

The Epistle of James

October 29, 2017

James 5:1-6

Wealth and Judgment

Sermon #18

Reading: Matthew 6:19-24

Jesus taught an important principle Christians need to know and practice in life, “No servant can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.” (Luke 16:13) We cannot submit to the prince of this world and the life style the world promotes, but we are to live as true disciples of Christ. Therefore, Jesus also taught as Christians, “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal,²⁰ but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal.²¹ For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” (Matthew 6:19-21) One thing that surely reveals the nature of a person’s heart is their attitude toward money and how they handle it.

As we have worked our way through James letter to the Jerusalem church he has given us a number of tests to help one determine if they and others are true believers or not. Here in chapter 5 James presents another test; that test is what is one’s attitude towards the money God has blessed them with. James is straightforward and gets to the point immediately writing in verse 1, “Come now, you rich, weep and howl for the miseries that are coming upon you.” James’ scorching and condemning opening is directed towards those in the church who claim Christ but in truth worship money. Though James sternly addresses those in the church who worship Christ as a small god and money as their true god the principles James lays out in this morning’s passage are good for all believers to understand. Verse 1 begins with “Come now!” It is softened in the English, but in the Greek it means, “Listen up!” or “Pay attention!” what is following is important

and you need to take it to heart. James had just dealt with the fools who did not take God into consideration as they planned their future and now he introduces this new test of one's attitude towards money. James says, "**you rich**" who put money above God and worship it, "**weep and howl for the miseries that are coming upon you.**" This is the type weeping and gnashing that one does when a loved one dies untimely. Mark recorded Jesus had come back to the west side of the Sea of Galilee at Capernaum and the leader of the synagogue, Jairus (*L ar ios*) came pleading for Jesus to come to his home for his daughter was near death. When Jesus arrives the girl had died and at "**...the house of the ruler of the synagogue, and Jesus saw a commotion, people weeping and wailing loudly.**" (Mark 5:38) The household had lost their precious child and they wept and wailed until Jesus restored the young girl. This is the type weeping and wailing and howling the rich who worship money will do for eternity when Jesus returns or they die and stand before the judgment seat of God. As recorded in Luke, Jesus warned those who sought money over God saying, "**But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation.**" (Luke 6:24) They have received their reward here on earth and will receive justice for eternity.

Let me be clear, the Bible does not teach that possessing material wealth is wrong or sinful. In America everyone possesses wealth compared to much of the world. Moses reminded the Hebrews of God's warning about divided worship, "**You shall remember the LORD your God, for it is he who gives you power to get wealth, that he may confirm his covenant that he swore to your fathers, as it is this day.**" ¹⁹ And if you forget the LORD your God and go after other gods (*which includes money*) and serve them and worship them, I solemnly warn you today that you shall surely perish." (Deuteronomy 8:18-19) More than four hundred years later King Solomon gave similar advice, "**The blessing of the LORD makes rich, and he adds no sorrow with it.**" God wants us to enjoy the material things he provides, within

boundaries. Outside of those boundaries is where the danger is found. Solomon continues, ²³ **Doing wrong is like a joke to a fool, but wisdom is pleasure to a man of understanding.**” (Proverbs 10:22-23) Money is a tool to be used for good; providing for one’s family, caring for the poor, advancing the gospel of Christ and providing for those serving Christ’s church as pastors.

Perspective is key for as with most things it is one’s heart that determines what is truly loved. Those who desire money above all other things have a heart for the world. Jesus told a story that illustrates this well. Turn in your Bible to Luke chapter 16 and follow along as I read beginning at verse 19, **“There was a rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day. ²⁰ And at his gate was laid a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, ²¹ who desired to be fed with what fell from the rich man’s table. Moreover, even the dogs came and licked his sores. ²² The poor man died and was carried by the angels to Abraham’s side. The rich man also died and was buried, ²³ and in Hades, being in torment, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham far off and Lazarus at his side. ²⁴ And he called out, ‘Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the end of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am in anguish in this flame.’ ²⁵ But Abraham said, ‘Child, remember that you in your lifetime received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner bad things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in anguish.’ ”** (Luke 16:19-25) In this parable Jesus illustrates the vast chasm both in this world and in eternity between those saved and unsaved and whose focus in life is the holiness of God and those who seek after the world.

In verses 2 to 6 James lists 4 sins that will bring judgment on the wicked rich. These wicked rich are condemned because their wealth was hoarded, unjustly gained, unduly spent and unfeelingly acquired.

