

## The Big Hump (Luke 18:18-43)



Jesus was nearing Jerusalem, and He and His disciples pick up speed from here. In Luke 17 Jesus answered the question: 'When will the kingdom of God come?' In Luke 18:1-17 Jesus taught on the importance of developing strong prayer life especially in the view of the coming kingdom. Now in Luke 18:18-43, Jesus answers the ultimate question, 'Who then will enter the kingdom of God?' He gives an illustration that is both humorous and ominous, '*For it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.*' (v25) There is a big hump we need to overcome in order enter God's kingdom.

Here Jesus has face-to-face conversations with three groups of people. (1) A rich young ruler who was 'so close to the kingdom, but didn't make it in'; (2) The disciples who were 'just barely in, but not by very much'; (3) A poor blind man who got 'right in and began following Jesus.' (Bartimaeus, C.f. Mark 10:17-27)

### A. Rich Young Ruler: 'So Close, BUT Didn't Make It In' (18:18-27)

1. '*Now a certain ruler asked Him, saying, 'Good Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?'* (v18) I.e. 'What can I do to DESERVE or EARN salvation?' Luke tells us this rich young man was also a 'ruler', a powerful man.

This young man was remarkable: (a) He wanted life, real life - eternal life. (b) He was the envy of many people - 'he had it all!' But he knew he didn't. This was deep insight and honesty, coming from a successful young man. (c) He knew, to have eternal life he needed to 'inherit' it. He had to receive it from someone far greater than himself, like he probably inherited his family money and position. (d) He was prepared to do anything to receive this life. Mark writes, '*he came running, knelt before Him [Jesus]*' (Mark 10:17) He was a humble man, unusual for someone young, rich and powerful. (e) He realised the answer to his quest lies with Jesus. He called Jesus, '*Good Teacher.*' No wonder Mark records, '*Jesus loved this young man.*' (Mark 10:21)

2. *So Jesus said to him, 'Why do you call Me good? No one is good but One, that is, God.'* (v19)
  - a. The young man's question is 'almost identical' to the clever lawyer's question, '*Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?'* (Luke 10:25) that started the parable of the Good Samaritan a while ago. The difference between them is one adjective - 'good', the word reserved by the rabbis to describe God.  
  
Through the mild rebuke, Jesus was probably challenging this young man to look deeper into his heart: (1) You should use the word for one person, God. So, you think I am God? Do you really know who I am? (2) Your praise of My 'goodness' will not get you a more favourable answer (c.f. 18:14). And finally, (3) Let's see how good you actually are. Jesus listed five of the six commandments to do with our relationship with people, deliberately leaving out the final commandment, '*Do not covet...*' (Ex 20:17). Why? Because covetousness was this man's problem.
  - b. *The young man said, 'All these things I have kept from my youth.'* (v21) I.e. 'I have tried all that, but it did not bring me 'real life', the eternal life. Please, tell me what else do I need to do!' Jesus said, '*You still lack one thing. Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me.*' (v22)

What was this one thing this rich young man lacked that so troubled him? What he lacked was Jesus. Jesus is saying to this young man, '*The One Thing you lack is really Me. But I can see something is getting in your way of coming to Me. You need to get over that big hump to truly follow Me. That hump in your life is covetousness. It is your attachment to your money and wealth. It possesses you more than you possess it.*'

This hump can be 'something' or 'someone'. We cannot have Jesus and 'something else' if that 'something else' stands in the way of Jesus' claim over our lives. For some people, it may not be money, but a sinful relationship. We must be prepared to cut whatever stands between Christ and us, if we want to follow Him and inherit eternal life. And when we have Jesus, then we have everything.

c. The young man's face dropped at Jesus' words. *'When he heard this, he became very sorrowful, for he was very rich.'* (v23) He came so close to Jesus, but could not get over the 'big hump'. He was not prepared to pay that particular price. If only Jesus would allow this young man to follow Him AND cart his big moneybag along, he would have said 'YES!' in a heartbeat. But Jesus didn't give him that option. Jesus loved him too much to lower the standard for him. Jesus was very clear, 'Get rid of it. Cut out the covetousness from your life. Then come and follow Me.' That is a hard thing to do.

