

Matthew 19:23-30 – “Hindrances To Heaven”

An investment banker was at the pier of a small coastal village when a small boat with just one fisherman docked. Inside the small boat were several large yellow fin tuna. The banker complimented the fisherman on the quality of his fish and asked how long it took to catch them.

The fisherman replied, "Only a little while."

The banker then asked why didn't he stay out longer and catch more fish?

The fisherman said he had enough to support his family's immediate needs.

The banker then asked, "But what do you do with the rest of your time?"

The fisherman said, "I sleep late, fish a little, play with my children, take a nap with my wife, stroll into the village each evening where I play guitar and sing with my friends. I have a full and busy life."

The banker scoffed, "I am a Harvard MBA and I could help you. You should spend more time fishing and with the proceeds, buy a bigger boat. With the proceeds from the bigger boat, you could buy several boats, eventually you would have a fleet of fishing boats. Instead of selling your catch to a middleman, you would sell directly to the processor, eventually opening your own cannery. You would control the product, processing and distribution. You would need to leave this small coastal fishing village and move to a big city where you will run your expanding enterprise."

The fisherman asked, "But, how long will this all take?"

To which the banker replied, "15-20 years."

"But what then?"

The banker laughed and said that's the best part. "When the time is right, you would announce an IPO and sell your company stock to the public and become very rich. You would make millions."

"Millions...Then what?"

The banker said, "Then you would retire. Move to a small coastal fishing village where you would sleep late, fish a little, play with your kids, take a nap with your wife, stroll to the village in the evenings where you could play your guitar and sing with your friends."

Many of us have dreams of what it would be like to have money....

The school of agriculture's dean of admissions was interviewing a prospective student, "Why have you chosen this career?" he asked. "I dream of making a million dollars in farming, like my father," the student replied.

"Your father made a million dollars in farming?" echoed the dean, much impressed.

"No," replied the applicant. "But he always dreamed of it."

Well, money isn't everything. In fact, wealth can be a real stumbling block for people entering the kingdom of heaven. We saw that clearly with the rich young ruler. He had wealth, but sadly that wealth had more of a hold on him. It obstructed his heart from seeing His need for Jesus and from surrendering all to Him. He went away sad at the thought of having to sell what he had to give to the poor.

So Jesus uses this now as a teaching moment for the disciples.

Summary Statement: Living for the pursuit of earthly treasures can be a hindrance to heaven, whereas living for the pursuit of Jesus brings riches eternally.

19:23 - *Then Jesus said to His disciples, "Assuredly, I say to you that it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven."*

Some have misunderstood what Jesus is saying here and have taken it to mean that money is evil. Or that being wealthy will almost be an instant disqualifier from heaven. This is not what Jesus is saying.

He doesn't say it's impossible for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven, just that it's a very hard thing. Why is it hard?

- Because wealth and riches have a way of consuming a person. They can tend to distract a person and pull them away from having a singular devotion to Jesus.
- For some in this day, wealth was viewed as a blessing from God. If a person had money, they saw themselves as highly favored by God and heaven was the expectation. It led to a dependence on self rather than on God. Throughout the Old Testament many people like the Patriarchs, the people inheriting the promised land, and Israel's kings as an example, were promised material blessing for spiritual obedience. This view still remained among the religious leaders of Jesus' day. But this was never preached by Jesus. In fact, it was quite the opposite, and that view was often contradicted by New Testament writers.

This is why prosperity teachers will often rely on Old Testament examples to justify their false teaching of wealth and prosperity.

The Bible is quite clear on the relationship money is to have with those who are living for God...

1 Timothy 6:6–10, *"Now godliness with contentment is great gain. ⁷ For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. ⁸ And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content. ⁹ But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. ¹⁰ For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows."*

Proverbs 23:4–5, *"Do not overwork to be rich; Because of your own understanding, cease! ⁵ Will you set your eyes on that which is not? For riches certainly make themselves wings; They fly away like an eagle toward heaven."*

Ecclesiastes 5:10, *"He who loves silver will not be satisfied with silver; Nor he who loves abundance, with increase. This also is vanity."*

Matthew 6:21, *"For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."*

Jesus adds an interesting illustration to show how hard it is to have riches and enter into the kingdom of God.

