

Would you say you're more successful than most in your family? Are you wealthier than most of your friends? Are you more talented than others on your team, smarter than the rest of your class, prettier than your peers, younger than your competition, stronger than most, quicker to learn, longer to last, thought highly of by nearly everyone you know and even most people you don't? If that's you... if that describes you in anyway... I want to warn you: you are among the most endangered of all men. According to Jesus, you are the most at risk of losing everything to gain nothing. Does that sound harsh? That's not my intent. But these most shocking words of Jesus are intended to get your attention, to wake you from your slumber, to turn your eyes away from yourself, from this world, from all the lesser accolades and onto the only One who can salvage you from all your "blessings". Plead, right now, with the God of mercy & grace to open your ears, to open your heart, to humble you, to rescue you from sin, death & the fire of hell that awaits you, and bring you, instead, to salvation, to your Savior, to Christ Jesus the Lord, the meek & lowly, whose burden is easy & whose yoke is light.

23-24 "Truly..." In other words, "Brace yourself boys: you're probably not gonna believe this!" This is counter to all our natural thinking. This completely challenges our norms, dashes them to pieces. What does? The rich aren't necessarily the blessed. Those truly blessed by God most likely aren't those living on easy street. In fact, it's more likely just the opposite. ¿Is it "with difficulty" that the rich enter the Kingdom? Is that what Jesus said? No! Not just "with difficulty", but "only with difficulty" will the rich enter Christ's Kingdom.

Growing up in the church I can tell you that I've heard all kinds of crazy explanations in an effort to water down Jesus' parable here. Supposedly there is a real gate, a narrow passage way in the Jerusalem called "the eye of the needle". Needless to say, it's tough to squeeze a camel through it, but it is possible. And, they say, that's what Jesus is really talking about here. Uh... no! The point of His parable here isn't to soften His words but to depict the truth of what He's saying in such a way that we can wrap our minds around & therefore heed His warning!

What ought to be our response? It's a no brainer, right? Run from the lure of wealth & riches. Yes they may provide a moment's satisfaction, but then leave you needing even more. Wealth is a powerful persuader against pursuing Christ's Kingdom. As JC Ryle pointed out, "Riches are the most perilous possession." Wealth perverts our ability to evaluate properly, it blurs our vision, it binds burdens onto our souls, weighs us down with all sorts of temptations, it can consume our thoughts: "more, more, more" is all we can think about. This is why it is the wealthy who are truly the most to be pitied in all the earth, living & abiding in such a perilous

way, the way that is “only with difficulty.” Jesus has warned us elsewhere that “the gate is already small, the path that leads to eternal life is naturally narrow, few there be that find it,” He said. Why make it even more difficult with wealth? Yes, it is possible to use it well, to do good with it; but for every one person who does, there are thousands who don’t, who are ruined by riches.

25-26 The disciples weren’t just “astonished”, they were “greatly astonished”. The word astonished means “greatly surprised”. So the word “greatly” is actually in there twice: they were greatly, greatly surprised. This is strong language here. They were shocked! They couldn’t believe what they were hearing? And why not? What made their leader’s words so shocking, so unbelievable? Because—just as is the case for nearly everyone today—*riches* were thought to be a sign of God’s blessing, of God’s favor. “How much rain did y’all get? Ninety points?! Man, we only got a trace. Y’all must be living right.” In other words, “You must be living a life that God rewards, that God blesses.” That’s the underlying thought; that’s the *natural* way we think. “If such a marked man, one like this rich young ruler, who is living a life that has clearly been blessed by God—I mean, just look at him: he’s loaded; he’s got it all!—if not even such a favored man like that can be saved, then who in the world can be?!”

Their question is worth noting. Look at what they ask, notice how they’re defining salvation, what it means to be saved: entering the Kingdom of God; being salvaged out of this world, and into the next; having eternal life; living forever with the Giver of every good thing; eternity with the Blessor. Exactly! That is exactly right! And that’s exactly *why* they couldn’t conceive of the notion that this man—who obviously enjoyed so much blessing from the Blessor—wasn’t any more fit for heaven than a camel could fit through the eye of a needle.

