

BOOK OF JAMES
WARNING TO THE RICH
JAMES 5:1-6

BOOK OF JAMES
WARNING TO THE RICH
JAMES 5:1-6

Introduction

It would be easy for us to just pass over this section of James' Epistle because I don't think any of us in here tonight are what WE might consider rich!

When we think of someone that is rich, most of us probably think along the lines of someone who has accumulated millions or in our day billions of dollars of net worth! Am I right? (e.g. *Forbes Members of "The Three Comma Club" which would include such names as Jeff Bezos-Amazon, Bill Gates-Microsoft, Warren Buffet-Berkshire Hathaway, Mark Zuckerberg-Facebook, 581 others*)

I could be mistaken, but I don't think we have anyone in our midst that fits the bill of **"rich" in terms of how the "rich" are viewed in the U.S.**

But how about when we are compared to people in most parts of this world? In comparison with **most people who now live and/or who ever have lived in the past, most of us would be considered VERY RICH!**

I don't think there would be much argument that compared to the majority of people in the world, **we ALL are indeed blessed!** Amen?! There are people all over the world that would love to trade places with the poorest of us!

=====

Now, it is important to stress that **God does not condemn the rich for being rich!** In fact, **some of the godliest people in the Bible were rich in this world's goods!** (e.g. *Job, Abraham, Joseph, David, Solomon, Philemon*)

However, we do know that after Christ's was confronted by the Rich Young Ruler, **Christ spoke of the difficulty of the rich being saved.** *Matthew 19:23-26* "23 Then said Jesus unto his disciples, Verily I say unto you, That a rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven. 24 And again I say unto you, It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God. 25 When his disciples heard it, they were exceedingly amazed, saying, Who then can be saved? 26 But Jesus beheld them, and said unto them, With men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible."

In our text tonight, we see that the LORD had a problem with at least some of those that were rich in James day. (*Read James 5:1-6*)

As we consider this passage tonight, lets address four questions:

1. **Who was James addressing in this passage?**
2. **What was in store for these rich oppressors?**
3. **Why was God so angry at these rich men?**
4. **What applications can we draw from this passage?**

I. WHO WAS JAMES ADDRESSING IN THIS PASSAGE?

Vs. 1 – "Go to now, ye rich men..."

A. Are These Rich Believers Who Had Been Guilty Of Oppressing Their Fellow Believers?

While that is possible, it is unlikely for several reasons:

1. These are not addressed as **"brethren"** as others are in this epistle! (*James 1:2,19; 2:1,14; 3:1,10; 4:11*)
2. There is no call to repentance here in this passage as there is throughout this epistle in those passages in which it is clear that **"brethren"** are being addressed! **Here we see only words of condemnation!**
3. The **"brethren"** are not addressed in this Chapter until **verse 7!** There were some of these **"brethren"** who were being oppressed by **rich men!** The **"brethren"**, in **verse 7**, are told to be patient in light of what has just been said about the oppression they faced from the rich!

B. The More Likely Scenario Is That Those Addressed Here Are Rich Unbelievers!

They were **rich men** who had been oppressing the believers that James letter was originally addressing! (*Vs 6*)

This tirade of judgment upon these rich men **appears to serve the purpose of comforting the brethren who were being oppressed by them!** (*Vs 7*)

BOOK OF JAMES
WARNING TO THE RICH
JAMES 5:1-6

1. The Lord has heard the cries of the oppressed Believers. (*Vs 4b*)
2. James assures that judgment is coming upon these rich oppressors!
3. So, therefore these Believers are told to be patient in the verses that follow! (*Vs 7ff*)

But even if this passage does not have direct reference to rich Believers, there are still things to which we should give careful heed to as Believers that we will address later, but first, let's look at:

