

# The Hardness of the Way

Second Series – Sermon Fourteen

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“Hardness” is the theme of this small chiasm in the first three sermons of series two. It reveals the practical outworking of the Gospel in the lives of the Father’s children. MacDonald takes on our principal issue that hinders our coming into Life, the idol of things! Riches, even for those who don’t have any, are at the heart of our double mindedness. Where you spend your time is where you spend your Life! Choosing to waste it, wanting and working for more, is to squander the one thing we can create no more of in this life-TIME.

## Outline

**Hardness** - Intro – It is hard!

**Wealthy People** – I don't want to be perfect; I am content to be saved.

**Trusting Riches** – It is impossible for us, who have in riches to enter the kingdom!

**Tyranny of Things** – For anyone who depends on anything for their well-being other than the Divine Life is a slave.

**Things in Death** – When truth dawns and the horror and disgrace of our chains is revealed, then will the good of saving Death appear.

**Death as Freedom** – Freed through the power of God combined with our own obedient effort. Freed into a condition, perhaps still tempted, but not bound any longer. We yield to an eternity of unrewarded consumerism. Enjoying all the delights with none of the consequences, thus we are saved!

## Mark 10:24 GNT

*“The disciples were shocked at these words, but Jesus went on to say, “My children, how hard it is to enter the Kingdom of God!”*”

I would assume that probably every thoughtful and prosperous person would feel the Lord's treatment of this young man to be too hard. Why, they ask, should riches make entering into the kingdom difficult? They are ready to look at this fact as an unreasonable judgement that seems to arise from the divine mind and seen from our side as a prejudice or an objection to the joys of having. Why should this limit the wealthy access in the world to come? Those who have never lived on an equal playing field with others, and are determined to live life as rich people. Why not!

This view of preference for the rich entering the kingdom of heaven is inconceivable to me. There is no kingdom in this world into which a rich man may not enter easily. Wealthy enough, that he may not access first. No heavenly kingdom could exist that the rich could enter more easily. The wealthy don't by necessity, belong to the realm of Satan, even though they are more exceptionally welcome. However, the wealthy receive no special treatment in the heavenly one. They will be only as welcome as any other person.

I suspect that many a wealthy person leaves this story resentful. They feel they have a special place and claim on all their possessions. People as a whole find it hard to believe the Lord meant to take the man's money.

**The man born rich sees his wealth as a natural and essential part of his well-being. The man who earns his money, feels it is his as a reward for his labor. Each assumes a right to have and hold his possessions.**

## **Wealthy People**

Why is this letting go necessary for entering the kingdom? Why does this make it all but impossible? Why can he not "have the best of both worlds"? He could compromise. He could serve money a little and God more. Then he would not have to do away with the wealth of this world to take the treasure of heaven. He could meet the minimum standards for heaven with the loss of as little as possible of the world. The compromise is not getting heaven's best, while only giving up the world's least.

*The Justification:* "A person educated in Christian views could easily reason: Is this demand made of me? If I commit to being a Christian, will I be required to give up all I possess? Justifying, it was probably no big deal for them back then to give up the kind of things they had! If I had been him, I'm sure I would have done it, with Jesus asking me Himself. But, the world is very different now. Wealth is part of my identity, affecting all my relationships! I would be giving up so much more than he! After all, I do not love money as he did. I try to do good with my resources!

Besides, I'm already a Christian! A Christian is not under the law as the young Jew. Surely the same is not required of me? The wealthy, like me, have a good view of money and care about using it responsibly. If we had to give it all up, the wicked would have all the power. The unbelieving would have no opposition, and the whole world would go to the devil. Incidentally, there are many stories of rich people in the Bible, and no others were required to give up their wealth! When Ananias was struck dead, it was not because he did not give up all his money, but because he pretended he had. Peter expressly said, "The property was yours to sell or not sell, as you wished. And after selling it, the money was also yours to give away." Didn't a rich man-Joseph, not bury the Lord?

Besides, Jesus said, "If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess..." I can't be perfect he would respond; it is hopeless. After all, He does not expect me to."