So, in v23, Jesus proclaims the shocking truth: it is only with difficulty that the rich enter the Kingdom. Then, to back that truth up, He gives the camel & the needle illustration. Then He drives it home: “With man this is impossible...” Note carefully that this is the second “with” in this passage. First, in v23, Jesus says, “only *with* difficulty do the rich enter His Kingdom.” And now, “*with* man this is impossible.”

What is the “this” that Jesus is referring to? Salvation. He is answering the question, “Well then who can be *saved*.” With man, salvation is impossible. What a humbler! What a leveler. With all of our technology, our smart phones, our digital satellite internet, our medical research, vascular surgeries, our nuclear powered submarines, our supersonic missiles, our antibiotics, our robotics... with all of our health, wealth & security, we are no more fit for heaven than any third

world countrymen. There is *nothing* man can do to save man from eternal separation from God. We are all at His mercy.

Therefore, what should we do? What is the only proper response to such truth? Plead for His mercy. Listen to His Word. Obey Him. Trust Him. Turn to Christ who alone has sufficiently paid the penalty from your sin through His blood on the cross. Such is the level ground we are all on. Everyone of us: dependent, in need.

“With man *this* is impossible”. Salvation—mere entry, just starting out, just beginning in God’s Kingdom—is impossible with man. But “with God”—not only is salvation possible, not only is entry into the Kingdom possible, but—ALL THINGS are possible! What good news! Not only can God rescue us from hell, redeem us, buy us back to Himself, but He makes it to where we can enjoy being salvaged, being rescued, being His forever & ever!

This is now our third “with”: 1) “with difficulty” the rich enter the Kingdom, 2) “with man” nothing is possible, but now 3) “with God” all things are possible!

And who can enjoy such a blessing? Only the wealthy? No: anyone! Anyone, Church! O be encouraged by this, family of faith. Let it ignite your prayers. Let it revitalize, fan the flames of all the so called “lost causes” you’ve ceased praying for. Don’t stop praying, Church! With God “all things” are possible! His grace is not average, not “ho hum.” It is almighty & amazing! The Holy Spirit of God cannot be defeated. He is not limited by our limitations. God’s arm of salvation is not shortened. Those you are praying for, are they poor? Are they lost? Are they sexually immoral, imprisoned, addicted? Are they spiritually blind, Biblically ignorant, authority rejecting? Maybe not? In fact, maybe they seem to have it all together? Maybe they’ve got it all, all “the blessings” one could possibly want? Maybe they have all the wealth a man could want and see no reason whatsoever to turn to God. Don’t let any of that burden you or hinder your prayers to the God of the impossible. Their plenty, their poverty or perversity is not an obstacle for Him. Their wealth & selfishness is no hinderance to His salvation. At any moment—beyond anyone’s expectations, against all odds—He can humble anyone, bring them to Him, bring them to an awareness of their smallness, their depravity, bring them to repentance, to confession, into a loving, dependent, trusting relationship with God Almighty. There is no wallet too thick or neck too stiff. If salvation depended on them, if it depended on us, none of us wretched would ever make it. But thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! How else can you explain your salvation? ¿Because you were so deserving? Because you’d lived such a clean & blessed life,

that you'd put yourself in a position of deservedness, that God owed you salvation? No! We all owe everything to Him.

So, be encouraged as you pray for the poor & the rich alike. Their plight, posture or plenty is no obstacle to Him. Abraham, Moses, David, Josiah, Hezekiah... all were men of incredible means, yet God salvaged them, they all knew God's love & undeserved favor was greater, was worth more than everything else in the world. They are all testimonies to the fact that nothing is too hard for God, no man is beyond His repair, outside His sovereign control. In fact, the more unlikely they are to be salvaged, the more glory He brings His name when He does so. So, hold fast to your hope in God, Beloved. Pray on!

