

The Camel and the needle's eye

by Elder C. D. Cole

And again I say unto you, It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God. -- Matthew 19:24.

It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God. -- Mark 10:25.

For it is easier for a camel to go through a needle's eye, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God. -- Luke 18:25.

Introduction: A familiar text, a puzzling text, a simple text, an amazing text. Nearly everybody knows it is in the Bible but it is not often quoted or pondered. It is a puzzling but simple text. Men wonder what it means and yet our Lord spoke in plain and impressive terms. It is amazing but in full harmony with the revealed plan of salvation. Christ's own disciples were exceedingly amazed. The text does not express a difficulty but an impossibility. It is not merely difficult for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, but it is an utter impossibility in the nature of things. The disciples would not have been so amazed if he had been speaking of something that was hard.

Some explain this by saying that there was a certain gate at Jerusalem called the Needle's Eye, through which a camel could not pass, save on its bended knee and after its burden had been taken off. But such an explanation destroys the whole force of the passage. Now the Jaffa gate at Jerusalem is known as the Needle's Eye, but it got its name from this New Testament passage. There is no proof that it was so called in our Lord's day, and our Lord was not speaking of any such gate. In the days of our Lord, a camel was a well-known animal, and a needle, quite similar to those used by our women today, was well known.

I. That salvation by human effort is absolutely impossible. Not difficult but *impossible*. If salvation were by works then, the rich man would have the advantage. A man with money can do more good than the poor man. Riches are valuable only as they are used in doing good. Riches used to gratify the lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh, and the pride of life, are a curse and not a blessing.

Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not highminded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy;"-- 1 Timothy 6:17.

Good works are not the price paid for salvation. Good works no more procure salvation than evil works.

Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost; -- Titus 3:5.

For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: <it is> the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them. -- Ephesians 2:8-10.

Christ takes the man who has the best opportunity to enter the kingdom of God by his own efforts and shows that it is impossible. If salvation were by works it could be by good works of course and the rich man would have the best chance to be saved. If the man with the best opportunity cannot enter the kingdom of God by his own efforts, then what chance is there for the poor man? None, absolutely none. Then no man can enter the kingdom by his own efforts, no man can be saved by good works.

Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily , verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. -- John 3:3.

II. Salvation is of the Lord.

But Jesus beheld them, and said unto them, With men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible. -- Matthew 19:26.

Nothing is too hard for God. He who created this vast universe also controls it. He has never vacated His throne, nor will he ever vacate it. He knows nothing of crises and emergencies. He resorts to no "New deal," for his counsels are of old. The Blue Eagle of his administration is an invulnerable bird, not a feather shall be clipped or plucked from its wings. It is a bird of providence not to be preyed upon by the hawks of human schemes.

Salvation is by grace, there is nothing of human merit in the blood of Christ, and all the power is in the Holy Spirit and the only instrument is the Gospel.

For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. --Romans 1:16.

Salvation by grace does not give the rich man any advantage over the poor man. It is rather a disadvantage; many dangers in riches.

1. Danger of independency. A man worth lots of money is naturally inclined to feel independent. Henry Ford was just as dependent upon God for his daily bread as is a Baptist preacher without work or income. And the disciples' prayer is just as appropriate for him as for the poor man. But his riches are apt to destroy such a spirit of helplessness. Money is a poor substitute for God even in material things, but it is the only God many rich men have even for this present life.

Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not highminded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy; -- 1 Timothy 6:17.

2. Danger of falling in love with money.

Trust not in oppression, and become not vain in robbery: if riches increase, set not your heart upon them." — Psalms 62:10 "But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows. -- 1 Timothy 6:9-10.

3. Danger of pride. Comparatively few men are humble men. There was pride and fullness of bread in Sodom.

III. Salvation is a miracle. "I am a miracle of grace." A miracle is that which is beyond the human and the natural. It is not humanly and naturally possible to put a camel through the eye of a needle. But it is possible for a miracle working God. The salvation of sinners is not humanly and naturally possible. But it is possible with God.

What is salvation? The word salvation means deliverance. The salvation we are discussing is deliverance from sin. That is the kind of salvation Jesus came to effect. Not from hard times, not from physical sickness and death, not from persecution. He did not come to save from temporary but from the eternal effects of sin. Sin is twofold, it is guilt and defilement. Guilt has to do with our standing before the law of God. It is transgression of the moral law that merits punishment, even the wrath of God. Defilement has to do with our sinful nature; it is unclean in the sight of God and cannot dwell in his holy presence. Now salvation from the guilt of sin is effected through the death of Christ, who bare the guilt of our sins in his own body on the tree; and who put away sin (the guilt of it) by the sacrifice of Himself. This is salvation in the sense of justification. This is instantaneous and everlasting. When the sinner believes on Christ he is instantly and completely and forever justified.

And by him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses. -- Acts 13:39.

Verily , verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life. -- John 5:24.

Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? <It is> God that justifieth." — Romans 8:33.

Salvation from the defilement of sin, deliverance from a sinful nature and its activities is effected by the Holy Spirit. This is salvation in the sense of sanctification and glorification. It is progressive and experimental. It begins in regeneration and ends in glorification. In this sense we are not saved until Christ comes and we awake in His likeness.

Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself. -- Philippians 3:21.

Salvation is a miracle whether viewed as deliverance from the guilt of sin or as deliverance from the defilement of sin. It is a miracle of grace.

For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit: -- 1 Peter 3:18.

And sent the Holy Spirit to make us alive. *And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins: -- Ephesians 2:1.*

1. The plan of salvation is a miracle of wisdom. It was divine wisdom that discovered a fit redeemer. Here is a sinner, what must be done with him? Reason says, "Let him alone." Justice says, "Cut him down." Truth says, "He or I one must perish, for the wages of sin is death." Holiness says, "I hate the workers of iniquity." But Mercy says, "Spare him." Is there to be a conflict among the attributes of God? No, here comes Wisdom, leading one like unto the Son of Man and Wisdom says, "Deliver him from going down into the pit for I have found a ransom."

2. The provision of salvation is a miracle of love.

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. -- John 3:16.

Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not. -- 1 John 3:1.

But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. -- Romans 5:8.

Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. -- 1 John 4:10.

3. The application of salvation is a miracle of power. The blood of Christ, the only remedy for sin, was shed on Calvary nearly 2,000 years ago. But the individual and actual salvation is the result of having his blood sprinkled on an evil conscience.

Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water. -- Hebrews 10:22.

The remedy must be applied. Christ on the cross must become an experience as well as a fact. The Holy Spirit makes the application when he takes of the things of Christ and shews them to us. Satan blinds men to the gospel.

He hath blinded their eyes, and hardened their heart; that they should not see with their eyes, nor understand with their heart, and be converted, and I should heal them. -- John 12:40.

The Holy Spirit opened the eyes of Saul to see. *And immediately there fell from his eyes as it had been scales: and he received sight forthwith, and arose, and was baptized. -- Acts 9:18.*

Brother Neprash, a Russian Baptist minister, was seeking to win a Mr. Solomon, a Communist leader and government official, to Christ. When approaching the heart of the matter, he became conscious of the necessity of God's intervention, if the man was to be saved. His heart went out in silent prayer, "Lord, apply Calvary, apply Calvary." What is it that causes men to give up opinions to which they are wedded by disposition and training? Nothing but the grace of God. Every saved man can say with Paul,

But by the grace of God I am what I am: and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me. -- 1 Corinthians 15:10.

[Brother C. D. Cole, at home with the Lord now, ministered in Canada and Kentucky. Permission to use his materials has been granted by Bryan Station Baptist Church of Lexington, KY.]