

### The Rich Denounced and the Oppressed Encouraged

#### James 5:1-12

*James 5:1-6 - "Come now you rich, weep and howl for your miseries that are coming upon you. <sup>2</sup> Your riches are corrupted and your garments are moth. <sup>3</sup> Your gold and silver are corroded and their corrosion will be a witness against you and will eat your flesh like fire. You have heaped up treasure in the last days. <sup>4</sup> Indeed the wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, cry out. The cries of the reapers have reached the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth. <sup>5</sup> You have lived on the earth in pleasure and luxury. You have fattened your hearts as in the day of slaughter. <sup>6</sup> You have condemned. You have murdered the just; he does not resist you."*

#### Background Notes

The epistle of James is a very practical book of Scripture. Even though it was written in the 1st century AD, it's right up to date -- because it's the Word of God! It speaks to us today in clear and certain and very practical terms.

In James 1 we had practical exhortation about the tests of our faith and our temptations to sin. In James 2 we were exhorted not to show favoritism to those having social status. In James 3 we were exhorted about the proper use of our tongues -- a very practical chapter in the Bible! Wouldn't you agree? In James 4 we had practical exhortation regarding strife -- even strife among ourselves as believers. Unfortunately, there's always strife, so James 4 is certainly very practical. In chapter 4 we were also exhorted not to make plans for the future without taking the Lord into account. All our planning should be made in the will of the Lord.

In the first half of James 5, we have two more very practical exhortations. The first message is to those believers who are rich: they are to stop their wrongdoing. The second message is to those people who are oppressed: they are to wait and be patient until their reward.

#### Doctrinal Points

##### 1. The sins of the rich will be judged.

In verses 1-6, four sins of the rich are denounced. Who did James have in mind when he addressed "the rich"? Is he referring to rich Christians or to rich non-Christians? Answer: **both!** Remember, the book of James was written to "*the twelve tribes, which are scattered abroad*" (James 1:1). When we studied James 1, we mentioned that this referred primarily to Jewish believers scattered throughout the Roman Empire, but certainly the contents of this letter would become known to many non-Christian Jews of the 1st century.

The sad note here is that many rich Christians practice the sins of the rich -- both then, and today! Remember - it's not wrong to **be** rich, if God chooses to make you rich. However, rich Christians should use their money responsibly and in accordance with the teachings of the Word of God. In addition, it's wrong to try to **become** rich (1 Timothy 6:9), because rich Christians are vulnerable to committing the sins listed here in James 5.

**Hoarding** is the first sin of the rich (v1-3). Instead of using their money and material to help the poor and needy, the rich Christians of James' day were hoarding their wealth. As a result of their hoarding, James described their material treasures as "moth-eaten" and "rotten," and their money was "corroded." This hoarded and corroded treasure would be a witness against them in the last days, at the time of judgment.

Let me ask you: Are you a "hoarding Christian"? You may say, "I'm saving for a rainy day." Well, listen -- a rainy day is already here for many folks. Look around you. Don't lose out on your reward in heaven, fellow believer, because you are hoarding here on earth! Is that message convicting to you? Let's not hoard our wealth -- let's share it!

**Acquiring wealth by dishonest means** is a second sin of some rich people. Verse 4: *"Indeed the wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you have kept back by fraud cry out. And the cries of the reapers have reached the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth"* [or Lord Almighty]. By 1st century standards, when the book of James was written, most of us (maybe all of us) would have been rich. You may be thinking, "Wait a minute! I'm not rich!" - but put yourself back in the context of the time when this letter was written. By 1<sup>st</sup> century standards, probably **all** of us are rich!

Now how did we get this way? By honest means or dishonest means? If you're an employer and you paid your employees inadequate wages, you're guilty of this sin. If you practice false advertising, you're guilty of this sin. If you have ever cheated on your income tax returns or lied on your expense accounts, you're guilty of this sin. Maybe no one else knows - but the Lord Almighty knows!

