

# The Gospel of Matthew

Selections from Chapters 18 and 19

Chapter 18 is the fourth major discourse in the Gospel of Matthew.

Throughout Chapter 18 Jesus is teaching a small group of disciples apart from the earlier crowds.

The first part of this chapter dealt with the “**Little Ones**”. This section concludes with the **Parable of the Lost Sheep**.

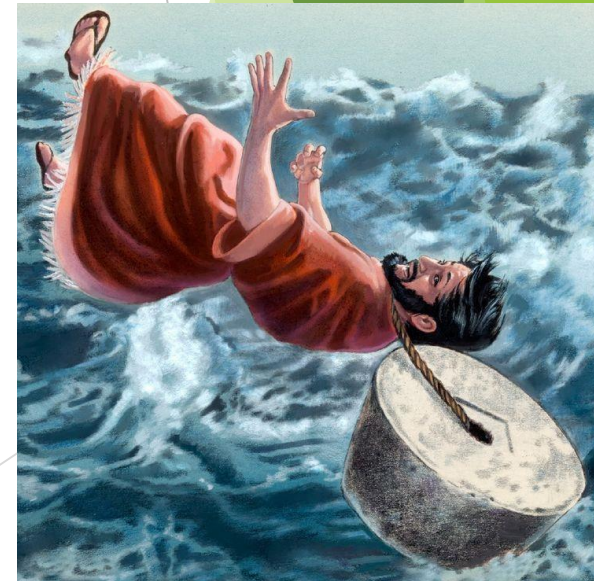
The second part dealt with how to handle the brother who sins.

The **Parable of the Unforgiving Servant** ends this second section on sin and forgiveness.

Last week.....



- ▶ Jesus told us that the greatest in God's kingdom are the ones who are as humble as a child. (Matt 18:1-5)
- ▶ We also read about what a grave sin it is to lure another into sin or away from faith in Jesus.



Also last week - Matthew 18:8-9

Cut off your foot or hand? Pluck out your eye?

- ▶ **If your hand or foot causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away.** It is better for you to enter into life maimed or crippled than with two hands or two feet to be thrown into eternal fire. **And if your eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away.** It is better for you to enter into life with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into firey Gehenna.
- ▶ What did he mean?

# The Body and its members are used as metaphor.

- ▶ This is a metaphor for the **community of believers**.
- ▶ If one of the community is challenging your faith or tempting others to sin, it is clearly better if you excommunicate that person or “cut them off”.

Paul also uses the body to describe the community of believers. In 1 Corinthians 12, Paul uses an extensive discussion of a body and its various parts to discuss the duties and obligations of members to each other and the Church.

But as it is, there are many parts, yet one body.<sup>21</sup> The eye cannot say to the hand, “I do not need you,” nor again the head to the feet, “I do not need you.”<sup>22</sup> Indeed, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are all the more necessary,<sup>23</sup> and those parts of the body that we consider less honorable we surround with greater honor, and our less presentable parts are treated with greater propriety,<sup>24</sup> whereas our more presentable parts do not need this. But God has so constructed the body as to give greater honor to a part that is without it,<sup>25</sup> so that there may be no division in the body, but that the parts may have the same concern for one another.<sup>26</sup> If [one] part suffers, all the parts suffer with it; if one part is honored, all the parts share its joy. (1 Cor 12: 20-26)

This idea of cutting off an offending foot or eye is a great segue into today's lesson.

## Disciplining members of the Church

### Matthew 18:15-19

If your brother sins [against you], go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have won over your brother. If he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, so that 'every fact may be established on the testimony of two or three witnesses.' If he refuses to listen to them, tell the church. If he refuses to listen even to the church, then treat him as you would a Gentile or a tax collector.



# Goal- correction, repentance and peaceful resolution.

1. The first step is to *speak with the sinner in private.*
2. The second is to obtain *one or two other witnesses* and approach him with support. *This is based on Deut 19:15: “only on the evidence of two witnesses or of three witnesses, shall a charge be sustained.”*
3. The third step is to take the person before the council or court of elders or to the Church.



# If that does not work treat him like a tax collector or Gentile?



Matthew's largely Jewish community would look down on the turn-coat tax collectors who were collaborators with Rome and usually corrupt in their practices.

