

## Warning the Rich in Light of the Judgment

### James 5:1-6

What we have is a warning as strong as we find among the OT prophets.

-- The prophets often brought words of woe and judgment to those in Israel who would not walk in the paths of the Lord.

-- James turns his attention to those he labels as RICH that were oppressing the people of God.

CHRIST TOLD US

Offenses must come.

But woe to those who offend one of these little ones who believe in me.

Little ones in that context need not refer only to age.

Weakness.

Dependency.

Helplessness.

WOE to those through whom those OFFENSES come.

It would be better that a millstone be tied around their neck and be cast into the sea.

Now that is drastic.

It is NOT an exaggeration.

It shows us HOW SERIOUS God takes these offense.

James warning takes on a two-fold aspect.

It comes as a word of warning and judgment.

In its larger context it encourages the people of God that God WILL vindicate His people in the great judgment.

In all likelihood James warning is directed not just to those in the church who were rich, but directed as a warning to the rich who were using their wealth against Christians in general.

**READ – 5:1-11**

It also should be an encouragement to God's people that – although they suffer many injustices today – there is a day of retribution coming.

In this message, we will focus on the judgment of the ungodly wealthy – and then in the next message in the series – we will look at the promises to those who are poor today – but rich toward God.

## **The Coming Judgment of Unjust Wealthy Persons 5:1-6**

### **I. The Warning Made Clear – v. 1**

### **II. They Have Hoarded their Wealth v. 2-3**

Their own wealth will be destroyed.

Their wealth will even come to testify against them.

### **III. They Have Unjustly Treated those who Depend upon Them v. 4**

Context of workers – also applies to slaves.

### **IV. They Have Misused their Wealth and Power in an attempt to Satisfy their own Selfish Desires v. 5**

### **V. They have mistreated the poor, even to the point of death v. 6**

### **I. The Warning Made Clear -- 1**

I want you to note, James never says it is a sin to be rich.

It is the sins that he charges “these rich ones” with that are truly grievous.

*As I studied the passage – I couldn't help but think about our own American history – especially in regards to slavery—which was only abolished 150 years ago.*

*-- How could CHRISTIAN slave owner read this passage and justify themselves over the way the slaves were generally treated and the way the system of slavery was practiced.*

*-- I understand how THEY TRIED to justify themselves – and the entire system -- but I think James warning was very applicable to the system of slavery as practiced in our country.*

*As we realistically look at our own situation.*

*Almost all of us in this room are “relatively rich”.*

*Relatively – when compared with ages past.*

*Relatively – when compared with so much of the world.*

*Why has God prospered us?*

*And what do we do with WHAT God has prospered us?*

## **II. They have hoarded their wealth v. 2-3**

And do we selfishly HOARD what God has given us – and use it simply to satisfy our own desires – OR – do we FREELY GIVE – with an open hand – and use what God has given us to glorify Him and to be generous.

You can't give what you don't have.

And Jesus said, “If all that God puts into your hand is a cup of cold water than all that will be required of you is a cup of cold water.

You can't give what you don't have.

So, it isn't good enough to say, “I don't need to give because I don't have very much.”

One of the reasons WE DON'T HAVE is because of our hoarding!  
I have found it to be true – over the years – some of the most generous people I have known – simply don't have very much – but they are generous with what THEY DO have!

So it isn't a matter of AMOUNT – it is a HEART matter.

And we can see the UGLY MATTER of the hearts of these unjust wicked persons who were oppressing the poor – and oppressing poor Christians.

**They have hoarded their wealth v. 2-3**

- Their own wealth will be destroyed.
- Their wealth will also be a testimony against them.

The wealth need not be LITERALLY destroyed.

Whether rich or poor – our possessions are destroyed TO US when we die

**THE LAST DAYS (v.3b)**

This is a technical term in the NT.

Question: Are we living in the last days?

The answer is YES.

But that doesn't mean run to your newspaper and try to figure out how the Book of Revelation is being fulfilled.

We are in the LAST DAYS because there are no further days to come – before we enter the ETERNAL STATE.

James lived in the Last Days.

Augustine lived in the LD -- Luther -- Calvin -- Thomas Watson – Spurgeon – All of us are living in the Last Days.

The Last Days is a technical term that doesn't denote a coming eschatological period of time.

The Last Days is a term for this NT age.

From the first coming of Christ until His second coming.

We live in the LAST DAYS because Jesus Christ WILL come again – and when he comes – there are no LAST-ER DAYS. ☺

American Evangelicalism is consumed with what some have called “Last Times Madness”.

I think that is a good description.

We need to go back to Biblical, NT thinking.

Christ came – and He will come again.

We are living in the last days – we just don’t know the appointed time for the VERY LAST DAY.

But, the rich are storing up their riches IN THESE LAST DAYS.  
They are misusing these riches – and misusing the people of God.

These very riches that are so precious today – will be a TESTIMONY against these people in the Day of judgment.

