

The Needle Gate

No, Jesus was not talking about a literal gate in Jerusalem called 'the eye of the needle' that camels had to squish their way through. I've checked and rechecked the evidence on this one, and there is no proof that there ever was such a gate.

The idea of Jesus talking about a small gate that was very difficult to get through is quite convenient for us. It means that though it is not easy, and you may have to unload a few things along the way, it is possible to get into the kingdom if you're willing to make the necessary sacrifices. But this is not Jesus' actual point at all. He meant what He said. He was being hyperbolic, He was being somewhat humorous – the thought of a camel going through the eye of a little needle is preposterous – it's impossible. Do you see that? Then you have His point.

It's like an elephant springboard diving into a cup of water, like a giraffe doing the limbo under a three-foot-high stick, like a Clydesdale getting into the driver's seat of a Smart Car. Get it?

It's not possible for a rich man to save himself. In fact, it's not possible for any man to save himself. You can't make enough sacrifices, you can't unload enough baggage to squeeze in. The disciples understood precisely what He meant. That's why they immediately asked, 'Who then can be saved?'

Jesus' answer implies that it takes the working of a divine miracle for a sinner to make it into the kingdom. We call this miracle the new birth – impossible with man, but possible with God!

The gospel of Jesus Christ declares that salvation is a miraculous act of God. That is why He gets all the glory. So instead of trying to work your way into the kingdom, trust in this miracle-working God who sends His Son to redeem us and Spirit to convert us.

It is extremely difficult for a rich man to enter into the Kingdom of God. It is so difficult that Jesus says, "It is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God."

There have been various interpretations of "camel" and "needle" in an attempt to soften the words of Jesus. For example, some have said that the "needle" was a small gate in the wall surrounding Jerusalem, a small gate which sat right beside the larger gate. It is thought that the large gate was closed at night to protect the city from enemies, and the small gate was used by the travelling public. The small gate is said to have been called "the Needle's Eye" because it was so small that it was difficult for even a single person to pass through.

Two things need to be noted about these interpretations:

a. There is no doubt that Jesus means a literal needle. He as much as says so in v.26, "With men this is impossible." What He does is use a proverbial saying for an impossibility. Most countries have proverbs that express the impossibility of some things. The camel was the largest animal among the Jews, so Christ either used a well known proverb among the Jews or else created one. There is also this point, when Christ chose to speak in parables, He chose the most common and ordinary thing to express His meaning.

b. Attempts to soften the Lord's point are just that: attempts to soften. But nothing can be softened with v.26, "With men this is impossible." No man, not even the rich man himself, can save a rich man.