Gentiles were not Jewish, did not follow ritual cleanliness and purity laws and Jewish Laws did not permit them to mix with the Jewish people.

This statement is a sentence of excommunication or of shunning at the very least.

These three steps are to bring one back to the community of believers-

When looking at these along side the discussion of the “little ones” in 18:1-14 and the idea of cutting off a foot or plucking ones eye out if it offends you, we see that this pertains to bringing a member of the community back into the fold with other believers by having him repent. **They are cut off from the community only as a last resort.**

Remember also the joy of returning a lost sheep to the fold and the comments about yeast or leaven of the Pharisees that influences the entire bowl of bread dough.



## Notes from elsewhere in Scripture:

**Leviticus 19:17** You shall not hate your brother in your heart, but you shall *reason with your neighbor*, lest you bear sin because of him.

(Lk. 17:3) Be on your guard! If your brother sins, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him."

**(2 Tim 2:23-26)** Avoid foolish and ignorant debates, for you know that they breed quarrels. A slave of the Lord should not quarrel, but should be gentle with everyone, able to teach, tolerant, correcting opponents with kindness. It may be that God will grant them repentance that leads to knowledge of the truth, and that they may return to their senses out of the devil's snare, where they are entrapped by him, for his will.

# The Power to bind and loose given to the disciples 18:18-20



“Amen, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. Again, [amen,] I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything for which they are to pray, it shall be granted to them by my heavenly Father. For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.”

**Recall Matt 16:19 where Jesus spoke to Peter alone: “I will give you the keys to the kingdom of heaven. Whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.”**

Here that the ability to punish or forgive sins or debts is now extended to the disciples as well. This is the foundation for sacrament of Reconciliation.

# Peter asks “How often shall I forgive my brother?”

- ▶ Seventy times seven times?!
- ▶ Peter has been given the responsibility to forgive those who offend him as well as the duty to bind or loose sins, debts and indiscretions. He seeks clarity.
- ▶ The number which is sometimes translated as 77 times and other places as 490 times implies that forgiveness should be offered infinite number of times.
- ▶ Next a parable explains why.

# The Parable of the Unforgiving Servant

- ▶ Jesus requires that his followers forgive. He goes on to tell a parable about the Kingdom. The King has forgiven much more than his servants could ever forgive each other.

In The parable of the Unforgiving Servant, the king's servant owes 10,000 talents. This is the equivalent of 6000- 10,000 days wages. It is an enormous amount of money.

Selling one's family into slavery to pay a debt was the practice in 2 Kings 4:1 and Isaiah 50:1, but in the first century it was no longer permitted. Selling one's wife into slavery was *never* permitted.

This King, then is meant to be depicted as a Gentile.

# The King Forgives the Debt

- ▶ The servant would never be able to repay the debt but still begged for more time to pay the debt off. The King has pity on him and forgives the entire debt.
- ▶ This same servant goes and finds another who owes him 100 denarii which is 100 days wages. The forgiven servant does not forgive his debtor. He chokes him and has him thrown in prison.
- ▶ Upon hearing this story, the King has the Unforgiving Servant tortured until his debt to the King can be repaid.
- ▶ **“So also my heavenly Father will do to you unless each of you forgive his brother from your hearts.” (Matt 18:35)**

# What do we learn?

We are to forgive others because we are forgiven by God.

There is no limit to the amount of forgiveness we are to dole out to others.

Failure to do so may result in punishment and relinquishing of our own forgiveness.

**“Forgive us our trespasses *as* we forgive those who trespass against us...”**



# The Rich Young Man

## Matthew 19:16-26

The Rich Young Man has an amazing question for Jesus.

**“What must I do to gain eternal life?”**

What does the nature of this *question* reveal about the man?