**Luxurious living** is the third sin of the rich. Verse 5: *"You have lived on the earth in pleasure and luxury. You have fattened your hearts as in the day of slaughter."* Luxurious living is living a self-indulgent lifestyle of unnecessary expenditure and pleasure, when others around us are in need.

Here's an illustration: Just this past week, one of my students from another country told me that she may have to leave school because her widowed mother is in desperate financial need. I need to do something about this situation. Relative to this woman's situation, I'm well off -- even rich! I need to do something about it, or I'll be guilty of this sin!

**Perverting justice** is the fourth sin of the rich. Verse 6: *"You have condemned. You have murdered the just; he does not resist you."* The point of verse 6 is that rich people take advantage of poor people and use their influence in many ways, even in the courts, to pervert justice -- even, literally, to the "death of the innocent," or those people who can't defend themselves. That's the point of verse 6.

It's hard to believe, but even Christians have gotten involved in perverting justice for their own selfish ends. God will judge all of these sins. The sins of the rich will be judged.

## 2. The patience of the oppressed will be rewarded.

James 5:7-11 - *"Therefore be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, waiting patiently for it, until it receives the early and latter rain. You also be patient; establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand. Do not grumble against one another, brethren, lest you be condemned. Behold, the Judge is standing at the door. My brethren, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord, as an example of suffering and patience. Indeed we count them blessed who endured. You have heard of the perseverance of Job and seen the end intended by the Lord, that the Lord is very compassionate and merciful."*

This section of James 5 is specifically addressed to believers who are undergoing oppression – oppression by people, as in the case of the persecuted prophets of old (v10), or by circumstances, as in the case of the patriarch Job (v11). Are you feeling crushed and oppressed, either by people or by circumstances? If so, here's some good news for you. If you're a Christian, you will receive reward - if you patiently endure this oppression. That's the teaching of this section of James 5.

Just as the farmer waits patiently for the rain and is rewarded with precious fruit (v7), so there will be reward for us if we patiently endure oppression, whether it be oppression from people or oppression from circumstances. Job patiently endured and was rewarded in the end (v11). Read the last chapter of Job and you will see how the Lord was very compassionate and merciful to Job. Job patiently endured -- and Job was rewarded!

Don't think that you'll have to wait a long time for your reward. Don't think, "Oh, I can't do it - it's too long! I just can't endure this!" Remember -- the Lord's return is very close! *"The coming of the Lord is at hand"* (v8). *"The Judge is standing at the door"* (v9)! The return of the Lord has always been imminent. If you patiently endure, there will be a reward for you. Life is short. The Lord is at hand – in fact, He's standing at the door! This time of trouble won't last forever. You can do it! You can handle it!

*"The Lord is at hand. The Judge is standing at the door."* Certainly the implication of in these statements, written in the 1st century, is that the Lord's return has **always** been imminent. It doesn't necessarily have to happen tomorrow -- but it could happen tomorrow. In fact, the Lord could return today! The return of the Lord has always been imminent. That's an encouragement for you, for me, for any believer, when we're undergoing trial and oppression from circumstances or people. So take heart if you're oppressed. The patience of the oppressed will be rewarded.

## Practical Application

**Let your "Yes" be yes!**

Let your “Yes” be yes! Verse 12: *“But above all my brethren, do not swear; either by heaven or by earth or with any other oath. But let your yes be yes and your no, no, lest you fall into judgment.”*

When you are undergoing oppression, either from people or circumstances, there’s a tendency to grumble (v9) and there’s a tendency to make flippant or emphatic statements using God’s name in an inappropriate way (v12). These off-the-cuff exclamations or comments would not necessarily have to be profanity or blasphemy -- just flippant oaths that supposedly add weight or emphasis to our unthinking outbursts.

Have you ever done this? Have you ever used the name of God inappropriately or flippantly? Verse 12 condemns this kind of exclamation or emphatic statement. This kind of speech will be judged. The Lord Jesus warned us of this same sin in Matthew 5:37.

So let your “Yes” be yes and your “No” be no! With the Lord’s help we should stay cool and calm and collected! And we should always be very honest. Let your “Yes” be yes!