*7 -- Therefore be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord.*

*8b -- the coming of the Lord is at hand.*

*9b -- Behold, the Judge is standing at the door!*

But these wicked rich ones do not even have to wait until THE FINAL JUDGMENT.

Remember the rich man and Lazarus?

HE LOST IT ALL – at death – just like all of us do.

He had tremendous comforts while he was alive.

He has nothing but sorrow now in the afterlife.

James gives us STRONG and PICTURESQUE LANGUAGE!

Moth-eaten garments – so proud of them at one time – now totally ruined.

Corroded gold and silver – literally “rusted”.

Gold and silver don’t rust – doesn’t James know that?

## FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE.

What good are they?  
They are now useless to you!

You trusted in your money – but God and righteousness cannot be purchased – at least – not with material wealth.

Common theme in Scripture. Turn please to Isaiah 55  
This theme occurs literally dozens and dozens of times.

### **Isaiah 55:1-7** – exposition

Here is the same message as James – with an exhortation to repent.

Buy without money?  
**SALVATION IS FREE!**

Notice who are the ones who are called – the thirsty ones – they are invited to the waters.

This goes along with effectual calling.

The truth is revealed.  
Then God creates the thirst.

Those called by God – who have this thirst – freely come to the water of life!

### **III. They have unjustly treated those who depend upon them v. 4**

#### **Deut. 24:14-15, 17**

<sup>14</sup>“You shall not oppress a hired servant *who is* poor and needy, *whether* one of your brethren or one of the aliens who *is* in your land within your gates. <sup>15</sup> Each day you shall give *him* his wages, and not let the sun go down on it, for he *is* poor and has set his heart on it; lest he cry out against you to the LORD, and it be sin to you.

The Bible talks often in the OT of the wicked ones who withhold pay from their workers.

The Bible warns us NOT to take the cloak of a widow as a guaranty – she needs it for her warmth.

Elsewhere they were told to return the cloak to the man at nightfall.

Israel had been slaves in Egypt.

They should have a heart for the slave – for the worker – for the poor – for the oppressed – for those in difficult circumstances.

The economic system of their day was admittedly very different than our own.

-- and we can thank the Lord that our system is better and more just.  
– but the principles given in Scripture of justice and mercy are timeless.  
-- and I would also argue some of the basic principles that James recounts here have helped us have a more equitable system.

I can understand how some folks would think that maybe a message about this passage just isn't "very relevant".

I'm not rich – what does this have to do with me?

The Word of God is always relevant because IT IS the Word of God.  
Our economic system in America is not exactly the same as theirs, although there are some parallels .

In this first century the gap between the wealthy and poor was growing.

It was an agrarian society – but many of the small farmers couldn't make it – and they basically had to sell themselves to the wealthy in order to make enough to live day by day.

-- In our day – employers SHOULD NOT exist just for their own profit.  
Nothing wrong in making a profit.  
There is everything wrong in making a profit on the broken backs of your employees.

-- Employers have a duty and a responsibility to treat those who work for them with dignity and respect.

#### **IV. They have used their wealth and power simply for their own selfish gratification v. 5**

It is the Lord who gives you the power to gain wealth.  
Remember what we said earlier about “hoarding”.

“On the earth” is key to understanding this warning.  
Those that misuse their wealth – are simply fattening themselves up for the slaughter.

The slaughter will come.

Like an animal -- being fattened and enjoying the luxury – and as they fatten they make themselves more attractive to the ones who will butcher them.

Like an animal – willingly walking to the slaughterhouse – unaware of the danger – that it will cost them everything!

#### **V. They have mistreated the poor, even to the point of death v. 6**

That may seem like an exaggeration – but how many have REALLY DIED because of poverty – because of starvation – because of abuse or neglect at the hands of those who could have helped.

You have condemned and murdered the righteous person.  
Some have thought James was speaking about Christ.

It is possible – but it doesn’t seem likely.  
In this context – the charge seems to be CHRISTIANS.

Those who ARE righteous – because they are in Christ.



True – we know we are righteous ONLY because of Christ and what He has done for us – but it is not wrong to call Christians “righteous ones”.

The last phrase is difficult and interesting.

“he does not resist you.”

If it were a capital – “he” – God would be in view.

Some interpreters take it that way.

GOD does not resist you – today.

You get away with it NOW – but the judge is coming.

The judge is standing at the door.

If you take “He does not resist you with what follows – it could refer to God – who in His providence is letting the rich oppress the righteous ones today – but it won’t always be that way.

A lower case “he” makes us go back to the context of the Christians who are not resisting their oppressors.

Both are possible.

The Greek is unclear – **so I like what the ESV did.**

They simply made it a STAND ALONE SENTENCE.

It is a capital “He” because it is the first word of the sentence – and so they haven’t made an interpretation for us – simply by punctuation.

The question for you is – in light of THE FACT that we are in the last days – and the judge is standing at the door – how is YOUR standing with God?

-- Do you know Him?

-- Do you believe His Word?

-- Have you trusted – by simple faith alone – in Christ as YOUR righteousness?

Pray

Hymn 241

Benediction: 5:7a