**He has faith. He believes that there is life after death and that Jesus must have the key to how to obtain it. He must have been a follower of Jesus to some extent.**

Jesus’ answer seems so simple: **Follow the commandments.**

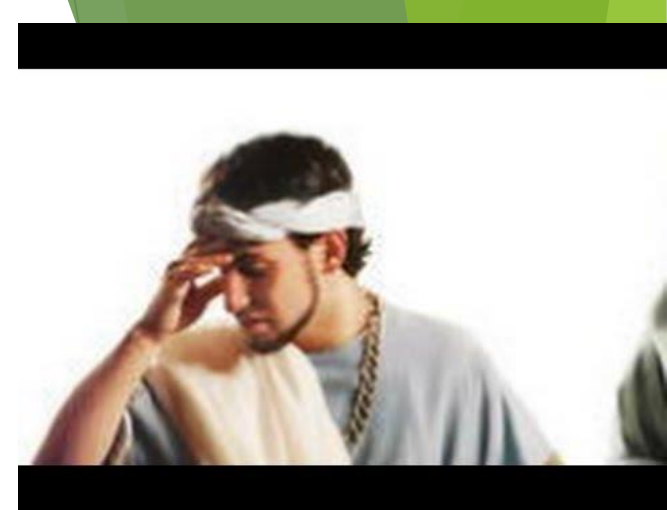
The response of the young man to Jesus’ answer indicates that he is Jewish, he knows the law and ***he must already believe there is something lacking in his life.***

“All of these I have observed.  
What do I still lack?” (19:20)

Jesus said to him, “If you wish to be perfect,\* go, sell what you have and give to [the] poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.”**22** When the young man heard this statement, he went away sad, for he had many possessions.

This is the end of the story. Why was he sad?

Did he not wish to give away all his “stuff”, or was there more to it than that?



# Why was he sad?

Jewish belief in the first century was that wealth was a *blessing from God for the righteous*.

If this young man was the head of a household or the eldest son, great responsibility also accompanied the inheritance or wealth. It would be his responsibility to care for and provide for younger siblings, women in the family and servants as well as aging parents.

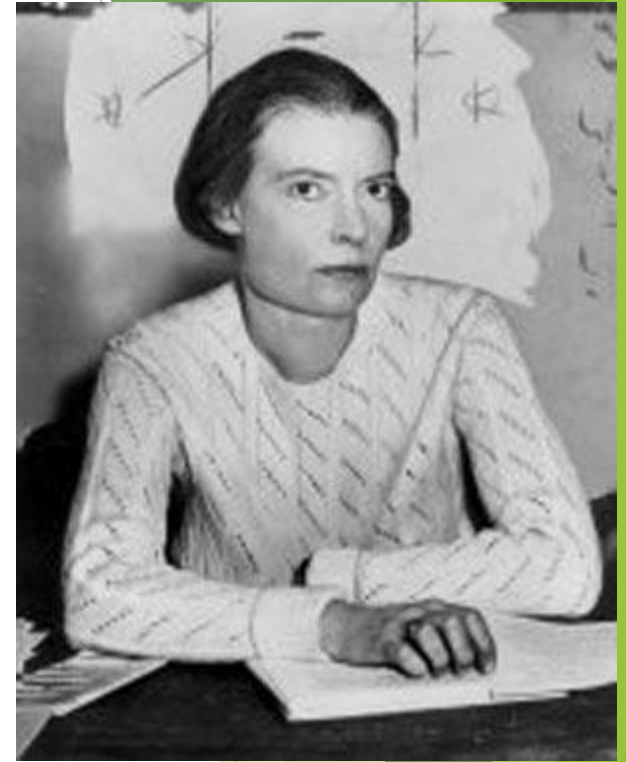
Wealth can be a stumbling block according to Ezekiel 7:19. It is an obstacle to full discipleship in this case.

# Perfection and Voluntary Poverty

Perfection is usually meant to mean “completion” in the ancient Greek world.

If you want to be complete, go and sell your possessions, give to the poor and and you will have treasure in heaven.

People like Dorothy Day and the Catholic Workers entered voluntary poverty to achieve these goals of “perfection”. Many monastic groups and orders of priests also take vows of poverty.



# The obstacle of wealth elsewhere.

“No one can serve two masters. He will either hate one and love the other, or be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.” (Matt 6:24)

“Better is a little with the fear of the Lord than great treasure and trouble with it.” (Proverbs 15:16)

One who loves gold will not be justified;  
one who pursues money will be led astray by it.

<sup>6</sup> Many have come to ruin because of gold,  
and their destruction has met them face to face.

