

THE RICH YOUNG RULER, WHO LOST A CHANCE FOR INVESTMENT

(Second Radio sermon by Rev. W. Edmund Smith.)

Text: And he went away grieved. Mark 10:22

Jesus had been blessing the little children that fond mothers had brought to Him. He had taken them up in his arms and breathed upon them His heavenly benediction. It was a beautiful sight, the crowd had gathered around and in that crowd stood a rich young ruler, in whose heart was surging the question of eternal destiny. Jesus had gone on his way, when suddenly that young man broke from the crowd and running came to Jesus, kneeled at his feet and asked the all-important question, "Good master, what must I do that I may inherit eternal life?"

Jesus quoted to him the commandments. One by one he named them. "Do not commit adultery, do not kill, do not bear false witness against thy neighbor". We are interested in that young man's reply.

There were several compromising replies he might have made that would be fairly satisfactory to many. He might have said, "Good Master I have all these commandments indelibly fixed in my mind. I learned them at a school of religious instruction when a child, and I repeat them every day."

Some of us would say, "That is very good. He certainly has a good foundation for ethical development and moral deportment. Let us take him in on probation to encourage him. We can lead him on to spiritual reality later".

Or that young man might have replied; "Master, I am sorry to say that my life for many years was wild and reckless. I broke nearly every one of those commandments. But I am also happy to say, that more than a year ago, on a New Year's eve, I turned over a new leaf; I completely reformed, and from that day to this I have conscientiously kept all of these commandments, what lack I yet?"

Some of us would be inclined to say, "This young man has a good morality of a year's standing. He seems to mean business. Let us take him in, and his morality will soon become tinged with a spiritual emotion".

Or he might have said, "Master, I have kept all these commandments from my youth up save one. I know that this is an important one to us Jews, 'Honor thy father'. But Master if you knew what a domineering tyrannical and irascible man my father is; if you knew (and I whisper it in shame) what a dishonorable man he is, you would judge me leniently in this matter."

And some of us would be inclined to say, "If his father were not worthy of honor, how could the son render him honor? The responsibility is upon the father and not on the son. Take him in and all will be well."

But this young man made none of these compromising answers. He looked up into the clear eyes of the Christ, and without a quiver in voice or a blush upon his cheek replied, "All these commandments have I kept from my youth up, what lack I yet?"

Jesus looking upon him loved him. Who would not love such a young man, so kingly in his moral purity; so clean and wholesome in his character! He was no mere catechumenn; he was no reformed rake; he was no selective anarchist. His morality was far reaching and well established. There seemed to be no weak spot in his armor.

Most of us would have said, "Swing wide the door take him in Master. No probation for

this young man. The church needs such as he. We need him on the official board. We need him as Superintendent of our Sunday School. We need him on our pulpit supply committee, to go to Conference and tell them the kind of preacher the church will need next year. There is plenty of room in the church for a young man like this."

They tell us that one of the rules of good angling is, that when you get a fine fish on your line—a trout or a salmon—you must use great skill and judgment in playing your fish. You must let out and take in according to the movements of the fish. To jerk the rod violently would mean disaster. It would break either the slender pole, the line or the hook, and away would go the fish, wounded and never to rise to the fly again.

And so in spiritual angling; they tell us that we must be very tactful and cautious when a person approaches us with questions relative to spiritual desire and need. We must put the rugged and the more severe aspects before them, telling them of what they are going to lose; we must put the pleasing side out and tell them what they are going to gain. We must give them the milk before giving them the meat; we must teach them to creep and to walk before we expect them to run.

Now this is good advice. The inspired writer said to his converts, "I have fed you with milk and not with meat, for ye were not able to bear it, neither yet now are ye able". Jesus also said on one occasion, "I have many things to say unto you but ye are not able to bear them".

But Jesus on this occasion used no caution. He did not say "Young man you are the one I have been looking for. Come in, we need you to give tone and color to our little band. Every one of these has a black mark against him somewhere. They have all confessed to me and have had it straightened out."

No! Jesus knew the secret idol of that young man's heart. He took the cross and placed it before his eyes and said, "if thou wilt be perfect, go sell all that thou hast and give to the poor and come and follow me."