Jesus who told His disciples, *'I will make you fishers of men,'* lost a fish that day. It got off the hook and swam away, and it was a big one. But Jesus would rather have this young man walk away in sadness than to follow Him under false pretences. Christ lost that young man because He did not let him have it both ways. The rich young man discovered he did not really want eternal life above anything else in this world, and he had to admit it. When the hard choice was clearly presented to him, he let go of eternal life. He let Jesus go.

3. Then Jesus said, *'How hard it is for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of God! For it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.'* (v24-25)

a. Maybe Jesus sighed, *'It is terribly hard for the rich, terribly hard for them.'* The disciples were astonished. They thought everything came easy to those who had lots of money. Wealth meant power and special privilege. But Jesus was saying, 'If you have lots of money, everything on earth comes to you easy, but not the things of heaven. Your account balance in heaven is ZERO if everything in your life is invested into this world. So, make changes to your investment. Sell your stuff and give it to the poor. Invest in heaven and follow Me.'

b. *The disciples said, 'If rich people can't get into heaven, then who can?'* (v26) Isn't that an amazing outlook? They assumed that rich people could use their power to enter the kingdom of God. As if they can sign a fat cheque and get the front seat in heaven!

Jesus corrected them, saying in effect, *'The poor and the little ones can just walk into the kingdom. But the rich who have so much stuff crammed into their huge backpacks? You might as well squeeze a dumb camel through the eye of a needle with its humps and all! It is impossible. But God can do it.'*

In fact, every soul that is saved and entering the kingdom is a mighty work of God, especially those who think they have so much to lose by choosing to follow Christ.

## B. [Peter & the Disciples: 'Barely In, But Not by Much' \(18:28-34\)](#)

1. Dear old Peter blurted out, *'See, we have left all and followed You.'* (v28) Don't you just love Peter, reminding the Lord for us all? *These rich people can't do it, but we did it!*

a. *Jesus said to the disciples, 'Assuredly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or parents or brothers or wife or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God, who shall not receive many times more in this present time, and in the age to come eternal life.'* (v29-30)

In other words, *'Peter you didn't lose anything by following Me. Don't talk like you have sacrificed so much for Me, because whatever you truly gave up for My sake, you will receive so much more, starting in this life, just for an appetizer. The blessing will unfold throughout eternity as God's full repayment comes to you. You cannot lose by following Me. You cannot outgive God. God is no man's debtor.'* (C.f. Mark 10:30 adds, we will receive persecution along with the blessings!)

b. Jesus also warned, *'But many who are first will be last, and the last will be first.'* (Mark 10:31)

*'Peter, remember this too. You can lose what you have gained. You may have been the first to drop everything to follow me, but the first can become last. It is not how you start the race, but how you continue in the race, that matters. It is not what you gave up when you first became a believer, but it is whether you are prepared to go on to the end. Peter, you've had a great start, but remember you need to follow Me all the way to the finish line.'*

2. *Then Jesus took the Twelve aside, 'Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and all things that are written by the prophets concerning the Son of Man will be accomplished. For He will be delivered to the Gentiles and will be mocked and insulted and spit upon. They will scourge Him and kill Him. And the third day He will rise again.'* (v31-33)

- a. This is Jesus' third prediction concerning His death and resurrection (9:22; 13:32-33). Here he gives more detail on the suffering that awaited Him in Jerusalem: (1) He will be delivered into the Gentiles' hands in outrageous injustice. (2) He will be 'mocked', 'insulted', and 'spit upon' in shameful rejection. (3) They will 'scourge Him' and 'kill Him' with a painful death. (4) On the third day, He will rise again with divine vindication.
- b. For centuries Christians accused the Jews as the 'Christ-Killers', but Jesus was actually killed by the hands of the Gentiles. The Jews handed Jesus over (Luke 9:22) and the Gentiles carried out the crucifixion. Both Jews and Gentiles, you and I, are responsible for the murder of Jesus. But Jesus knew what would happen to Him in Jerusalem. The cross was not a misfortune or tragedy, but the very centre of God's will, all foretold by the prophets. And He would rise from the dead after three days.
- c. These words of Jesus did not sink into the disciples' hearts. They had trouble believing even after Jesus rose from the dead. Why was it so hard for them to absorb this bit of information? Because they were thinking about the 'crown', not the 'cross'. They didn't want to hear 'bad news' or 'doom and gloom'. Mark writes, at this point James and John came to Jesus and asked Him for the powerful seats in the Kingdom on His right and left! (Mark 10: 37) The disciples were dashing for the crown, and they could not see the cup of suffering Jesus was about to drink right in front of them.

