

James 5:1-6

Deuteronomy 8:18a “But remember the Lord your God, for it is He who gives you the ability to produce wealth...”

Proverbs 10:22 “The blessing of the Lord makes one rich, and He adds no sorrow with it.”

1 Timothy 6:10 “For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.”

James has two aims in the first 6 verses of chapter 5. First, to illustrate the ultimate worthlessness of all earthly riches. Second, to demonstrate the detestable character of those who possess wealth and hoard it.

I. The Unproductivity of Withheld Wealth (Vs. 1-3)

James’ words in this passage clearly indicates when we abuse God-given wealth:

- Our Christianity is phony
- We are headed for the judgment of God
- To concentrate on material things is to focus on decaying delusions
- And self-produced destruction

A. Their Riches Are Corrupted (Vs.1-2a)

The word for “weep” in verse 1 means to “cry out loud” or to “howl.” It was used to describe the grief that is expressed when someone has died or describe the reaction that accompanies intense shame and guilt. It means to shriek and scream in anguish.

“Achan’s lust for money and possessions brought death to himself, his family, and dozens of men in battle (Joshua 7). The prophet Balaam would have cursed God’s people for Balak’s payment (Numbers 22:4-25). Delilah betrayed Samson to the Philistines for a fee (Judges 16). Solomon’s lust for more and more wealth led him to disobey flagrantly the prohibitions of God’s law concerning the accumulation of large amounts of horses, gold, silver, and wives (Deuteronomy 17:16-17). To gain wealth Gehazi lied to Naaman and then to Elisha, for which he was afflicted with leprosy (2 Kings 5:20-27). Because of Ananias and Sapphira’s love for money and prestige caused them to withhold money and the Lord struck them dead for it (Acts 5:1-11). In the ultimate act of treachery, the materialist Judas asked the chief priests, ‘What are you willing to give me if I hand Him over to you?’ and then betrayed the Son of God for thirty pieces of silver (Matthew 26:14-16, 47-50, 27:3-10).” [Randy Alcorn; *Money, Possessions, and Eternity*]

What James is rebuking here is not having wealth, but hoarding wealth, when there is such a great need in our world for spreading the gospel.

The word “corrupted” in verse 2 can also be translated “rotted” and “ruined.” James is rebuking the wealthy for hoarding grain way beyond their needs while people are going hungry.

B. Their Garments Are Moth Eaten (Vs. 2b)

The word for garments here refers to expensive outer wear such as robes or coats. It is not referring to the inner robe everyone would wear. The lesson here is, what’s the point of hoarding up garments or grain and just feeding moths and possessing rotted grain?

C. Their Gold and Silver Are Corroded (Vs. 3)

This verse (vs. 3) literally translated would read like this, “Your gold and silver are now made exuding poison, and the poison of them shall be for a testimony to you, and shall eat your sinful flesh nature as a fire stored up within the Last Days.”

The last part of verse 3 is language is from the courtroom. Hoarded riches will be a witness for the prosecution against the wealthy who have hoarded their riches. The hoarded grain will testify, “I could have fed the hungry.” The hoarded garments will testify, “I could have clothed the ragged who had no decent clothes to wear.” The gold and silver will testify, “I could have financed the support of churches and the proclaiming of the life changing Gospel to the unreached.”

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James 5:3 also says what *Ecclesiastes 5:13* (NKJV) says, “*There is a severe evil which I have seen under the sun: Riches kept for their owner to his hurt.*” The fact that the rich have hoarded goods in the day of judgment will be presented as evidence that they have abused the blessings God put into their hands and treated them not as His steward, but as if they owned it.

II. The Seriousness of Wrongful Wealth (Vs.4, 6)

The sin in verse 4 is not in owning land nor is it hiring workers at a fair wage to work your land. The sin is in using others in an abusive way and not paying them on time, paying them less than was agreed on, or not paying them at all.

Deuteronomy 24:14-15 (NKJV) ¹⁴ “*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.* ¹⁵ *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 law says in *Leviticus 19:13*, “*Do not say to your neighbor, ‘Go and I will give it ... when you have it with you.’*”

How this verse is applicable for us today is in not giving adequately to God’s work from the rich blessings we’ve received from the Lord.

III. The Rich have used their wealth selfishly

The first part of verse 5 can be translated “*You have lived on the earth in soft luxury and extravagant, immoral pleasures ...*” The Greek word for “*soft luxury*” comes from a root word which means to “*break down.*” It describes the soft living which will drain and destroy a person’s moral character and integrity. The phrase “*extravagant, immoral pleasures*” is the Greek word “*spatalan.*” It is harsh and severe word which means to live in lewdness and lustfulness.

IV. Those who chose this lifestyle have also chosen its end

The end of verse 5 describes the practice of taking a cow and specifically fattening it up to be slaughtered for a feast. ³ William Barclay interprets the last half of verse 5 this way, “*... those who have sought this easy luxury and selfish wantonness are like men who have fattened themselves for the Day of Judgment, The end of their pleasure is grief and the goal of their luxury is death. Selfishness always leads to destruction of the soul.*”

How this is applicable to us today? Our withholding of funds that we can give to the Lord’s work is figuratively and literally taking life from the poor in order to continue our prosperous lifestyle.

V. The Selfishness of Wasted Wealth (Vs. 5)

The context in verse 5 is directed toward the selfish waste of wealth. Verse 5 distinctly states that they are headed for the judgment of God like an animal that is being fattened up to take to the slaughterhouse.

There is an application here for us today for those Christians who live not just in opulence and extravagance, but those of us who live comfortably.

[C. T. Studd (1860-1931) was a famous cricket player] “*Some want to live within the sound of church or chapel bell; I want to run a rescue shop within a yard of hell.*” *Only one life, twill soon be passed. Only what’s done for Christ will last.*”

Application:

Is the way I spend God’s money as His steward pleasing Him? How will I increase my giving to the Lord’s work?