

“Through the Eye of the Needle”  
2 Samuel 19:31-39  
(Preached at Trinity, January 12, 2020)

I'm supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord's Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

**Disclaimer:** These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I'll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. In Matthew's Gospel we are told of a rich man who came running to Christ with a question that all men should ponder.  
**Matthew 19:16 NAU** - "Teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may obtain eternal life?"
  - a. Testing him, Jesus pointed him to the Law. It is the Law that condemns us. In order for a man to claim eternal life the demands of the Law must be met. The Law demands perfection. As James says:  
**James 2:10 NAU** - "For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one *point*, he has become guilty of all."
  - b. The Rich Young Ruler proudly claimed his moral perfection.  
**Matthew 19:20 NAU** - "All these things I have kept; what am I still lacking?"
  - c. Jesus quickly exposed the fallacy of his claim.  
**Matthew 19:21 NAU** - "If you wish to be complete, go *and* sell your possessions and give to *the* poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me."
  - d. Of course, we know the end of the story.  
**Matthew 19:22 NAU** - "But when the young man heard this statement, he went away grieving; for he was one who owned much property."
  - e. Jesus knew this young man was consumed in the idolatry of his great wealth. It was his god and he was not willing to part with it and follow Christ as his Lord and King.
  - f. This astonished the disciples. Seeing their confusion Jesus made a bold statement.  
**Matthew 19:23-24 NAU** - "And Jesus said to His disciples, "Truly I say to you, it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. <sup>24</sup> "Again I say to 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."  
The camel was the largest animal in Palestine. How utterly impossible it would be for such a beast to go through the eye of a sewing needle.
  - g. Jesus was using the literary tool of hyperbole to stress the difficulty of a rich man entering the Kingdom of Heaven. Hyperbole is an exaggeration to emphasize a point. "I'm so hungry I could eat a horse." "I heard that argument a million times."
2. Jesus wasn't declaring that it is impossible for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of Heaven, but it is certainly a great difficulty. This is because with much wealth comes the danger of idolatry. A rich man usually has little interest in eternal matters and little interest in seeking the will of God.

3. We do have examples of wealthy men in the Bible who did follow God.  
Abraham - **Gen. 13:2** - "Now Abram was very rich in livestock, in silver and in gold."  
Job - **Job 1:3** - "His possessions also were 7,000 sheep, 3,000 camels, 500 yoke of oxen, 500 female donkeys, and very many servants; and that man was the greatest of all the men of the east."  
Boaz - **Ruth 2:1 NAU** - "Now Naomi had a kinsman of her husband, a man of great wealth, of the family of Elimelech, whose name was Boaz."
4. We have in the text before us tonight another Godly man of great wealth.  
**2 Samuel 19:32 NAU** - "Now Barzillai was very old, being eighty years old; and he had sustained the king while he stayed at Mahanaim, for he was a very great man."  
 "Great man" refers to great possessions as well as great influence.  
**2 Samuel 19:32 ESV** - "Barzillai was a very aged man, eighty years old. He had provided the king with food while he stayed at Mahanaim, for he was a very wealthy man."  
**2 Samuel 19:32 NKJ** - "Now Barzillai was a very aged man, eighty years old. And he had provided the king with supplies while he stayed at Mahanaim, for he was a very rich man."
5. Barzillai takes his place among the wealthy who punched their way through the eye of the needle. He was a rich man who was virtuous and full of generosity. More space is given to Barzillai than the others David encountered on his way back to Jerusalem. The author is specific in calling this man to our attention and there is much we can glean from him by way of example.  
 William Blaikie writes of Barzillai – "It is very refreshing to fall in with a man like Barzillai in a record which is so full of wickedness, and without many features of a redeeming character. He is an example of humanity at its best—one of those men who diffuse radiance and happiness wherever their influence extends."<sup>1</sup>
6. We don't really know much about him. Our only information we have about him is from this brief encounter with David. The Bible tells us he is from Rogelim, but we don't know where that is. We don't know the source of his wealth, although we have to assume it was from agriculture and livestock. He is called a Gileadite. Gilead was the region where the Reubenites and Gadites settled due to their large possession of cattle.
7. We are not told specifically that he was moved by a desire to glorify God with his life, but we can see the marks of someone who does. It would not be unreasonable to assume that Barzillai was a God-fearing man.

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<sup>1</sup> Blaikie, William Garden. (2005). *Expository Lectures on the Book of 2 Samuel*. (Birmingham: Solid Ground Christian Books), page 301.

