



Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. AMEN

Our Gospel reading this morning is a familiar one. This text from Mark is one of the best stories we could hear in our quest to learn how to inherit eternal life. It is also one that we spent time looking at in seminary but for a different reason. The story of the Rich Man is a prime example of how studying the Old Testament can inform our understanding of the New Testament. It is also how Martin Lutheran interpreted Scripture, as he continually taught that Scripture informs Scripture.

Our rich man story, that I just read, begins with a religious guy coming to Jesus to ask a question of the teacher. The man knelt before Jesus, called him the Good Teacher and then asked the utmost question. "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" Wow, that is a big question. As the scene unfolds, we learn a bit about this man, although never his name. He tells Jesus that he has obeyed all the commandment, since he was a child. Most would find this interesting, as we are all sinners and fall short of the glory of God as we talked about last week.

Another interesting thing is that this rich man has found favor with God as he is blessed with success and great wealth. And even better, was that Jesus "loved him", verse 21. In that love, Jesus told the man how get the one thing he lacked; how enter the kingdom of God. He had to sell everything he had

and give the money to the poor. And then, come and follow Jesus. WOW that is a pretty big ask.

We all know the result of Jesus' telling the rich man how to get to eternal life. Not only was he shocked but he went away very sad. He was not able to fathom giving up all his many possessions. This way to eternal life would just not work for him. Seeing his reaction, Jesus goes ahead and tells the disciples that his request is difficult. And we here get the famous statement, "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God." Even though the disciples had dropped everything in their lives to follow Jesus, they were still quite shocked to hear Jesus say this. The disciples were perplexed, and they too asked who can be saved?

Picture with me a camel, one hump or two trying to go through the head of a needle. Does not take much imagination to know that it will not be happening. No way is a camel able to squeeze through the teeny tiny hole at the end of a needle. In fact many of us know that it is not easy, especially in our later years, to put thread through the hole in the needle, yet alone a camel.

Now let's look at a different perspective on this story. As we study the Old Testament we learn that most large cities, ones like Jerusalem, had security walls built around them. The walls had gates that opened up to allow both merchants and visitors in during the day. But at night, these large gates would be closed for security reasons. In case of emergency, there was usually a much smaller gate, probably four feet high, that a person could barely fit through that could be opened on request. This gate was called the "needle's eye".

This smaller gate allowed a person through but they would have to bow down to enter, while guards with swords in hand allowed them to enter. This gate would also be nearly impossible for a camel to fit through. But it could be done with lots of risk and hard work.

I read, that in order for a camel to pass through the needle's eye, all its' baggage would have to be removed from the camel. Then the camel would have to be coaxed through the small gate on its knees. This could take several hours. Did you ever try to coax a camel to do anything? I guess they are really very stubborn animals that are afraid of the unknown. And during that time, all the goods that the camel was carrying were unattended and ripe for thieves to take. There just was too much risk, that this process of having the camel go through the eye of the needle was almost never done. Better to take

the chance of no security on the outside of the city walls than force the camel to go through the needle.

Maybe just maybe this story is really about all the baggage we carry, we hang on too. It is not about the idea that having money makes it more difficult to enter heaven, but rather that burden of caring for our possessions that makes it impossible. I think that what Jesus is saying is that we need to unburden ourselves of all things we think we need, things that are so valuable that they cannot fit with us through the eye of the needle. We must learn to trust only Jesus and God's grace alone so that we are able to come into the kingdom of God.

There was once a man who loved gold. Then he inherited a fortune. With a sense of great joy he redecorated his bedroom. He put gold parchment paper up, he hung yellow curtains, and he had a golden colored rug and a yellow bedspread, he even bought some yellow pajamas, when he was feeling especially good. But then he got sick and came down with, of all things, yellow jaundice. His wife called the doctor who made a house call and the doctor went up to the bedroom for an examination. The doctor stayed up there quite a while, and when he came down, the wife asked, "How is he?" "I don't know," said the doctor. "I could not find him."

Our rich man had everything going for him. He had done things right. He did not murder, commit adultery, steal, lie, defraud and he honored his father and mother. Yes, he had done all the right things. So, isn't it true that if we follow God's commandments and live good lives God will reward us for our efforts? After all that is the American way too, isn't it? It was Israel's way of life for sure. That is what the Old Testament taught.

But understand that financial security, like the rich man enjoyed and trusted in, was competing with his trust in Jesus the Christ and his redeeming grace. Jesus went to the cross, died a horrible death and then rose again on the third day so that we could have eternal life as well as forgiveness and abundant life. This is the fact that we should trust in. Inheriting eternal life is only found in believing that Jesus is our Risen Savior. There is no security but His Word, Jesus. No amount of money, possessions, cleverness, or anything else we possess can match that fact. Jesus is the only way to heaven.

Luther said it best in his Large Catechism when he said that it was not just "Money" that lures us away from our faith and trust in God. Luther wrote, "So, too, if anyone boasts of great learning wisdom, power, prestige, family and

home, and trusts in them, he also has a god, but not the one true God. It requires that one's whole heart and confidence be placed in God alone, and no one else. To cling to him with our whole heart is nothing else than to entrust ourselves to him completely."

And Jesus answer to the disciple's question of who can be saved is perfect. "For mortals it is impossible, but not for God; for God all things are possible." It is possible to have eternal life through Jesus Christ if only we have belief in God. We all need to stand under the cross of Christ where He forgave our sins and enabled us to pass through the eye of the needle. Jesus gave up all of his baggage, his very life to enter us into the kingdom of God. So let us kneel before Him in thanksgiving. AMEN