

The Two Rich Men

Luke 18, 19.

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How beautifully the incidents recorded in the Evangelists exhibit the workings of nature and of grace. They are short and familiar, but full of matter for the meditation of our hearts that we may be either warned or comforted.

Uneasiness of conscience was goading the rich young ruler of Luke 18 to seek relief wherever it might be found. He loved the world and could not give it up; and yet he had religious apprehensions of a day of judgment, and owned the fact that there was a kingdom of God still to come. This is a common case. A calculating worldly heart with serious religious sentiments, all together working uneasiness in the soul. He was a sample of the thorny ground hearer. He would fain have both worlds, and yet was not so sure that he had the future world. And how could he? How could such a double-minded man be stable? How could a body, the eye of which was thus evil, be full of light? His uneasiness was goading him hither and thither, and in his waverings he seeks Jesus.

Can anything be more natural? He was not a reckless man of pleasure, but a religious calculating man of the world, who could deliberately weigh his own interests in time and eternity, and make them supreme in all his reckonings.

He was, with all this, of course nothing but an old bottle. The new wine is therefore spilt; The doctrine of Christ is lost upon him. He goes away a lover of the world as he had come, for the love of money keeps him apart from Jesus and thus outside the kingdom of God.

The Lord draws the simplest moral from this incident. "How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God." The disciples however are amazed at this and say, "Who then can be saved?" And Jesus answers, "The things which are impossible with men are possible with God." These last words are much to be noted.

It is the way of the Spirit in Luke to group together matters for moral instruction, making that much rather his end than mere accuracy of historic time and place. After a short interval from the time of the case of the rich ruler, according to this his usual method, as I have said, Luke gives us the case of the rich publican, Zaccheus of Jericho,

They were both rich. This is a common characteristic. And up to this moment they may have had much more in common; but from this out, as far as we learn of them, they are separated for ever.

Solemn thought! but a thought suggested by every day's experience.

Zaccheus is not under the goading of a natural conscience. Nothing of this appears in his present movement. His path was under the drawings of the Father, for he seeks Jesus. (John 6.) It was the secret effectual drawing and teaching of the Father, and not the goad of an uneasy conscience, that was determining his present path. This was so, as we have said, because it lay toward Jesus; as He says Himself, "every one that hath heard and hath learnt of the Father cometh unto me." And that path really leading to Jesus as really led away from the world. For Zaccheus was now travelling a road which nature and the spirit of the world would never have taken. He forgets himself on this journey. He was no longer the rich publican of Jericho. The young ruler, on the contrary, had never forgotten his riches.

But wealthy and important as Zaccheus was, all that is now forgotten, and through the crowd he passes, and up the tree he makes his way, careless of every cost if he may but see the Lord.

Very beautiful this. Here is an incident, as I said, exhibiting the working of grace: so the former had done the working of nature.

And the end of these workings is as different as the path itself. He lays his wealth at the feet of the Lord, while the ruler had gone away, full-handed as he came.*

*It was the exercise of soul in this young man, I believe, which made the Lord love him. (Mark 10: 21.) [I question this, Ed.] For He hoped it was genuine and would end in life and fruitfulness. (See 1 Cor. 13: 7.) But this shows how the Lord values the exercises of the soul.

For Zaccheus was "a new bottle." He keeps the new wine. Both are preserved. The wine is not spilt, the bottle is not burst. The drawing of the Father had led the soul, and the doctrine of the Son fills it.

Here was a living witness of what the Lord had said, "the things which are impossible with man are possible with God." For here was a rich man entering the kingdom, because he was not under the mere impulse of the conscience — that could never have done it — but under the conduct of God Himself; the teachings and drawings of the Father.

What a volume of holy instruction opens to us here!

And I doubt not that the case of these two rich men suggests some principal features in the parable that follows, "the nobleman that goes into the far country." The parable itself is suggested by another circumstance, as we learn (Luke 19), but some of the features of it arise hence, as I have said.

For in the unprofitable servant we see a picture of the young ruler, and in the other servants we see Zaccheus. The moral difference between them is this: the unprofitable servant religiously owns the seriousness of a day of judgment and of reckoning, and is careful for his own sake, to provide, as he judges, against it. He lays up his Lord's pound in a napkin, dreading the account he may hereafter have to make of it. But this is all. He has no heart for Christ or His service at all — but having saved himself, as he hoped, against the results of a day of reckoning, he goes forth and spends his activities on himself, or for his own interests. And such an one was the young ruler — he feared judgment, but had no heart for Christ, serving himself in the world.

The other servants had no calculations about judgment at all, but they thought about their Lord and His kingdom. It was their Lord who gave impulse to their activities. They set *His* service before them when they went forth to do business, they took *His* talent with them, and not their own. That is, they traded in the world for Him and not for themselves. Altogether the opposite of the unprofitable servant this was. The Lord's talent was not left at home, but carried abroad. Whatever was done by these servants was done for Christ, and not for themselves, whether it was more or less. And such an one was Zaccheus. He looked on his goods and with full purpose of heart used them for his Lord, either by restitution or by alms-deeds serving His glory in the world.