

## **ERIC – THE RICH LITTLE RICH KID**

“Why don’t you ever watch where you are going,” my brother Tom said in an angry voice. I had accidentally bumped into him when I came running around the corner of my house trying to hide from my friend Ricky. We were playing hide-and-seek.

“I’m sorry Tommy, I’m trying to hide from Ricky.” “Well just be careful next time,” he said in a grouchy voice. Even though Tommy was only a year older than me, he never liked to play with me or my friends. And he had trouble getting along with his own friends because he would always pick fights with them.

I quickly hid behind one of the bushes in my backyard waiting for Ricky to find me. After about five minutes, I got tired of waiting so I headed out to the frontyard to see where Ricky was. Instead of looking for me, he, along with three of my other friends who were playing with us, was listening to a man talking to them. At first I thought they must be in trouble, but then I heard them all laughing and hurried over to find out what was going on.

As soon as Ricky saw me, he said, “Eric, this man is talking to us about the Bible.” “Really?” I replied. Then I asked the man, “Are you a Jehovah’s Witness?” I was really surprised when he said, “No,” because I thought they were the only ones who would go out into neighborhoods talking about the Bible. Then he asked me, “Do you know what you have to do to go to heaven?” “Be good,” I answered.

Then all my friends started laughing and Paul said, “Nope.” The man could tell I was embarrassed so he said, “That’s what most people think and that’s what I used to think too, but if we did have to be good to go to heaven, would heaven be a gift or a reward?” I thought for a few seconds and replied, “Reward.”

“That’s right,” he said, “but I want to show you in the Bible where it says that it is a gift.”

He then opened his Bible and let me read Romans 6:23 where it says the gift of God is eternal life. I responded, “Gosh, I never knew that.” He then explained to me that the reason Jesus died on the cross was to pay our way to heaven since we can’t pay our way and that the only condition to go to heaven was to believe in

Jesus. Being good was so that we could have a happy life and rewards in heaven, but being good could never get us to heaven.

The more he talked the more sense it made. I realized that by thinking I had to be good to go to heaven I wasn't putting my faith in Jesus, but in myself. And I was so happy when he explained to me that once you trust Jesus to get you to heaven, He will never cast you out of His family no matter how bad you are. He showed me in the Bible where Jesus said, "the one who comes to Me I will never cast out."

I felt so happy knowing that heaven was my home! The next day at school I could hardly wait to tell my girlfriend Haley about my new-found knowledge.

At lunchtime as we were walking to the cafeteria together I said, "Yesterday when me and my friends were out playing a man talked to us about God and I found out that you don't have to be good to go to heaven."

I was expecting her to be surprised just like I was, but instead she said, "Oh, I've known that since I was five years old." "You have?" I said in a voice that expressed my amazement, "then how come you never told me?"

The year before, when Haley and I were in fourth grade, our teacher, Mrs. Rogers, had us work on a project together. Haley was pretty and she was fun to be with so I started liking her as my girlfriend. I just couldn't believe that she had been my girlfriend for over a year and she had never told me how to go to heaven. It hurt my feelings that she could have this wonderful message and never tell me.

As I waited for her to explain, I could tell she felt embarrassed. Finally she said, "I'm sorry Eric. I should have talked to you about this, but I was too shy."

I found that hard to believe. I never thought of Haley as being shy. Then with excitement in her voice, she said, "You know what Eric? I go to a Bible Club every Sunday, why don't you ask your parents if you can come?"

Again I felt hurt that she hadn't told me about this either. I asked, "Why have you never asked me before?"

"Oh, I just thought you wouldn't be interested."

"Well I would be interested and I bet my friends would too."

She replied, "They're all welcome to come."

I was wrong about all my friends wanting to come. Only my best friend Ricky was as interested as I was about learning more about the Bible. Sunday morning

Haley's mother picked Ricky and me up. I was expecting to be driven to a large auditorium or something so I was surprised when we pulled up to a house. Haley's mother explained that the children had Bible Club in a bedroom and the adults met in the livingroom. I thought that was sort of strange but I felt adventurous.

