Just Who Can Be Saved?

Psalm 22: 1-8, 22-31

Mark 10:1. 17-31

*If I were a rich man,  
Daidle deedle daidle  
Daidle daidle deedle daidle dumb*

*All day long I'd biddy-biddy-bum  
If I were a wealthy man*

*I wouldn't have to work hard,  
Daidle deedle daidle  
Daidle daidle deedle daidle dumb*

*If I were a biddy-biddy rich,  
Daidle deedle daidle daidle man.*

You may know the song – from the musical *Fiddler on the Roof*. It is a story about a Russian Jewish peasant family in the early years of the 20th century – over 100 years ago – as it struggled in a small village. Tevye is the local milk man and with his wife, Golde, have 5 daughters. The daughters want to marry not by being matched, but because of love. The tradition of the ages is unhinged. If Tevye had been rich so much would have been solved.

If Tevye were rich he sings, he would not have any problems. Golde could boss servants around and oversee a wonderful home much different than the hovel they lived in. The town leaders would come and ask him questions and seek his wisdom. As Tevye sings –

*It won’t make one bit of difference if I answer right or wrong.*

*When you are rich they think you really know.*

But the most important thing is that if he was rich, then he could spend more time in the synagogue praying and studying scriptures.

It is a great song. And a great musical.

I learned this week that it is also the basis for a song *Rich Girl* written by Gwen Stefani in 2004. It is in the ragga genre – think reggae and dance music.[I had to look that up too]. The point of the song is to let the singer highlight her “. . . dreams of fame and riches from the perspective of "when she was just an [Orange County](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Orange_County,_California) girl"” [[1]](#endnote-1)

In her song, Stefani also sings about how money can buy access and privilege. But she doesn’t talk about praying and discussing holy books. But then, how many of us would put that in our own song about what being rich could do?

One day a man for whom being rich was not a hypothetical question came to Jesus. He had a full life. But something was missing. What must I do to be have eternal life? What is it that would let me find fulfillment and joy, not simply in the life to come, but also in the life that is here?

Being rich was thought of in those days as giving you a leg up on that kind of good life. Still is.

Jesus responds – first by saying – remember only *God is good*. The Jesus instructs him – keep the commandments – you know them – don’t murder, commit adultery, steal or lie and honor your parents. That’s it.

But the man said – *Isn’t there something more? I’ve done those things and I am missing something.*

What is missing for you? A few years ago I was part of a pastor coach training program and the leader began one session with this question: *what keeps you up at night?* There are lots of things that can get us up at night – maybe even prevent us from going to sleep to begin with. Our responses run the gamut – toss and turn; get up and watch television or check our social media feeds; maybe self-medicate with your substance of choice. It is all that common to ask – *isn’t there something more?*

PHPC – what is keeping you up at night? Regardless of how long you have been coming here – what is keeping you up at night? What are you looking for? Human nature is to look for something more. We may not be wealthy. But most likely we have asked the question – what else is there? What does keep you – and me – up at night?

You know what? Mark wrote that Jesus looked at this man. He looked at him. Maybe looked him over. But then, I have to think, he looked him in the eye. When he did that Jesus did not judge him or dismiss him.

Jesus didn’t say *bless your heart.* Jesus looked at him – and Jesus loved him. Just as Jesus loves us. There was that nonverbal communication of connection. It was a look of love. Then Jesus said - *Something is holding you back. Let go of it so that you may find your way. It won’t be easy. But it is the thing you need to do.*

And then Jesus said: *Get rid of all your possessions and follow me.*

The gospel does not record any verbal response. But he was shocked and left in sorrow because that would have required too much.

As a man of riches he was supposed to have the answer the rest of us seek. As Tevye sand – *when you are rich they think you really know.* My grandmother came from very modest means and as she assessed folks she might say – *they are really smart.* She didn’t mean academically bright. She meant they were rich. You know the meme – *if you are so smart, why aren’t you rich?*

In the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 6: 21 – Jesus taught:

*The place where your treasure is, is the place you will most want to be, and end up being.*

This encounter with a wealthy man is but another way of saying this.

So what does that mean?

A few folks throughout history have taken this direction quite seriously. A notable story is St. Francis of Assisi. He was the son of a wealthy family but struggled with his advantage. He came to a crisis and renounced his inheritance. He then drew interested men around him to share the gospel and a simple lifestyle. His example grew and the Pope had to find a way to channel the energy and enthusiasm.

But not everyone is a St. Francis of Assisi. Not everyone who gives up everything like he did is met with an organizational or social recognition. In fact, often they are written off as crazy, unbalanced or just plain weird.

I wonder if Jesus’ word to us is not simply about wealth. I wonder if it is also about what is encumbering us. Wealth requires management. At what point do assets we “own” begin to “own” us? In recent days as the stock market has bounced around there have been any number of stories about investors chasing returns. And it raises a question – what is at the heart of a desire to manage investments? Is it only to get a certain amount – or is it to fund a particular meaningful and hope-filled purpose? I have to think that the rich man Jesus met was more concerned about his wealth that his life.

Or the question could be – what is it that you care about more than your life?

All too often we focus on the first part of the question – what must **I do** to inherit eternal life? The eternal life is already there. How do I get it – seems to be the man’s question. And it is a question we also ask. We often use the language of the disciples as they talk to Jesus – Who can be saved? This rich guy didn’t cut it. And rich people have the answers don’t they? Who has the answers if folks more concerned about managing assets than sharing hope are the ones with the challenges?

There are 2 parts of what we commonly think of as salvation. The first part is called justification. God saves us not because of what we do, but because God saves us. Presbyterian theologian Shirley Guthrie put it this way: *… despite the fact that things are not right in our inner lives and personal relationships, God forgives and accepts us.[[2]](#endnote-2)*

That is more than awesome! Yet all too often we leave it there. It is like the rich man saying he followed the commandments. We struggle with – what else is there?

So how do we follow Jesus? We all need things to take on a journey of faith. It is also called sanctification. Sometimes it means leaving things behind. At other times it means taking things on.

*Justification tells us how a person becomes a Christian. Sanctification tells us how a person grows in the Christian life.*

*Justification tells is about God’s gracious action towards us. Sanctification tells us about our response with obedient action toward God.*

*Justification tells God is for us… Sanctification tells us that by the Holy Spirit God works in us...*

*Justification tells us that Christ is our Savior wh died for us. Sanctification tells us that the same Christ is our Lord who commands us to live for him.*

*Justification tells us that God adopts s to be God’s children. Sanctification tells us God expects and helps us to live as God’s children – and therefore as brother and sister of one another.* [[3]](#endnote-3)

As a church, what do you need now? What do you need to let go of? What do you need to hold on to?

As an individual in your family, what do you need now? What have you had in the past but need to let go of? What else do you need now?

One Sunday when I was in high school I was sent to pick up my grandmother from church. I don’t remember why my Mom didn’t go to church that Sunday – probably was because she was preparing Sunday lunch. And I got a pass as well. So I went to church a few minutes before 12 to pick up my grandmother. As the doors to the sanctuary opened, a woman came out – of the same age as my grandmother I thought. She asked me: *Young man, are you saved?*

Of course, I replied. I had been baptized. But as I have lived with that story for many years, I realize I could have said, of course I have been justified. But it took a long time to claim what God was doing in me through sanctification. It takes a long time for any of us to realize what God is doing in and through us.

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1. Wikipedia entry “Rich Girl.” Accessed 16 March 2018. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Christian Doctrine, 1994, p. 319. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Christian Doctrine, 1994, p. 331-332. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)