*The Honest Response:* Should have been, "I don't want to be perfect; I am content to be saved." **This person does not realize that without perfection, there is no salvation. Perfection is salvation, freedom! They are one.**

So, I say to you, "Have you kept and are you keeping the commandments?"

Would it be fair to say I know the answer? "I know better than he did what keeping the commandments means!"

Persisting, does your answer account for the Lord being a hard master? So, have you taken fewer pains to do as He asks? Or, committing your energies to keep the law, have you found the impossibility of keeping them? Did you miss the part that the rich young man had kept the commandments from his youth? Because he was found faithful, was this additional command given to him? Surely not!

Could you be found in a similar condition and have this commandment given to you? Can you, as he did, declare your observance? Have you discovered the same dissatisfaction and gone to the Master desiring eternal life? Or are you satisfied with where you are? So happy that you have never sought eternal life? Never hungered after righteousness, the perfection of your being?

If the latter is your condition, then be comforted; the Master does not require you to sell, give to the poor, and follow him! He does not need you to go with Him and preach the good news! You who do not desire perfection! You are not ones whose fellowship He wants. Be comforted, I say: He does not need you! He will not ask you for your money. You can give or not; it means nothing to Him. What! Do you think He needs a cheerless giver's money? Bring Him a sincere heart and willing hands; for this, He has given His life. He neither cares for or needs your money!

Pray then, ask the Lord for mercy. Confess, agree with Him, I have not sought the kingdom. Tell Him you want to change. You want to be free!

Once again, first go and keep the commandments. Your use of money is not the next step. The commandments are enough for you; you do not yet love kingdom life. You have not hungered for the Father's embrace. You only want His provision. As for your money, let the commandments inform your use of it.

It is an unfortunate assertion of certainty for you to question this requirement to sell and follow. When in this action, you find the reward of loving God, seeing yourself as but an unprofitable servant! **The lesson of the law is that the only ones who can keep them are those who don't need them! When you are aware of something beyond what your mind can think, yet not beyond what your heart can desire, something that is not yours and seems as if it never could be, without which your life would be worthless. It is those that the law has led to Christ.** Those crying, "What can I do that I may inherit eternal life?" It may be then that He will say to you, "Sell all that you have and give to the poor and come and follow me." If He does ask you, you will be honored if you obey, pitied if you refuse. Without obedience, you are of no comfort to Him, no pleasure to His disciples. If the youth too had obeyed, then he would have accepted God's clear calling as a disciple. Since he refused to obey, then he rejected that calling.

*We Say:* "But I don't trust in my riches. I believe in the rewards of my Lord and Savior, trust in His finished work, trust only in His sacrifice."

Yes, *Yes!* You will trust in anything but the Man Himself. The one who tells you how hard it is to be saved! None of the rewards of God and His Christ can give you eternal life. God the Father and Jesus His Son can, and they cannot and will not without your keeping of the commandments. The commandments being, "**Love God and your neighbor as yourself.**" **Knowing the living God is the way to eternal life.** What are His rewards for obedience to do with me? I have to be close to Him for yourself!

## **Trusting Riches**

As for us trusting our riches, who could imagine eternal life earned by their riches? No man, half-aware, with half a brain, and perhaps no heart at all, could assume that in trusting his riches, he could enter the kingdom. That would be totally absurd! The rich hope that their wealth is a sign of God's favor, and that favor will not fail him in the end. Or, their riches so blind them that they cannot even think of themselves as being lost!

**Do you forget who you are? Are you questioning the Lord's own words? He said, "How hard is it 'for them that trust in riches' to enter into the kingdom of heaven!" I am not assuming something here concerning my perspective. To this very point, I have led you. I believe Jesus never said those words. The interpretation of the oldest manuscripts read, "Children, how hard is it to enter into the kingdom of God!" These I believe to be the words of Jesus.**

Some scribe, a copyist that translated with the mind of a rich man who was unhappy with the Lord's view of money. Perhaps, like you or me he was ready to soften the blow. Added this slight additional wording, this diversion from its impact. This change, having the effect of redefining the intended meaning. **The slight of hand here is that it is not the possession of riches, but the trusting in them, that is the issue. Is it the trust that makes it difficult to enter the kingdom? Because it is impossible for those, who trust in riches to enter the kingdom!** Though impossible with man, is this possible with God? Can God take the Mammon-worshipper into his glory? No! The Lord never spoke of trust, just riches.