The teacher for the children was Miss Helen and she warmly greeted us and told us how happy she was that we were there. I liked her right away and really enjoyed her class. I learned a lot of things I never knew before. I had no idea that the Bible says that everyone who goes to heaven will stand before God to be judged to see how many rewards they are going to receive. She showed us in the Bible that when we do good things for God that we are laying up treasures in heaven.

When I heard that I right away thought that I didn't want to go to heaven empty-handed. Then Miss Helen explained that the main work God wants us to do is to tell others how to go to heaven. When she said that I thought that Haley wasn't going to have too many rewards because I had never known her to talk to anyone about God.

That night I called Ricky and asked him if he wanted to talk to some of the kids at school the next day about God. He was as excited as I was about laying up some treasures in heaven.

At lunchtime the next day we talked to three boys and they were all interested and believed the Gospel. Then Ricky said to me "How about if we talk to the new girl? She seems really nice, I bet she'll listen."

The new girl was Michelle. She had come to our school after Winter Break. She had shiny dark brown hair and dark brown eyes. She was exceptionally pretty. She was really interested in hearing about going to heaven and she listened intently to every word that Ricky and I said.

Ricky had a pamphlet in his pocket and he pulled it out to show her some verses that were quoted in it. After she read the verses herself, she couldn't hide her excitement. She said, "That's wonderful news. That means I'm going to heaven!" Her happiness made us happy and I asked, "Would you like to come to our Bible Club next Sunday?"

“Yes, I would,” she answered.

Next Sunday, Michelle’s face was shining as Miss Helen talked about the Bible. When she asked if anyone would be interested in going with her that afternoon to listen to her talk to people about the Bible, Michelle instantly raised her hand. I thought it was great that she wanted to learn how to explain the Gospel.

At school the next day, Ricky and me asked her if she wanted to go with us after school to a park to talk to people there. She said, “Yes,” and we talked to a lot of kids our age and teenagers. Only a few of them didn’t want to talk to us.

After she left, I said to Ricky, “Boy that sure was fun.”

“Yeah,” he said, “and boy is that Michelle pretty.”

I gently slapped him across the back and said, “I think you’re in love.” He never said anything, he just blushed so I knew he really did like her.

That night I called Haley and told her about what a great day we had. I could tell she wasn’t excited to hear about it and I said, “Haley, why don’t you come with us?”

“You know how busy I am. I’ve got gymnastics on Monday, Band on Tuesday…”

Before she could continue, I said, “Okay Haley I get the point.”

The next day I could tell that Haley was becoming jealous of Michelle. It was obvious by the way she was treating her. Michelle asked me if I knew why Haley was treating her so coldly and I told her that Haley and I were boyfriend and girlfriend and she was probably jealous of her. I felt bad because I didn’t want Michelle to get her feelings hurt so I talked to Haley about the way she was treating Michelle. Instead of admitting she was jealous, she told me that she had seen Michelle cheating on a test. That really surprised me because Michelle didn’t seem like that type of person.

I was going to talk some more to Haley about it, but she started being really nice to Michelle so I figured that my talking to her had helped.

About two months later, Haley called me up after school and asked if I wanted to go with her over to Michelle’s house. I met her in front of the Seven-Eleven and I was surprised to see she was carrying a large bag.

“What’s that?” I asked, pointing at the bag.

“You’ll see soon enough,” she answered.

She really had my curiosity up and I offered to carry it for her, not just to be a gentleman, but also so I could take a peek in that bag. But she insisted on carrying it herself.

When we got over to Michelle’s house, Haley rang the doorbell and Michelle answered the door.

I wasn’t prepared for what happened. As soon as Michelle opened the door, Haley handed her the bag and as soon as she opened it up and looked in, her face turned red. I looked in the bag and could see it was filled up with used toys. I felt so bad for her. This was the first time I had ever been over to Michelle’s house and it was obvious by its appearance and size that Michelle was poor. And I knew Haley was rich so it was apparent that Haley had brought over her used things because she pitied her. I felt so bad for Michelle because she was so embarrassed. I could barely hear her when she said, “Thank you.”

As soon as we were far away from her house so that she couldn’t hear us, Haley told me how surprised she was by her response. But I didn’t see things the same way she did at all. I was really angry with Haley for being so cruel and I said, “How do you think you’d feel if someone made you feel like a charity case? I really don’t think she wanted your charity!”

