The Eye of the Needle (Mark 10:25 & Luke 18:25)

Mark 10:23-31

> *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.”*

Straining the Gnat, Swallowing the Camel

Ministries will often obsess over tiny legalistic details - *how exactly to pray*, specific words to say to unlock "blessings," or demanding strict tithing from their viewers (straining the gnat), meanwhile, they swallow the massive, heavy camel of greed, luxury, and exploiting the poor and vulnerable who send them money hoping for a miracle.

The Contrast of the Early Church

It stands in breathtaking contrast to how the early church operated. In the Book of Acts, the Bible describes the first believers as selling their possessions and **sharing everything in common** so that "*there were no needy persons among them*" (Acts 4:34). The goal was lifting up the community, not building an empire for one person.

It is a sobering reminder that the warnings Jesus gave 2,000 years ago weren't just for ancient history - they are actively playing out on television screens today.

Are there Rich People in Heaven?

Jesus wasn't saying rich people are strictly barred from heaven, but He was issuing a massive, flashing warning sign about how dangerous wealth is to the human soul.

The secret to understanding this passage lies in **the very next sentence** Jesus says, which completely changes the math.

1. The Disciples' Panic

When Jesus made the camel/needle comment, the disciples were absolutely terrified. They asked, *"Who then can be saved?"*

To understand their panic, you have to understand ancient culture. In that day, people believed wealth was a direct sign of God’s blessing.

The logic went: *If the rich guys (who clearly have God on their side and have plenty of money to give to the temple) can’t get in, what hope is there for the rest of us beggars?*

2. The Absolute Plot Twist

Jesus's response is the most important part of the entire interaction, He looks at them and says:

"With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible." (Matthew 19:26)

Jesus's point wasn't that rich people are uniquely doomed; His point was that salvation is humanly impossible for *everyone*. It is only through the grace of God - doing the humanly impossible - that *anyone* gets saved.

Why Wealth Makes It Harder

So why single out rich people? Wealth creates a powerful illusion of self-sufficiency. When you can buy food, medicine, and security, it is incredibly easy to trust in your bank account instead of trusting in God.

Wealth often owns the person, rather than the person owning the wealth. Squeezing through the "narrow gate" requires dropping your baggage, which is much harder to do when your baggage is highly valuable.

In short, rich people can absolutely make it to heaven and the Bible mentions several wealthy, faithful people (like Joseph of Arimathea or Lydia in the Book of Acts). But they enter the exact same way a poor person does: empty-handed, completely dependent on the mercy of God.

The "tiny gate at night" is actually a complete myth, despite being taught in thousands of sermons.

There is absolutely *no archaeological or historical evidence* that a gate named "The Eye of the Needle" ever existed in ancient Jerusalem. It is a legendary explanation that didn't pop up until the Middle Ages (around the 9th to 11th centuries), likely invented by well-meaning commentators trying to make a scary-sounding verse a bit more manageable.

When Jesus gave this teaching (Matthew 19:24), He meant a ***literal*** sewing needle and a ***literal*** camel.

Why the "Gate" Theory is Wrong

1. The Core Message of the Verse: The whole point of the story is that the disciples are shocked. When Jesus says it's easier for a camel to go through a needle than a rich man to get into heaven, the disciples ask, *"Then who can be saved?"* If Jesus meant a gate where you just have to "unload your bags and crawl," the disciples wouldn't have panicked. They would have said, "Oh, so it's just really difficult." But Jesus explicitly responds to their panic by saying: "*With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible*." He was describing an *impossibility*, not a difficult night-time procedure.
2. Luke Uses the Word for a Surgeon's Needle: In the Gospel of Luke (18:25), Luke uses a highly specific Greek word for needle (*belonē)* which specifically refers to a sharp medical or sewing needle, completely ruining the "city gate" interpretation.

The "Other Term" (The Rope Theory)

The other theory you likely heard about is a **translation mix-up**.

In ancient Greek, the word for camel is κάμηλος (*kámēlos*). However, the word for a thick ship's rope or cable is κάμιλος (*kámilos*).

Because they sounded nearly identical, some early church fathers (like Cyril of Alexandria) suggested that the text originally meant a thick rope trying to squeeze through a tiny sewing needle.

Threading a thick shipping rope through a tiny needle's eye makes a lot of sense visually!

The Bottom Line

Whether Jesus originally said "rope" or "camel," both terms are examples of **ancient hyperbole** (extreme exaggeration to make a point). In the culture of the day, using the largest local animal to describe an absolute impossibility was a common idiom.