This addition by Mr. Haveitbothway's crept into the text and still stands in most versions. Jesus was not in the habit of explaining away His hard words. He lets them stand within his consuming fire to purge us! The light in which their simplicity plainly speaks for themselves. The divided heart still tries to justify itself!

**It is hard for a rich man, just because he is rich, to enter the kingdom!**

Some that are rich will think that because it is so hard, this fact will be taken into consideration. The rich are so used to preferential treatment. The wealthy can only assume that as they enjoyed things here, they will enjoy them there. **It is Life they must have; there is no enduring existence without it. They think they can do without eternal life if only they can live forever! Those who know what eternal life means would not live forever without it!**

Take Jesus' words directly, "Children, how hard is it to enter into the kingdom of God!" This is just like how He reveals everything. First, pointing them to the difficulty "every" man has. Then building on it, adding the more significant problem of riches. "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to go to heaven." It always was, always will be, hard to enter the kingdom. **It is also hard to believe that we must be born from above. That is embracing a new and unknown awareness: the law-keeping Jew and the Sunday Christian recoil from this kind of self-annihilation. The religious shrink from the life of grace and truth, knowing nothing of the clear air of heavenly joy. This love that fulfills the commandments and renders them useless. They cannot accept a condition of being, in itself, as eternal life.**

How hard is it to enter the simplicity of this full life? It is as hard as Jesus could find the words to express its hardness. "If a man comes to me, and does not hate...even his own life, he cannot be my disciple." The wealthy finding it even harder to hate their own lives. There is so much pride of self in their consciousness. The realization of this difficulty in casting aside their self as a mere ugly shadow compared to the self-God has made, is vastly increased.

No one can know how difficult it is to enter the kingdom except those who have tried, tried hard, and are still trying. I don't care for the teaching that you can obtain at once the full sweetness of assurance. I do not desire assurance, but life itself. Nor do I seek the certainty of eternal life. I don't care what preachers say. Paul said the spirit and the flesh are in constant conflict.

I repeat, only those who are in conflict every day, know how hard it is to enter into life. Those progressing to every hour and are beginning to live in it every moment. Those depending on God's presence that makes them strong. Let anyone testify of peace, contentment, and unspeakable joy as the result of the new birth. I don't deny such a statement or refuse such a testimony. **I only want to clarify that if they view salvation as anything less than oneness with God, then I count it as no salvation at all. Nor would I be content with it if it included every joy of our best imagining.**

**If we are not righteous, even as He is righteous, we are not saved. No matter one's gladness or contentment. We are only on the way to salvation!**

## **Tyranny of Things**

Possessions are Things, and things in general, whether obtained by conquest or by means of spiritual appropriation, are always ready to prove harmful to a better life. **The one who depends on anything for their well-being other than divine life is a slave, depending on something that is less than himself.** He is imperfect, who, could not be calm and content, knowing he has lost nothing of value. Who, as a child of God, is the possessor of everything of worth!

**Things are given to help us, our bodies being the first of them. These are tools for our education so that we will learn to be independent and free of them. We must own them; they must not own us.** Their use is to indirectly connect the lower earthly things to the higher unseen things. They mediate spiritual matters, not of the noisy visible world, but the silent world of being. The unshaken, spiritual world must remain.

The unseen taking form in time and space, not that they may exist, but those that already exist in God used for our training. That which the children of God will possess. Instead of reaching out for the

eternal, we grasp at the earthly. Regarding the physical, as things they must have, falling in love with their material forms instead of their immortal souls.