“Oh brother!” she said and walked away in a huff.

The next day I was extra nice to Michelle. I wanted so badly to tell her that I had no idea what Haley was up to, but I thought that it might hurt her feelings even more to bring up the subject so I didn’t.

When she didn’t show up for Bible Club on Sunday I had this sick feeling in the pit of my stomach that she was too embarrassed to come. But when Miss Helen phoned her after Bible Club, she explained she wasn’t feeling well. I felt bad she wasn’t feeling well, but I was relieved that she wasn’t planning on dropping out of Bible Club.

The next night was Haley’s birthday party and Ricky and I were really disappointed that she wasn’t well enough to come. The following day I was so happy to see her at school and I went up to her and asked, “Would you like to have

lunch with us?" I was really taken back when her eyes welled up with tears and she said, "No thank you." I couldn't understand why she acted that way.

I asked Haley if she knew what was wrong with Michelle. She said that it probably was because she wasn't completely better yet. I really didn't think that explained her response so after school I went up to her and when I did, I could not believe the look of hurt on her face. I asked her what was wrong and she told me that she really didn't want to talk. I walked home from school that day with a heavy heart.

It really hurt my feelings that Michelle no longer wanted to be my friend, but I didn't think I could talk to her about it since she refused to tell me what was wrong. And I couldn't help but notice that it was only me that she treated differently. She had no problem with the other kids at school and at Bible Club. I talked to Ricky about it and he thought maybe she liked me and was jealous that Haley was my girlfriend.

I really didn't think that was it and I felt bad that Ricky thought that Michelle liked me because I knew how much he liked her. That's when I suggested that he ask her to go out ice skating. Ricky was so shy I knew he would never do this unless I talked him into it.

When I said this, he said, "There's no way that she likes me." "Ricky, I really think you're wrong. And how will you ever find out unless you ask her out?"

"But," he protested, "if I ask her and she says no, I'll feel like a real jerk whenever I'm around her."

"I'll tell you what, I'll ask Haley to ask her if she likes you and no one but you and me will ever know that I'm asking for you." I could tell he really wanted to know, but at the same time he didn't want his hopes dashed to the ground. He half-heartedly protested, but I was finally able to talk him into it. I phoned Haley that night and said, "Do you think there is any way that Michelle likes Ricky?"

"I don't know." "Would it be any problem for you to ask? Just don't tell her that it was me who wanted to know." "All right."

About fifteen minutes later she called me back and said, "Guess what? Michelle really likes Ricky and I could tell she was really surprised that I asked. She told me not to tell him though and I told her I wouldn't." She laughed and said, "Of course,

I didn't tell her I would tell you and that you probably would tell Ricky." Then she asked, "He does like her, doesn't he?"

I didn't answer her and thanked her for asking for me. I could hardly wait to get off the phone to call Ricky. He couldn't have been happier and he finally had enough nerve to ask her out the next day.

Because Ricky started spending more time with Michelle, I sometimes would find myself without someone to go to the park with me to talk to people about the Bible. I went alone a few times and even though I had fun talking to people about God, I missed having a friend with me.

I knew that none of my other friends had any interest in sharing the Gospel and one night, as I was praying about it, all of a sudden I thought of my brother Tom. Maybe, I thought, he would like to go with me.

I had talked to Tom about the Gospel about a week after I had believed it and he believed it too. Tom was so different from me and my older sister Frances because he had trouble keeping friends and he seemed so unhappy.

But, as I thought about this, I realized that if Tom served the Lord, then God would change my brother so he would be someone that did get along with the other kids and he would be happy. I fell asleep that night all excited at the prospect of my brother becoming a fellow disciple.

The next morning I went into his room and woke him up. "What do you want?" he said in a groggy voice.

"I want to talk to you about something really important."

"It better be important to wake me up for."

"Tom, don't you want to be happy?"

In an angry voice, he responded, "Who says I'm not happy?"

I had no idea he would react like this. I thought he would be anxious how to hear about how to escape his misery. But I now realized that he was very sensitive about my knowing he was unhappy. I felt bad that I hadn't even asked God's help in talking to my brother so before I said another word I prayed to the Lord to help me explain this to him. Then I asked, "Tom, you know I've been going to a Bible Club and that I talk to people about the Bible."

