

The Needle's Eye

A rich young ruler came running to Jesus and, kneeling before the Master, posed the question, "Good Master, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?" Jesus called attention to some of the basic commands of the law. The young man answered, "Master, all these have I observed from my youth." Jesus, knowing that he lacked one important thing, told him to sell whatever he had, give it to the poor, and he would have treasure in heaven, "and come, take up the cross, and follow me."

The young ruler reacted by a display of sadness. He went away grieved, for he had great possessions. Looking on the disciples, Jesus remarked, "How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God!"

The disciples reacted with astonishment. Jesus explained, "Children, how hard it is for them that trust in riches to enter into the kingdom of God! 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" (Mk , 10:23-25).

A Gate or Sewing Needle?

In my youthful years, I heard some preacher say that in ancient times there was a small gate in the wall around Jerusalem; and this tiny gate was called "the Needle's Eye." According to the preacher, the little gate was used when the big, regular-size gates were closed. It was so small, declared the preacher, that a camel could go through it only by getting down on his knees and squeezing through. The lesson then, according to said preacher t is that a rich man can be saved only by squeezing through - getting on his knees, so to speak, by the proper and sacrificial use of his wealth.

That story impressed me, and in ignorance I repeated it. A more objective study of the passage in which Jesus spoke of the needle's eye led me in time to reject that story about the gate, and to come to the conclusion that the Lord was speaking of an ordinary kind of needle.

First, I noticed that Jesus spoke of a rich man in the sense of one who trusts in riches, not merely one who possesses wealth. Read carefully Mark's account and notice the following:

" . . . they that have riches" (10:23).

" . . . them that trust in riches" (10:24).

" . . . a rich man" (10:25).

Now, is it possible for people who trust in riches to be saved? Not at all! One must put his trust in the Lord to be saved. They that have riches, that is, they who trust in riches, can no more be saved than a camel can go through the eye of a needle. To a Jew the camel was the largest domestic animal, and the eye of the needle the smallest of openings visible to the eye. Such a large animal passing through such a small hole clearly conveyed an impossibility.

The disciples took Jesus' illustration to have that meaning. They asked, "Who then can be saved?" Obviously, something would have to change before a camel could go through the eye of a sewing needle. Therefore, Jesus said, "With men it is impossible, but not with God: for with God all things are possible" (v. 27).

It is impossible for one who trusts in riches to be saved, whether he has five dollars or five million dollars. But with God all things are possible. Working through the power of the gospel, God can change a man so that he ceases to trust in himself, his riches, his own wisdom, etc., and puts his trust in Jesus Christ.

Also, it is worthy of note that the Greek word "needle" (*rhapsis*) used in Mark's account comes from *rhapto*, meaning "to sew." Vine says, "The idea of applying 'the needle's eye' to small gates seems to be a modern one; there is no ancient trace of it. The Lord's object in the statement is to express human impossibility and there is no need to endeavor to soften the difficulty by taking the needle to mean anything more than the ordinary instrument." The word for "needle" in Luke's account is *belone*, which according to Vincent, "is the peculiar word for the surgical needle." A.T. Robertson says it "means originally the point of a spear and then a surgeon's needle."

McGarvey sums the matter up by saying, "The conceit, which originated I know not where, that 'the eye of a needle' here means a low and narrow gate through which the camel could not go except on his knees and after his burden had been removed, is not only without historical foundation, but is inconsistent with the context, which contemplates something impossible with

men" (comments on Matt. 19:24).

This article is not designed to needle anyone, but to point out that we need to carefully study the language used before eyeing conclusions.

- by *Irvin Himmel*

True Life

The goal of the gospel is to prepare people for heaven. Its emphasis centers upon happiness in a life to come rather than upon this life. "For what profit is it to a man," Jesus once asked, "if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul?" The Lord would teach us to look through faith beyond the suffering and heartaches of this life to a life free of suffering and heartaches; to lay up treasures in heaven rather than upon the earth. He wants us in our preaching to proclaim a message of salvation through His blood, to bring to people's consideration those things that are eternal. But when we succeed in leading men and women to surrender their lives in favor of the life to come, we lead them into gaining, not only heaven, but also the peace and contentment that make for real happiness upon this earth. "He who finds his life shall lose it," Jesus said, "and he who loses his life for my sake shall find it."

- by *Bill Hall*

Complaints about the Church

We frequently hear complaints about local churches. That's nothing new. In fact, there were some folks complaining about the church in its very earliest days (see Acts 6:1-6). And, we know that some criticism is fully justified and is offered in a constructive way that will, hopefully, bring about needed changes.

However, we feel that there is a troubling trend evidenced by the kind of criticism that is often leveled against local congregations. Seldom, if ever, do we hear folks say things like: "I'm disturbed that this church is not more active in the realm of evangelism." Or, "It really upsets me that we are not supporting more preachers." And we never hear, "I just think we ought to have more gospel meetings."

What we do hear is things like: "I just don't think this is a friendly church." And, "There are just not enough social activities, especially for the young folks." Or, "People here really don't seem to care about each other."

Two observations need to be made. First, a local church is not a social institution. While it is important for people to have social interaction, God placed all such responsibilities in the realm of the home, not the church (1 Corinthians 11:34). If your main concern is about social things, you need to come to a better understanding of the work and function of the Lord's church.

Second, those who level these charges should spend some time looking in the mirror. If there are problems - if there are areas that need improvement - what are **YOU** doing to bring about those changes?

Complaints about the church are not new. Oftentimes they are needed and helpful. But, if you complain, be sure you're willing to lend a hand to make the needed improvements. Let's work together to make this church everything that God would have it to be. Think!

- by *Greg Gwin*