

SIT, DISCUSS, AND LEARN
RATHER THAN CLASH, WRANGLE,
AND REMAIN UNLEARNED

Many years ago at Birmingham several of us younger brethren, with more zeal than wisdom, met with an humble, older brother to discuss the Scriptures. As we sat in his house in this private study our attention centered upon the outpouring of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2 and Acts 10-11).

We who were younger and inexperienced outnumbered and rudely over-ruled the older brother. We maintained that Holy Spirit baptism was essential for one to be an apostle. The elderly brother explained that this action involved the apostles in the two times it occurred, but it did not bestow the apostleship. We were so sure of ourselves that the older brother's comments were given little consideration.

Another period of discussion was arranged. With kind admonition upon our arrival, the elderly brother suggested that our discussion be conducted with patience, with sincere attention to another's point-of-view, and with a more considerate attitude than had prevailed in the previous meeting. We agreed. This time we conducted ourselves with more respect - and discovered we had been wrong in our earlier understanding.

Had apostleship come by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, then Paul could not have been an apostle (2 Cor. 12:11-12, 1 Cor. 15:8-9). He heard and spoke with the Lord on the journey to Damascus, and he did become an apostle, but he never received the baptism of the Holy Spirit. This outpouring was for another purpose; that of extending the gospel message first to the Jew and then to the Gentile (Rom. 1:16, Acts 2, and Acts 10-11).

Had we not humbled ourselves and listened, we would have neglected the opportunity to discover a grand truth. With this newly learned approach, insight into deeper truths have continually opened to us, truths which might otherwise have never been known.

Paul wrote, *"But if ye bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one of another"* (Gal. 5:15). James advised, *"Let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak"* (Jas. 1:19).

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APOLOGIA

QUESTION: Does Jesus mean in Matthew 19:24 that it is impossible if you are rich to go to heaven? If so, what does it mean to be rich? What is the standard to determine the meaning of being rich?

ANSWER: Before we begin to answer the questions raised above we need to first establish the context in which this statement is given. Many times we fail to take under consideration the circumstances that warranted the answer or statement of the one speaking.

In order to do this, one should go back and begin reading with verse 16. Jesus was approached by one who wanted to know what was necessary to have eternal life (verse 16). Jesus answered that the man should keep the commandments (verse 17). Remember that at the time of this incident the New Covenant had not yet been given, thus the answer was appropriate for one who lived under the Old Testament.

We find that the young man answered that this he had done from his childhood (verse 20). To which Jesus then responded that he should now go and sell all that he had and give it to the poor and come and follow Him. The young man, we are told, went away sorrowful because he had great riches (verse 22).

It is against this background that Jesus makes the following statement in Matthew 19:23, 24:

Then said Jesus unto His disciples, Verily I say unto you, that a rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven. And again I say unto you, It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.

In order for us to correctly understand the meaning of the passage, we need to first determine what is meant by the use of the camel and the eye of the needle.

There are those who try and make a literal application of this phrase. They tell us that in Jerusalem there is an extremely small gate that a camel could only go through if it were unburdened. While this sounds like a good explanation, it seems to be more rooted in fiction than in fact. It seems that ancient

commentaries do not make this application. More than likely what we have is a figure of speech called a hyperbole - an extended exaggeration. This camel was the largest beast of burden in Palestine, and the eye of a needle is one of the smallest openings.

If one takes this literally then the meaning would be that it is impossible for a rich man to be saved. If one takes it as a figure of speech, then its meaning would be that it is very difficult for a rich man to enter into heaven. The fact that the latter is the correct meaning rather than the former is evidenced by the answer Jesus gives to the disciples' question. After they (the disciples) heard Jesus make the above statement, they asked "Who then may be saved?" to which Jesus responded, "...With men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible" (verse 26).

Thus the correct interpretation is that it is extremely difficult, but not impossible, for those who are rich to be saved. This is further substantiated by the apostle Paul as he wrote in 1 Timothy 6:9-10:

But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil: which some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.

Paul certainly tells us that riches are not conducive to godliness, but it is not impossible to be rich and still be godly. Note what he writes later in 1 Timothy 6:17-19:

Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not highminded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy; That they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate; Laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life.

Note that Paul tells us plainly that the rich may lay hold on eternal life. However, it may be hard for them to do so.

There are several reasons why riches of this world make it difficult for those who possess them to be saved. Let's note a few.

First, there is a tendency among the affluent to feel that they have no need of God. They begin to trust their material possessions rather than God. This was a problem with Israel. When they entered into the promised land, they were blessed with many earthly possessions. This had a negative effect upon them. Somewhere along the way they forgot who was responsible for the blessings they had received. It seems that more often than not, faithfulness and possessions are inversely related.

Secondly, the rich often become indifferent to the needs of others. This is a result of the desire to have more themselves. They can't stand the thought of giving that which they have away.

Thirdly, the rich often have a hard time accepting the simplicity that is in Christ. They tend to be very worldly in their thinking, and the lack of such in the Gospel makes it unappealing to them.

