

# WHAT'S YOUR CAMEL

Pastor Colin Rieke ~ October 9, 2016



**<sup>17</sup> As Jesus started on his way, a man ran up to him and fell on his knees before him. “Good teacher,” he asked, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?” <sup>18</sup> “Why do you call me good?” Jesus answered. “No one is good—except God alone. <sup>19</sup> You know the commandments: ‘Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not give false testimony, do not defraud, honor your father and mother.’” <sup>20</sup> “Teacher,” he declared, “all these I have kept since I was a boy.” <sup>21</sup> Jesus looked at him and loved him. “One thing you lack,” he said. “Go, sell everything you have and**

**give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.” <sup>22</sup> At this the man’s face fell. He went away sad, because he had great wealth. <sup>23</sup> Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, “How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God!” <sup>24</sup> The disciples were amazed at his words. But Jesus said again, “Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! <sup>25</sup> 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.” <sup>26</sup> The disciples were even more amazed, and said to each other, “Who then can be saved?” <sup>27</sup> Jesus looked at them and said, “With man this is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God.” (Mark 10:17-27)**

This is the day the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it,

Just picture the scene, a 35 year old man is meeting a 32 year old woman on their first blind date. He knows a little bit about this woman from her online profile, but he’s still a little cautious, because things on the internet are not always true. But when his date walks through the restaurant doors, she seems to be everything that he could imagine – she was tall with dark hair, beautiful eyes. As the night progresses, he finds that their personalities mesh perfectly with one another. She seems like the perfect woman. But then her phone rings, she pulls it out of the purse, and then he sees it, and it’s a complete deal-breaker – her phone is in an ASU Sun Devils case. He knows at that moment there will not be a second date.

I’ll leave it to you to decide whether or not you would break off a relationship for that reason. But that illustration helps to bring some humor into the baggage that we all carry. This baggage is mostly of concern in the dating scene, and as the years pass, the more emotional baggage a person can accumulate – perhaps it’s a kid from a failed relationship, perhaps it’s depression, perhaps it’s another dirty little secret that a person is toting around.

In our gospel for this morning, Jesus had an opportunity to talk about another relationship that is very important, more important even than finding the right person to spend the rest of your life with, it is the relationship with your God whom you hope to spend the rest of eternity with. And just like our personal relationships are accompanied with baggage, so also is our spiritual relationship with God. Oftentimes this baggage is more than we realize. But Jesus doesn’t use the word baggage, but rather he uses an illustration with a camel and a needle. Jesus was using a camel as an example of

the things that we carry with us that can prevent us from getting to heaven. And so the practical question that we must ask ourselves is: WHAT IS YOUR CAMEL?

Shortly after Jesus' encounter with the Pharisees from last Sunday, he prepared to leave the town in which he was staying. The sun was just peeking over the horizon and Jesus had just left the city gates behind, when there's the pattering of sandals slapping the dusty road behind him. It's one of the young men from the synagogue, the Jewish house of worship. Probably a prestigious youth in his 20s who not only contributed support to the synagogue, but was immersed in the Laws of Moses. Not only was it a surprise to see him running, but upon reaching Jesus he fell down on his knees in homage to him.

**"Good teacher"** he said gasping as he caught his breath, **"What must I do to inherit eternal life?"** The question that was on this young man's mind was about eternity. Having grown up a Jew he had a pretty good idea of what the Rabbi's and teachers had said, keep the laws of Moses and you will have eternal life. And this is what he did. He followed them as best he could. But with a travelling teacher in the region, he wanted to know if he was missing something. Was there one thing he could do that would give him assurance of getting eternal life.

Jesus' answer to him may have gotten his hopes up a little bit: **"You know the commandments: do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, don't give false testimony, don't defraud, honor your mother and father."** Excitedly this youth exclaimed, **"All these I have kept since I was a boy."** From the context, I have no doubt that this man was serious about his claim. He thought he actually had kept these commandments since his youth. But notice what happens next, because it's important: **"Jesus looked at him...and loved him."** How easy it would have been for Jesus to slap this young whippersnapper around and say "how could you think that? Haven't you read any of the Old Testament?" But Jesus didn't. Rather, he saw a young man who was unaware of his lost condition, and he loved him.

**"One thing you lack"** in other words, "there's one place you fall short." Instead of saying what that one thing was, he gave the young man instructions to illustrate his point. **"Go sell everything you have and give it to the poor...then come and follow me."** With this one sentence, the prominent young man went away crushed, his entire world turned upside-down. One moment he thought he was so close to achieving eternal life, and in the next, his entire house of cards came tumbling down, when he realized how far he was from that.

Did Jesus mean to say that if the young man would have given up his wealth and followed Jesus then he would have earned heaven for himself? No, of course not, that's not what the rest of the Bible says, and that's not what Jesus says in the very next verses. At this time, you can imagine Jesus' disciples whispering among themselves, amazed that Jesus would say something so harsh to a man who was likely well loved and respected in the town, surely he was closer to heaven than that they must have wondered.