- I. The Biblical record points to his generosity
- A. We first met him as David was fleeing from Absalom and arrived at Mahanaim.
1. Three individuals provided richly for David and those under his care.  
**2 Samuel 17:28-29 NAU** - *they* "brought beds, basins, pottery, wheat, barley, flour, parched *grain*, beans, lentils, parched *seeds*,<sup>29</sup> honey, curds, sheep, and cheese of the herd, for David and for the people who *were* with him, to eat; for they said, "The people are hungry and weary and thirsty in the wilderness."
  2. He didn't enquire what others were giving – he simply saw the need of the king and gave of his abundance.
  3. This is the NT model  
**Acts 2:44-45 NAU** - "And all those who had believed were together and had all things in common; <sup>45</sup> and they *began* selling their property and possessions and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need."  
**2 Corinthians 8:1-3 NAU** - "Now, brethren, we *wish to* make known to you the grace of God which has been given in the churches of Macedonia, <sup>2</sup> that in a great ordeal of affliction their abundance of joy and their deep poverty overflowed in the wealth of their liberality. <sup>3</sup> For I testify that according to their ability, and beyond their ability, *they gave* of their own accord,"
- B. Jesus described the generosity of His sheep  
**Matthew 25:34-36 NAU** - "Then the King will say to those on His right, 'Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. <sup>35</sup> 'For I was hungry, and you gave Me *something* to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me *something* to drink; I was a stranger, and you invited Me in; <sup>36</sup> naked, and you clothed Me; I was sick, and you visited Me; I was in prison, and you came to Me."
- II. The Bible describes him as aged  
**2 Samuel 19:32 NAU** - "Now Barzillai was very old, being eighty years old"
- A. Age affects different people different ways
1. I've seen people in their 60's who are very old. I've seen others in their 80's who are as vigorous as those in their 60's.
  2. The Bible displays both.  
Caleb was still full of vitality at 85 –  
**Joshua 14:11 NAU** - "I am still as strong today as I was in the day Moses sent me; as my strength was then, so my strength is now, for war and for going out and coming in."  
David, on the other hand was frail in his old age.  
**1 Kings 1:1 NAU** - "Now King David was old, advanced in age; and they covered him with clothes, but he could not keep warm."
- Barzillai was suffering from the ravages of age  
**2 Samuel 19:35 NAU** - "I am now eighty years old. Can I distinguish between good and bad? Or can your servant taste what I eat or what I drink? Or can I hear anymore the voice of singing men and women?"

- B. Barzillai did not allow his advanced years to excuse him from service to his king
1. Too often God's people end their service too early. We need to rethink the concept of retirement.
  2. Much of our thinking about retirement has been influenced by the Social Security Act of 1935. The idea was to provide relief for those who could not support themselves due to old age and aid to dependent children. Workers became eligible for benefits at age 65 which at the time was older than the life-expectancy. A person born in 1995 can expect to live 35 years longer than a person born in 1900. Today there are about 60,000 Americans over the age of 100.
  3. Today, we still think a person has the right to retire at age 65 even though he can easily live another 20 years in good health. The Biblical model is usefulness our entire life.
  4. Noah was 600 years old when he completed the ark. Even after the flood he became a farmer  
**Genesis 9:20 NAU** - "Then Noah began farming and planted a vineyard."  
Moses was 80 when he began to lead the children of Israel out of Egypt  
Jacob was in his 60's when he left home and would have been almost 90 when he took his family and left Laban.
- C. In spite of his age Barzillai gave himself in service to his king
1. He personally brought provision to David during his time of need
  2. Now that David is returning Barzillai would not be denied the privilege of escorting the king.
  3. Travel would have been difficult, especially for a man of many years. Barzillai did not use his age as an excuse to cease being productive and useful.
- III. Barzillai understood the importance of loyalty
- A. As soon as he heard his king was in need he came to his aid  
**2 Samuel 17:29 NAU** - "for David and for the people who were with him, to eat; for they said, "The people are hungry and weary and thirsty in the wilderness."
1. Now as David is returning Barzillai made the journey to escort him.  
**2 Samuel 19:31 NAU** - "he went on to the Jordan with the king to escort him over the Jordan."
  2. His advanced years would have made this difficult for him
- B. We need to recognize the great risk Barzillai faced to bring David provision
1. Absalom had seized the throne and was dwelling in Jerusalem  
David had fled, fearing for his life
  2. Most people would have said in their heart, I'm not going to get involved. This is strife that doesn't concern me. I'll stick to my own business. This is the same attitude that leads men to watch a woman being attacked and they do nothing. There's no risk in walking away.
  3. There was nothing requiring Barzillai to get involved. Why not sit back and see what happens?
  4. Getting involved was risky business for Barzillai. He was a wealthy landowner. He had much to lose.  
But Barzillai understood something about loyalty.

