

Grace to you and peace from Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood and has made us kings and priests to God. To Him be glory and dominion forever and ever. It is certain.

Mark 10:23–31 (NKJV, et al.)

23 Then Jesus looked around and said to His disciples, “How hard it is for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of God!” **24** And the disciples were astonished at His words. But Jesus answered again and said to them, “Children, how hard it is for those who trust in riches to enter the kingdom of God! **25** 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.” **26** And they were greatly astonished, saying among themselves, “Who then can be saved?” **27** But Jesus looked at them and said, “With men it is impossible, but not with God; for with God all things are possible.” **28** Then Peter began to say to Him, “See, we have left all and followed You.” **29** So Jesus answered and said, “Assuredly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My sake and the gospel’s, **30** who shall not receive a hundredfold now in this time—houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions—and in the age to come, eternal life. **31** But many who are first will be last, and the last first.”

We Enter the Kingdom through the Eye of a Needle

In Jesus name, fellow redeemed,

A fully grown adult camel stands larger than a horse. On average a camel measures 7-11 feet long and about 7 feet tall at the hump. To Jesus’ audience, this would be commonly known as the largest of all animals.

[visual aid: cp. NEEDLE to CAMEL]

What a fitting description. Sinful mankind ... a herd of camels approaching the needle hole of God’s kingdom. Because we cling to **earthly things**, it is **EASIER** to **thread a camel** through a needle than for **us to gain entrance to God’s kingdom**. “Who then can be saved?” What is **impossible for man**, is **threaded by God**, and **stitched in eternity**.

WE ENTER THE KINGDOM THROUGH THE EYE OF A NEEDLE.

1. Impossible for Man

“Who then can be saved?” Peter asks the right question. Last week we pondered how we lack what is needed to gain eternal life. This week we see how we cling to what prevents us from gaining eternal life. Either we cling to what we have or what we don’t have. Either life is all about the retirement package or we face doubt and dissatisfaction about our future. If we don’t have it, we sometimes wish we did. When we shouldn’t have it, we can’t let it go. We cling to camels. In one way or another we all cling to earthly things that make it impossible to enter the kingdom of God. We are like **camels approaching the needle size hole of God’s kingdom**. **WITH MAN, THIS IS IMPOSSIBLE.**

(v.23) When we speak of the kingdom think: the rule of a king. A kingdom is an exercise of ruling power, a realm and a reign. Perhaps Peter asks the question “who then can be saved?” is because Peter was thinking of an earthly kingdom. We, with Peter, would suppose a kingdom would picture great riches and power. Indeed it does. The real question is – what are the riches and power of God’s kingdom?

Among the teachers in Israel at the time of Christ it was taught that wealth was a mark of God’s favor. They suppose that receiving earthly riches, power, or property, was sign of favor from God. This is His reward to you for who you are or what you’ve done. Lack of such things meant God is giving you what you deserve for sin. This teaching emphasized the kingdom as earthly liberation, freedom from the oppression of the Roman government, and the establishment of a “king David” like figure on the throne of Jerusalem once again. In such a kingdom, the coming of the Messiah would be marked by great earthly powers and riches. How can Jesus say that the rich will not enter the kingdom of God?

Paul writes in Romans 14, ***“for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.” (Romans 14:17)*** Both Paul and Jesus reveal what the kingdom of God really is. It is not eating, drinking, or any earthly thing at all. The kingdom is a spiritual rule, the reign of a spiritual King, within a spiritual realm. It is the reign of Christ in the Spirit. It is the riches of heaven and not of earth.

We so easily fall into the same thinking as those in Jesus’ day. When things are going good, we feel good about ourselves. When we get a promotion at work, or are given a bonus, we think we must be doing something right. However in Luke 10, Jesus says to the Pharisees – ***“what is highly regarded among men, is an abomination in the sight of God” (Luke 16:15)***. The kingdom of God is not of promotions at work, nor is it having your face on *People* magazine. It is not winning the next debate or being ahead in the polls. It is not getting to the top or being in the spotlight. Quite the opposite – (v.31)

Our camel-size selfishness is makes it impossible for us to enter this last-first kingdom. For example, a couple of children were fighting about who would get to have the first turn with the new toy. When told “the last will be first,” the one child responds, “ok, you can go first.” Yet really, he only chose to be last because he thought it would mean he got to go first. This me first mentality is embedded in every one of us. When we don’t have what the rich has, we are tempted to think this will make us first in the kingdom. (v.28) Even when we try to do something selfless, there is part of us that is doing it for ourselves, to receive praise, to earn something, attached to ourselves. We are attached to sin.

Here come the camels. There stands the needle hole. “Who then can be saved?” **WITH MAN, THIS IS IMPOSSIBLE.**

2. Threaded by God

[visual aid: NEEDLE]

God has seen the impossibility of this task. He has seen our camel sized sins and worldly attachments. He knows the needle size hole that requires spiritual purity to enter into His realm.

In His kingdom there can be no camels of pride, no earthly trust. He knows that for us to come under His rule and power, for us to enter the realm where He is King, is impossible – for us. (v. 27) **GOD THREADS YOU THROUGH THE EYE OF HIS KINGDOM.**

God has woven a tapestry that is beyond our greatest thought. He has threaded a camel through the eye of a needle. Knowing that it was impossible for the hand of man to thread this needle by his own strength or wisdom or righteousness, God wove this thread in Christ. God did the impossible. He became man. Where our hands have fumbled and missed the mark, Jesus was steady and sure.