II. WHAT WAS IN STORE FOR THESE RICH OPPRESSORS?

A. Miseries That Will Cause Them To "Weep And Howl"!
(Vs 1-3a)

1. **In fact, so certain are these miseries to come, that James speaks of them as already occurring!**
 - a. **"Your riches are corrupted..."** (*Vs 2a*)
corrupted = to make rotten; putrid. (Only here)
These riches refer to crops, flocks, stores of grain, wine, oil and many changes of garments.
 - b. **"...and your garments are moth-eaten."** (*Vs 2b*)
moth-eaten = (Only here)
 - c. **"Your gold and silver are cankered..."** (*Vs 3a*)
cankered = speaks of being tarnished or having lost its brightness by exposure to air, dust, or the like. (i.e. lost its luster!)
2. **When this "corruption" of their riches occurs...**
 - a. **It will serve as a witness against them.** (*Vs 3b*)
(i.e. It will witness that they were indeed guilty of the things that he mentions here!)

BOOK OF JAMES
WARNING TO THE RICH
JAMES 5:1-6

The *rust* or discoloration bore testimony against them that **these things were not used as they should be**, either in paying those to whom it was due, or in doing good to others.

b. It will eat their flesh as it were fire. (*Vs 3c*)

- 1) The anguish and misery of **poverty usually affects the hardest those who were once rich!**
- 2) So, when the poverty to come strikes, it will make them **"weep and howl"** for the miseries that would come upon them!

B. The Miseries Spoken Here Are Believed To Be A Prophetic Reference To What Later Occurred In 70 A.D.—The Roman Destruction Of Jerusalem.

1. Not long after this epistle was written, Jerusalem was destroyed by the Romans!
2. Many of the rich Jews who had oppressed their Christian brethren literally **"wept and howled"**!
3. What they had failed to realize was that they had **"heaped treasure together for the last days"** (*Vs 3d*)
 - a. Like the man in the parable of the rich fool (*Luke 12:16-21*), they thought they were laying up riches for their last days of their lives.
 - b. When in fact, it was actually the **"last days"** of the Jewish economy when they were so busy storing up wealth!

The miseries that came upon these rich people were terrible indeed (they are described by the historian Flavius Josephus, who was an eyewitness of the destruction of Jerusalem).

BOOK OF JAMES
WARNING TO THE RICH
JAMES 5:1-6

Even if it did not come upon some of them in the destruction of Jerusalem, it certainly came upon them when they died, as it did upon the rich man in the story of the rich man and Lazarus!
(Cf. Luke 16:19-31)

This leads us to the third question...

III. WHY WAS GOD SO ANGRY AT THESE RICH MEN?

Let's See The Seven Sins Of These Wicked Rich Men:

1. **They Were Guilty Of Heaping Together Treasures On Earth! (Vs 3; Cf. Matthew 6:19-21; Luke 12:15-21)**
i.e. They were **hoarding** their wealth!

2. **They Were Guilty Of Defrauding Laborers! (Vs 4)**
Leviticus 19:13 "Thou shalt not defraud thy neighbour, neither rob him: the wages of him that is hired shall not abide with thee all night until the morning."

Deuteronomy 24:14-15 "14 Thou shalt not oppress an hired servant that is poor and needy, whether he be of thy brethren, or of thy strangers that are in thy land within thy gates: 15 At his day thou shalt give him his hire, neither shall the sun go down upon it; for he is poor, and setteth his heart upon it: lest he cry against thee unto the LORD, and it be sin unto thee.

Jeremiah 22:13 "Woe unto him that buildeth his house by unrighteousness, and his chambers by wrong; that useth his neighbour's service without wages, and giveth him not for his work;

Malachi 3:5 "And I will come near to you to judgment; and I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers, and against the adulterers, and against false swearers, and against those that oppress the hireling in his wages, the widow, and the fatherless, and that turn aside the stranger from his right, and fear not me, saith the LORD of hosts."

BOOK OF JAMES
WARNING TO THE RICH
JAMES 5:1-6

3. **They Were Guilty Of Living In Pleasure At The Expense Of Those Defrauded! (Vs 5)**

Matthew 23:14 "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye devour widows' houses, and for a pretence make long prayer: therefore ye shall receive the greater damnation."

