

Wednesday Night BIBLE STUDY

Wednesday, October 19, 2016 – First Baptist Church Buda
Midweek Prayer Meeting & Bible Study

GETTING PRACTICAL WITH YOUR FAITH A STUDY OF THE BOOK OF JAMES “Warnings to the Wealthy” *James 5:1-6*

THOUGHT STARTERS: *(discussion questions)*

1. Most Americans are rich by worldly standards. How can we know when we're guilty of living in luxury?
2. How can we know when we cross the line from prudent savings for the future verses ungodly hoarding?
3. Is it wrong for Christians to own nice things or to buy non-necessary items in the face of so many needs in the world?

Money never stays with me. It would burn me if it did. I throw it out of my hands as soon as possible, lest it should find its way into my heart. ~ John Wesley, Cleric and Theologian

If a person gets his attitude toward money straight, it will help straighten out almost every other area in his life. ~ Rev. Billy Graham, Evangelist

A dreadful thing is the love of money! It disables both eyes and ears, and makes men worse to deal with than a wild beast, allowing a man to consider neither conscience nor friendship nor fellowship nor salvation. ~ John Chrysostom, Early Church Father

Do not think me mad. It is not to make money that I believe a Christian should live. The noblest thing a man can do is, just humbly to receive, and then go amongst others and give. ~ David Livingstone, Missionary to Africa

The fellow that has no money is poor. The fellow that has nothing but money is poorer still. ~ Billy Sunday, Evangelist

God doesn't need us to give Him our money. He owns everything. Tithing is God's way to grow Christians. ~ Adrian Rogers, Pastor

God does not need your money; He wants what it represents-you. Finances are God's gift to you to fulfill His will for your life. While God desires you to prioritize His work in giving, He wants you to purpose to follow and serve Him no matter what happens with your finances. ~Paul Chappell, Pastor

God never leads anyone anywhere for money. ~ Jack Hyles, Pastor

If I love money more than Christ, woe is me! ~ William Tiptaft, Minister

The person who thinks the money he makes is meant mainly to increase his comforts on earth is a fool, Jesus says. Wise people know that all their money belongs to God and should be used to show that God, and not money, is their treasure, their comfort, their joy, and their security. ~ John Piper, Theologian, Preacher and Author

It is reported that F. Scott Fitzgerald and Ernest Hemingway once engaged in the following interchange:

Fitzgerald: “You know, Ernest, the rich are different from us.”

Hemingway: “Yes, I know. They have more money than we do.”

It is debatable whether this dialogue ever actually occurred, but the humor based on obvious fact brings a smile to our lips. The most significant part of this interchange is that part left unanswered, namely, how are the rich different? Or, are they different? Secrecy shrouds the inner lives of the wealthy. Gossip, legend, and imagination envelope them. The rich are notoriously private people. It is next to impossible to uncover the truth about them. In this study we will see that God, through James, says about, and to, a certain percentage of the wealthy... or at least the wealthy of the first century. Then we will consider how these words relate to the wealthy of today.

I. BACKDROP TO THE WARNING

In order to determine the context, we need to look back to the preceding chapter in which James addressed those who plan without God. Look back at James words in James 4:13, *“Come now, you who say, ‘Today or tomorrow we will go to such a such a city, spend a year there, buy and sell, and make a profit.’”* James has in mind those who arrange their futures and live as though God does not exist. In chapter 5 James has a similar type of person in mind. Notice James 5:1, *“Come now, you rich, weep and howl for your miseries that are coming upon you!”* These are the people who accumulate and spend as though there is no God. But, perhaps, to understand James’ grounding and strong teaching on the subject of money, wealth and material things we need to go even further back. Where do you suppose that James his strong understanding and theological background on the subject of wealth and material things? Jesus, perhaps?

