

The Pharisees, we're told, were "lovers of money." Perhaps because such wealth enabled them to live luxuriously. But even more because they believed that financial success was evidence of God's grace and favor.

Jesus' disciples also bought into this belief, although they were not lovers of money. And this explains their shock and astonishment here in our text when Jesus says, "*it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the Kingdom of God.*" "*Then who can be saved?*" they cry in response. Not, "Then how can the rich be saved?" "How can anyone be saved?" "Since the rich, who are favored by God, have such difficulty being saved, well, the poor must have no chance at all! How can anyone, rich or poor, be saved?"

There are some today who twist Jesus' words into something that is easier to accept. "Well, He must not mean an actual camel," or "He must not mean a tiny sewing needle." Sure He does! His words are clear. He chooses the largest animal in that part of the world, and the smallest opening they know of. Jesus' point is not that we have to try really hard to push the camel through the needle's eye, but that we accept defeat, admitting that it cannot be done.

But the world doesn't think that way. And don't we have at least some of the world's thinking in us? Those who are of the world argue that "good people (and everyone, pretty much they say, has at least some good in them); good people will be able eventually to push the camel through."

But no. Jesus' disciples get it. "*Then who can be saved?*" And they are likely thinking, "How can I be saved?" Jesus answers with clarity: "*With man it is impossible, but not with God. For all things are possible with God.*"

These words are a warning to all who are holding out hope that they will be saved because they are basically good people, even if they live apart from the Lord Jesus. Yet even as these words are a warning to them, they are wonderful comfort for you. And here is why. If being saved was dependent upon you, even a little bit, you could never be assured that you would make it. You would have nightmares about camels. You would never be certain that you were good enough, rich enough, poor enough, whatever it takes to enter the Kingdom of God.

It is comforting to hear Jesus say, "*With man it is impossible,*" for then we are able to admit defeat and say: "Lord, if I am to be saved, it is completely in Your hands." And there is no better place for your salvation to be than in the nail-pierced hands of your Lord.

All things are possible with Him. He did the impossible, becoming man in the womb of the Virgin Mary. He did the impossible, rising from the dead after being crucified. Jesus did what was impossible with man by giving salvation to a thieving tax collector named Zaccheus. He did what was impossible with man by promising Paradise to a dying, no-good criminal on a cross. Jesus did what was impossible with man by turning a fierce enemy of His Church into the Apostle Paul. And also this, my friend, also this: Jesus did what was impossible for us, impossible with man, by bringing you into the Kingdom of God in Holy Baptism.

You know what we call something that God does, but that is impossible with man? A miracle. And such is your baptism into Christ Jesus. Your baptism is a miracle, impossible for man but not for God. Baptism, which is the true riches of God, is His grace and favor toward you; His miracle in which He made you His child.

And that is really important. When Jesus' disciples become amazed at His words: "*How difficult it will be for those who have wealth to enter the Kingdom of God,*" He immediately calls them children. "*Children,*" He says, "*how difficult it is to enter the Kingdom of God.*" But He calls them children, God's children. And "*to such children,*" He says, "*belongs the Kingdom of God.*" "*Whoever,*" He says, "*does not receive the Kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it.*" But they are children, God's children. He calls them such. They have received, therefore, the Kingdom of God.

And so have you. You are God's baptized child in Christ Jesus. As you were being baptized, God was pulling the camel through the eye of the needle. He was bringing you into His Kingdom of Grace. He was giving you salvation, doing the impossible.

These words of Jesus here about camels and needles should make us pause and consider: "What are my priorities in life? Am I focused more on gaining wealth than on gaining Christ? Do my riches have a greater place in my heart than they should?"

Being here in the Lord's house on this day, when these words of Jesus are before us, is a true blessing because, through them, God calls us to repentance. And we all need to repent. All of us struggle to live in such a way that Jesus, and not our wealth, is our true Lord and Master.

But let me say this. God does not define you by your wealth or lack of it. He defines you by what Jesus has done for you. He calls you His child. And more, His forgiven child because you are one for whom Christ died. You are baptized into Christ; your sin is washed away. Even your sin of mixing up your priorities is forgiven.

You do not need to set your heart on wealth. Your true wealth is reserved in heaven for you. "*With man, salvation is impossible,*" is a call to turn away from yourself to Jesus with whom "*all things are possible.*" Amen.