

## The Supreme Refusal: the Rich Young Ruler

By  
Rev. H. P. Robinson

*“And he was sad at that saying, and went away grieved: for he had great possessions.”  
(Mark 10:22)*

[Editor’s note: Preached at the Greenville Camp Meeting in May 1953 and at the East Virginia Camp Meeting in July 1953.]

The right thing in the world is to come to Jesus in the right way for the right thing at the right time in the right spirit. The story of the rich young ruler is one of the saddest, most regrettable pictures to come down to us from the Bible past. When Jesus passed up and down Palestine, he met and interviewed people from every strata of society. He met a cross section of people from every walk of life.

Their reactions to his invitation to follow was typical of human society ever since. Most people for one reason or another had an excuse for not following Jesus. Too few people then and now choose the broad road that leads to hell instead of the narrow one that leads to life eternal.

The man in Samaria wanted to first bury his father. One wanted to say “goodbye” to his kin folks. Another refused because the way was not convenient. One said he had bought a piece of ground and needed to inspect it. Another had bought a yoke of oxen and needed to take them out for a test drive. Yet another had married a wife and could not leave her. The people of Nazareth rejected him because of his lowly birth and poor upbringing in their midst. Others would not follow because he was from Nazareth.

The case of the young ruler is the most pathetic of them all. He did the right thing; he came to Jesus. He went to the right place – to the feet of Jesus. He chose the right time

– when Jesus was interested in him. He came in the right way – with honest questions. But he did not come in the right spirit; he loved his possessions more than he loved the Christ.

To all outward appearances, he was a fine young man. But in the presence of Jesus, he was shocked to learn the price he would have to pay. In the presence of Christ is the place for any man to see himself more clearly. It is there that men get the right appraisal of their worth. It is there that men see themselves as God sees them. It is only there that a man sees himself undone and lost without God.

### **The Way this Man came to Jesus**

1. He came publicly, courageously.

Not like Nicodemus who came in the night. Instead, he ran out in the street in the sight of everyone – a ruler of the Jews – putting his social and religious standing in jeopardy. He was not ashamed – ashamed of reproach is a cause that keeps many away from Jesus. He was courageous – a lack of moral courage keeps many away from Christ because they fear the criticism of the crowd.

2. He came eagerly – running to Jesus.

The greatest sight on earth is to see a man, woman, boy or girl running to Jesus. The high water mark of the chief of parables is when the prodigal son goes home to his father. The thrilling picture of the Samaritan outcast running to Jesus brings tears of joy to the eyes.

When we see a young man come running, we rejoice because he offers most of the years of his life to Christ.

When we see an old man come running, though the odds are against him and his sun is sinking, his chances almost gone, yet he is getting in before it is too late.

When we see a moral man running to Jesus, we rejoice because he can be used of God instantly. He has little baggage to hold him back.

When we see a wicked man running to Jesus, we rejoice because the wicked will cease his wandering. God will redeem his past and use his testimony to reach others caught in the same traps.

When we see an afflicted man, whether from sin or sickness, running to Jesus, we glory in his surrender of everything – his anger, his sorrow, his self-pity, his hopelessness – that Christ may now use his condition to show the power of God.

When we see a rich man running to Jesus, we rejoice because his resources and his talents can now be dedicated to the kingdom.

When we see a poor man running to Jesus, we rejoice because he who has nothing now has everything and an inheritance greater than the richest man on earth.

3. He came humbly – kneeling in submission.

Some are proud and conceited and will not humble themselves under the mighty hand of God. Others refuse to be identified with God's good people and never get in. Humility is a necessary virtue that unlocks the door to the kingdom to the potential seeker.

4. He came respectfully – calling Jesus "Good Master"

He recognized goodness and holiness and was respectful in the presence of it. In the presence of deity, he was reverent.

5. He came with a question – the most soul-searching question of the ages: what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?

He had done a lot already. His had been an almost perfect record, yet he felt that

there was something else that must be done. He felt that somewhere, somehow, he had missed the mark. He felt that he had found a man in Jesus who could tell him where he had lost his way. I visited a woman in the hospital once who was like this man. She was a good, moral person who had been a church member for 28 years, but she had never been born again. Like this woman, the young man had lived up to all he knew to do and all he had been taught. It is a popular idea today that it doesn't matter what you believe so long as you are sincere in your belief. But, my friend, you can be sincerely wrong.

Jesus called his attention to the law and the young man's response: "All these have I kept from my youth." He is not boasting. He is simply stating the facts as he saw them and he is happy in his moral achievement. He felt some security on moral grounds. But Jesus introduced this man to his own heart. For the first time in his life, this young man confronted the love of his life, the thing that he placed above God. He learned with great regret that it takes more than humility, enthusiasm, desire, good works, and reverence to be a disciple of Jesus. He learned that it takes a change of heart and affection. Nothing and no one can be permitted to distract our love and affection for God. Jesus saw through his pretense and recognized that this young man loved his riches more than anything or anyone.

Standing there in the sight of all the people, heaven looked on and waited. There, under the penetrating eyes of Jesus, he made his choice. It was a hard choice because he wanted eternal life, and he wanted to follow Jesus. But he could not conquer his heart's attachment to his wealth. He turned away slowly and sorrowfully and left the presence of Christ. He chose the riches of this temporal life and squandered the unimaginable eternal

wealth of his heavenly inheritance. He forfeited the security of his soul for stability during his brief sojourn on earth.

Inheriting eternal life is a matter of trusting in God.

Trusting that Jesus can and will save.

Trusting that the blood of Jesus has the power to cover sin.

Trusting that no man comes to the Father except through the sacrifice of Jesus.

Trusting that eternal life is the reward of the faithful and that it far exceeds the wealth of this world.

How is this possible? As the rich young ruler walked away, Jesus said to his disciples: “With men it is impossible, but not with God: for with God all things are possible.”