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Through the Needle's Eye

By David Servant

Introduction

Anyone who reads through the Gospels cannot avoid repeatedly encountering Jesus' startling and often troubling words about money, possessions and stewardship. He told His followers to sell their possessions and give to charity.¹ He forbade them to lay up earthly treasures.² He told stories about rich people who went to hell.³ He warned that eternal damnation awaited those who don't help the very poor among His family.⁴

What are we to make of these "hard sayings," as they are commonly called?

Regrettably, some within the realm of Christendom, certain that their eternal salvation is secure by means of a faith that requires no obedience to Christ, simply ignore them. They mistakenly trust in a grace that is foreign to Scripture, one that gives them license to sin. In their minds, Jesus' commandments serve no higher purpose than to show them their sinfulness, thus motivating them to receive Him as Savior as they continue to reject Him as Lord. Repentance and obedience are optional.

I have exposed these fatally-flawed assumptions in another book titled *The Great Gospel Deception* (Ethnos Press, 1999). Jesus and His apostles continually warned that faith without works cannot save and that heaven does not await the unholy. Jesus declared that it is not those who call Him Lord who will be saved, but those who do the will of His Father (see Matt. 7:21). Only *they* are His true brothers (see Matt. 12:48-50). Paul taught that those who practice sin, including the greedy and covetous, will not inherit God's kingdom, even if they profess to believe in Jesus (see 1 Cor. 6:9-10; Eph. 5:3-5). John declared that only those who keep Jesus' commandments actually know Him (see 1 John 2:3-4). The author of the book of Hebrews tells us that without holiness, no one will see the Lord (see Heb. 12:14). Jude warned against the heresy of turning God's grace into a license to sin (see Jude 1:4). Those who ignore Jesus' hard sayings about money, possessions and stewardship will have to face them later and give an account.

Those who don't ignore Jesus' difficult statements about stewardship often soften or explain them in such a way that troubled consciences are soothed. How relieving it is to discover "what Jesus must have really meant," so that we can convince ourselves that we have been, after all, obeying Him right along.

¹ Luke 12:33

² Matt. 6:19

³ Luke 12:16-20; 16:19-31

⁴ Matt. 25:31-46

Both of those “solutions” are only temporary solutions at best. Eventually we all must stand before the One who gave those commandments that we currently ignore or modify. And just the fact that we resist what the Lord Jesus plainly said indicates that we have a problem right now that needs fixed.

Let’s face it, rich people like you and me don’t like to think that God might appraise us as being selfish, materialistic, greedy, deceived or disqualified for heaven. We’ll do just about anything to avoid those kinds of thoughts, including believing lies. The only other alternative— taking what Jesus said honestly—is just too difficult, perhaps impossible.

God, of course, knows better than anyone how hard it is for rich people to enter His kingdom. After all, it was Jesus who said it was easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to be saved (see Matt. 19:24-25). Even if you’ve believed the legend of an alleged “Needle Gate” in Jerusalem where camels had to unload before entering, the idea conveyed is still the same—everything must be shed or you don’t get in. We should be thankful that Jesus offered some hope to His despairing disciples who, after hearing His camel analogy, asked, “Then who can be saved?” He responded, “With men it is impossible, but not with God; for all things are possible with God” (Mark 10:26-27).

So there is hope for us, with God’s help.

It is obvious, however, that Jesus did not mean that God would make the impossible possible by changing His mind and lowering His requirements for rich people to enter His kingdom. Rather, He would make the impossible possible by helping rich people to meet His requirements.

It is also obvious, however, that God won’t help us without our cooperation. Jesus didn’t stop the rich, young ruler from sadly walking away. God isn’t in the business of making holy robots.

That being said, God helps us by first helping us to face up to what Jesus plainly said. He exposes the lies we have believed in light of His Word. He makes us feel guilty. Then He helps us change our desires and repent. He turns greedy people into generous people. He helps us to do what is not possible to do without Him. It is nothing short of a miracle, and it happens to very few people. *But you can be one of them.* You must be prepared, however, to let God help you *His way* and to cooperate with *His help*.

I can guarantee you that you will be challenged by what I’ve written, but that is part of the process. You must understand that *there is no other way.* May I add that I can certainly sympathize with you. As I’ve personally faced up to what Jesus taught, I’ve often felt like a camel going through the eye of a needle. For many years as a pastor, I lived and taught in contradiction of much of what I’ve written in this book. But God helped me, first by showing me how I had been ignoring numerous scriptures as well as twisting the clear meaning of many others.

He also showed me my selfishness. I had been a very poor steward of His money with which I had been entrusted, and I was not ready to stand before Him to give an account. It wasn’t an easy pill to swallow, but I’m so glad God opened my eyes. Better now than later.