“For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.” (Romans 8:3–4)

Jesus went through that needle first by perfectly putting Himself last. Indeed in Christ, the first are taken to last. As the Spirit says in Philippians, God humbled Himself, taking the form of a slave and coming as a Man (Philippians 2:5ff). He humbled Himself to the point of death on the cross. When He was the only One ever to live deserving life, deserving to be first in every way, He became last. Ultimately, this is the only way to truly be first in God’s eyes. God’s measure of first and last is completely different to our thinking. His first is our last and our first is His last. A love that serves the needs of the whole world before thinking of Itself was the price of our redemption.

In v.24, Jesus addresses “children.” As we read a few weeks ago – *“Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of God.” (Mark 10:14–15)*

Children, after all, have no riches, no possessions to call their own. Day by day their needs are cared for by their parents. We are children who have earned no living, have nothing to offer, nothing to barter. The kingdom is seen not in earthly power or riches, but in total humiliation. We have nothing of any real value in this kingdom. Not our works nor our property will gain us anything in God’s kingdom. This is why entrance to the kingdom is worked through God’s true treasures – the riches and gifts He has earned.

What a miracle! As it says in Romans 3 – “we are declared righteous, freely, by His grace...” As we referenced earlier, the kingdom is not eating or drinking. It is ruling power of God’s free love. It is the gift of His Spirit to believe that God has made possible the impossible. He has brought us into the riches of His kingdom. This is something not seen in outward works, earthly power, fame, or riches. The kingdom is not seen at all. It is heard. It is believed. It is received by faith. It is the treasures of God’s heavenly riches which grant us undeserved entrance in Christ. *“He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love.” (Colossians 1:13)* **What is impossible for man is threaded by God. WE ENTER THE KINGDOM THROUGH THE EYE OF A NEEDLE.**

3. Stitched In Eternity

[visual aid: NEEDLE]

Maybe you've done some needle work. It takes tender care and patience. It takes a steady hand to thread a needle. God is even more patiently working every day to complete His work. And His work is to complete the glorious tapestry of the Holy Christian Church. His steady love is working day by day through every trial, stitching. In the midst of every sin, and around every obstacle that arises, He stitches forgiveness. By His grace, He is working all things toward His good purpose – to weave you into heaven. **YOU ARE STITCHED IN ETERNITY.**

The election season is fast upon us. It is just about everywhere in the media. According to a poll by the Washington Post, the number one reason that over half of voters are concerned with is the economy. While there is a healthy concern for the financial future of our children and grandchildren, at what point do we begin resting all our confidence in a certain candidate or the people in Congress to determine whether you are clothed, fed, and cared for medically? ***“Therefore do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ ... For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.” (Matthew 6:31–33)***

All these things will be added to you. Food, clothing, warmth. God's kingdom coming to us is a collision of cosmic proportions. It is a meeting between earth and heaven as we receive the word is by faith. It is your entrance into a world of things not seen. Yes our bodies still function in a world filled with sin, in a reality controlled by time – but in Christ we enter into a spiritual realm where time ceases, where we the kingdom has conquered all, where we encounter a heavenly eternity filled with heavenly blessings.

(v.29,30) Christ is the needle that goes before us. It is Christ who became last is now first in our eyes too. We are the thread that is pulled along according to His lead – woven by His care toward heaven.

Only by the rule of the Spirit in our hearts do we see amid earthly persecution and temporal loss, heavenly blessings and eternal gain. Think of what these words meant to Christians at times of great persecution. Think of those who have gone before us who did truly face the choice between losing house, property, family, and even their own life ... or speaking the few words it takes to deny allegiance to Christ.

It is the eternal thread of God's promise that keeps us faithful at times like these. And how can we say it won't come upon us? Perhaps a time will come where you will face the choice between life for the sake of this world and death for the sake of the world to come. Or perhaps in a more subtle and cunning way, you face such things right now. Maybe you face the choice to stay steadfast to the word at the cost of friends or family – persecution for the sake of the gospel.

Eternal stitching is needed. ***“Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” (Matthew 5:10)*** Earthly losses are heavenly gain. They are gain because they are done for the sake of the gospel – the good news that heaven has come to us in Christ.

Just like the kingdom which is not eating or drinking or any outward thing, so also the blessings of the kingdom are not. These blessings are a hundredfold in heavenly riches. The house and brothers and sisters we gain are found in the blessings of the Holy Christian Church. We gain spiritual brothers and sisters who would care for us when all else is forsaken and lost. You receive a family that sincerely loves you and will be with you into eternity.

We are stitched in eternity. In a few moments we will be engaging in this eternal reality. In finite form we receive the body and blood of our Savior Jesus. This is something impossible made possible by God. It the unfathomable truth that the infinite Christ has entered into our finite world. Just like the incarnation, here we receive the great work of the kingdom. This is the body which was given for you. This is the blood which was shed for you. Take, eat, receive this heavenly presence of Jesus in earthly bread and wine. Faith receives these unseen miracles of God – forgiveness, life, salvation – Christ Himself.

Through the Word we receive these eternal promises. We see the stitching found not in the things of this world which come and go, rise and perish. We see the stitching which is pulling us to heaven – a sure and certain promise in Christ – **WE ARE STITCHED IN ETERNITY.**

[visual aid: NEEDLE, CAMEL]

Yes, God has done it. By His great work in Christ He has brought you into His kingdom. He has threaded the eye of a needle. He pulls you along with Christ at the lead. He has stitched you into eternity. Amen.