

Mark 10:23-31 - "The Origin, Definition and Purpose of Riches"

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Our text begins with Jesus saying to His disciples, "*How difficult it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!*" And lest we think because of our financial situation that Jesus' words don't apply to us, "*Jesus said to them again, "Children, [referring to His disciples] how difficult it is to enter the kingdom of God! It's easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God."*

What is it that often causes people, especially those with worldly riches, to reject Jesus Christ as their Savior? For the most part, it's their belief that they are doing fine without Christ. According to their natural way of thinking they believe that the origin of what they have is either inherited, their own hard work, luck, or a combination of all these things. And if they're what the world calls "spiritual," they may believe that their good fortune is evidence of God or the gods smiling on them because they're such good, hard working people. So, without giving much thought to these false impressions, they carry on believing that they're fine, and will continue to be fine in the future.

What's one of the ways God helps us to see our need for a Savior outside of ourselves before it's too late? When Jesus told the rich young man to "*sell all that you have and give to the poor;*" one of the things Jesus was encouraging this young man to think about was his death. For it's at the time of our death that all worldly riches will be taken from us whether we like it or not, and left to others. In this valley of the shadow of death, the death of people of all ages, whether through covid, cancer, heart disease, accidents, old age, abortion, terrorism, or whatever, is a constant reminder of what will eventually happen to all of us, rich and poor alike.

But people have become so accustomed to the evils of this world, including death, that it still doesn't seem to phase them. That's when some personal reminders, whether through things like the sickness of ourselves or our loved ones, can be a good thing. They're good if they help to remind us that this world (including our life in it) is temporary. At such times, the definition of riches is reevaluated.

One of the things that often makes something valuable is its permanence. In the face of death, we are reminded of the impermanence of this world. Hopefully, when the rich young man we heard about last week comes to terms with the truth that his riches and good works are worthless when it comes to saving him from death, he will start to look elsewhere for true riches. But what about Jesus' disciples, people like you and me, who already believe in Jesus as our Savior and our greatest treasure? Why did they ask Jesus, "*Then who can be saved?*"

This question of Jesus' disciples reveals another important truth in God's Word: our constant need for God and His Word in our lives to keep us in the faith. The more our sinful pride tells us that we don't need to hear what God's Word says about our sins and our Savior, the more we need to hear what God's Word says about our sins and our Savior.

In response to Peter's question, "*who can be saved,*" Jesus said, "*With man it is impossible, but not with God. For all things are possible with God.*" These words of our Lord make it clear that our salvation relies 100% on God. This is also true even when God gives us new life through His Word and the waters of Holy Baptism. We still rely on the Spirit or breath of God, which He breaths into us through the "*living and active,*" "*two-edged sword*" of God's Word to keep us alive—to cut us free from our sinful thoughts words and deeds and raise us up every day in repentance and faith in our Savior, Jesus Christ.

Thankfully the Bible overflows with the Good News of God doing what for man is impossible. Nowhere is this more clear than through Jesus' resurrection from the dead. The more we read and meditate on the Good News that Jesus offered His life as the full payment for our sins through His damning death on a cross, but then rose from the dead on the third day as He promised, the more God enables to trust in His love and power to save us, and to keep us from being distracted by the things off this world.

Since it's true that we can allow our hearts to be hardened by rejecting this gift of God in pursuit of the temporary pleasures of this world, thank God for His continual presence and work in this world to enable us to repent of our sinful, fool-hearty ways and believe in His words of forgiveness. In the midst of this world and these bodies that are falling apart before our eyes, Luther reminds us that this promise of God's forgiveness through Jesus Christ is our greatest, most permanent treasure when he writes in his famous hymn, A Mighty Fortress is Our God: "And take they our life, goods, fame, child, and wife, though these all be gone, our victory has been won; the kingdom ours remaineth."

What did Jesus mean when He told Peter that "*there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands, for my sake and for the Gospel, who will 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*"? The things of this world, that we either willing share with others or are taken from us, are restored "*a hundredfold*" when we become members of Christ and of His body or family—the Church, "*in this time*" and in the eternal "*age to come.*"

Finally, what's the purpose of all God gives us in this life, including "*persecutions*"? The eternal salvation of ourselves and others who come into contact with this Good News through Christ and His Church (people like you and me).

[Children's Sermon] Jesus said, "*It's easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle*" than for people like you or me to go to heaven. This is the eye of your average needle, so I brought this needle with a much bigger eye. Can you now fit through the eye of this big needle? No. It's impossible. And that's what Jesus wants you to remember, that it's impossible for you to get to heaven by what you do.

What would happen to a camel or to you if I did manage to squeeze you through the eye of this needle? You would be dead! But what happened to Jesus when our sins smashed and killed Him on the cross? He was able to squeeze through the eye of the cross, death and hell and rise from the dead in a body free from all sin, death and corruption forever. And the best news of all is that He did it for us, to open the door of heaven for us so that when we die it will be like going to sleep and waking up in heaven with Jesus.

Jesus is our greatest treasure. How do we know and believe this? Through God's Word, which focuses mainly on Jesus' death and resurrection for our salvation through the cross.

All glory be to God, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.