

How Jesus Viewed Money

The International Sunday School Lesson for January 16 is: "Our All for the Kingdom"—Matt. 19:16-30.

By WILLIAM T. ELLIS

Fittingly, key and its lock to our own existing world conditions is one of the tersely-told tragedies of the New Testament. The tale is that of a rich young man who came to Jesus, questioning after the supreme good. Every reader of the familiar old story finds his heart warming to that noble youth. He had a fine spirit, and rare polish, and a real eagerness to live life at its best. It required no small degree of courage for that son of privilege to be seen in conference with the radical Rabbi from Nazareth. With his courage went open-mindedness also. He may fairly be said to represent the highest type of modern university man of inherited fortune.

Before we strike the stride of the story, let us stand apart for a paragraph to contemplate that young man. So many homiletical stones have been cast at him for ages that we may lose sight of his real worth. For he was a fine young man. His wealth and privileges had not shut the doors of his inquiring mind. He wanted to be bigger than his fortune. In real sincerity, he sought light upon his problem which he perceived to be a spiritual problem, from every possible source. That the unconventional Nazarene, upon whom members of the young man's conservative class had begun to frown, had the word of light and leading, he had become assured. Therefore he sought his wisdom. Searched by the question of Jesus, the young man proved to be both moral and religious, a keeper of the law. Small wonder the Master looked upon him with yearning and admiration. So He bade him to do the one thing more that was needful—sell his goods for the benefit of the poor, and join the discipleship. That final test the young man could not meet; for he was very rich.

Upon that incident Jesus based some remarks about money which are peculiarly appropriate today.

What Money Has Done To Us

Without passion or prejudice or demagoguery, let us try to get the Jesus-viewpoint upon the money question as it exists in our world.

As all who follow international affairs closely are well aware, it is the money-side of the adjustment of the world that has made most of the present trouble. Commercial ambition and antagonism was one of the inciting causes of the war. Lurking in the background of all the decisions made at the peace conference were the financial phases of territorial changes; a big and disturbing book has been written upon the economic aspects of the peace treaty. Territories were desirable or undesirable according to the money that the big powers saw in them. Mineral wealth lurked bigger than moral considerations. Reparations hang like a storm-cloud on the horizon of the world which we look for peace. The manner in which governments have lent themselves to commercial projects and practices is assuredly a serious factor in creating discords between recent allies. In a word, money is a present international problem of greater importance than any mere questions of depreciation of exchange. Peace has been lamed by the blow of gold.

All this is commonplace. We know that love of money has marred the honor of the nations in the past two years. Even more familiar is the fashion in which greed of gold beclouds the high idealism of the peoples at war. With shame we confess the sordid story of the munitioneers and other war profiteers. That scandal is one that will re-echo for long years to come; for its blackness appeared against the golden background of the courage and chivalry and sacrifice of the greater company of men and women.

What, we have to confess to being part of a money-mad world. We have put the pursuit of gain, and indulgence in the luxuries it would buy, above the old integrities of character. A first cause of the relaxed moral fibre of our time is undoubtedly this vague of money madness. Last week two eminent citizens of an American community were sent to jail for robbery and betrayal of trust; with no other reason than that the craze for money had usurped honor and decency and good sense. What is the much discussed "crime wave" of the world today but a flouting of law and civilization for the sake of "easy money." Truly, this old world in which we dwell has been sorely wounded by this terrible fashion of eagerness for money.

When the Test Comes

In less crass and vulgar fashion we discern the workings of the same spirit which kept the rich young man of old from becoming a friend and a follower of Jesus—perhaps one of the great figures of apostolic church. Even among "nice" people it is common to judge a person by his financial standing. So-called "good society" has a dollar mark for a portal. The standard of success today is the money standard. One could not hope to be a "leading layman" except he were wealthy! Individual churches and national religious organizations are fairly sycophantic towards persons of wealth. The thing is too common to create comment.

Saints and heroes, servants of the world and teachers of humanity, are looked upon rather pityingly by "successful" men, if they have not made money. James J. Hill, who himself made more than money, once boldly affirmed that the one test of success was the ability to make and hold money. When upon a poet commented:

"Oh, Homer! poet—genius—
What a woe! failure, thou
As thou beggest in town and city
Sustenance for life enow.
What thou' through the endless ages
Laurel wreaths are on thy brow,
Still thou hadst no earthly riches
And a woe! failure, thou."