Wealth: Uselessly Hoarded

James launches into the first sin of those who desire money above God writing in verses 2 and 3, “Your riches have rotted and your garments are moth-eaten. ³ Your gold and silver have corroded, and their corrosion will be evidence against you and will eat your flesh like fire. You have laid up treasure in the last days.” Hoarding is a problem in America. We have TV shows about hoarders and only in America do people take things they no longer use and put them in a storage unit, paying rent to keep them there so no one else can use them – is this not insanity and sin? God gives believers the ability to gain material goods, but they are to be used for their needs and His Glory. We certainly have a responsibility towards our families, as Paul wrote to Timothy, “But if anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for members of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.” (1 Timothy 5:8) Christians are to be known for their willingness to work hard and provide for their families and beyond to provide for ministry and those within the body of believers with true needs.

James gives 3 ways the rich hoard common to the time he wrote his letter but they are also true today. First James writes, “Your riches have rotted.” This could apply to riches in general but more specifically to food. The rich then and today have a tendency to have an excess of food so some soils before it can be used. Like the rich man in Jesus’ parable found in Luke chapter 12, who decided to build bigger barns and live a life of ease, he desired to “relax, eat, drink, be merry.” (Luke 12:19) However, what he had amassed and hoarded, if it did not rot, went to others after he died.

In the 1st century one way wealth was shown was by the clothes one wore and the extent of one’s collection of fine clothes. When the king of Syria wanted favor from the king of Israel he sent his messenger “taking with him ten talents (75lbs per

talent or a total of 750lbs with a current value of \$203,160) of silver, six thousand shekels (.4oz each shekel or 150lbs with a current value of \$3,078,240) of gold, and ten changes of clothing.” (2 Kings 5:5) The king of Syria sends precious metal worth \$3,301,400 dollars and it was important to include 10 changes of clothes. Fine linen and clothes was a sign of wealth. This is true today; ones house, car and clothes are used to define a person’s success. As Christians Paul instructed, *“I desire then that in every place the men should pray, lifting holy hands without anger or quarreling; ⁹ likewise also that women should adorn themselves in respectable apparel, with modesty and self-control, not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly attire.”* (1 Timothy 2:8-9) We are to live in modesty, meeting our needs, but not spending our money on costly attire and vanity. The excess the Lord blesses us with should be used to further kingdom work.

The 3rd sign of the wrong use of wealth is found in verse 3, *“Your gold and silver have corroded, and their corrosion will be evidence against you and will eat your flesh like fire. You have laid up treasure in the last days.”* We see gold and silver as indestructible and yet they often bring corrosion into ones life because of greed and they will have no value when one is standing before the Lord’s mercy seat as believers (John 5:24) or “great white throne” of judgment (Revelation 20:11) as nonbelievers.

Verse 3 ends with, *“You have laid up treasure in the last days.”* The last days refers to the time we live in, the time between Christ’s resurrection and his return. This is the time as Jesus instructed, *“lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. ²¹ For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”* (Matthew 6:20-21) Material wealth is a blessing from God and is to be used for provide for ones

family's true needs with the excess used to advance kingdom work. Those who fail to use what God gives wisely and hoard his blessings are disobedient.

The part of verse 3 that says, “[their corrosion will be evidence against you and will eat your flesh like fire.](#)” This is one of many references in the New Testament that for those who remain unsaved, hell is a place of physical torment. Back to the story I read from Luke chapter 16 of the rich man and Lazarus, Jesus says, “[The rich man also died and was buried,](#) ²³ [and in Hades, being in torment, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham far off and Lazarus at his side.](#) ²⁴ [And he called out, ‘Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the end of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am in anguish in this flame.’ ”](#) (Luke 16:22-24) This should give us motivation to share the gospel of Jesus Christ with anyone who will listen while there is time. Do not let the sun set without sharing the saving gospel of Christ in both deed and word.

Wealth: Unjustly Gained

The sinful rich not only hoard their wealth but they sin in the gaining of their wealth. Reading from James chapter 5 verse 4, “[Behold, the wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, are crying out against you, and the cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord of hosts.](#)” In Israel those who hired out by the day to work and to harvest were an important part of the economy. They were dependent upon the daily wages to provide shelter and feed their families, withholding their wages was prohibited in the Old Testament. In Leviticus we read, “[The wages of a hired worker shall not remain with you all night until the morning.](#)” (Leviticus 19:13) In Deuteronomy, Moses instructed owners, “[You shall not oppress a hired worker who is poor and needy, whether he is one of your brothers or one of the sojourners who are in your land within your towns.](#) ¹⁵ [You shall give him his wages on the same day, before the sun sets \(for he](#)

is poor and counts on it), lest he cry against you to the LORD, and you be guilty of sin.” (Deuteronomy 24:14-15) Being fair and paying the labor at the end of the day was so important the prophet Jeremiah cursed those who violated this command saying, “Woe to him who builds his house by unrighteousness, and his upper rooms by injustice, who makes his neighbor serve him for nothing and does not give him his wages...” (Jeremiah 22:13)

