

### ***CRIBB<S>NOTE – OCTOBER 11, 2009***

Jesus said to his disciples, “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.” (Mark 10:25)

That is a very uncomfortable and quite challenging statement, especially for those of us who are rich and live in comfort. Yet, it speaks directly to the purpose of faith and what it means to be a Christian. Contrary to the ‘prosperity preachers’ who advocate the accumulation of wealth, Jesus warns against placing a priority on material gains. It is a trap and stumbling block to authentic life.

Equally fascinating is how his disciples were amazed at such teaching. They, like many of us, were accustomed to being told about the value of self-sufficiency and the security of possessing everything one needs or desires. But, Jesus provides a very different perspective. In fact, he explains the dangers associated with putting money ahead of salvation. It gets in the way.

Of course, money alone is not the culprit. We are tempted to avoid authentic life by making other things more important; such as, jobs, entertainment, ambition, and even religion. We often have a lot of ‘stuff’ on our minds that weigh us down and prevent us from living as fully as we can.

Jesus made his statement about the difficulty of being rich and going to heaven in response to a young man who raced toward him asked what else he needed to do to attain salvation. According to the story, Jesus looked upon the young man with love and told him the only thing left was to give up his wealth; to sell everything, support the poor, and follow Christ. Unfortunately, the young man did not receive what Jesus said with joy. Instead, he became very sad and walked away.

No doubt many of us would have done the same thing. It is not easy to forsake everything we have acquired. In fact, we are taught to insure our possessions and hold on tightly to what we have. We are inundated with messages about fear and insecurity. We are told to protect our stuff and make sure it is put away in a safe place. Instead of letting go we hang on to everything we own. The young man was not a ‘bad fellow’. He was devout in his religious practices. He represented the successful and honorable people of his class and society. But more was required.

What would we do if Jesus came to us and made the same statement? How important is it to us to live a fuller, more authentic life? Do we have things that we just can’t give up? What do we really care about?

There is another aspect to the story about the rich, young man. While he was seeking answers to his life, Jesus was pressing him to think about others first. That is the rub. In order for security to exist and peace to prevail, we have to create space for community to strive. Community is the basis of a safe and sane society. We have to care about people around us. Putting self first erodes the very foundation of civil society.

We have a greater obligation to achieve a higher goal than merely gathering things that can be stolen or will rot. We must develop a level of sensitivity that focuses our attention on people who are not included in the circle of “acceptable” or “desired” company. Our security requires our involvement in the lives of the most vulnerable and least secure people around us. Our welfare depends on the improved living conditions of everyone who is affected by the priorities and opportunities in our society.

If 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,” then we have the very hard task of deciding on what side of history we want to stand. We are a rich people. What will we do with our wealth?