



LESSON IX.—AUGUST 26, 1906.

The Rich Young Ruler.

Luke xviii., 1-14.

Golden Text.

If any man will come after me let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.—Matt. xvi., 24.

Home Readings.

Monday, August 20.—Mark x., 17-31.
 Tuesday, August 21.—Mark x., 2-16.
 Wednesday, August 22.—Mark x., 32-45.
 Thursday, August 23.—Rom. xiii., 1-14.
 Friday, August 24.—Deut. v., 28-6; 9.
 Saturday, August 25.—Matt. xix., 16-30.
 Sunday, August 26.—Luke xviii., 18-30.

(By Davis W. Clark.)

A special, though sad, interest attaches to all the incidents of Jesus' last journey to Jerusalem. He had healed the lepers and blessed the children, and now, almost under shadow of His cross, in point of time only four weeks removed, comes this subtlest of interviews with the rich young president of some synagogue.

The man was like one thoroughly incased in armor. Every piece was burnished with diligence and disposed for effect. He stood panoplied cap-a-pie. But beneath all this splendid, impregnable, moving fortress lurked a disquiet spirit, that felt itself not quite secure in spite of all, else he would never have come to the Nazarene rabbi.

Jesus just condescends to enter the lists, and tilt and foil with this knight of legality on his own ground and by his own methods. First of all, He will bring him, with all his boasted goodness, face to face with the absolute goodness of God. He adroitly puts a significance upon the hollow term of polite address which the user of it never dreamed of. In the blazing light of Divine perfection the vaunted armor of self-righteousness is sadly dimmed.

But since the inquirer will be perfect by his own exertion, Jesus holds before him the unyielding, flinty table of the law, and cries, 'Do and live!' The legalist, thinking only of the letter, could say, 'I have kept it.' Yet spite of this vaunted literal obedience, there is a dread sense of insecurity.

The Master knew all the while the weak spot in his brave and glittering armor. He has only been toying with and testing His opponent so far. Now He brings His lance to rest to make the deadly thrust. 'Sell all, and give all!' 'If you really want the treasure of heaven, give up the treasure of earth.'

Gossner quaintly says 'a man may pledge and stake his head a hundred times, but if one were to proceed to take it from him, he would feel for the first time how it sticks to him.' In the dread concussion of Jesus' word the rich young magistrate realized for the first time how he was wedded to his wealth. It was as much a part of him as his head was. He would as soon have parted with the one as the other.

Jesus was holding up with steady hand the first table of the law that required a supreme love of God which would expel any idol. In the flashing light of that divinely-engraved Sinaitic tablet the ruler discovered that Mammon filled his whole heart. The revelation was thorough. Not a word needed to be added. Equivocation was impossible. A heart was revealed to itself. It found itself destitute of the very essence of religion—supreme love of God.

Crucial moment that! The compass-

needle of a soul wavered between heaven and hell. Alas! alas! when in a moment it came to rest, it pointed steadily toward perdition. What a loss! The dread unrest, extreme enough to bring this man of high rank to the despised Galilean; and to bring him, not like Nicodemus, but in the most public place and manner. That unrest might have been instantly removed by the absolute assurance of a happy immortality. Riches held by frail tenure—wealth, the sport of the natural elements and standing temptation to human rapacity, were then and there deliberately preferred to treasure laid up where moth and rust do not corrupt, and where thieves do not break through and steal.

No wonder the Master-teacher availed Himself of such a didactic incident. He quotes the proverbial description of the impossible to indicate the extreme difficulty of a happy outcome to this and similar instances. As easily could their largest domestic animal pass through the smallest orifice with which they were familiar, as a rich man enter heaven. He will not enter at all except by means of that regenerating grace which enables him to break the enchanting spell of mammon and love God with a supreme affection.

ANALYSIS AND KEY.

