caiaphas, the high priest who, along with the high priest emeritus, Annas, conspired with Pilate to have Jesus executed
- e) But an encounter with Jesus changed Saul into the Apostle Paul, who spent the rest of his life preaching the gospel and dying for it!
 - (1) It's like Caiaphas himself became a missionary preacher for Jesus!
 - (2) It's like Pilate became a missionary preacher for Jesus!

Conclusion: Principles.

(1) **Jesus indicates that the wealthier someone is, the more difficult it becomes for him or her not to trust in their riches (v. 23).**

(2) **Prosperity can be "an acid test of character. For every 100 who can stand adversity only one can stand prosperity" (v. 23; Barclay 288).**

(3) **Does our love of money compel us to cut legal or ethical corners or commit sins against others in order to acquire it (v. 24)?**

(4) **Jesus never says that it is impossible for a wealthy person to be saved, but he does say that it is *extremely difficult* for the wealthy to enter the kingdom of God because of their idolatrous trust in riches (v. 24).**

(5) **Worldly wealth has been overrated for centuries, but most won't figure this out until it's too late (v. 24).**

(6) **Money makes for a wonderful servant but for a terrible master! If you have it, don't put your confidence in it and be sure to use it for furthering God's interests (v. 25)!**

(7) **Wealth must never be viewed as a special token of God's love or blessing and might better be viewed, at least in some cases, as a "dire obstacle" to entering into the kingdom of God (v. 26; Plummer 242).**

(8) "There is no mark of God's special favor in possessions, nor in the lack of them" (v. 26; Lane 369).

(9) Without *God's* grace having been provided by the shed blood of Christ on the cross as mankind's substitute, it is impossible for anyone to enter the kingdom of God for, "God gives what neither money nor merit can buy," which is why grace is a gift (v. 27; Godwin 86; cf. Eph. 2:8-9).

(10) All the things necessary for the salvation of any person in the world are possible with God, because God, by his grace in response to faith in him coupled with a repentant heart, can save and transform even a thief, rapist, pedophile, or mafia hit-man into a saint (v. 27)!