Since then, and after conversing with many people on this subject, I’ve become convinced that none of us can honestly receive what Jesus said about money, possessions and stewardship unless God Himself does a work in our hearts. If our hearts are not open to God’s work, however, no amount of Scripture or logic will change us. Jesus Himself could not open the eyes of the Pharisees, whom the Bible states were “lovers of money” (Luke 16:14), and who scoffed when He spoke about stewardship. He told them, “You are those who justify yourselves in the sight of men, but God knows your hearts” (Luke 16:15). We, too, may justify ourselves in the sight of people, but God knows our hearts. He knows if we are self-deceived or not.

“But I’m certain that I’m not deceived!” you may claim. Do you realize, however, that every deceived person would claim that very thing? If deceived people knew they were deceived, they wouldn’t be deceived. That is why it is imperative that we adopt a sincere, humble attitude that says, “I may be deceived, and if I am, I pray that God would help me to see it.” Otherwise, there is little hope that we will accept what Jesus taught.

The Bible promises that God resists the proud (see 1 Pet. 5:5), and as long as we are not open to self-examination and correction, our pride is exposed and God resists us. Scripture also teaches, however, that God gives grace to the humble (see 1 Pet. 5:5). As we sincerely humble ourselves and ask God to show us the truth—to open our eyes to any lies we’ve believed and to reveal if we’re displeasing to Him in any way—He will pour His grace upon us. God hides truth from those who consider themselves “wise and intelligent,” but He opens the eyes of “babes” (Luke 10:21).

A Word about Guilt

So the very first step through the needle’s eye is being willing to face up to what Jesus plainly taught. We must be willing to examine ourselves in the light of His Words and accept guilt if we find ourselves falling short. That being so, it is imperative that we understand that guilt is not the bad thing it is often made out to be. Guilt, in fact, is the great catalyst of spiritual progress. The truth is that we don’t change unless we are motivated to change. *Repentance is always preceded by guilt.* That is God’s way, and the only way that He can even begin to get camels through needles.

Guilt is the simple recognition that we are not pleasing God whom we ought to please. The only people whom God doesn’t want to *feel* guilty are those who *aren’t* guilty. And the only people who are not guilty in God’s eyes are those who are not sinning, or those who have sinned, repented, and been forgiven by Him. If one repeats his sin after he has received God’s forgiveness, he is once again guilty, and should feel guilty.

Scripture says, “My son, do not reject the discipline of the Lord, or loathe His reproof” (Prov. 3:11). What is guilt but God’s reproof? We should therefore not reject guilt, but welcome it, embrace it, and allow it to work His goal in us, which is our repentance and obedience.

On the other hand, Scripture declares that fools spurn God’s reproof (see Prov. 1:22-30). Foolish indeed are those who are adverse to guilt or any teaching that makes people feel guilty. *If one is adverse toward guilt, he is adverse toward God.* Amazingly, many such people claim to be Christians.

What so many professing Christians reject as “condemning” really ought to be embraced as “convicting.” The primary difference between condemnation and conviction is the existence or absence of hope. Condemnation is void of hope. Conviction is bursting with it. The whole purpose of guilt is to motivate us to repent; thus the very concept of guilt implies that forgiveness is available. Praise God! But those who don’t yield to guilt’s conviction do not experience forgiveness.

Another difference between condemnation and conviction is the motive behind each. Condemnation springs from a motive of justice, whereas conviction is born from a motivation of love and mercy. This book is convicting and not condemning in the least, and anyone who claims otherwise is hiding behind a smokescreen because he feels convicted and doesn’t want to change. The truth is, ear-tickling preaching is really the most condemning preaching of all, because those who buy into the false grace that is proffered through it are sealing their eternal condemnation. I write from a motivation of love, as one who once was completely brainwashed (“brain dirtied” would describe it better) by beliefs that contradicted Christ’s commandments. I’ve also wrestled with the conviction that every reader will face. It hasn’t been easy for me and it won’t be easy for

you. But to keep silent now would be criminal, because God ultimately does condemn those who resist His conviction. Then there is no longer any hope.

When guilt is based on the unconfessed, unforgiven transgression of God's will, guilt is a *very good* thing. It is a means of God's communication. It is an indication of His love. Please, as you read, don't resist His love for you. Don't resist what can motivate you to change. We can deal with guilt either by confession/repentance or by justification. Confession/repentance reveals a humble heart that choose to believe the truth; attempting to justify one's actions reveals a proud heart that willfully believes a lie. If we believe in and love Jesus, we will not be adverse to what He plainly said. He declared, "If you love Me, you will keep My commandments" (John 14:15). It's that simple.

So let us begin with a sincere prayer on our knees, or better, on our faces. Pray for God's help to get through the needle's eye. Then let us begin to consider honestly what Jesus taught about money, possessions and stewardship. You are about to begin a journey that leads to true joy.

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