

The Rich Young Ruler

I know what they say of me, but it isn't true – well, not all of it, anyway. OK, yes, I do have some money – yes, all right, quite a lot of money. But it's not really mine, not really; it's like my position in the synagogue, it's family money, family status, it's all family, not really mine at all. How could I, at my age, have got together that amount, and in an occupied country as well? And even if I had, how could I then have got to be where I am in the synagogue?

And now you're thinking, and how did his family get rich, in an occupied country? And you're right to think exactly that. I know, because I thought that, as soon as I was old enough to understand. I even asked it aloud, once – and my father exploded! He grabbed me by the collar, swung me off the ground, slammed me against the wall and began shouting inches from my face – why was I asking? Was I accusing him of treason, of being a collaborator with pagans and Jew-killers, of taking bribes from the Romans, of betraying fellow Jews to the Romans, of – oh he went on and on, while I choked and struggled, and eventually passed out.

No, I hadn't been accusing him of these things – but I was accusing him from then on.

I think that was why I started listening in the synagogue, and in school, why I started taking all that stuff about God seriously. My friends didn't; when they came to their bar mitzvahs – well, for them it was just an excuse for a party! At best, it was all about growing up, about becoming a man, about girls. Not for me; for me it was an inevitable step into commitment to God and commitment to my nation; commitments that I have never broken.

It wasn't enough, and I knew it wasn't enough. Whatever I did, whatever I didn't do, always behind it there was the memory of my father slamming me against the wall.

Then came Jesus.

Jesus spoke with a new authority, a challenging authority, an authority that made me think – more, an authority that seemed to say I was right to think, to think for myself. And this Jesus accepted lepers, foreigners, women, collaborators, terrorists – even children. So I began to think – might he accept me?

So I asked him – indirectly, but that was what I was really asking, and we both knew it: would he accept me, who was of such tainted family? What more would I have to do for God to accept me?

And that was what he really answered: all I needed to do was to let go. Let go of my wealth; let go of my status; let go of my family, let go of my guilt; drop everything and walk away from it.

All I had to do was to stop being the Rich Young Ruler, and to begin to be me.

I couldn't do it then – not on the spot, not without thinking about it, not until I was sure – sure either way. I needed time.

Now I've had time, I have thought. And I'm sure.