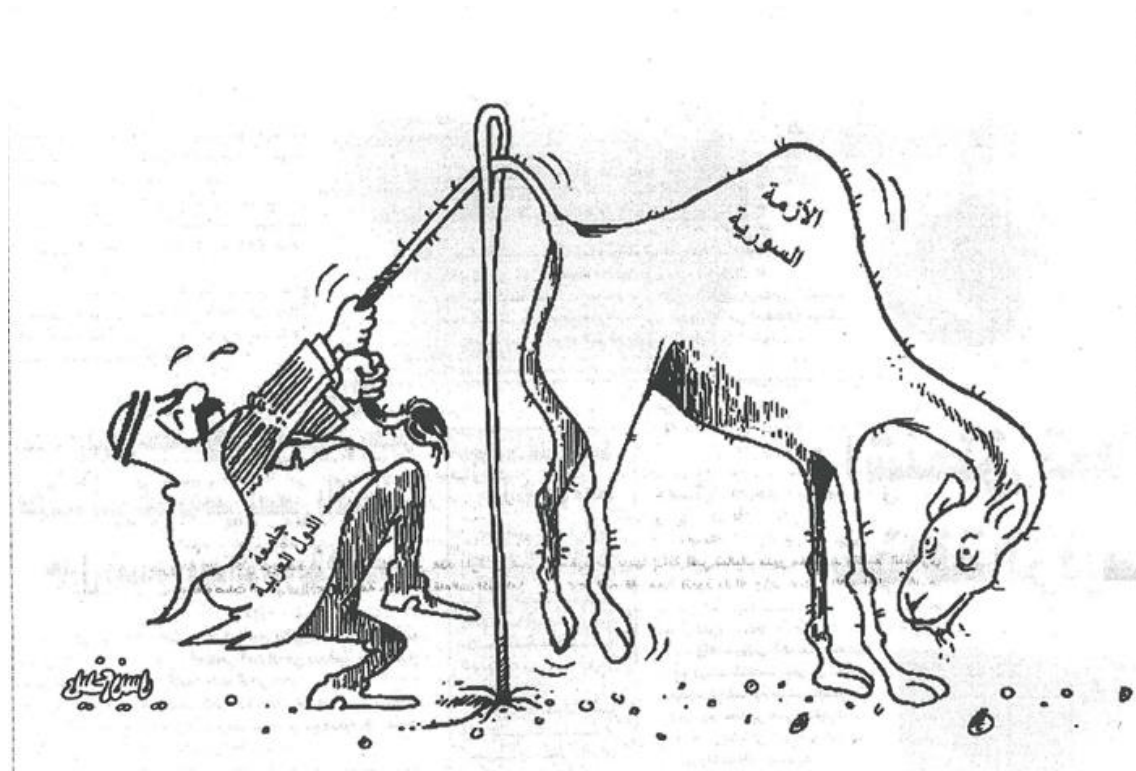
<sup>7</sup> It is a stumbling block to those who are avid for it,  
and every fool will be taken captive by it. (Sirach 31:5-7)

**..it will be hard for one who is rich to enter the kingdom of heaven.**

**Matthew 19:24-26**

- ▶ **Again I say to you, it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for one who is rich to enter the kingdom of God.”<sup>25\*</sup> When the disciples heard this, they were greatly astonished and said, “Who then can be saved?”<sup>26</sup> Jesus looked at them and said, “For human beings this is impossible, but for God all things are possible.”**
- ▶ **The challenge is caring for ones wealth before or instead of caring for the things of God.**

