

A STUDY OF JAMES (17)

Come Now You Rich
James 5:1-6

The Book of James

- Continuing our study of James, we have addressed numerous practical applications.
- His audience was primarily Jewish converts who were scattered abroad
- The book is filled with practical applications.
- Our last lesson noted our need to keep God in our plans (“If the Lord wills”). We also concluded with the warning of **Jas. 4:17**
- Today we find (another) warning to the rich. But who is James addressing?

Come now you rich – **5:1**

- Wealth has been a considerable discussion throughout this book.
- The Truth for Today Commentary series (James – by Duane Warden) notes that of the 108 verses, 27 of them are directed against those who oppressed Christians with wealth OR response to such. About 25%.
- Money is an important subject – something we need to live but consider as we live our lives as Christians. Here we find James' strongest address of this subject.

Come now you rich – **5:1**

- Is it sinful to be rich?
- No! Money is morally neutral. It is not about how much you have but how you use it (and how it was obtained).
- Many godly & faithful individuals recorded in scripture who had great wealth – Abraham, Job, Joseph, David, Nehemiah, Barnabas, etc. Others who were likely wealthy – Lydia, Zacchaeus, Nicodemus, etc.
- **Proverbs 13:22**, *A good man leaves an inheritance...*

Come now you rich – **5:1**

- Is it sinful to be rich?
- There are strong warnings about wealth in scripture:
- **Matthew 19:23-26** – after the rich, young ruler left
- **1 Timothy 6:6-10**
- **1 Timothy 6:17-19** – directed toward rich believers
- **Matthew 6:19-21, 24, Hebrews 13:5**
Ecclesiastes 5:10, Proverbs 30:8-9

Come now you rich – **5:1**

- Who is James addressing in this text?
- Likely wealthy unbelievers. They are corrupt and opposed and oppressed Christians and the vulnerable.
- This section (1-6) does not use the word “brethren” (which is found 15x in this short letter – incl. **4:11 & 5:7**)
- Likely, much of James’ audience was not wealthy. There was little middle class in the Roman Empire and most were poorer.

Come now you rich – **5:1**

- Is James addressing unbelievers (continued)?
- Throughout this letter James has given practical advice that all can apply regardless of financial status. But here...
- There is no call for repentance in this section – just a warning of judgment.
- IF so, James' intent is to encourage Christians suffering to know that God WILL judge those who were oppressive. **Cf. Luke 16:19-31**

Come now you rich – **5:1**

- Is James addressing unbelievers (continued)?
- Regardless, if a believer is guilty of these behaviors, the warnings apply!
- *Weep and how for your miseries that are coming*
- we WILL be held accountable for our stewardship!

Cf. Luke 16:19-31

Come now you rich – 5:1

- Is James addressing unbelievers (continued)?
- Note: More specifically, many sources believe that James has the corrupt Jewish leaders and wealthy class who rejected Jesus and used their powers to try and quash His followers.
- *Weep and howl...* James could be addressing what Jerusalem was going to face in a few years for their corruption. Descriptions of what happened to Jerusalem during the siege could be applicable. It lasted about 5 months (April-September, 70 AD). Began as Passover was concluding.
- **BUT apply the text to anyone described!**

God's judgment upon the wealthy – **5:2-6**

- *Your riches are corrupted* (**2-3**)
- While using literal terms of decay, likely the appeal their ungodly attainment and use
- In judgment, you wealth will NOT help you!
- Consider ancient coins and artifacts – even undisturbed are depleted over time.
- **Matthew 6:19-20** – where is your treasure?
- *Corrosion would be a witness against them*
- *Eat your flesh like fire* – judgment – **2 Thessalonians 1:6-9**
- *Treasures in the last days* – judgment all will be made right!

God's judgment upon the wealthy – **5:2-6**

- *The wages of the laborers (4)*
- They were defrauded by the wealthy
- **Cf. Matthew 23:13-14** – they devoured widows houses.
- The poor (defrauded) depended on their wages daily –
Cf. Matthew 20:1-16; Leviticus 19:13, Deuteronomy 24:14-15.
 - This was also a factor in the downfall of Israel and Judah (**Jeremiah 22:13, Habakkuk 2:9, etc.**)

God's judgment upon the wealthy – 5:2-6

- *The crises of the reapers have reached the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth (4)*
- God hears their cries
- Sabaoth is a word that means armies or hosts (numerous). The point is God's power cannot be resisted by the corrupt.
- You do NOT want His face against you!

God's judgment upon the wealthy – 5:2-6

- *You have lived in pleasure and luxury (5)*
- Often wealth and comfort causes one to forget who God really is.
For some, their lifestyle was at the expense of the poor and vulnerable.
- Fattened hearts for the day of slaughter –
In judgment, what benefit will your wealth be?
WHO will you have to blame for your condemnation?

God's judgment upon the wealthy – 5:2-6

- *You have condemned and murdered the just (6)*
- Were they literally guilty of murder? Could be, but their conduct rendered them guilty.
- Often the “rich and powerful” take measures with no thought of how it harms the poor and those “beneath them”. They have the resources to get their way.
- Many examples in scripture – silversmiths in Ephesus, a poor widow seeking vengeance from a corrupt judge, paying Judas 30 pieces of silver, Jezebel against Naboth, devouring widows houses, **James 2:6-7** – they drag you to court
- Some poor may join them, but are they pawns?

God's judgment upon the wealthy – 5:2-6

- *You have condemned and murdered the just (6)*
- Even today who is behind much of the oppression against Christians?
 - Who legislates laws making preaching against homosexuality illegal?
 - In a pandemic who lobbied to keep churches closed and bars open?
 - Who seeks laws to keep prayer and Bibles out of public places like libraries and schools?
 - Who sues a bakery or photographer for standing on their moral principles?
- These things take resources to advance their agendas.

God's judgment upon the wealthy – 5:2-6

- *He does not resist you (6)*
- Because, physically he cannot! The poor often do not have the resources for a good defense. Their only hope is for one with resources and compassion to stand up for and with them.
- But regardless, God sees and one day will make things right!

Concluding thoughts – **James 5:1-6**

- Wealth is not wrong, but how we use what we have matters!
- God is watching. Are we visiting “orphans and widows” (**James 1:27, cf. Matthew 25:31-46**)?
- And, there WILL BE an accounting.

When you stand before God,
what will He say to you?