"O! Columbus! What a failure
As thou sailedst uncharted seas!
Tho' a world thou didst discover,
Still, a sovereign didst not please;
Bound in chains, by those thou honored
Or didst."

By thy genius and thy deed,
Still in poverty thou perishedst
Thou'rt a failure—so we read.

"Jesus! Saviour! What a failure!
As Thou diedst upon the cross!
Couldst Thou but have preached for profit,
They Thy life should not know loss.
What Thy worlds redeemed acclaim
Thee."

With the thorns upon Thy brow,
Neither made nor saved Thou money,
So a woe! failure Thou!"

Facing a Grim Fact

Jesus did not despise money as money, any more than He despised food or homes or education. What He did despise—and that word should be read as connoting also scorn and contempt and pity—was the exaltation of money into first place in life. He saw that God's rival in men's hearts is money; therefore He cried that we cannot serve God and Mammon. He asked for the rich young man's money in behalf of the poor, only because He wanted the man's life, and saw that his life

otherwise so far, was in the grip of his fortune. The world has greeted with incredulity the announcement of the renunciation of a legacy of a million dollars by a Massachusetts youth. The state of the public mind is such that it is difficult to entertain any other thought than that money is the principal thing.

So long as money thus rules life, Jesus will be kept from the throne of sovereignty. That is the clear and unwelcome teaching of the Bible. Money as a servant must always have a place; money as master challenges the very kingship of God. Our young people must be taught—chiefly by the practice of their elders—that money is not the principle thing. Unless we can produce a generation of Christians willing to be poor, we shall fail to make the first of all preparations for facing the tidal wave of revolution that is sweeping the world.

It is slowly being forced into my consciousness that the lesson of the Russian aristocracy was all in vain so far as the privileged peoples of the western world are concerned. I saw many instances of the utter inability of the rich Russians to grasp the idea that their money would not always purchase them special consideration. To them it was simply unthinkable that any revolution which dethroned the rights of place and property could continue. Alas, that blindness has entailed the loss of many thousands of lives, and misery beyond reckoning. Please God, we shall never see anything like the Russian revolution in this land. Nevertheless, there is under way an irresistible social movement which will reformulate values, and curb the peculiar privileges and power of mere money. The grim fact gives present point to the teaching of the lesson.

Living for Things Worth While

After His staggering words, about the rich man's entrance into the kingdom of heaven being as difficult as the passage of a camel through a needle's eye, Jesus proceeded to set forth to His amazed disciples the worth-whileness of service and sacrifice for the kingdom. Mere investives against wealth will get us nowhere. The way of the Master was to present the better part, the joy and privilege and reward of serving His kingdom.

He offered the rich young man the career of all careers. Then, as now, rich men were common; and, save for his inglorious contact with Jesus, this nameless young man passed on into the obscurity of the merely rich. Well, has it been said, "The rich man's sons do not have a fair chance in life." Doomed to be nonentities or worse, they go through the years as leeches upon life, instead of lifters of life. Most of them do no high deeds, serve no great cause, leave no noble mark upon their generation. What a chance the rich young man in the lesson story was given by the Master!

And he missed it! But stay: what of ourselves and our sons? We are alive in the most plastic and portentous era in the world's history. Great events are shaping on every hand. One man, with vision and courage, may do more than was possible to a hundred men a century ago. What a day to be a servant of the living God, a true brother of all men, and a builder of the kingdom of heaven on earth! He who puts Christ first today lives the life that lasts.

SEVEN SENTENCE SERMONS

No man ever prayed heartily without learning something—Emerson.

No sadder proof can be given by a man of his own littleness than disbelief in great men.—Carlyle.

Be earnest, earnest, earnest, mad if thou wilt;
Do what thou dost, as if the stake were heaven.
And that thy last deed were the Judgment day. —Charles Kingsley.

I find that doing the will of God leaves no time for disputing about His plans.—George MacDonald.

