

“If I Were A Rich Man”

When I was a young man (many years ago), I enjoyed watching the movie, *Fiddler on the Roof*, based on the 1964 musical. (We watched it with an advanced technology of the time, the video disk. Does anyone remember this?) There are several famous melodies from the show, but my favorite is the song, "If I Were a Rich Man." It is performed by Tevye, the main character, and expresses his desire for a better life within the harsh context of Jewish persecution, poverty, powerlessness, and social injustice.

Please watch the video of the song from the movie. Pay close attention to the lyrics (subtitled):

https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=if+i+were+a+rich+man+spanish

The song clearly captures the double-sided nature of money. On the one hand, it represents power and provision, which are necessary in this “present evil age” (Gal 1:4). On the other hand, it enables the expression of greed and abuse. From the scriptures we can name many negative examples of the use of wealth, such as Queen Jezebel (1Kings 21:1-16), the Rich Fool (Luke 12:8-12), and Simon the Magician (Acts 8:14-24). But, we can also find many examples of the godly use of money, such as Job (29:12-16), David (1Chron:29), Nehemiah (Neh 13:31), Lydia (Acts 16:13-15), and Joseph of Arimathea (John 19:38-42).

Think about this carefully. The motives for and the use of money are key indications of our spiritual health, according to the Bible. At what point would your desire to become a “rich man” evolve into the “love of money” (“a root of all kinds of evils” [1Tim 6:10])?

What would you do if you really were a rich man or woman? How would you use your money? What lifestyle would you adopt? What would you do if you acquired \$1,000,000? How would you use another \$100,000? Would you use money the way that consumerism demands, to invest in “treasures on earth,” or would you invest your money as “treasure in heaven” (Matt 6:19-21)?

Fortunately, for those who are economically prosperous, Paul provides very specific instructions about wealth. Listen to what he wrote in 1 Timothy 6:17-19 and pay attention to what he says about motives and use:

As for the rich in this present age, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy. They are to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, thus storing up treasure for themselves as a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is truly life.

In verse 18 the verb, “do good,” is a rare word appearing only here and in Acts 14:17. In Acts it refers to God, the one who bears witness to Himself through acts of kindness and generosity:

In the generations gone by [God] permitted all the nations to go their own ways; and yet He did not leave Himself without a witness, in that He did good and gave you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons....”

God is good and His sustenance in creation witnesses to His character. The point of the matter is simple: actions reveal nature. Our economic activities are a testimony of our true character. In 1 Timothy 6:18 “doing good” manifests the true nature of the rich person's heart with reference

to money. And, our actions with money leave a testimony, positive or negative, which God and mankind can see.

The verb, "do good," is qualified further by three terms and phrases: "to be rich in good deeds," "generous" ("free giver" or "ready contributor"), and "ready to share." "Ready to share" is from the word "kiononia" part of a large word group from which we get the words "participate," "communion," and "fellowship." This means that a part of church membership involves a willingness to share economic resources.

The broader context of verses 17 and 19 can be summarized like this. Paul instructs the rich to forsake unhealthy attitudes and behavior about money and to adopt others that are biblical. To say it figuratively: The rich ought to withdraw their accounts from the "bank of earth" and redeposit them in the "bank of heaven." In the bank of earth the interest is low but the investment is actually risky, whereas in the bank of heaven, the return is high, but the investment is very secure.

To summarize, Paul says that rich people must obey the command: "Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind" (Rom 12:2). They should learn and confess with Paul in Philippians 4:11: "I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances."

Specifically: The rich should do good with their assets. They should view wealth as a stewardship, as an occasion for mercy, benevolence, and an investment in eternity. They should have a mature assessment about money, that money is sacred, a spiritual test, and a very dangerous gift. They must not submit to the values or methods of Mammon (Matt 6:24). Rather, they should be faithful, generous, abundant in good deeds, and care for the needs of the widow, the poor, the fatherless (Matt 25:35-45), and the ministry of the church (**Gal 5:17-18**).