“Yeah, so?”

“So how about coming with me to Bible Club and coming with me to talk to people about the Bible?”

“Did you really wake me up to ask me this? I think I can find better ways to spend my time.”

“Come on Tom. Please,” I said in a pleading voice.

I could tell by the look on his face that he was really considering it. Then his expression changed back to his usual miserable one and he said, “No thanks.”

I left that room bitterly disappointed. Life could be so different for both of us if only he would serve the Lord; Tom and I would be happy and that would make me happy.

After I had finished breakfast, I said to Tom, “I’m going to Holiday Park, if you change your mind I’ll see you there.”

“Don’t hold your breath,” he said sarcastically as he took another bite of cereal.

It hurt my feelings that he was rejecting my attempts at being his friend, but I just prayed extra hard for him as I headed to the park.

After being there for little over an hour, I was so shocked and surprised to see my brother riding towards me on his bike.

“Tom,” I said, “I’m really glad you changed your mind!”

He just looked at me and said as he locked up his bike, “Don’t expect me to do any of the talking. I’ll just listen.”

That was fine with me. I felt like I was dreaming as we approached several children. It seemed like a miracle to me that Tom was really by my side listening to me witness. And I could tell by the look on his face that he was really enjoying himself. When we were done, he said, “I’ll give you a ride home if you like.”

“Sure,” I said, hopping on his handlebars.

On the way home he said to me, “I never thought it would be fun to talk to people about the Bible, but that was fun.” Just then I spotted a teenage girl sitting on a bus bench and I said to Tom, “Do you want to talk to her?”

“Me?” he said, and after hesitating a few seconds said, “Help me out if I need it,” and we stopped to talk to her.



The girl was more than happy to listen to him and had no problem accepting the Gospel. When he had finished talking, I looked at my brother and I saw an expression of happiness on his face I had never seen before. When we pulled up to our driveway and got off his bike, he said, “Eric, I want you to know that I had no intention of ever coming to the park today.”

Surprised, I exclaimed, “Really?” He explained, “Right after you left I thought to myself that you were nothing but a fanatic and I wanted no part of anything you were doing. But as soon as I thought that I started choking on my cereal, which I thought was weird. “Then I decided to go for a ride on my bike and when I was on the corner by McDuffy’s Supermarket, a crow attacked me. I was terrified it was going to hurt me. It actually brushed the top of my head.”

“You’re kidding?” I said in disbelief.

“I jumped off my bike and ran into the store for cover. I was scared stiff. I started thinking that what was happening was happening because I didn’t go to the park with you. First I choke at breakfast and now this bird is out to get me.

“After walking around the store for about five minutes, I ventured outside and, thank goodness, the bird was gone. And as soon as I hopped on my bike and rode away, I stopped thinking that God had made those things happen to get me to the park. But I hadn’t gone two blocks before a dog came out of nowhere and grabbed on to my pant leg. I screamed for help and someone called the dog’s name and he left me alone.

“I wasn’t about to see what was going to happen next, so I headed directly to the park.” And then with a big smile on his face he added, “And I’m glad I did!”

That day marked the beginning of my brother serving the Lord and the beginning of a friendship between us that has been growing ever since. Tom is not just my brother, he’s my friend.

Later that summer, Haley confessed to me that she was the reason that Michelle withdrew her friendship from me. Because Haley was afraid I might start liking Michelle, she told Michelle that I had said something cruel and unkind about her. She told her that I had cut down the place she lived in and said that she could never be popular because she was poor.

I felt so bad that Haley had lied about me like that and I was really angry with her. I even considered dropping her as my girlfriend. But she was really sorry and I could see that Haley was changing into a different person; she was really concerned about pleasing God. So I didn't stay mad at her for long and I forgave her. And Michelle and me became friends again.

When I look back at how things worked out, I realize that maybe I wouldn't have tried to get my brother to serve the Lord if things had stayed the same between Michelle and myself. I think this is an example about how God can turn bad things into good things. I know one thing for sure, I can say like Joshua, "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."