READ (purple)

Jesus gave strong and steady, reliable and hard hitting instruction on wealth and material assets. Some of His strongest appears in His Sermon on the Mount. **(Matthew 6:1-4, 19-21, 25-34 READ)**

3 Basic Teaching from Jesus on Wealth and Material Things:

1. We are to give a portion of what God has given to us back to him, and for His glory and purposes never to draw attention to ourselves (Mt. 6:1-4)
2. We are not to hoard and store up earthly things that are of value only here in this life, but to be building up a heavenly store house of spiritual treasure (Mt. 6:19-21)
3. We are not even to worry about our earthly needs, but to trust God and God alone to provide for our needs, and He will do it (Mt. 25-34)

II. CLASSIFICATION: TYPES OF PEOPLE

It is not true that the poor always go to heaven and the rich necessarily go to hell. There are some godless poor, and there are some godly rich. Such has been the case in the past, and so it will be in the future. We are inclined to peg people into one of two categories: those who have, and those who have not. But, the problem is broader than that. Essentially, from a biblical perspective there are four kinds of economic groups:

4 Kinds of Economic Group From a Biblical Perspective:

1. **Those who are poor without and poor within** – These have little or none of the world’s good and, at the same time, know nothing of Jesus Christ or God’s love. These are the people to be most pitied. The poor without Christ are just as lost at the rich without Christ... and lost to the same degree. Being lost or saved is not determinate on how much you have in this life.
2. **Those who are rich without and rich within** – In comparison, these have a healthy portion of material goods and, at the same time, maintain a close walk with God. Not only do we have contemporary examples of people like this, but there are biblical examples as well: Abraham, Joseph, Daniel, Job, Joseph of Arimathea, and Barnabas (to name a few).
3. **Those who are poor without and rich within** – These have little in the way of possessions, but are born again and beneficiaries of the riches of Christ which are credited to their spiritual accounts. The Apostle Paul, in describing himself, said of himself in **2 Corinthians 6:10**, that he regard himself *“as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things.”* How can that be? How can you be poor, having nothing, yet be rich possessing all things? He is speaking of being poor without, yet rich within because of Jesus Christ, salvation, the hope of heaven and all the promises of God and heaven. Go back a couple of chapters and notice what James said back no **James 2:5**, *“Listen, my beloved brethren: Has God **not** chosen the poor of this world to be **rich** in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him?”*
4. **Those who are rich without and poor within** – By now it is clear to us what these people are like. It is to this group that James directs his message. In his day the plutocrats ruled the world and controlled the lives of most everyone. They were oppressors of his day. Thus, the words of verses 1-6 are aimed at the unbelieving, oppressing rich who were then, and who are today, spiritually impoverished. Jesus even spoke of these being inside the church when He address the church at Laodecia in Revelation 3 and confronted their “lukewarmness” that was nauseating to Jesus. Here is what Jesus said to them in **Revelation 3:14-18 (READ)**. Did you notice what he said in **verse 17**, *“Because you say, ‘I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing’—and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked.”*

READ (yellow)

SIDE NOTE: *These may possibly have been some of the oppressors and persecutors that the Jewish converts to Christianity James is addressing in his letter were being tormented by. Economic persecution was a very real threat in New Testament times. If*

those who “had” refused to patronize and do business with the common merchants of the day, who very much depended on their trade for their livelihood, those economic boycotts would literally starve out a family. These Jewish converts to Christianity were not just being persecuted with physical martyrdom and imprisonment, but also with economic sanctions because of their new found faith.

III. SPECIFICS OF THE WARNING (James 5:1-6)

Come now, you rich, weep and howl for your miseries that are coming upon you! ² Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are moth-eaten. ³ 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. ⁴ Indeed the wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, cry out; and the cries of the reapers have reached the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth. ⁵ You have lived on the earth in pleasure and luxury; you have fattened your hearts as in a day of slaughter. ⁶ You have condemned, you have murdered the just; he does not resist you.” – James 5:1-6

The core of James’ warning is contained in verse 1, “*Come now, you rich, weep and howl for your miseries that are coming upon you!*” The words “weep” and “howl” can be paraphrased “shriek.” That’s the thought behind the wording in the original text; it conveys a misery that cannot be contained and must be exploded through the lips. With this in mind, let’s restate James’ warning; *You who are rich, if you could see your misery and account for it now, you would shriek.* Woven into this text are the reasons why this warning was given and predictions of divine retribution which the “rich without and poor within” could anticipate.