27 I can only imagine that when Peter heard the word "impossible" from Jesus, he just couldn't keep a lid on it. "Woah! Wait just a minute, Jesus. We've left everything and followed You. What's in it for us?" Peter thought Jesus was being a bit unfair. He's pretty emphatic: "WE left all!" What's remarkable here is that, apparently, Peter and the rich young ruler aren't that far apart. In fact, their questions are almost identical. After being told what he must do to be saved, the rich young ruler replied, "Yeah, but isn't there something more? I've kept all those from my youth. I've followed God, all my life. Isn't there anything better than this?" That's not that much different than Peter's reply: "We've left all and followed you. What then will we have? What more are we gonna get?" Neither of these men—the rich young ruler, or the apostle Peter—could see, the surpassing value of following God & His Word, at least not at this point. "We're doing that already. Isn't there something more?" Ouch! That's exactly what wealth does to us: it blinds us from being able to see & to evaluate life correctly. We misapply value. Walking with God, being in relation with Him, knowing Him, understanding His Word, loving and living accordingly... O the riches & pleasures at the right hand of God:

You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore. —Ps16.11

But that's not what the rich young ruler thought, and apparently Peter missed much of it, too. But does the merciful Master reject Peter in turn? No. He could have cast him aside, but, the fact is, they have sacrificed to follow Him, and Peter's legitimate inquiry deserves an answer. So how would Jesus answer?

28 *TRULY!* Again, brace yourself! In the world-renewed, in Christ's Kingdom... you have no idea how much blessing you will receive! When Christ the glorious One sits on His throne of glory, you apostles who have followed Me... you will also sit on a throne, judging, ministering to the

twelve Tribes of Israel. That motley crew of ministers, the apostles would share a role with the King of kings, the Lord of lords, the Son of Man in judging Israel.

They can't imagine the glory that is coming for them in the consummation of Christ's Kingdom. Not only will they be *with* the glorious One forever & ever, they will reign with Him, on thrones of their own: with God all things are possible!

Can you see how Jesus' response is a bit of a rebuke? While Peter's worried about what they're gonna get in exchange for their great sacrifice, Jesus makes it clear: the glory coming is incomparable to all the sacrifices anyone, everyone could ever make!

29-30 Here our Master turns His attention beyond the 12 apostles and onto "everyone" of us who have left anything to follow Him. *You*, Church, are in His sights here. He is talking about those who've left anything, who've endured hardships, lost friends, family, homes, inheritance in exchange for following Jesus. A full, 100 times-over recompense is coming for you, is now, already for you! For loving Christ, the world may think you a fool; your friends may ridicule you, family turn their back on you. But, in exchange, you get His family, true family, not those you have to perform for, no! You inherit—not earn, but inherit—a fellowship with the humble, with other servants who love lots unlovable just like you; they won't leave nor forsake you; they understand your struggles, your fears & insecurities, they have them too & Christ is overcoming them through their ministry to one another. They will pray with you & for you. They will love you & help you. They are the family of Christ, learning to follow Him, trust Him, obey Him, love like Him, lead like Him, help like Him, abide like Him, persevere like Him... hope in Him.

In our culture, we may not lose our homes, our parents may not disown us for our faith, but the cross is becoming more offensive in our nation all the time: laughter, mockery, ridicule, being overlooked for the job or the promotion. Everyone of Jesus' faithful, exposed to these sorts of trials & losses, ought to find comfort here in His Words. The great reversal of all wrongs is coming: Redemption! He will give back the years the locust has devoured.

In Christ, no matter how much we lose, the truth is: we will never be losers. Yes, there may be a season or seasons that feel like great losses, we may be cast down by afflictions from time to time, but rest assured, Beloved: Christ is the Champion, and we—with Him—will only win in the long run, and for eternity thereafter. Jesus can raise up friends & family for you who will become better & mean more to you than all the world can afford. His is the true peace, eternal joy, bright hope & satisfaction that will exceed any we could ever experience on earth.

Are you Christ's today? Are you a Christian, or do you belong to someone or something else, to this world? Do you believe His promises? Do you trust Him & therefore live accordingly? If you cannot see & therefore do not believe Jesus is of greater value & glory than all this world has to offer, then no wonder you don't love, trust & obey Him. But, if by God's grace, He has revealed Him to you as supremely good, then you will have no trouble making the good confession that He alone is your hope & joy everlasting.

I wonder if anyone here can make that confession today?

SONG: *Forgiven*

COMMUNION

SONG: *Here Is Love*

BENEDICTION: *Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy, to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen. – Jude 24-25*