**Some good people can't believe that if the youth had agreed to give up his wealth the Lord would not have told him to keep it. Thinking Jesus cared more about the decision than the obedience, they believe the treasure in heaven insufficient in the exchange. They cannot imagine he would be better off without his wealth.** "Is not wealth power?" It is, in fact, a power just like a wolf hidden in a sheep disguise. It is the savage power of a force that the possessor has no idea how to manage or control. The majority of those who read this story agree with the youth and are like him in his worst moment of turning away. Like him, but with one huge difference. They are not sorrowful.

**Things cannot be safely possessed by people who cannot do without them. People who would not be completely content in the awareness that their origin of being is with Them and in Them. Let me make this clear. No one can have the presence of God with him, and not find contentment in this alone. Without this eternal contentment, he can possess nothing freely.** We cannot be in a loving relationship as God would have us be in the everlasting way of inheriting, loving, and holding.

He who has God has everything, everything the way He intended you to have it. To every man, woman, and child, I say, "If you are not content, it is because God is not with you in the way you were designed to be. Not with you as He wants to be, as you must have Him. You need Him as your very body ever needed food or air. Or, your souls ever hungered after joy, peace or pleasure."

## Things in Death

We must rid ourselves of the tyranny of things, realizing how powerful they are. If the youth continues to cling to his wealth, God will do what He can to liberate him from the hell of his possessions!

Is the youth freed from the dominion of things? Does Death help him - release him?

Not so! But first, I believe, a man of wealth must become aware of their tyranny. When the man learns to restrain himself, then he realizes the power of his passion. **He may need to lose everything before he knows the power things have over him. If later, he begins to deal with them, rejecting them from his soul as death has torn them from his hands. Then, for the first time, will he understand the full power of possessions. Understanding the slavery of loving the worthless part of the precious.**

So, where lies the benefit of Death? Death takes the sting, but leaves the poison!

In this it is not the chains of bitterness, but the chains of comfort, which eat into his soul. When his chains of gold are gone, those on which he delighted, the very ones that held him to his dungeon wall, buried far from air and sunshine. Then, he will feel the first lack of them. Realizing the indifference with which he sees the beauty of the ordinary, the earth, sea, and stars.

**When truth dawns, exposing the horror and disgrace of his chains, then will the good of saving death appear. Then the man begins to understand that "having", never was and never could be, well-being. He understands it is not by possessing that we live, but in the Life he possesses.** In the loss of things he thought he had. He takes this slight movement, in favor of, but only barely towards his deliverance. This movement reveals his first awareness of slavery — the beginnings of his freedom. **A soul can never be**

**free without first feeling his slavery. Nothing but himself can enslave his soul. Nothing without his participation can free him!**

## **Death as Freedom**

Likewise, when the drunkard free from his body, but unable to indulge begins to think. A fragile hope will begin to dawn on him. He is saved from an eternity of unrewarded alcoholism. Freed through the power of God combined with his own obedient effort. Freed into a condition, perhaps still tempted, but not bound any longer.

**Thus, death may give a new opportunity. New hope for a multitude calling themselves Christians. Those who are possessed by things as by a legion of devils. Those who are in good standing with their churches. Whose lives are regarded as stainless? Those who are kind, friendly, give significantly, and believe in the redemption of Jesus? Who speak of the world and the church with passion? Yet, whose goal is to have more, to make more into wealth, to add houses and cars. They are burying themselves deeper and deeper into the ash-heap of Things!**

**Let's remember it is not only the rich who are under the power of things. The poor can be slaves to it as well. Having no money and are unhappy with the lack of it.** The one who is ever digging his grave is little better than the one already lying in it. The money the one has that the other wants, are in either case, the cause of spiritual stupidity. To both comes the same word, "How is it you do not understand?"

## **CLIFFNOTES WITH ORIGINAL MACDONALD QUOTES**

To the man born to riches they seem not merely a natural, but an essential condition of well-being; and the man who has made his money, feels it his by the labour of his soul, the travail of the day, and the care of the night. Each feels a right to have and to hold the things he possesses;

### **Wealthy People**

They little think that without perfection there is no salvation—that perfection is salvation: they are one.—

When you have come to know that the law can be kept only by such as need no law; when you have come to feel that you would rather pass out of being than live on such a poor, miserable, selfish life as alone you can call yours; when you are aware of a something beyond all that your mind can think, yet not beyond what your heart can desire—a something that is not yours, seems as if it never could be yours, which yet your life is worthless without; when you have come therefore to the Master

The knowledge of the living God is eternal life.