And the sad sight we have is, to see that young man who had come to Jesus so voluntarily, for nobody had tried to drag him to the altar. He had come so enthusiastically, even running to Jesus: He had come so devoutly, kneeling at Jesus' feet, confessing his own inferiority and need. He had come so enquiringly, asking the question without any beating about the bush; and yet when the test came, he arose and went away sorrowful. He went away peeved and angry at the unreasonable conditions Jesus had required for discipleship. Not the first nor the last that has been offended at the narrowness of the way, and the offence of the Cross.

But you may ask, "Did Jesus really expect that young man to literally carry out his command to sell all and give to the poor"? I do not know. Perhaps if he had replied, "Good Master, I have a great estate and am very rich, but I count my gain as loss. I will gladly sell all for the privilege of sitting at your feet and following with this band in the way of Life Eternal".

Had he thus spoken Jesus might have said, "Thou hast met my challenge well. Go back to your estate, to your office, or your factory, and from now on reckon me as the owner of it all and you my steward. You have broken down the artificial barrier between the secular and the religious. You may be quite as spiritual in your office or your shop as you can be going up and down the country with us. I see that you love me more than you love your wealth, and I give

it back to you and you will have a keener appreciation of it than you ever have had."

It is just like Jesus to do this. Time and again he has called one to a complete consecration, the yielding up of business and all, then has given the whole thing back again to be used for the glory of God. I know a fine man in Central New York—a farmer with a lovely farm splendidly equipped. He was the raiser of registered Holstein stock and was making a fine success of his business. He was an elder in a certain church, and held the confidence of the entire community as a Christian man. But new light came to him and he longed for the baptism of the Holy Spirit that would make him a vessel unto honor, sanctified and meet for the master's use. For days he sought at an altar of prayer, but all the time the Spirit of God seemed to be putting his hand on the farm and cattle saying "Lovest thou me more than these?" Finally in anguish of heart he cried "Lord thou canst have them all. I will sell them and do what you want me to do." He went to his home and told his wife that he meant to sell out. She cried and said, "It will mean the poorhouse for us". "Anything", he replied, "so long as it is the will of God".

Needless to say the baptism soon came, and with it came the revelation that God was pleased with his consecration. He sent that man back to his farm to carry it on more successfully than ever, and with a larger satisfaction. Not till you and I have yielded our all to Jesus do we really enjoy what we have. If a fire devoured that farmer's barn, he would be immediately reconciled, for the barn belonged to God. If tuberculosis broke out in the herd, they were God's cattle, and the whole thing had been settled back there at the time of consecration. It is thus God's true child has the victory before the test comes.

But if Jesus had required this young man to literally carry out the command, what of it? What an opportunity Jesus was offering him to make an investment in life! He might have become one of the most illustrious of all the early followers of Jesus. He might have written an epistle as deep in its philosophy and as gripping in its spirituality as that of Romans. He might have written a Gospel as beautiful as that of Luke: He might have gone up and down the land organizing churches finally following in the train of Jesus as a martyr for the faith. He might have been numbered with the immortals. His name might have been as familiar to us as that of Peter, James, John or Paul. His messages might have been feeding our souls today with their spiritual inspiration. But he comes to us as the unknown one. He has a most ignoble immortality.

But he had to go back to his old associates, and I can imagine that they were ready to meet him with their humorous jibes and sneers. I can imagine one saying, "You are back are you! You didn't stay long on your preaching excursion. We thought we had lost you, and that you had gone with that strange preacher and his shabby band."

Now was the time that the blush came to his cheek. I can imagine him making his excuse. "Yes it is hard for my friends to understand my actions, recently. I was under an awful nervous depression that day; I was gloomy and sad. Life's outlook seemed most unpromising. And when I saw that Rabbi blessing the little children, he seemed so radiantly happy, and so open and sympathetic in his ministry, that I thought he might be able to do me good. So I went to him; but he had nothing for me. He attached too great importance to himself and his authority. Yes I have come back home; the doctor says that I need a rest; that I have been applying myself too con-