19:24 - *And again I say to you, 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.*"

What Jesus is showing here is you have a better chance of getting a camel through an eye of a needle than for a person to be loaded with earthly possessions and truly seek after God.

Again, not impossible. You can get a camel through the eye of a needle, but you're going to have to grind that camel down bit by bit and turn that thing into something that it was never intended to be.

- C.S. Lewis once observed that God can bring a camel through the eye of a needle, but that camel will not be the same creature having come through a needle's eye!

Now some have attempted to soften this a bit and give a little more allowance for wealthy people to enter the kingdom by saying the eye of a needle was actually the name of a small gate in the wall surrounding Jerusalem. It remained open when the other gates were closed at night. Because it was so small anyone

going through it had to be careful. A camel would have to have its packs removed and it would have to get down on their knees and crawl through with great difficulty. Great picture, but there's no historical proof of such a gate. Some say that the word Jesus used was actually *kamilos* in the Greek which spoke of a ship's rope or cable. The word somehow just got changed to *kamelos* which is the Greek word for camel.

- But try putting a ship's rope through the eye of a needle. Pretty impossible too. Try putting a thread through the eye of a needle and you just want to give up at that alone!

Jesus clearly is speaking in hyperbole once again and His point is to show the difficulty of getting into heaven with much wealth.

- You know what it's like when we go through adversity or trials. We are quickly calling out to God for help. If someone is going through a health crisis they are giving serious consideration to what comes next.
- Like the saying goes, there are no atheists in foxholes.

But riches have the opposite effect. We get comfortable. We begin to think that we have all we need and so we don't ponder the important issues of life and death.

- When you have a heart so full of earthly possessions, there's little room for your heart to be occupied with heaven.

Now let me just say before moving on, this is a generalized understanding of the relationship between people and wealth. This does not mean that if you are wealthy you are a bad person or that your eternity is now up in the air.

- There's been many Godly people that have been wealthy and they've used that wealth to further the kingdom of God. They have the gift of giving (Romans 12:8) and they have a Godly perspective in the use of it.
- So let's be careful you don't begin to judge people if they have more money than you. Don't go up to them and tell them you're praying for their salvation. Money is not the issue. The issue is how you are viewing it. And in the case of the rich young ruler, it had become an idol to him. His trust was in his wealth rather than in the Lord.

We see this same thing being played out in the church of Laodicea.

Revelation 3:17, *"Because you say, 'I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing'—and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked—"*

They became complacent through their wealth.

This is what Jesus is speaking of by showing the difficulty of getting a camel through the eye of a needle in comparison to a rich man into heaven.

The disciples seemed to understand exactly what Jesus was implying based on how they responded.

19:25-26 - *When His disciples heard it, they were greatly astonished, saying, “Who then can be saved?”²⁶ But Jesus looked at them and said to them, “With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.”*

Upon hearing these things, the disciples aren't just surprised, they are **greatly astonished**. It's said this way to show how much the disciples are caught off guard by this. Remember, they are thinking in Old Testament terms where wealth was equated with the blessing of God. So now they're wondering, **Who then can be saved?** Is there hope then for anyone to enter the kingdom?

And Jesus gives a great response. **With men this is impossible**. If you're trying to enter into the kingdom through your own means and goodness (like the rich young ruler) it's not going to happen. You can't do it. You can't buy your way in, you can't earn your way in, you can't do anything to put yourself in a better standing with God through your own effort.

But here we see one of these great turning points or reversals in Scripture. And it starts with a big **but!** But God. **With God all things are possible**.

If left up to man, salvation would be an impossibility. As we discussed last Sunday, the demands are too high. The level of goodness needed to achieve is too great. Only One is good and that's God!

This is why God is responsible for our salvation. It takes God to convict us through the Spirit and draw us to repentance. He then forgives and cleanses us, making us new through the regenerating work of His Spirit. And we experience reconciliation and the restoration of a right relationship with Him. How amazing this salvation is that God has gifted us with.

- **Titus 3:3–7**, *“For we ourselves were also once foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving various lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another. ⁴ But when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared, ⁵ not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, ⁶ whom He poured*

out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior, ⁷ that having been justified by His grace we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life."

