

“Are There Two?” – October 30, 2016
by Wayne J. Schneider – Soli Deo Gloria

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St. Matthew 19:23-26

A little girl was talking to her teacher about whales. The teacher said it was physically impossible for a whale to swallow a human, because even though it was a very large mammal its throat is very small. The little girl stated that Jonah was swallowed by a whale. Irritated, the teacher repeated that a whale could not swallow a human; it was physically impossible. The little girl said, *“When I get to heaven I will ask Jonah.”* The teacher asked, *“What if Jonah went to hell?”* The little girl replied, *“Then you can ask him”*.

Did you know that there are two kinds of Jesus? One that is real and one that is created by our narcissistic, me generation culture. The non-real Jesus is the casual, ever-ready, happy, fix-it savior who agrees with whatever our agenda is. If this is the only Jesus we know, this urbane, kindly, but wilting ‘errand-boy,’ then our spiritual growth is not just limited but stunted. This Jesus *“Is a sniveling modern invention,”* says George Bernard Shaw, *“for which there is no warrant in the Gospels.”*

The other Jesus is the One we discover in the Holy Scriptures. This is the vigorous Jesus who is more than a ray of sunshine. This one challenges us, and will not settle for any place but first in our lives. His call to us is to a white-knuckle pilgrimage of dynamic discipleship. Even though he accepts us as we are, his love is so enormous that he cannot leave as we’ve are.

This authentic Jesus fondly cares for us when we are in pain, but he stubbornly uncovers anything that hinders us from growing as his servants. This idea of two kinds of Jesus is not a clever attempt to get your attention. Nor has an ancient scroll been found. Rather, it is my desire to show that contemporary Christianity has placed its attention almost exclusively on the Jesus who is always available to solve our dilemmas. That’s OK to begin with, but if that is all you know, that lack can hinder the enormity of life God desires for you.

It is delightful to have Jesus as a friend who will never leave us or forsake us. He holds us up when we are lonely; he directs us when we are bewildered; and inspires us when we are discouraged. We need Jesus when we miss the mark and we ache for reassurance. But, we place limitations on him when we make him only a 'problem-solver.'

How often we play "*let's make a deal*" with God. We say: "*If I attend church every Sunday and pay my tithe, then I earn the right to sin a bit and it won't count against me.*" Or, we say to God, "*If He gives me what I want I'll be sooooo obedient.*" Or we tell ourselves – "*I don't commit this or that sin so I'm not as bad as some*" and that is ridiculous. Please note how Jesus responds:

Then Jesus said to his disciples, "*I tell you the truth, it is hard for a rich man 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 a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.*"

I believe most people have a friend who relates to them on the basis of their current crisis. You know, the only time they contact us is when they have a problem they can't solve. When the phone call comes or the note is in my mail box, I sometimes groan.

One day I asked my friend why he contacts me only when he is in trouble. He was stumped. He had not realized he was doing this. Then, he remembered that the only time he could get his parent's attention, was when he got into trouble. In psychological terms, he projected that image onto his friends.

I think that many Christians have a relationship with Jesus like my friend. Their relationship is based on their 'problem' times, their needs, and their agendas, leaving little time to know or enjoy Jesus. Living with the intent of getting God to do what I want is to miss what God wants for me. I cannot hear the exciting plans God wants to share with me.

God's desire is for us to try what we have thought was impossible. God pulls us into challenges that require more power than we have ever believed possible. God craves for you a life that is beyond anything you could ever envision.

It is this real Jesus that people inside and outside the church are longing for. Sometimes, this Jesus speaks troublesome words to shake us out of our apathy. These words leave us breathless. They dare us with the other part of the Gospel: the disturbing, astonishing, mind-blowing potential handed over to us as 'Followers of the Way.' These 'hard sayings' are often the ones we skip over in our search for teachings that are more appealing.

Back to the 'camel thing:' Jesus speaks with hyperbole, whose point is: if you're not willing to give up what keeps you from God, you will not be able or willing, really, to dance with God.

"When the disciples heard this, they were greatly astonished and asked, who then can be saved?" Jesus looked at them and said, *"With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."* Please note the contrast: man=impossible, God=possible. What we try to do to earn God's favor will fail. Period. But, when God reached down to us (and gave the Son for us) anything is possible. Spiritual self-reliance is self-deception.

Some of Jesus' sayings are complex and difficult to understand. I often ask, *"I wonder what Jesus means by this?"* We sometime skip over these words hoping that we will learn their meaning later on. The words are like hidden treasures that are available only by digging the meaning out with the Holy Spirit's assistance.

These are hard sayings because they are not easy to live out. We cry, *"Who could ever live this way?"* And THAT is the reaction Jesus is waiting for. It was never his intention for you or me to attempt this in our own power. It is the Spirit's power, living in you, that will provide the courage and the power. When we dare to live like Jesus lived, empowered by the Holy Spirit, we will begin to know his mind, grow in his way, and become more like him.

There is a further reason these words are hard sayings: They are like lasers applied to the hard places in our hearts. They cause implosions in our inner beings which produce new values, new attitudes, and new priorities. Our lives are turned topsy-turvy, perhaps for the first time.

And in all of this, we find a Savior who is helpful as well as a healer; who is sensitive to our needs but enlists us to meet the needs of others. We are uprooted from our discontent into determined, joyful living. May it be so for each of us. Alleluia. Amen.