

## **OPENING:**

I remember the first time I learned what the word “yuppie” meant.

I must have been around 11 years old when I first heard it, and I did not know what it meant. I remember having it then explained to me what it was: a....

Young

Urban

Professional

“Yuppie”

I remember being confused because I could sense the word being used in a negative way, but I did not understand why.

Being “young” seemed to be good.

Living in a city seemed to be good.

Having a job seemed to be good.

Many years later, I remember the first time I learned that **I** was a yuppie.

By that time, that realization was accompanied by some amount of resentment at the classification:

Yuppies, after all, were responsible for gentrification, for valuing their stock portfolio over the traditional family, and for all sorts of other sins, chief among them seemed to be playing way too much tennis.

## **GOSPEL**

The rich, young man in our Gospel reading is a “yuppie if there ever was one.” He has it all, he has the wealth, he has good graces, he is doing everything right. He is a “winner who will not give up trying to win.”<sup>1</sup>

We feel sorry for him because we know how the story ends but, actually, if we knew him in real time, we would be really impressed by him.

Impressed by his wealth, impressed by his manners, and impressed by his faith.

Our rich young man might not actually be the original 1980s version of a Yuppie—you know the Ferrari driving, Wall Street investment banker version of that term.

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<sup>1</sup> Farrar Capon, Robert. 2002. *Kingdom, Grace, Judgment: Paradox, Outrage, and Vindication in the Parables of Jesus*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 382- 383. (I conflate the separate Gospel accounts, as does Capon).

Instead, this rich young man is the 2021 version of a “yuppie”—he does all those things *AND* he eats TOFU, he gives to the right philanthropic organization, he is on the Boards of multiple charities, and he somehow still has time to play lots and lots of tennis.

## **YUPPIE:**

What do we do with this yuppie?

Better yet, what does Jesus do with our Gospel’s yuppie?

Verse 21: “Jesus looked at him and he loved him.”<sup>2</sup>

If you were wondering how Cowherd was going to wiggle out of this difficult passage about wealth, that’s how.

And it’s a common method of wiggling out of it: only here, famously, in the Gospels is it reported that Jesus expresses his “love” for one individual.

Not for his mother, not for his disciples, not for the meek and the mild, but Jesus “loves” this yuppie.

Amazingly, Jesus gives the young man an opportunity to step back and lower the stakes. The man had asked him: “how shall I inherit eternal life?”

Jesus says “Follow the Ten Commandments.”

But the man rolls his eyes, the yuppie in him comes out in full force, he can’t help himself.

He says: “I’ve got that covered, give me a really hard assignment, give me something really difficult and I’ll do it, because look.... Look at my hairline, look at my bank account, look at my everything. **I can do** it all.”

And Jesus responds by giving him the Good News, capital ‘G’, capital ‘N.’

Jesus says: “Lose it all, that’s what I am asking.”<sup>3</sup>

Growing up, I watched a lot of *Perry Mason* and *Matlock*, the TV courtroom dramas, and the amazing thing about those lawyers was that they almost never lost a case, only every once in a blue moon would they lose and it would be shocking.

That’s what happens to Jesus here: this is the only unsuccessful conversion that Jesus has.

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<sup>2</sup> Mark 10.21a.

<sup>3</sup> Capon, 384; Mark 10.21b.

Elsewhere, he faces down demoniacs, and tax collectors and prostitutes and wins them over, but this yuppie tells Jesus: “Hard Pass,” to what he is offering.

### **MODERN-DAY:**

There’s so many ways to go wrong with this passage, so many ways to anger and to be offended, to be disheartened and disconsolate.

Left on the editing room floor of this sermon, in the recycle bin in Sheads’ somewhere, are the more dramatic conclusions that commentators have drawn about what Jesus is saying here about our economic system and our role as individuals in it.

This morning, I will merely inch out on the ledge by mentioning two modern-day yuppies, aging yuppies actually, who have not grown out of that stage, that have been in the news a lot recently: Richard Branson and Jeff Bezos.

And I offer them up as a mirror and means of reflecting on this passage, with the caveat that there is no greater fan of space exploration than me, I will be an astronaut again this Halloween as will my son.

Branson and Bezos are famous, of course, for financing and going on flights into space this year.

I wonder if their efforts are an attempt to answer our yuppie’s question:

“What must I do to inherit eternal life?”

“How do I enter the kingdom of God?”

“How do I live forever?”

“How do I (literally) get to heaven?”

Maybe the yuppie in our Gospel had done something similar, in his own time, something amazing, something incredible, something that cost the equivalent to \$5.5 billion dollars, as Bezos’ flight alone did.<sup>4</sup>

But still, on the return, there would be this aching sense that, after all that winning, there was something empty about it all.

Jesus then gives him that look, verse 21, that terrible/ awesome/ love-filled gaze and it was all too much. Our yuppie cannot bear the sight of Jesus’ gaze and the realization that he had done enough winning, now it was time to lose.

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<sup>4</sup> [Jeff Bezos Just Spent \\$5.5B to Be in Space for 4 Minutes. Here Are 7 Things That Money Could Help Solve. \(globalcitizen.org\)](https://www.globalcitizen.org/en/content/jeff-bezos-just-spent-5.5-billion-to-be-in-space-for-4-minutes-here-are-7-things-that-money-could-help-solve/)

## HOME:

This passage makes me uncomfortable, and it should make you uncomfortable as well.

Because one can't help but think: "this passage is about me."

Even as I try to distract with talk of yuppies and aging astronauts, Jesus still keeps that same, loving gaze, that he used in your story, on you and me, and on his Church.

And I don't know about you, but I don't like Jesus looking at me that way.

I would much rather him say "You need to do more, follow more commandments, strive harder."

I would much rather him be angry and judgmental and righteous towards me, because then I could at least look Jesus in the eye and say "how dare you?"

But instead, there is this stand-off, a heart-broken yuppie retreating into the wilderness, with Jesus lamenting the loss.

## CONCLUSION

In our story, Jesus also offers that loving gaze to his disciples, his friends, quasi-yuppies (they were too blundering and working class to really count).

Could they stand it? Hardly.

Could Jesus stand to deliver it? Knowing that he had given them a death sentence by following him.<sup>5</sup>

It's all almost too much to bear, so instead, we try to fix it by all fitting a camel through the eye of the needle.

Well maybe, maybe if **I DO** this, or if **I DO** that.

The comfort is that that is indeed impossible, but it's not our job, it's not my job to wiggle our way out of this.

Jesus declares that's his job, he's in the impossible business. The business of turning things upside down, of turning death into life, pain into joy.

Our job is to try to try to meet his gaze, to hold it, and accept his love.

## AMEN

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<sup>5</sup> Mark 10.27.