### **Trusting Riches**

You forget yourself; you are criticizing the Lord's own words: he said, "How hard is it for them that trust in riches to enter into the kingdom of heaven!" I do not forget myself; to this I have been leading you:—our Lord, I believe, never said those words. The reading of both the Sinaitic and the Vatican manuscript, the oldest two we have, that preferred, I am glad to see, by both Westcott and Tischendorf, though not by Tregelles or the Revisers, is, "Children, how hard is it to enter into the kingdom of God!" These words I take to be those of the Lord.

To the effect that it is not the possessing of riches, but the trusting in them, that makes it difficult to enter into the kingdom! Difficult? Why, it is eternally impossible for the man who trusts in his riches to enter into the kingdom! it is for the man who has riches it is difficult. Is the Lord supposed to teach that for a man who trusts in his riches it is possible to enter the kingdom?

It is hard for a rich man, just because he is a rich man, to enter into the kingdom of heaven.

It is life they must have; there is no enduring of existence without life. They think they can do without eternal life, if only they may live for ever!

It always was, always will be, hard to enter into the kingdom of heaven. It is hard even to believe that one must be born from above—must pass into a new and unknown consciousness. The law-faithful Jew, the ceremonial Christian, shrinks from the self-annihilation, the Life of grace and truth, the upper air of heavenly delight, the all-embracing love that fills the law full and sets it aside. They cannot accept a condition of being as in itself eternal life.

All I care to say is, that, if by salvation they mean less than absolute oneness with God, I count it no salvation, neither would be content with it if it included every joy in the heaven of their best imagining.

If they are not righteous even as he is righteous, they are not saved, whatever be their gladness or their content; they are but on the way to be saved.

### **Tyranny of Things**

The man who for consciousness of well-being depends upon anything but life, the life essential, is a slave; he hangs on what is less than himself.

Things are given us, this body first of things, that through them we may be trained both to independence and true possession of them. We must possess them; they must not possess us.

There are good people who can hardly believe that, if the young man had consented to give up his wealth, the Lord would not then have told him to keep it; they too seem to think the treasure in heaven insufficient as a substitute. They cannot believe he would have been better off without his wealth.

Things can never be really possessed by the man who cannot do without them—who would not be absolutely, divinely content in the consciousness that the cause of his being is within it—and with him. I would not be misunderstood: no man can have the consciousness of God with him and not be content; I mean that no man who has not the Father so as to be eternally content in him alone, can possess a



sunset or a field of grass or a mine of gold or the love of a fellow-creature according to its nature—as God would have him possess it

### **Things in Death**

It may be, when a man has not a thing left, he will begin to know what a necessity he had made of things; and if then he begin to contend with them, to cast out of his soul what Death has torn from his hands, then first will he know the full passion of possession, the slavery of prizing the worthless part of the precious.

When the truth begins to dawn upon him that those fetters were a horror and a disgrace, then will the good of saving death appear, and the man begin to understand that having never was, never could be well-being; that it is not by possessing we live, but by life we possess.

Never soul was set free without being made to feel its slavery; nothing but itself can enslave a soul, nothing without itself free it.

### **Death as Freedom**

Thus death may give a new opportunity—with some hope for the multitude counting themselves Christians, who are possessed by things as by a legion of devils; who stand well in their church; whose lives are regarded as stainless; who are kind, friendly, give largely, believe in the redemption of Jesus, talk of the world and the church; yet whose care all the time is to heap up, to make much into more, to add house to house and field to field, burying themselves deeper and deeper in the ash-heap of Things.

But it is not the rich man only who is under the dominion of things; they too are slaves who, having no money, are unhappy from the lack of it.