And so Jesus took the opportunity to share with them, yet again, the truth about the kingdom of God. **"How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of heaven"** and again, **"Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God."** If we just looked at those words, we might conclude that it's difficult to get to heaven, but not impossible. But Jesus wasn't done. Just to show how hard it was to enter the kingdom of heaven he gave the simple illustration that many of you have probably heard

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before. **"It's easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God."** You know how big a camel is, and you know how little an eye of a needle is, right? It's impossible for that camel to force its way through that needle. So, if it's easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for someone to enter heaven, who then can be saved? This was the question that stumped Jesus' disciples (even after everything Jesus had taught them), and before we get to Jesus' answer, let's consider more closely these words.

While Jesus used this example on a rich, young man, the application goes far beyond simply having riches. And we mustn't think that having riches automatically disqualifies you from heaven. What was this rich man's problem? It wasn't so much that thought that he had kept the commandments of God, but that while he was devoting time to keeping these other commandments, he had completely neglected the very first (You shall have no other Gods). Jesus wasn't interested in making this rich man poor, he wasn't interested in exerting his authority over this religious man. Jesus was interested in making him aware of his sin, making him aware of how far he was from inheriting eternal life.

What this rich man didn't realize is that his wealth had become his god. This was put on full display when Jesus exposed how dearly he treasured his riches. Jesus was asking – are you willing to part with your riches and follow me – because that's what it means to have no other gods. This man's riches was the camel that couldn't pass through the eye of the needle to make it to heaven. This is the reason he went away sad.

Now perhaps you're thinking that you could do what Jesus asked of that rich man. Perhaps you're thinking that you could actually sell all of your possessions and follow Jesus. How near and dear to your heart are your possessions – that big screen TV, that hot-tub, that nice home? Is riches your camel, like it was for the rich man?

WHAT IS YOUR CAMEL? Maybe your camel is not your riches, maybe you don't have a problem giving stuff away to help others, and that's great. But then perhaps is your camel pride? Are you so proud of the fact that you don't succumb to the worldly temptations of wealth and how it's so easy to give stuff away? Is pride the camel that you are unwilling to give up. Or is it an ungodly relationship that you're unwilling to give up – whether it be with a real person or with a computer screen? Or is it an ungodly attitude or emotion – like anger or worry? Whatever your camel might be, whatever possession, whatever habit, whatever pleasure – sinful or otherwise – they are all camels to God, because if we struggle to give them up, they are taking the place of God in our heart.

It is impossible for us to continue to hang onto these camels, continue to hang on to these sinful attitudes and behaviors, while at the same time hang on to Jesus. We cannot hang on to both, because these are things that separate us from heaven with God. And God says we all have them, **"There is no one who understands God, no one who seeks him, all have turned away...there is no one who does good, not even one."**

But we might say, "God doesn't expect us to be perfect." Let me stop you right there, yes he does! And he says whoever isn't perfect, doesn't deserve to be in heaven with him. And you say, "that's impossible!" And he says, "yes, with man it is." And then maybe you begin to see the point that Jesus was making. **"It is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than it is for a rich man."**

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**man to enter the kingdom of God."** Instead of "rich man" insert your own name. **"It is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than it is for Pastor Rieke to enter the kingdom of God."** The point Jesus is driving home, is that this is impossible for us to do.

But our God thrives on the impossible. Think about it. An angel appeared to a young woman, who was a virgin and said, **"nothing is impossible with God,"** and God proceeded to place his Son inside a virgin womb. That Son when he grew up performed impossible miracles of feeding 5,000 with five loaves of bread and two fish, he walked on water, he restored sight to those blind from birth, he even raised the dead. All of these would have been impossible for man, but not for God. But that Son was not finished. In one final decisive act, he collected all our camels, he collected all our baggage, he collected all our sins, and nailed them to Calvary's cross and died. Then the miracle of miracles – he picked up his life again and began to live. Knowing that people would have a hard time believing it, he showed his disciples again and again that it was him.

Then in one final impossible miracle, God came to you, who were dead in your sins, and planted the seed of faith in your heart, raising you from spiritual death. It is that faith which takes hold of the impossible promises and miracles of God. It is faith which no longer clings tightly to those camels which kept us from heaven, but it clings even tighter to a Savior who gives us lasting treasure in heaven.

Because Christ has already clinched heaven for us, our efforts no longer need to be spent in trying to please God. Our efforts can instead be used to give him thanks and praise, our efforts can instead be used to confront others with their camels in the same loving and caring way our Savior did, and then to share with others about our impossible Savior who gives a sure answer to an impossible problem. May you walk in this impossible truth all of your days. Amen.