And lastly, they often allow their desire to corrupt them. They begin to do whatever it takes to gain more. Think of all the evil that goes on in the world that is motivated by a desire to become rich. This should cause us to stop and ask, "Who is rich?". It seems that the disciples felt that all were rich, for they asked, *"Who then will be saved?"* in response to Jesus' statement (verse 25).

The word rich is by the world's standards a very relative term. For example, a person who has a \$100,000 house would think that a person who has a \$1,000,000 house would be rich. A person who has a \$50,000 house would think both of the above to be rich. Generally speaking, we think of the other fellow as being rich and not ourselves.

From the Biblical standpoint, rich and poor are defined differently than the world's standards. We find that a good definition of rich and poor can be deduced from a statement made by the apostle Paul. In 1 Timothy 6:8 we read: *"And having food and raiment let us be therewith content."*

Paul seems to suggest that the standard to measure our wealth by is our basic needs. If, for example, we have more than our basic needs then we are rich. If we lack that which is necessary for life then we would be poor. This would explain the apostle's reaction to Jesus' teaching. Remember they said, *"Who then could be saved?"*. They realized that most everyone would have their needs met, thus no one would be saved. Jesus went on to tell them that with God all things are possible.

In conclusion, most of us have more than what is necessary to live. For this we should be thankful. Never let our riches separate us from our God.

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UNITED TOGETHER WITH CHRIST

One of the Bible's arguments against a life of sin focuses on baptism (Rom. 6:1-12). Why baptism? As the passage explains, baptism is "*into Christ*", "*into His death*" (6:3, NKJV), or in other words, "*united together in the likeness of His death*" (6:5, NKJV). When baptized into Christ's death (6:3), one dies to sin (6:2). And, since the Roman Christians had died to sin and had been symbolically buried with Christ by means of baptism, their life after baptism should be "new" just as Christ experienced new life after His burial and resurrection. Their new life was to be different than their old life by being free from slavery to sin (6:4-6).

The passage identifies baptism as the gateway to a special relationship with Christ and of a new life free from sin. By being "*baptized into Christ*" we "*put on Christ*" or are "clothed with Christ" (Gal. 3:27, KJV). Once that relationship is established, "*if any man be 'in Christ' he is a new creature...*" (2 Cor. 5:17, KJV).

Baptism's role in access to this relationship with Christ and access to His death (Rom. 6:1-5), may help explain why it is associated with salvation (Mk. 16:16, 1 Pet. 3:21) and forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:38; 22:16) - for surely we must access Christ and His death in order to be forgiven and saved from sin. Life without that relationship is described as, "*that at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.*" (Eph. 2:12, NKJV). On the other hand, every spiritual blessing is "*in Christ*" (Eph. 1:3, NKJV) where there is "*no condemnation*" (Rom. 8:1, NKJV).

Have you been baptized into Christ for the forgiveness of sins, thereby being "united together" with Christ in a new relationship and life? If not, we encourage you to do so.

MIKE PANNELL
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SEARCH THE SCRIPTURES

1. In Judges, the first mention of a woman leading Israel is found. What was her name?
2. Before David died, he instructed Solomon to seek some level of revenge against what two people?
3. In Ecclesiastes Solomon said, "the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong..." What did he say determines man's fate?
4. After Jesus died on the cross, who went to Pilate to request possession of the body?
5. In Acts when Paul spoke to the Athenians at Mars' Hill, he mentioned an inscription he had read on an altar. What was the inscription?

ANSWERS NEXT MONTH . . .

and remember last month's questions?

1. Moses told God that if God wouldn't lift his burden, he would prefer God do what? PUT HIM TO DEATH (Num. 11:15)
2. According to I Chronicles, during the second raid on the valley by the Philistines, David was to attack when God gave what sign? A MARCHING SOUND IN THE TREETOPS (1 Chron. 14:14-15)
3. In Psalm 74, a large creature is mentioned whose name also appears in Job. What is it? LEVIATHAN (Psa. 74:14)
4. Whose ear was severed when the chief priests came to apprehend Jesus? MALCHUS, SERVANT OF THE HIGH PRIEST (Matt. 26:51, Mark 14:47, Luke 22:50, John 18:10)
5. In the book of Titus, what was Zenas' occupation? LAWYER (Tit. 3:13)

GOSPEL MEETINGS

DATES

February
4 – 6

PLACE

Taylor's Cross Roads
Roanoke, AL

SPEAKER

Mike Daniel
(Douglasville, GA)

PSALM 100

Make a joyful noise unto the LORD, all ye lands.
Serve the LORD with gladness: come before his
presence with singing.

Know ye that the LORD he is God: it is he that
hath made us, and not we ourselves; we are his
people, and the sheep of his pasture.

Enter into his gates with thanksgiving, and into
his courts with praise: be thankful unto him, and
bless his name.

For the LORD is good; his mercy is everlasting;
and his truth endureth to all generations.