

“Getting a camel through a needle’s eye”

Mark 10:17-27 NIV

“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?’

“‘Why do you call me good?’ Jesus answered. ‘No one is good—except God alone. 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.’

“‘Teacher,” he declared, ‘all these I have kept since I was a boy.’

“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.’

“At this the man's face fell. He went away sad, because he had great wealth. Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, ‘How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God!’

“The disciples were amazed at his words. But Jesus said again, ‘Children, how hard it is to enter 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.’

“The disciples were even more amazed, and said to each other, ‘Who then can be saved?’ Jesus looked at them and said, ‘With man this is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God.’”

This story fits perfectly today.

A young man’s in a great hurry.

Rich, successful—he likely knew how to get things done.

Like a baseball player trying to steal home plate, he ran hard and fast up to Jesus; then knelt.



As if wanting to get to into town speedily to close a deal, he wanted a rapid response.

He hastily asked: "Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?"

Everyone thinks about it at some point: How can I live forever? How do I attain heaven?

What’s the surest way to get there?

This fellow used the word *inherit*.

He likely became rich by coming into money, lands, or both—perhaps he had a rich uncle.

If so, his fortune might have come without effort on his part.

**But heaven—eternal life—
how do you inherit that?**

According to popular Jewish thought then, this guy held an advantage.

He’d “done” all the right things:

- **First, he chose the right parents; he was born into Abraham’s lineage.**
 - **Second, he kept the Ten Commandments.**
 - **Third, being rich, he could donate large sums. Think of someone who gives millions to charity and has hospital wings named after him/her.**
- Many people assumed the Lord was duty-bound to award a heavenly mansion to such a person.

The young, wealthy ruler, as Luke called him,

probably thought he could seal his eternity deal by one hugely generous, good deed.

He’d become heir to an afterlife mansion.

Jesus gave the fellow a good “Jewish” answer.

“Keep the commandments,” Jesus said:

'Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not give false testimony, do not defraud, honor your father and mother.'



Despite what you hear, see, and read, the majority keeps those commandments.

Most folks don’t commit murder or adultery, they don’t steal, don’t defraud other people, and they’re respectful to their parents.

I read that something like 3% of the total population actually ever commits a murder.

Most of us keep the “Thou shalt not kill” commandment.

If 97% attain something, the standard is easy.

“Thou shalt not commit murder” is a fairly low standard if only 3% of people violate it.

I agree that even .003% is a horrible number, but we are speaking of percentages and majorities.

Imagine going to a HS track meet next spring and officials tell the high jumpers that the starting bar will be set at two inches.

“Two inches?” you ask. “Even rickety Bob can jump that high. What kind of competition is this?”

That’s what this rich young ruler thought, too:

“Teacher,” he declared, “all these I have kept since I was a boy.”

Does this sound to you like:

“That’s easy. I’ve been doing all of these things since I was a little tyke!”?

I think he imagined that Jesus would say:

“Great job, son! Keep it up.

We need more young people like you.”

To stay popular, some religious teachers try to keep the “performance” bar low.

Some theorize that one Jerusalem entrance was so low, camels had to kneel in order to get



through it.

If a camel had to kneel, most humans could through with only a minor difficulty.

Jesus referred to that “Needle’s Eye” gate, they say.

I find no biblical or extra-biblical substantiation for that theory.

Without God’s grace in Christ, no one enters heaven.

Recall the 2” high track-meet start bar set?

At the next track meet where you hope to compete, they’ve raised the standard to 30’.

“Not possible!” you complain.

Recall what Jesus said in his Sermon on the Mount about the “thou shalt not kill”?

Jesus raised that bar to “fifty feet.”

Jesus said, “Whoever is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment.”¹

If you carry anger past sundown, you are in trouble, said Paul.²

¹ Matthew 5:22 NIV

² Ephesians 4:26, 27

If we remain bitter over something that happened last week or last year, we may be sinking in 50 foot deep yogurt.

Try jumping 50’ high out of that mire.

But anger wasn’t this young man’s problem.

Jesus told this fellow what he needed:

“Jesus looked at him and loved him. ‘One thing you lack,’ he said.”

If Jesus looked you in your eyes today and said, “Here’s the one thing you need to do. Here’s what you lack.” What would he say to you?



He wouldn’t say the same thing to everyone.

Jesus actually gave his disciples several high bars to attain.

Particular actions and thoughts restrict us from heaven.

Check out what Paul told the Galatian believers:

“Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of

which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.”³

We must all ask ourselves, “What do I lack in my obedience to God?” What must I change?”

Some of us possibly struggle with anger; others with constant complaining.

- Sex sin stops some. Greed, countless.
- Worry, doubt, and selfishness halt some.
- Gambling and drunkenness eliminate many.
- Addiction to books, soap operas, sports, and porn will keep others out.

Pray it’s not all of the above for any of us.

Only you and the Lord know the corrections you must make.

I can’t judge you; I must work on me.

Jesus raised the bar to impossible heights.

“Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven.

Then come, follow me.”

³ Galatians 5: 19-21 NASB See also 1 Corinthians 6: 6-11; 10:1-12.



Money was this guy’s god.
He wanted his Creator to give him eternal life, but he worshiped the popular money idol—greed.

We need to talk about this, but first, a point about Jesus’ request.

Jesus told the fellow: “Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor . . .”

**Most preachers would say,
“Give it to my church or to my charity.”**

Religious leaders often want to control the cash or build their own nest eggs.

Jesus urged the man to give directly to the poor.

“At this the man's face fell. He went away sad, because he had great wealth.”

Can you see him trudging away head-down?

He came close to inheriting eternal life, but wouldn’t let go of his money god.

Might the flimsy god you serve keep you from inheriting heaven?

**Read “the rest of the story”
as Paul Harvey used to say.**

All 12 Apostles gave up businesses and houses to follow Jesus. The 12 received special abilities.⁴

Others gave up possessions to follow Jesus. Acts tells us that after Judas betrayed Jesus, the 11 chose one of those other disciples to replace Judas. They chose Matthias, who was added to the 11.⁵

He became one of Jesus’ 12 Apostles.

We know Matthias’s name; his name is written in heaven.

Each of the 12 foundations of the New Jerusalem has an Apostle’s name.⁶

We don’t know the wealthy guy’s name.

Your name can be written in heaven, too, not on the foundation, but definitely up there.⁷

I pray that all of us will give up our cardboard gods to serve the Creator of the Cosmos, forever thanking and praising Him for his grace in Christ.

With God, all is possible. Jesus welcomes you!

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⁴ See Mark 10:28 & Matthew 10:1-4

⁵ Acts 1:15-26 for the full story.

⁶ Revelation 21:14

⁷ Hebrews 12:22-24