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QUESTION: What did the Lord Jesus mean when He said, “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”? (Matthew 19:24). What kind of “needle” was He referring to? Today, we know of several types: sewing needles, medical needles, shoemaking needles, and more. So, what exactly did Jesus mean by “the eye of a needle”?

ANSWER: The context of this statement comes from the encounter between Jesus and a wealthy young man. This man approached Jesus, asking, “What good thing must I do to inherit eternal life?” Jesus responded by asking whether he had kept the commandments. The young man answered, “All these I have kept since I was a boy. What do I still lack?” (Matthew 19:20).

> Jesus, looking at him with love, said, “If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.
>
> (Matthew 19:21).

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But when the young man heard this, he went away sorrowful, because he had great wealth. That’s when Jesus turned to His disciples and said:

> Truly I tell you, it is hard for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of heaven. Again I tell you, 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.
>
> Matthew 19:23–24, NIV

So what is “the eye of the needle”?

Some historians and Bible commentators believe that Jesus was referring to a narrow gate in ancient Jerusalem, known by some as “The Needle’s Eye.” This was a small entrance built into the city wall, used at night after the main city gates were closed for safety. The gate was so low and narrow that only pedestrians and small animals could pass through easily. For a camel to pass through, it would need to be unloaded completely and forced to kneel and crawl through—a very difficult and humbling process.

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This interpretation, however, is debated. There is no definitive archaeological evidence proving such a gate existed during Jesus’ time.

Another explanation comes from linguistics. Some scholars suggest that the original Aramaic word for “camel” (gamal) closely resembles the word for “thick rope” (gamla). When the New Testament was translated into Greek, this word may have been misunderstood. If the original phrase referred to a thick rope, the verse would read:

“It is easier for a thick rope to go through the eye of a needle…”—which still makes the same point: it’s something humanly impossible.

Whether Jesus meant a literal camel, a thick rope, or a narrow gate, the meaning is clear:

It is extremely difficult for someone who puts their trust in riches to enter the kingdom of God.

This teaching was meant to shock and grab attention, much like other hyperbolic sayings Jesus used:

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> Why do you look at the speck in your brother’s eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye?
>
> (Matthew 7:3)

> You blind guides! You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel.
>
> (Matthew 23:24)

Obviously, no one can have a literal plank in their eye, or swallow a camel. But these exaggerations powerfully underscore spiritual truths—and that’s exactly what Jesus was doing here.

When the disciples heard this, they were astonished and asked, “Who then can be saved?” (Matthew 19:25). Jesus replied with one of the most hopeful verses in the Bible:

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> With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.
>
> Matthew 19:26, NIV

In other words, salvation—whether for the rich or the poor—is not something we can earn or achieve through human effort. It is the gift of God’s grace, and only He can change a person’s heart and redirect their trust from material wealth to eternal riches.

Final Thought:

Jesus wasn’t saying that all rich people are automatically excluded from heaven. Rather, He was warning about the spiritual danger of wealth—how it can lead to pride, self-reliance, and a false sense of security. Entering the Kingdom of God requires humility, surrender, and wholehearted trust in Christ.

“It Is Easier for a Camel to Go Through the Eye of a Needle…”
— What Did Jesus Mean?(Matthew 19:23–24

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“It Is Easier for a Camel to Go Through the Eye of a Needle…”
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