

Too Much to Give Up

Miriam picked up a needle from where it had fallen on to the stone floor, held it and looked at it for a moment. 'I'm still not sure I understand what the Master was talking about yesterday. I wouldn't like to have to push a camel through the eye of this needle!'

'But that was the point...' Nathan began

'No not the point..the other end.' Miriam was quick to see the pun.

Nathan sighed patiently. 'Jesus meant that it is impossible for rich people to get into the Kingdom unless they're ready to give up their riches.'

'So the Kingdom's only for poor people !' Rebekah was standing in the open shop doorway and joined in the conversation. She always did.

'No, of course not.' Nathan had that simple uncomplicated faith which soon loses patience with people like Rebekah who want truth in neat little bundles. 'But you can't put God first when anything else is at the centre of your life. So if your riches mean more than God, you can't have the Kingdom. It's simple.'

'Did you see his face ?' Miriam did not want these two to get into an argument just now in her shop. It was bad enough at home, but there were customers to think of here.

'Yes, I saw his face.' Rebekah missed very little of what happened in the village.

'Who was he anyway ?

'You mean that visitor who asked Jesus the question about how to get eternal life.' said Nathan. 'He was a total stranger to me.'

'I didn't mean him.' Miriam carried on folding the curtain material she had been sewing. 'That man was a trader, passing through. He had a whole team of men with him. They were taking cloth down to the city. He tried to sell me some. I was sorely tempted. He had some of the most beautiful linen I've seen anywhere. It was no use to me though. I could never ask prices like that here.'

'His face was a picture,' Rebekah took up the theme. 'I've never seen such a gloomy look in a long time. Not since our Asher had his whole week's wages stolen by a stranger he stopped to help who'd fallen in the road. He hadn't fallen by accident. It was all set up to catch him and he fell for it.'

'It was more than that,' said Nathan, eager to not get involved in stories of Ashers doings. 'That man thought he was as rich in spiritual things as he is in money. He had a shock though. He couldn't give it up for God.'

'And what have you given up for God ?' Rebekah, feeling snubbed, had to retaliate. Once more Miriam stalled an argument.

'When I asked if you had seen his face I was talking about Jesus. Did you see his face ? Did you see the way he looked at the trader ?

'Can't say I did,' replied Rebekah.' I was watching that man. I felt so sad for him.'

'I saw him.' Leah came out from between the hanging folds of material where she had been quietly working and listening. 'I couldn't take my eyes off him. His face was well ... full of pain of love of forgiveness and understanding It was as though he felt all the sadness of that man's heart, and you could almost see him aching for all that the fellow was giving up.'

'But he didn't give it up,' said Rebekah.

'Not his riches,' Leah continued patiently. 'He gave up so much more. He turned his back on eternal life - on all the love and peace and happiness we've begun to discover with Jesus.' She looked round at the bundles of cloth. 'I may never work with the finest silks and linens, or own my own shop, but since Jesus came here I've riches I wouldn't exchange for any of that. I'll tell you something. I wouldn't want Jesus ever to look at me in the way he looked at that trader man.'

Rebekah felt embarrassed by the silence that followed Leah's words. 'I'd better look out for a camel-sized needle, or a needle-sized camel.' She had to say something.

Miriam and Nathan exchanged looks which said, 'You have to believe everything is possible with God when trying to get through to Rebekah !'