



Camels and Needles Luke 18:18-30

One of the nice things about the English language is that it is so idiomatic – by that I mean that we use the most ridiculous words sometimes to express ourselves. The problem is of course that people who are learning the language, or who have been taught English formally at school find it very difficult to understand us.

I remember at Spurgeons we had a very nice Dutch lecturer for New Testament and we quickly realised that he was very confused by things we said. So if I were to say to you that on the Sea of Galilee that it was blowing a gale and tipping it down so much the disciples were witless whilst Jesus snoozed like a baby, you'd know what I was talking about. Unfortunately Pieter could have been looking confused and hunting for his dictionary at that point.

Sometimes quite idiotic pictures can be used to make a point “He drinks like a fish” “He snores like a drain” “He's as popular as a rattlesnake in a lucky dip” “She's as old as the hills”. Phrases like these help us express ourselves more effectively – providing we know how to use them and what they mean. Native speakers usually do but others don't.

All languages are idiomatic and all cultures use these expressions to make them colourful and interesting. It was the same for Jesus. He spoke frequently in parables and pictures and it's His use of language that helped make Him a popular and effective communicator.

Let's have a look at one in the passage. *24 Jesus saw that he was sad and said, "How hard it is for rich people to enter the Kingdom of God! 25 It is much harder for a rich person to enter the Kingdom of God than for a camel to go through the eye of a needle."* Now maybe you are thinking of a camel and one of these – a needle. You see what Jesus means straight away.

Actually, what he might have been referring to is not a needle like this at all, but a small pedestrian gate in the wall of cities that allowed people to get in and out when the main gate was closed. It was large enough for a man to get through, but too small to get a camel through – unless it was very small and very thin! So the eye of the needle was a little gate and a bit of an easier proposition than getting a camel through one of these! They don't usually come in that size!

Jesus said “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.” Why? Because however rich a person may be, he is never going to have enough money to buy his way to heaven. It's a simple principle of God's Word – eternal life can neither be earned or deserved. Listen to this familiar verse:

Ephesians 2:8 For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith--and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God-- 9 not by works, so that no one can boast.

How do we get to heaven – by grace, through faith. God has shown us His unmerited favour (that's grace) and loved us so much that he sent His own dear Son Jesus to die on the cross for each one of us, so that he can offer us a gift – forgiveness of sins and an eternity with Him – and that's all obtained by putting our total faith and trust in Jesus as our Saviour and Lord.

Of course that is what we are here to remind ourselves of as we take the bread and wine this evening – that a price has been paid, a redeeming work done – and paid for completely by Jesus. It's here so that it will remind us not to become like this rich ruler in believing that eternal life was something gained by wealth but to reaffirm it is a price paid for in Christ.

We look in despair don't we at our nation – one that is blessed so materially but so few people

profess Christ. Yet as we look at the rest of the world, we find the Christian faith growing so rapidly. I find it exciting to hear stories of people coming to faith in Christ in China, India, South America, Africa. It's the world's fastest growing faith. The majority of Christians live outside Europe and North America. And they are drawn from the poorest countries. In India, people are coming to Christ faster than ever before. They are mostly dalits – the poor underclass; the untouchables – why? Because Jesus gives them hope and by faith he gives them the highest status of all; sons and daughters of the living God. They are raised from nothing to adoption into the royal line!

Yet in our rich country, few come to Christ. Few see the need to come to Him. They are like the man in the story whose god was money and material things. *"How hard it is for rich people to enter the Kingdom of God! 25 It is much harder for a rich person to enter the Kingdom of God than for a camel to go through the eye of a needle."*

I know that many of you have seen all this change in a couple of generations in our own land. As our land has prospered materially, so we have become poor spiritually. As we come to communion this evening, let us give God thanks for the way in which the gospel is surging forward in so many lands right now, but bring our own country before God, that it may turn away from its love of wealth and return to the true and living way that only comes through trusting Jesus and making Him Lord.

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