

A SOUL'S SUICIDE

Mark 10:17-22

As Christ was approaching Jerusalem for the last time the incident occurred which is recorded in this graphic story that is so rich in thought and practical in instruction, and which challenges our attention now. It is one of the most intensely interesting and appealing, and yet one of the most tragically sorrowful, stories recorded in the four Gospels.

In this narrative we are given a picture of a spiritual suicide, which is far worse than physical suicide.

I. A Striking Ruler.

Of all those who came face to face with Christ while He was here in the flesh, none was more winsome than he. Who he was, we are not told, but the succeeding generations have called him "The Rich Young Ruler".

As our Lord was leaving Perea this young man came hurriedly to Him. It is doubtful if any young man ever displayed brighter promise. He is one of the most fascinating characters in the entire New Testament. He seems to have had everything.

This young man was well-born. It is fine to have an excellent family tree, provided you are not constantly reminding somebody of it. It is well to remember that if anybody climbs high enough in any family tree he will find something hanging there that is not desirable.

This ruler was a striking personality. He was young. Youth is always interesting because it is the time of physical strength, mental acumen and spiritual acquisition. He faced life with shoulders unbent by burden-bearing, and with eyes undimmed either by years or by tears.

"How beautiful is youth! how bright it gleams
With its illusions, aspirations, dreams!
Book of beginnings, story without end,
Each maid a heroine, and each man a friend!"

Of all young people those of this generation have more opportunities, privileges, material possessions and means of achieving knowledge than God has ever entrusted to any generation. What science has wrought staggers our imagination. We can fly higher and faster, shoot harder and farther, dive deeper and longer, hear and see, produce and possess as no other generation in the history of mankind.

The fact that this young man was a ruler would seem to indicate that he was approximately thirty years of age. He was a ruler in the synagogue, or possibly a member of the Sanhedrin, the highest council in the land. He was probably about the same age as Christ. He was in the very prime of his fine young manhood.

This young man had many possessions. Of course, we are aware that no amount of money can satisfy the deep longings of the heart. Yet wealth is not something to be despised. Money may be a source of vast good or of much evil. It is dangerous only when people relate themselves to it in the wrong way.

It is to the credit of this young man that he had availed himself of the opportunity to win the favor of his fellowmen. He also won the admiration and praise of the lovers of the best in life. He possessed many praiseworthy virtues. His seriousness was one of the first signs of his greatness. His temperament was amiable. His

disposition was admirable and lovable. He was unusually discerning. His character and reputation were above reproach. He was high-minded and noble-spirited. His morals, habits and conduct were commendable. He was justly proud of his clean record. He was reverent in spirit, but, like many others, his piety was purely negative. All that he could boast of was the evil which he had not done.

II. A Strange Request.

This young ruler had position, possessions, prominence and prestige, and yet he was not happy. He had good character, social standing, fine temperament, a clean record, great wealth and noble aspirations. He was lovely, but lacking. He was conscious of the fact that there was something lacking in his life.

Even though this young man had a splendid ancestry, a lovable disposition, a clean record, a high position and great wealth, he still had a craving for something which he did not have. He was not displeased with what he had, but he was dissatisfied with what he was. He was deeply conscious that he had not obtained that for which his soul was longing. Deep down in his heart there was a hunger for something that he lacked.

Having heard of Christ and His teaching, this young man was eager to get to Him ere He left his vicinity. With eager haste he ran to Christ and knelt before Him. Of course, that was not an act of worship, but it was an expression of utmost respect, and perhaps of veneration. When we consider the social difference between this young ruler and Christ, we cannot help but be impressed by the beautiful humility which this act of kneeling exhibits. How I wish there were more humility before Christ and more reverence for the things of God among the youth of today! Modern youth has many fine qualities, but it is deficient in its capacity for reverence, much to its own discredit and loss. All of us can learn much from the humility of this young ruler.

Despite his high social standing, he made no attempt to conceal his sense of need of his admiration for Christ, as many others did. He did not seek for a private interview with Christ, as Nicodemus did. He ran down the road after Christ, unmindful of the ridicule of the crowds. He was not ashamed to be seen in the presence of Christ in broad daylight. What commendable courage he thus shows us!

Having heard about eternal life, and knowing that he did not have it, he was interested in learning how he might obtain it. Confident that Christ knew the secret of how to obtain eternal life, this striking ruler knelt at His feet and said, "Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life?" Nothing prevented him from expressing publicly his spiritual anxiety. He is certainly to be commended for going to the right person for information on the subject of salvation. He went at the right time, while he was young, and still had a life as well as a soul to be saved. He went in the right spirit. He went in a hurry. He went running, indicating that he considered the matter of obtaining eternal life very important, and that time and opportunity were slipping by.

Believing that eternal life was the supreme good, and knowing that he did not have it, the young man wanted to know what he could do to inherit it. He wanted to be saved, to escape the torment of hell and to enjoy the bliss of heaven. Evidently he thought that he was ready to do anything that might be necessary to obtain eternal life. His question revealed the fact that he thought the title to eternal life could be secured by his own efforts. However, his request reveals how much ignorance an uninstructed person can display in remarkably few words. The young

man was mistaken about Christ, thinking that He was a good man, but a mere teacher. It is quite evident that he did not believe in the deity of Christ. The appellation "Good Master" could have been applied to almost any rabbi of that day.

His ignorance was further indicated by his idea of the ability of man. He thought that eternal life could be earned or obtained through doing. Like many today, he did not know that eternal life has never been received by anybody except as an outright gift. The idea of doing something for which God will impart eternal life as a payment has kept millions from possessing what God gives only by grace through faith. Salvation has never been earned by works. This ruler referred to eternal life as an inheritance. An inheritance is always free and is never earned by works. "What good thing shall I do?" implied that the young ruler thought perhaps one more good act on his part would enable him to obtain eternal life.

III. A Startling Reply.

Christ's reply startled the young man. Our Lord directed his attention to the commandments which he had been trying to observe in the belief that nothing else would be required of him. When our Lord referred him to the law itself, it is noteworthy that He mentioned only those commandments which deal with man's relation to man. In his lack of knowledge of himself, he claimed to have kept all of these commandments. So Christ gave him a very simple and practical test to show him that he did not measure up as he thought.

No man has ever been saved because of what he did to or for his fellows. Although some people are teaching salvation by works with new vigor and viciousness today, it is still true that nobody has ever been able to save himself. "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us" (Titus 3:5). "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9).

Christ looked upon the young man. This does not mean that He merely cast His eyes toward Him, but that He gave him one of those long, fond, gazing looks which indicated affection. He looked lovingly and longingly upon him. What was in that look of Christ? Admiration? Yes, but there was love in that look also. He saw infinite possibilities in him. How wonderful it is that Jesus loves us!

"I am so glad that Jesus loves me!
Jesus loves me! Jesus loves me!
I am so glad that Jesus loves me!
Jesus loves even me!"

IV. A Sorrowful Result.

In spite of all his fine and laudable qualities, this young ruler did not have eternal life. When it was offered to him on terms which were different from what he had expected, he declined it. He wanted the blessing, but on his own terms. Quickly and cheerfully he would have undertaken some extra-ordinary work if thereby he could have obtained eternal life, but he would not receive it on any other terms. Refusing to yield to Christ, he went away without salvation, but in great sorrow. Conscious that he was missing much, he turned his back upon Christ and made the greatest mistake that one can possibly make, namely, that of refusing eternal life, or committing soul suicide.