Que harías si fueras realmente un hombre rico o una mujer rica? Como gastarías tu dinero? Que estilo de vida adoptarías? Pero ponerlo de otro modo, que harías si tuvieras \$1,000,000? O, supongamos que sos una persona normal, con un estilo de vida de clase media, como usarías unos \$10,000 o \$100,000 extras? Usarías el dinero según las demandas del consumismo, para invertirlo en “tesoros en la tierra”, o lo invertirías en “tesoros en el cielo”?

- Desafortunadamente, Pablo nos da instrucciones específicas para las personas con riquezas. Escucha lo que escribió en 1ra Timoteo 6:17-19:

A los ricos de este siglo mándales que no sean altivos, ni pongan su esperanza en las riquezas, las cuales son inciertas, sino en el Dios vivo, que nos da todas las cosas en abundancia para que las disfrutemos. Mándales que hagan el bien, y que sean ricos en buenas obras, dadivosos y generosos; que atesoren para sí mismos un buen fundamento para el futuro, que se aferren a la vida eterna.

- En el versículo 18 el verbo, "hagan el bien", es una palabra rara que aparece solamente aquí y en Hecho 14:17.
- **(DIAPOSITIVA 10)** En Hechos se refiere a Dios, el que da testimonio de sí mismo a través de actos de bondad y generosidad: "En las generaciones pasadas (Dios) permitió a todas las naciones seguir su propio camino; y aun así siempre dejó testimonio de sí mismo, en el El hizo bien y les dio lluvias del cielo y estaciones fructíferas..." Dios es Buenos y su sustento en la creación es testigo de su carácter. El punto de la cuestión es sencillo: las acciones revelan la naturaleza. Nuestras actividades económicas son un testigo de nuestro carácter verdadero. En 1Timoteo 6:18 "hagan bien" manifiesta la verdadera naturaleza del corazón de la persona rica en relación al dinero. Y, nuestras acciones con el dinero dejan un testimonio, positivo o negativo, el cual Dios y la humanidad lo ven.
- El verbo, "hacer bien" es cualificado mas adelante por tres términos y frases: "ser ricos en buenas obras", "generosos ("dador libre" o "colaborador siempre listo"), y "siempre listo para compartir". "Listo para compartir" viene de la palabra "Koinonia", parte de un gran grupo de palabras del cual viene la palabra "participar", "comunidad" y "compañerismo". Esto significa que una verdadera comunión implica una disposición a compartir recursos económicos.
- El amplio contexto de los versículos 17 y 19 pueden ser resumidos así. Pablo instruye a los ricos a abandonar actitudes y comportamientos no saludables sobre el dinero y a adoptar los bíblicos. **(DIAPOSITIVA 11)** Para decirlo figurativamente: El rico debe retirar sus ganancias del "banco terrenal" y re depositarlas en el "banco celestial". En el banco terrenal el interés es bajo pero la inversión es riesgosa, en cambio en el banco celestial, la devolución es alta, pero la inversión es muy segura.
- Entonces para resumir, Pablo dice que la gente rica debe obedecer el mandamiento : "Y no adopten las costumbres de este mundo, sino transfórmense por medio de la renovación de su mente" (Rom 12:2). Deberían aprender y confesar con Pablo en Filipenses 4:11: "He aprendido a estar contento en cualquier situación".
 - **(DIAPOSITIVA 12)** Específicamente: Los ricos deben hacer el bien. Deberían ver su bienestar como una mayordomía, como una oportunidad para misericordia, generosidad y una inversión en la eternidad. Deberían tener una evaluación Madura sobre el dinero, que el dinero es sagrado, una prueba espiritual y un regalo peligroso.
 - No deben someterse a los valores y métodos de Mammon. En cambio, deben ser fieles, generosos y abundantes en buenas obras, y ocuparse de las necesidades de las viudas, los pobres, los huérfanos (Mateo 25:35-24), y al ministerio de la iglesia (Gálatas 5:17-18).