1. A Subtle Interview.
Meaning of universal application.
2. A Knight of Legality: The Young Ruler.
Disquiet spirit leads to Jesus.
An impetuous inquirer.
3. Condescension of Jesus.
Meets on his own ground.
Uses his own methods.
4. Relative Goodness Made to Face Absolute Goodness.
5. The Legalist Bidden to 'Do and Live.'
Referred to the law.
6. Obedience Averred.
Jesus' admiration for ingenuousness.
7. The Weak Spot Touched Last.
Crucial command: 'Sell and give.'
Self-revelation.
Lordship of Mammon recognized.
8. Failure in Final Test.
9. Jesus' Caution Against Undue Love of Wealth.

THE TEACHER'S LANTERN.

Alas! the genus of the rich young ruler is not yet extinct. The world contains as many, if not more, moralists, than ever. The refrain still greets our ears, 'All these have I kept.' They are on the best of terms with the Ten Commandments.

Under bold front, however, disquiet vents itself in the query, 'What lack I yet?' There is conscious deficiency. If an iota is wanting, all is lost; for how shall an imperfect morality effect a perfect salvation? Cause must equal effect.

Morality seeks to fortify itself with added works—'Some bold stroke of righteousness, some grand supererogation.' But what do these amount to when the very source of these is evil? They spring from love of self, not love of God.

Morality fails in the crucial test of a complete surrender to God. All the legal doings of a lifetime did not empower the young man to lift his eyes to heaven and cry, 'Even so, Father; for thus it seemeth good in Thy sight.'

Where morality fails, grace succeeds. The thing impossible to man (in a state of nature), is possible to man when God works in him to will and to do of his good pleasure.

Size of a bank account, amount of real estate, bonds, and stocks, is not the question. But attitude of the heart—that is the test. If a voice should sound from heaven, 'Sell all and give all,' are these material things held so lightly that compliance with that hypothetical voice would be possible?

Nay, have these things already been sur-

rendered to God? Are they held in trust for Him? Is the principle of Christian stewardship recognized and lived up to?

Touchstone for all, not rich alone, is here. The poor may be as ardently attached to the wealth they covet as the rich to that they actually possess.

Not dollar out of pocket, but grace in heart, is what God wants. What are our worldly things to the Proprietor of the universe? Moral qualities of the soul are more precious to Him than rivers of oil or cattle on a thousand hills. A literal surrender would have been nothing apart from the spirit in which it was made.

One Greek word for sin signifies, literally, 'To miss the mark.' One as certainly misses it by falling short of it as by going beyond it. Failure in supreme love to God is as certainly sin as actual transgression of the law.

Is it small matter that we fall short in our love for that Being who, above all others, should have the supreme affection of every rational soul? He has created, preserved, redeemed? Such love for Him is the very essence of religion.

One may speak with tongue of men and angels, and have gift of prophecy, and understand mysteries and knowledge, and have mountain-moving faith. One may literally do what Jesus required of the rich young ruler, and even suffer martyrdom in addition; yet if all this could be conceived of as being done without a supreme love of God, it would be profitless, and as meaningless as a clanging cymbal.

Think you the Saviour's test extreme in its severity? Providence is yet daily applying it. Call to ministry, call to philanthropy, halt in amassing wealth to disperse it as an almoner of God—this is Jesus saying yet, 'Sell and give!'

Pity the sorry plight of the rich young ruler. Yes! But have a care we are not in the same plight ourselves. The natural man is so ready to exclaim, 'Anything but that, Lord.' Rest assured the Searcher of Hearts will never lay His hand on anything short of the idol, and nothing but the new birth will enable us to surrender it.

C. E. Topic.

Sunday, Aug. 26.—Topic—Home missions among our island possessions. Isa. xlii., 1-12.

Junior C. E. Topic.**TEMPERANCE MEETING.**

Monday, August 20.—Benhadad and Ahab. I. Kings xx., 1-9.

Tuesday, August 21.—Benhadad's threat. I. Kings xx., 10.

Wednesday, August 22.—Ahab's answer. I. Kings xx., 11.

Thursday, August 23.—Benhadad's feast. I. Kings xx., 12.

Friday, August 24.—God's promise. I. Kings xx., 13-15.

Saturday, August 25.—Erring through strong drink. Isa. xviii., 7.

Sunday, August 26.—Topic—The story of Benhadad. I. Kings xx., 16-21.

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