Who was at Jesus' right and left when He was drinking the cup of suffering? A couple of thieves.

- d. Jesus is the very epitome of leaving everything for the sake of the kingdom. His disciples too have left all, and were on their way to Jerusalem, following Jesus. But they were so oblivious to God's plan.

They were barely in God's kingdom, but not by much.

### C. Poor Blind Man: 'Right In, and Following Jesus' (18:35-43)

1. This is the last account of healing in Luke. Jericho was the oldest city in the world and the most immoral city of all. It was the city of Rahab the harlot, who is in Jesus' family tree! It was located in the Jordan Valley, only 20km from Jerusalem and 250m below sea level. Jesus and the disciples' long journey to Jerusalem began in Luke 9:51, and was now nearing its end.
2. Now a large crowd was milling around, and a blind man named Bartimaeus 'heard' the commotion. He asked around, 'What is going on?' and he heard, 'It is Jesus.' He then knew this was an opportunity he cannot let pass by him. He began crying out for Jesus. The crowd rebuked him, just like the disciples rebuked the children from coming to Jesus (18:15). *The Master is busy! He doesn't have time for you!* But the blind Bartimaeus cried out all the more, like the persistent widow who refused to give up. He hollered louder and louder. Suddenly he heard a voice - summoning him? Unseen hands grabbed him, rushing him somewhere - to someone. Then Bartimaeus heard the voice of the one standing right before him, speaking to him, 'What do you want Me to do for you?' (v41) It was the voice of Jesus. Bartimaeus cried out, 'Lord, that I may receive my sight!' Jesus said to him, 'Receive your sight, your faith has made you well.' (v42)

3. What is wonderful about this blind man, Bartimaeus?

- a. Bartimaeus, the blind man is the only person in Luke to call Jesus, 'the Son of David'. It means 'the Messiah', 'the One Anointed to heal, deliver, and to save.' It took a blind man to 'see' Jesus as He truly was! The disciples were still struggling to grasp who Jesus was and His coming death and resurrection, even after repeated personal instruction from Jesus. This blind man saw Jesus more clearly than the disciples! In just a few weeks, the crowd in Jerusalem would cry out, 'Hosanna! Son of David!'

How did this blind man get this 'insight'? *Jesus said, 'For judgment I have come into this world, that those who do not see may see, and that those who see may be made blind.'* (Jn 9:39)

b. *'Immediately he received his sight, and follow Him, glorifying God.'* (v43).

The rich young ruler had too much to lose, so he couldn't follow Jesus. He was so close but not close enough. To choose Jesus above all else, was the only way to have Jesus. Jesus' challenge was too demanding, too risky.

But here comes a blind man who already lost everything. He had no illusion about his life or the world. He was through with this world, and he was so free to follow Jesus. When a man comes to a place where he has nothing more to lose, he has less of a 'hump' to overcome to enter the kingdom of God.

It was so much easier for this poor blind man to follow Jesus than the rich young ruler.

#### D. Reflection

1. It is not easy for the rich to enter the kingdom of God. Not just the financially rich, but also those who are intellectually, morally or artistically outstanding. Capable people feel compelled to *work* for their salvation, so that they *earn it* and *deserve it* rather than to receive it free as God's mercy.

Do you relate to such people in any way?

2. If you feel Jesus is passing you by, it is time to cry out to Him. This opportunity may never come again in the same way. The blind Bartimaeus cried out, *'Son of David, have mercy on Me!'* When healed, he arose and followed the Lord. *'Blessed are the poor, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.'*

Do you know that you are in desperate need of Jesus? Will you come to Jesus Christ like this poor man?

3. Do you know that eternal life is the pearl of 'great price' worth selling all that you have to get it? Do you know that this world has nothing whatsoever of eternal value to offer you? If you have Jesus, you have everything. Do you know that you will be more than compensated for all that you have given up to follow Jesus?

*Let our entry into the kingdom of God not be like that of a stubborn camel being squeezed through the eye of a needle, humps and all.*

Will you surrender all, and follow Jesus?

4. Jesus promises vindication for those who follow him whole-heartedly. Do you believe that following Christ has its own reward far greater than all that you've had to let go? Are you experiencing that reward now?
5. The simple people who don't have much to give up, enter the kingdom of God easily. What did you personally have to give up to follow Christ? Looking back on it, are you glad about your decision?