# The Camel and the eye of a needle...An indication that something is impossible



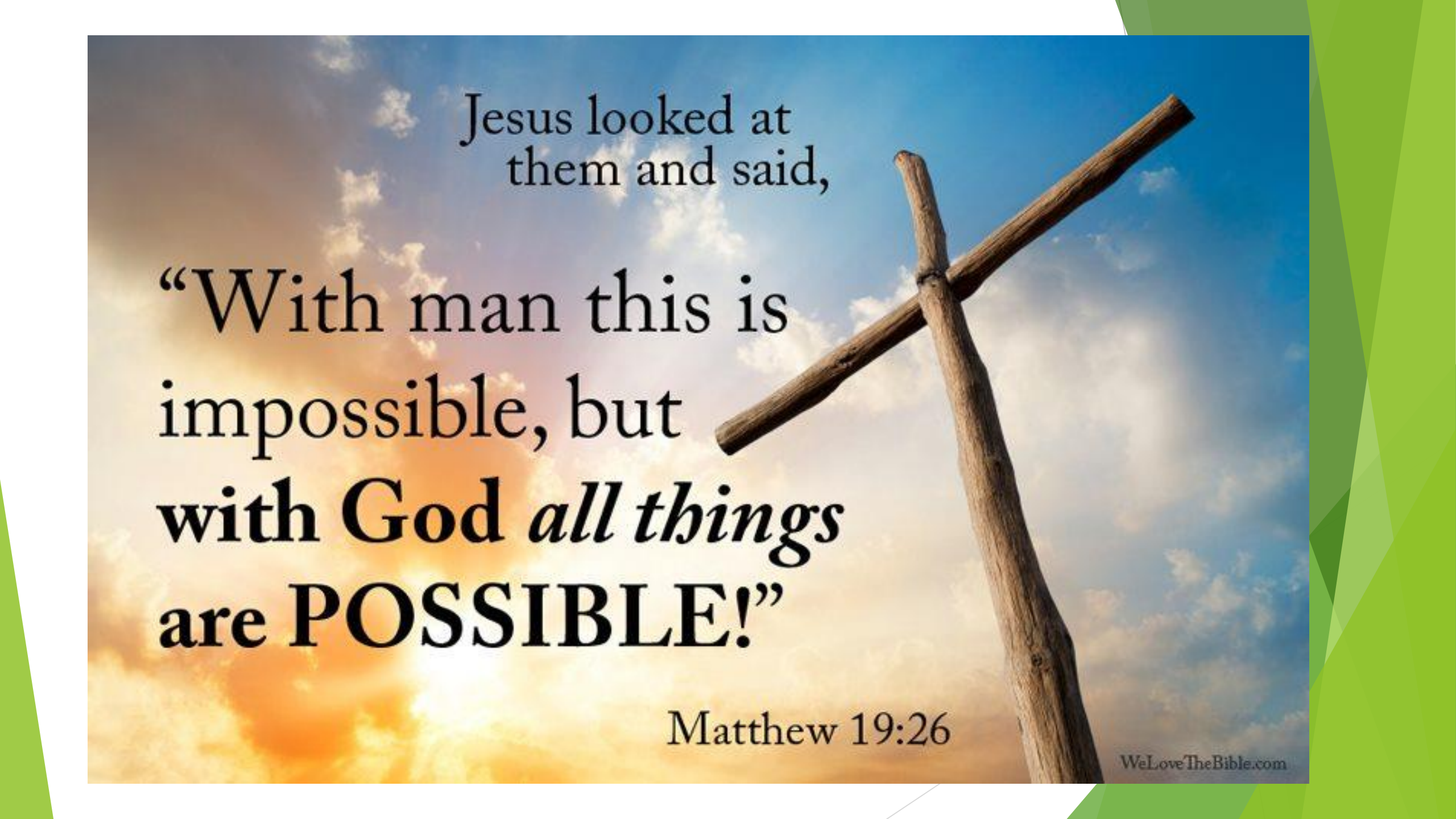
# A contemporary analogy

A camel cannot fit into the eye of a needle and neither can a camel loaded with packages fit through a narrow gate.

A contemporary situation might be that of a man arriving late to an airport gate with all his luggage in tow who is told that there was room for him on the plane, but not for his luggage. It is too late to check luggage and his bags will not fit through the narrow doors. If he refuses to leave the luggage behind, he will not make it to his destination. He might just get left behind with his luggage and miss the happiness of the trip and his desired destination.





A wooden cross made of two weathered branches is positioned on the right side of the image. The background is a sky transitioning from a bright orange and yellow sunset at the bottom to a clear blue sky at the top, with scattered white clouds. The overall scene is peaceful and inspirational.

Jesus looked at  
them and said,

“With man this is  
impossible, but  
**with God *all things*  
are POSSIBLE!”**

Matthew 19:26

# Let us pray

- ▶ Father, we praise You for the gift of unity that the Spirit creates in our relationships! You place others perfectly in our lives, and inspire us as Christians to work together with the gifts that we have been blessed with. When we look at this meeting through Your eyes, we see Your gifts fostered in us to further Your plans.
- ▶ Lord help us to recall your sacred words that call us to humility, gratitude, patience and forgiveness. May the words of the Beatitudes echo in our souls, reminding us that through you we will be made whole. We ask that you continue to bless us and these studies of scripture. Bless us Lord, as we leave here today, to take the peace of Jesus Christ with us. Amen