

## Prayer

You bring compassion into a lost world of loveless selfishness, Lord Jesus. Forgive us when, as members of Your church, we forget the sheer strength of Your compassion for the lost, the poor, the weak and the disadvantaged. Like little children, help us believe that all things are possible through You; and may we live to demonstrate Your compassion in this world. AMEN

## Other Prayer Suggestions

### Weekly Theme: Gifts of the Spirit

*Paul states in Romans 12 and 1 Cor. 12 that the gift of love is paramount. Pray for all God's people that they might show the love of God in both their lives and their witness.*

### On-going prayers

- Give thanks for the joy of Christian fellowship
- Pray about advertising and its influence on young people
- Pray for young people who know nothing but a life of crime

## Meditation

Every day, Lord Jesus, is a gift of Yours containing many possibilities:

- The gift of time to use to the full for what is right;
- The gift of opportunities to take, and explore;
- The gift of space to fill with what is right and good;
- The gift of love which longs to share and be shared;
- The gift of light to see things as the Lord sees them;
- The gift of fellowship to share and enjoy with friends;
- The gift of care by which we act upon concern for others.

Every day, Lord Jesus, is a gift of Yours containing many possibilities:

Providing unique opportunities which, too often, are never repeated.  
May we never leave them unattended, to fade through lack of care;  
May we open every gift and make them fruitful by our constant use.

## Bible Study - Matthew 19:23-26

<sup>23</sup> Then Jesus said to his disciples, 'Amen, I tell you, it will be hard for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of heaven. <sup>24</sup> I tell you again, it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God.' <sup>25</sup> When the disciples heard this, they were utterly astounded and said, 'Then who can be saved?' <sup>26</sup> But Jesus looked at them and said, 'For people, this is impossible, but for God all things are possible.'

### Review

This passage takes the teaching of Jesus about the Kingdom of God further than before, and this is contains one of the most famous of Jesus' sayings about entry into the Kingdom. As Jesus continued on His way to Jerusalem, it seems that He was most concerned to tell the disciples all the essential truths about access to the Kingdom of Heaven. The passage

today deals with the disciple's response to the incident of Jesus' difficult discussion about wealth with the rich young man (19:16-22). Jesus firstly expressed concern for the young man and his inability to accept the call of the Kingdom, and said 'it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of God!' (19:24) The disciples were astonished at Jesus' teaching because it was different from anything they knew about how God worked, so they asked the important question 'who then can be saved?' (19:25) Jesus' response 'for people this is impossible, but for God all things are possible' is also about as famous as the saying about the camel and the eye of a needle!

Jesus was speaking in earnest, and we can tell this because he began with His characteristically emphatic words 'Amen I tell you ...' (19:23). In his saying about the impossibility of a camel passing through the eye of a needle he was not being casually humorous (as some have suggested); for Him, this was an important matter.

**A Camel through the eye of a needle?** Much debate has centred upon this saying, all attempting to make something logical out of it. Some have found evidence that the word for camel is similar to a word for some kind of thread used in fishing vessels, and have suggested that entering the Kingdom of Heaven is as difficult as the awkward task of mending fishing nets! Others have very controversially suggested that some ancient city gates made within the thick protective walls (perhaps of Jerusalem), were designed so that a man and a camel could just squeeze through providing all the baggage was removed from the camel (so that they could be inspected!). This is a lovely picture which serves to suggest that we must remove all 'baggage' before we can enter the Kingdom. However, this is not at the heart of what Jesus meant by saying what he did, and it is wrong of us to try and put words in Jesus' mouth that may suit us but are not what Jesus actually said.

The whole point of Jesus remark was simply this. It was indeed totally impossible for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, and impossible for a rich person to enter the Kingdom! Jesus may have adapted a remarkably similar ancient (and well attested) saying; 'can elephants fly through the eye of a needle?' This was used humorously in His day to refer to something that was impossible, just as we might say 'pigs might fly!' today. Indeed, it is possible that Jesus used some form of humour to make his point, but we should not be too carried away with this because what Jesus was saying was certainly not a matter of fun.

**Who then can be saved?** The disciples clearly knew what Jesus was saying about the rich young man, but it was not what they expected. This man was someone they had treated with respect because he was rich, and who they thought of as a 'good catch' because he was one upon whom God had already showered the blessings of wealth. They had to learn at that moment that this was not the way of Jesus of His Father, and they were astonished! If it was impossible for such a good rich person to be saved, they thought, then 'who then can be saved?' (19:25) they asked. Yet again, the disciples were caught in that trap of uncertainty between the new radical teaching of Jesus and all that they had previously known about wealth as an outward demonstration of God's favour.

**The grace of God makes all things possible** Jesus answered the question with another 'mind-teaser'. Scripture says 'He looked at them' as if to emphasise His direct call on the disciples attention, before He said; 'for people, this is impossible, but for God, all things are possible'. The disciples had not yet learned the truth which Jesus had been drip-feeding to them since the earliest days of the Sermon on the Mount. This was the impossibility of achieving entry to the Kingdom of God upon any basis other than the free grace of God, which they would soon discover could only be obtained through the death and resurrection of their Lord. Jesus taught them in the Sermon on the Mount that all efforts to keep the law (as the young man attempted but failed), even going beyond it to aspire to the very heart of the law, was not humanly possible. Yet Jesus was beginning to teach them a way of faith

and trust in God and obedience to the Father through His own teaching and example as the Messiah (Matthew chs 5-7). Jesus was the only hope because He was God Himself, as Peter declared at Caesarea Philippi (16:16), and Jesus turned all normal values on their head (as in His example of children entering the Kingdom - 18:1-5).

'Don't you get it yet?' Jesus seemed to say; 'you can only enter the Kingdom of God through me!' This was not exactly what Jesus said, but given all His teaching so far in Matthew, it is what He wanted the disciples to hear from Him in their hearts. Wealth was not the evidence of God's blessing, indeed, it was a handicap to the total call of discipleship by which salvation would be found. The true wealth to be stored was trust and faith in Jesus as the Messiah.

## Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. What 'explanations' have you come across which purport to explain Jesus' saying about the camel and the eye of a needle?
2. Why should people with wealth have difficulty entering the Kingdom of God? Is this not prejudice, and if not, why not?
3. What do you believe Jesus meant by saying that all things were possible through Him? Did He really mean 'all things'?

## Discipleship

### Personal comment:

*It is amazing to think that Jesus was wanting to give the disciples the great blessing of knowing that 'all things' were possible through Him, but in order to make this point, He had to explain that those who relied upon their own resources could not receive this blessing in the Kingdom! When we reach the point of yielding all things to God, we can know a great sense of liberty and blessing, and this opens the doors to all manner of blessings of which we are unaware before we take the step. History is full of examples of how people have been blessed after letting go of everything, for God.*

### Ideas for discipleship programme

- *We live in a complex world, and many people, live in debt yet maintain a lifestyle far in excess of their means. Reflect on how we can respond to Jesus saying given this truth about modern living.*
- *Pray for all who struggle with these sayings of Jesus, and pray for all who are taking the step of letting all things go for Him.*

## Final Prayer

Lord Jesus, You have loved us whether we are rich or poor, and whatever part of the world we come from. Help us to see past the divisions of wealth and culture which society places upon us, and value each other as You value us, as people who are loved. This we ask in Jesus' name; AMEN