To treat unfairly by withholding what is due someone who has performed work is not only a sin of selfish gain, it is also dishonesty and James calls it “fraud”. In addition it is also a sin both against God who provides and against those wrongfully treated. God says he hears their pleas as they cry out for justice. Verse 4 says, “the cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord of hosts.” Depending on your translation it may say “Lord of hosts” or “Lord of Sabaoth” (sab·ah·owth). This term “Lord of hosts” was first used by David in 1 Samuel, “Then David said to the Philistine, ‘You come to me with a sword and with a spear and with a javelin, but I come to you in the name of the LORD of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied.’ ” (1 Samuel 17:45) David says his God is the Commander of the heavenly hosts or armies. Jesus hears the afflicted poor and will use the heavenly armies to enact justice. As recorded in Matthew, Jesus says, “The Son of Man will send his angels (*heavenly hosts*), and they will gather out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all law-breakers,⁴² and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.⁴³ Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear.” (Matthew 13:41-43) Great and terrible judgment awaits those who rob from the poor and hoard their ill-gotten wealth for themselves. Jesus makes clear that he, as the righteous judge will act and his judgment will be lasting.

Wealth: Unduly Spent

The wicked rich who have increased their wealth by hoarding and robbing the workers add to their sin by spending this wealth for self-indulgence. Continuing in verse 5, “You have lived on the earth in luxury and in self-indulgence. You have fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter.” James tells us that people who amass wealth by these sinful means seek to live life in luxury while those they defrauded suffer. As one lives in luxury they seek pleasures that are never fully satisfied. This leads one into an ever-downward spiraling life of sin for physical pleasure. All one has to do is observe the lives of the rich and famous, politicians, TV evangelists and the idols of Hollywood to know this is often true. Paul taught that the church should care for true widows and meet their needs in his 1st letter to Timothy. But, he also warned, “she who is self-indulgent is dead even while she lives.” (1 Timothy 5:6) Paul’s statement goes beyond widows; people who live self-indulgent lives are physically alive yet spiritually dead. This condition will continue through eternity if they do not repent and become redeemed. However, if these wicked self-indulgent people, like the prodigal son in Luke chapter 15 who “squandered his property in reckless living” and then came to his senses and said, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you.” (Luke 15:13 & 18) if they repent and seek God they also will be reunited to God through Christ.

Wealth: Unfeelingly Acquired

James ends this short passage of those who sin by hoarding their ill-gotten gain and their downward spiral of robbing others and spending it in self-indulgent pleasures with finally they murder the righteous person. Verse 6 reads, “You have condemned and murdered the righteous person. He does not resist you.” These wicked people become so addicted to their life of luxury and self-indulgent pleasure they would kill to keep it. Because they have gained power in the world

they use it and wield it to keep their lifestyle and power. They have no problem murdering people morally, spiritually, mentally and for some even physically to maintain their sinful lusts. In Deuteronomy chapter 17, God directs courts to be set up to protect the innocent and determine truth. These courts were to be impartial and yet even Israel's courts over time became corrupt by taking bribes and siding with the rich. In the 200+ years America has been a country the judicial system began in the same manner to protect the innocent but has become more and more corrupt and when not corrupt there is less and less logic to the justice it metes out. The righteous man suffers and God is offended and sinned against by this wicked behavior.

Doing what is true and right is what Christians are called to live. Jesus did not resist when he was unjustly taken before a false and wicked court. He lived and died what he had already taught and as we are to follow. Here is what Jesus taught, “You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’³⁹ But I say to you, Do not resist the one who is evil. But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also.⁴⁰ And if anyone would sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well.⁴¹ And if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles.⁴² Give to the one who begs from you, and do not refuse the one who would borrow from you.⁴³ You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’⁴⁴ But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,⁴⁵ so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven.” (Matthew 5:38-45) For wealth to be a blessing, used for the good of the kingdom, one must first be rich in faith. For those in the church who possess wealth beyond what is needed to care for their family and provide a future for their children as Paul instructed Timothy to teach the church, I also follow Paul and instruct, “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. ¹⁸ They are to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, ¹⁹ 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.” (1 Timothy 6:17-19) My beloved as those who have been blessed with material wealth, if we are rich in faith, let us use God’s blessings for our families, to care for the poor, advance the gospel of Christ and provide for those serving Christ’s church. Amen!