4. **They Were Guilty Of Living In Wantonness Or Luxury To The Uttermost! (Vs 5)**

Romans 13:13 "Let us walk honestly, as in the day; not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying."

5. **They Were Guilty Of Gorging Themselves With Food And Drink Living In Luxury And Excess! (Vs 5 – "...ye have nourished your hearts, as in a day of slaughter.")**

This expression has the idea of feasting and being **gluttonous** as men do at the time of the slaughter of many sacrifices at religious feasts.

6. **They Were Guilty Of Condemning The Just Or Perverting The Judgment Of The Poor! (Vs 6; Cf 2:1-10)**

Wrongly using the power that usually comes along with wealth! ("**Money talks**"... **paying and/or receiving bribes.**)

They failed to see this truth: That which is done against a believer is done against Christ!

7. **They Were Guilty Of Killing The Just To Multiply Their Own Riches! (Vs 6)**

(e.g. 1 Kings 21 - Just like wicked Ahab who killed Naboth and took his vineyard!)

Again, that which is done against a believer is done against Christ!

IV. WHAT APPLICATIONS CAN WE DRAW FROM THIS?

A. We Need To Be Careful How We Obtain Our Wealth!

1. To obtain wealth wrongly at the expense of others invites the LORD's displeasure with us!
2. It is wrong to think that we can only climb the ladder of success by stepping on others!
3. This might be an appropriate place to add what we learn from Paul in 1Timothy 6:9-10:
 - a. It is NOT riches that are wrong, but the **DESIRE TO BE RICH** that is both wrong and is wrought with many dangers!
 - b. Riches themselves are NOT wrong if they are the **BY-PRODUCT** of our endeavors and not the **GOAL** of those endeavors!
(i.e. One may desire to be a doctor to help the sick, or a plumber because of one's skill or interest in such matters, and receive riches as a by-product because of the value society might place on such services.)

But to enter such professions solely because one's goal is to get rich thereby, then we are ensnared by the love of money!
4. So how do we obtain our wealth?
 - a. If we do it honestly and are compensated for a job well done, then God is pleased!
 - b. But if we do it by hurting others and by making wealth our primary object, then we are in danger of God's chastening hand as believers!

B. We Need To Be Careful How We Use Our Wealth!

To spend it on luxurious living when others are suffering is exactly what James has described in this passage!

That is an indication that we lack the love of God as we should!
1 John 3:17 "But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?"

According to the New Testament, the purpose of working is not to obtain wealth for our own gratification, but to help those less fortunate!

Ephesians 4:28 Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labour, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth.

1Timothy 6:17-19

Acts 20:34-35 "34 Yea, ye yourselves know, that these hands have ministered unto my necessities, and to them that were with me. 35 I have shewed you all things, how that so labouring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive."

Conclusion

1. Living in the country and society in which we do, we have much for which to be thankful! (We have been blessed!)
2. But we also have much of which we need to beware:
 - a. We live in a society where it can be quite easy to become wealthy if we don't care about the methods we use or if our motives are all wrong!

BOOK OF JAMES
WARNING TO THE RICH
JAMES 5:1-6

- b. We live in a society where covetousness or the desire to be rich are not considered sins. (You might as well say Amen right there because it is so anyway!)
- c. We live in a society where heaping up treasures for our own gratification is considered an inalienable right!

It is so easy for even Believers to be influenced by these worldly values!

3. Perhaps we need to ask ourselves constantly: Are we laying up treasure in heaven, or on earth?

- a. Those who lay up treasure in heaven are those who use their wealth to do good and help the poor and less fortunate!
Matthew 19:21 "Jesus said unto him, If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me."

1 Timothy 6:18-19

- b. Those who lay up treasure on earth are actually storing up for themselves miseries and judgment!
 - 1) Miseries...when their wealth fails them in their time of true need!
 - 2) Judgment...from God in the Day of Judgment that is yet to come

These are sobering thoughts worthy of our careful consideration!
Have you even begun to lay up treasure in heaven by obeying the Gospel of Christ?