And this statement, “with God all things are possible” should continue to ring in our ears and be faith builders for us. Nobody is too far gone. No heart is too hard for God to break through.

In whatever area you might be battling thinking it’s an impossibility for it to get better – but God.

- Perhaps you’re struggling in your marriage and thinking it’s hopeless – with God all things are possible.
- Perhaps you’ve got a boss you think will never like you – with God all things are possible.
- Perhaps you’ve got a debt you think is an impossibility to get out of – with God all things are possible.
- Perhaps you’ve got kids that never seem to listen to you – that could be impossible, there are limits 😊. Nope! With God all things are possible.

How we need to be reminded of this great truth.

19:27-28 - *Then Peter answered and said to Him, “See, we have left all and followed You. Therefore what shall we have?” ²⁸ So Jesus said to them, “Assuredly I say to you, that in the regeneration, when the Son of Man sits on the throne of His glory, you who have followed Me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.*

The disciples thinking of Jesus’ call to the rich young ruler to go, sell what he had and give to the poor, in which he would gain treasure in heaven, then come follow Jesus (19:21), are probably wondering what they’re going to gain for their willingness to follow after Jesus. Peter is sure to point out what an incredible sacrifice they have made in leaving all to follow Jesus.

And Jesus lets Peter (and all the disciples) know of the amazing privilege they’re going to have in the kingdom to come. That is what Jesus means when He speaks of the regeneration (Gk, *palingenesia* – renewal; new birth). This is the time when the earth is renewed and ***the Son of Man sits on the throne of His glory***. This is the kingdom age, the thousand-year reign of Christ on the earth known as the Millennium. These disciples are going to have a very special honour of sitting on thrones to govern (***judging***) the 12 tribes of Israel. Israel is

going to be brought back into their land and the 12 tribes will once again be restored after they turn to faith in Jesus as their Messiah in the Tribulation.

- This again shows that the church is not the new Israel. There is a distinction between Israel and the other nations in the Millennium.

So the 12 Apostles are going to be given a great reward for their commitment to Christ. But there is also reward for all followers of Jesus...

19:29 - *And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My name's sake, shall receive a hundredfold, and inherit eternal life.*

Jesus promises that whatever you may have given up to follow Him, you will gain a hundred times more. It doesn't mean you'll have 100 houses, because then you will have 100 wives on that premise too. What Jesus means is that you will gain so much more than you will ever lose when you make Jesus your life.

- Living as a disciple of Christ is indeed a life of sacrifice, but after this statement it seems like more of an investment than a sacrifice doesn't it?

Not only do you receive a hundredfold in return, but you receive eternal life!! Forget about the hundredfold, give me eternal life and I'll do whatever is required. That's the greatest of rewards! That's reward enough for me to say, my life is yours Lord. Whatever it takes, whatever it costs, I'm yours!

Now Mark's Gospel slips something in here that we often want to dismiss: **Mark 10:29–30**, *"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."*

- Are we willing to not just give up all, but endure all? The life of the believer is never promised a path of comfort, but you're promised eternal life.

"The question for us is whether we will live for short-term pleasures we cannot keep or for long-term treasure we cannot lose. We don't want to miss the reward in Christ because we want more stuff in this world. Jesus is infinitely better, and His reward is eternal."¹

¹ Platt, D. (2013). *Exalting Jesus in Matthew* (D. L. Akin, D. Platt, & T. Merida, Eds.; p. 269). Holman Reference.

- As we discuss these topics of money and discipleship, we can walk away feeling like it's all about what we must give up. But remember what Jesus said to the rich young ruler, go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven!
- Jesus then was not calling the man *away from* treasure but *to* treasure!

19:30 - *But many who are first will be last, and the last first.*

Those who are living for this world, who may seem like they're getting ahead or they're receiving all the good things now, will end up being last. These things never pay off. Again, *what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul?*" (**Matthew 16:26**). It's just not worth it.

However, those that seemed to not have much and lived a life of servanthood, they gain everything. They may have seemed like they were last in the world's eyes, but in God's eyes, they are coming in first.