

Expository Tracts, No. 12.

THE RICH YOUNG MAN.

BEING

THOUGHTS ON MATT. XIX. 16–22.

BY THE

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THE RICH YOUNG MAN.

MATTHEW XIX. 16–22.

- 16 And, behold, one came and said unto him, Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life?
- 17 And he said unto him. Why callest thou me good? *there is none good but one, that is God*: but if thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments.
- 18 He saith unto him, Which? Jesus said, Thou shalt do no murder, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness,
- 19 Honour thy father and *thy* mother: and, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.
- 20 The young man saith unto him, All these things have I kept from my youth up: what lack I yet?
- 21 Jesus said unto him, If thou wilt be perfect, go *and* sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come *and* follow me.
- 22 But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful: for he had great possessions.

READER,

You have in these verses a conversation between our Lord Jesus Christ and a young man who came to Him to inquire about the way to eternal life. Like every conversation in the Gospels between our Lord and an individual, it deserves special attention. Salvation is a matter in which every one must act for himself. Every one who wishes to be saved must have private personal dealings with Christ about his own soul.

1. You see, for one thing, from the case of this young man, *that a person may have desires after salvation, and yet not be saved*. Here is one who in a day of abounding unbelief comes of his own accord to Christ. He comes not to have a sickness healed; he comes not to plead about a child: he comes about his own soul. He opens the conference with the frank question, “Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life?” Surely, you might have thought, “This is a promising case: this is no prejudiced ruler or Pharisee: this is a hopeful inquirer.” Yet by and by this very young man “goes away sorrowful;”—and you never read a word to show that he was converted!

Reader, you must never forget that good feelings alone in religion are not the grace of God. You may know the truth intellectually; you may often feel pricked in conscience; you may have religious affections awakened within your heart, have many anxieties about your soul, and shed many tears: but all this is not conversion. It is not the genuine, saving work of the Holy Ghost.

Unhappily this is not all that must be said on this point. Not only are good feelings alone not grace, but they are even positively dangerous, if

you content yourselves with them, and do not *act* as well as *feel*. Actions often repeated produce a habit in man's mind; feelings often indulged, without leading to actions, will finally exercise no influence at all.

Reader, apply this lesson to your own state. Perhaps you know what it is to feel religious fears, wishes, and desires. Beware that you do not rest in them. Never be satisfied till you have the witness of the Spirit in your heart that you are actually born again, and made a new creature. Never rest till you know that you have really repented, and laid hold on Jesus Christ and the hope set before you in the Gospel. It is good to feel; but it is far better to be converted.

2. You see, for another thing, from this young man's case, *that an unconverted person is often profoundly ignorant on spiritual subjects*. Our Lord refers this inquirer to the eternal standard of right and wrong,—the moral law. Seeing that he spoke so boldly about “doing,” He tried him by a command well calculated to draw out the real state of his heart: “If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments.” He even repeated to him the second table of the law.—And at once the young man confidently replies, “All these have I kept from my youth up: what lack I yet?”—So utterly ignorant was he of the spirituality of God's statutes, that he never doubted that he had perfectly fulfilled them. He seemed thoroughly unaware that the commandments apply to the thoughts and words, as well as to the deeds, and that if God were to enter into judgment with him, he could “not answer Him one of a thousand.” (Job ix. 3.) How dark must his mind have been as to the nature of God's law! How low must his ideas have been as to the holiness which God requires!

It is a melancholy fact that ignorance, like that of this young man, is only too common in the Church of Christ. There are thousands of baptized people who know no more of the leading doctrines of Christianity than the veriest heathen. Tens of thousands fill churches and chapels weekly, who are utterly in the dark as to the full extent of man's sinfulness. They cling obstinately to the old notion, that in some sort or other their own doings can save them,—and when ministers visit them on their death-beds, they prove as blind as if they had never heard truth at all. So true is it, that the “natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him.” (1 Cor. ii. 14.)

Reader, what is the state of your own soul in the matter of spiritual knowledge? You go to church perhaps; you hear the commandments read; you profess to believe and obey them: but do you really know the length and breadth of their requirements? Oh, beware of spiritual ignorance! It is possible to have eyes and yet not to see.

3. You see, in the last place, from this young man's case, *that one idol cherished in the heart may ruin a soul for ever*. Our Lord, who knew what

was in man, at last shows His inquirer his besetting sin. The same searching voice which said to the Samaritan woman, "Go, call thy husband" (John iv. 16), said to the young man, "Go, sell that thou hast, and give to the poor." At once the weak point in his character was detected. It turned out that, with all his wishes and desires after eternal life, there was one thing he loved better than his soul, and that was his money. He could not stand the test. He was weighed in the balance and found wanting. And the history ends with the melancholy words, "He went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions."

You have in this history one more proof of the truth, "The love of money is the root of all evil." (1 Tim. vi. 10.) You must place this young man in your memory by the side of Judas, Ananias, and Sapphira, and learn to beware of covetousness. Alas, it is a rock on which thousands are continually making shipwreck! There is hardly a minister of the Gospel who could not point to many in his congregation, who, humanly speaking, are "not far from the kingdom of God." But they never seem to make progress. They wish, they feel, they mean, they hope: but there they stick fast! And why? Because they are fond of money.

Reader, prove your own self, as you leave the passage. See how it touches your own soul. Are you honest and sincere in your professed desire to be a true Christian? Have you given up your idols? Is there no secret sin that you are silently clinging to, and refusing to give up? Is there no thing or person that you are privately loving more than Christ and your soul? These are questions that ought to be answered. The true explanation of the unsatisfactory state of many hearers of the Gospel, is spiritual idolatry. St. John might well say, "Keep yourselves from idols." (1 John v. 21.)

Reader, if you want to be saved, seek first and foremost to be rich in grace. Ask the Lord Jesus Christ to give you "gold tried in the fire, that you may be rich." (Rev. iii. 18.) "Lay up for yourself treasure in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through and steal." (Matt. vi. 20.) This is the only treasure that endures for ever. The gold and silver of this world cannot be carried beyond the grave. The grace of God and the peace which Christ gives, are the only lasting possessions. He who has them will be rich for evermore; he who dies without them will be a pauper to all eternity.