For verily the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many. —Mark 10:45.

Before man made us citizens, great nature made us men.—Lowell.

Everything right that we do is on the winning side; everything wrong is bound, in the end, to go down in defeat.—Sunday School Times.

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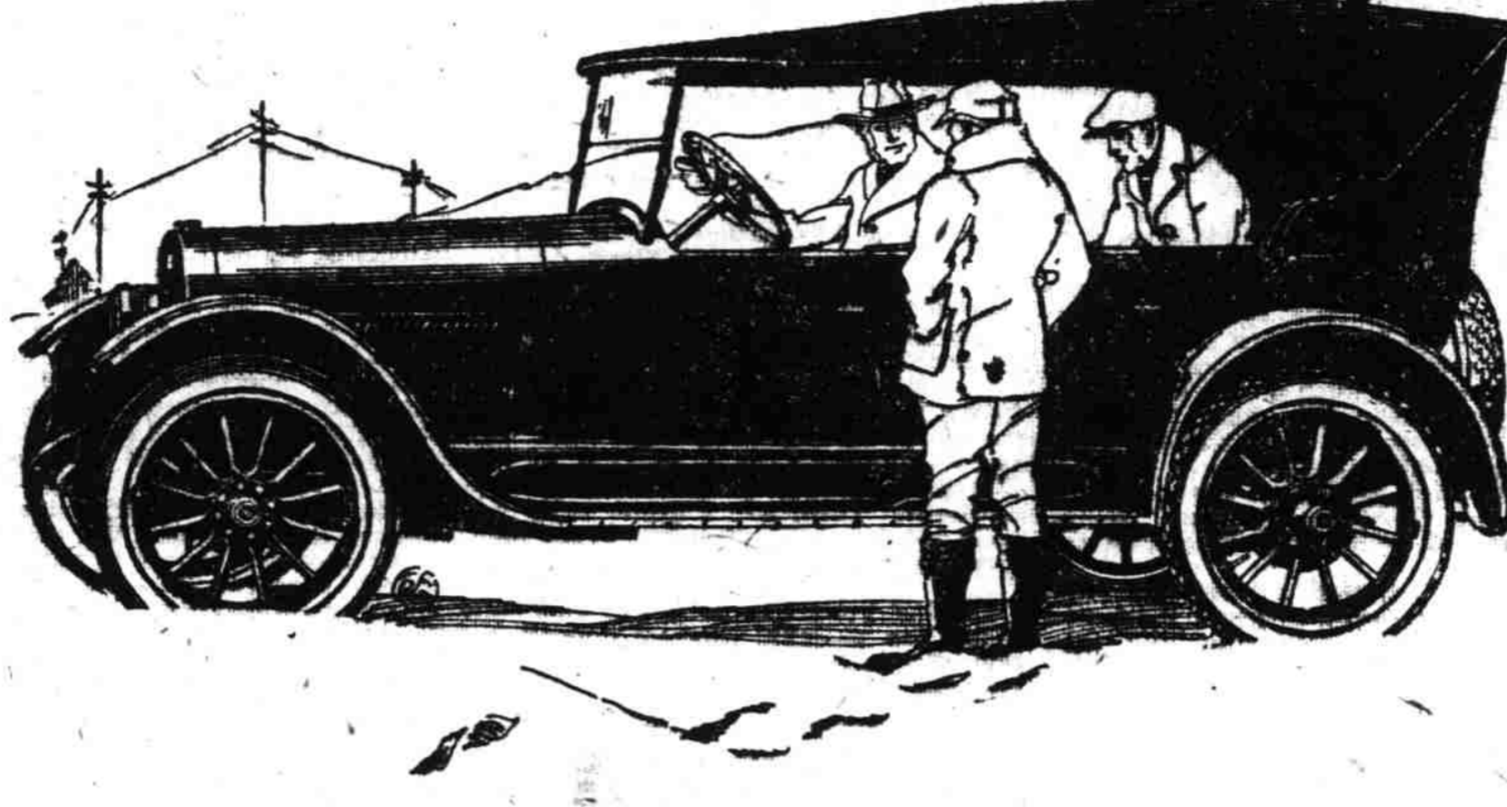
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