5. Dale Ralph Davis comments on the great risk these men took: “Here, they stand beside Yahweh’s appointed king. And they do so at some risk: the battle had not yet been fought; the issue had not been decided; indeed, Absalom was likely to marshal overwhelming numbers against David. But these men come out in the open; they stand by David; they choose the one Yahweh has chosen. Each of them had plenty to lose since all were doubtless wealthy landowners. Nevertheless, in spite of the risks, all that mattered, it seems, was to remain loyal to the one to whom they owed allegiance.”<sup>2</sup>

C. Following Christ is risky business

1. Many have lost livelihood, family and friends. Some have lost their lives.
2. Jesus warns us to consider the cost of discipleship -  
**Luke 14:26-28 NAU** - "If anyone comes to Me, and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple. <sup>27</sup>  
 "Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple. <sup>28</sup> "For which one of you, when he wants to build a tower, does not first sit down and calculate the cost to see if he has enough to complete it?"

IV. The Godly man looks to the future of his children

A. Barzillai gave consideration for the future of Chimham

1. Barzillai had lived his life and was now a man of means. David was about to reward him with royal recognition and provision.  
**2 Samuel 19:33 NAU** - "You cross over with me and I will sustain you in Jerusalem with me."
2. Barzillai understood his days were few but his son’s days were still before him. He asked David to provide for his son.  
**2 Samuel 19:37 NAU** - "However, here is your servant Chimham, let him cross over with my lord the king, and do for him what is good in your sight."
3. There isn’t much we know about Chinham. We presume he is Barzillai’s son, most likely his firstborn.
  - a. We know he crossed over with David according to the wishes of Barzillai.
  - b. How did Chinham fare in Jerusalem? Four hundred years later after the destruction of Jerusalem when the Johanan brought a remnant of Jews to Egypt we read they departed and dwelt in Chimham.  
**Jeremiah 41:17 NAU** - "And they went and stayed in Geruth Chimham, which is beside Bethlehem, in order to proceed into Egypt"
  - c. This tells us that after 400 years the name of Chimham was significant. This was largely due to Barzillai making provision for him with David.

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<sup>2</sup> Dale Ralph Davis, *2 Samuel: Out of Every Adversity*, Focus on the Bible Commentary, (Great Britain: Christian Focus Publications, 2002), 220–221.

- C. This should be instructive for parents
1. We have a duty to watch over our children and seek to provide for their future. Abraham was careful to seek a bride for Isaac.  
**Genesis 24:3-4 NAU** - "I will make you swear by the LORD, the God of heaven and the God of earth, that you shall not take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I live, <sup>4</sup> but you will go to my country and to my relatives, and take a wife for my son Isaac."
  2. The concept of inheritance is modeled in our redemption  
Our adoption as God's children brings with it an inheritance  
**Romans 8:16-17 NAU** - "The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God, <sup>17</sup> and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with *Him* so that we may also be glorified with *Him*."
  3. Godly parents should look to the future of their children.  
**Proverbs 13:22 NAU** - "A good man leaves an inheritance to his children's children"

#### Conclusion:

1. May Barzillai stand before us as a demonstration of faithfulness.  
Barzillai demonstrated his love for David by his rich provisions. He was wealthy and aged, yet his wealth had not made him proud, nor did he use his advanced age to excuse him from service.
2. How much more do we owe faithful service to our King?  
Barzillai was faithful to his king, but everything Barzillai did for David was that which was due to God's anointed king.  
**Luke 17:10 NAU** - "So you too, when you do all the things which are commanded you, say, 'We are unworthy slaves; we have done *only* that which we ought to have done.'"
3. This is true of each of us. We must give ourselves in service to our great King.
4. We should also note however, God does not forget our labors of love.  
Barzillai requested Chimham to go in his stead). And David most gladly granted his request.  
Christ rewards His servants, not because we deserve it or have earned it but according to His rich mercy. It is an inheritance prepared for us from the foundation of the world.  
**Matthew 25:34 NAU** - "Then the King will say to those on His right, 'Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.'"