Reasons for the Warning – 4 Areas of Violation James Addresses: In observing the rich, James found four areas of violation.

1. **The rich were guilty of hoarding their riches (v.2)** – In James’ day and New Testament times wealth was exhibited primarily through three avenues: eating, dressing, and spending. James emphasized these in relation to hoarding, adding into his discussion the elements of time and disuse. He indicated that hanging onto things... hoarding them... produces spoilage, rust, and rot. This is, perhaps, why we get the warning from Jesus in his Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 6:19-21, “¹⁹ *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.*”
2. **The rich were cheating those deserving wages (v.4)** – The rich hired people to do specific jobs and then withheld their pay. The rich gained some of their wealth by oppressing and defrauding their day laborers... a practice that was strictly forbidden in the Old Testament. Leviticus 19:13 gave this command, “¹³ *You shall not cheat your neighbor, nor rob him. The wages of him who is hired shall not remain with you all night until morning.*” And similarly in Deuteronomy 24:14-15, “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.” And Jesus taught that “the laborer is worthy of his wages...” in Luke 10:7. Paul repeated the same idea in 1 Timothy 5:18 saying, “... You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain, and the laborer is worthy of his wages.”

3. **The rich were living a selfish life-style (v.5)** – Given enough money and privacy, most men will withdraw from others and live to selfishly gratify their own desires. The analogy James uses here to describe the rich is interesting; he speaks of their hearts being “fattened.. in a day of slaughter.” Animals in the process of being fattened concentrate on filling their stomachs and are oblivious to their destiny. Being contented for the moments is their only concern.
4. **The rich were taking advantage of the righteous (v.6)** – In fact, they were putting the Christians to death.

Divine Words of Retribution – 4 Warnings of Consequence: In summary, these words are as follows...

1. **Hoarded riches reap miserable dividends (vv.1-3)** – “Come now, you rich, weep and howl for your miseries that are coming upon you! ² Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are moth-eaten. ³ 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.” In verses 1-3 of our passage in James what are the “miserable dividends” that James says hoarding riches may bring?
2. **Riches provide no relief in eternity (vv. 3b, 5b)** – James speaks of corroded earthly treasures being a witness against those placing their hope in them, and if that is not bad he says they will “... eat your flesh like fire...” (v.3b), a clear reference to the final “fiery” judgment” awaiting the lost. And the end of **verse 5** James speaks of “a day of slaughter” a very vivid depiction of the divine judgment. Notice what Solomon says in Proverbs 11:4, “Riches do no profit in the day of wrath, but righteousness delivers from death.”
3. **The unjust acts of the unsaved are not forgotten (v.4)** – “⁴ Indeed the wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, cry out; and the cries of the reapers have reached the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth.” In other words, the Lord sees, and knows. Nothing escapes his ears. And God will repay! Paul in quoting directly from God’s own words, tells us that God says in **Romans 12:19**, “... Vengeance is Mine, I will repay, says the Lord.”
4. **A lack of judgment today does not mean a lack of judgment tomorrow (implied)** – The prophet, Jeremiah, was troubled by this thought, so he asked the Lord in Jeremiah 12:1, “Why does the way of the wicked prosper? Why are those happy who deal so treacherously?” **Listen to Psalm 37:1-17 (READ).** James 1:11, “For no sooner has the sun risen with a burning heat than it withers the grass; its flower falls, and its beautiful appearance perishes. So the rich man also will fade away in his pursuits.”

READ (green)

IV. LESSONS APPLIED FROM THE WARNINGS (1 Timothy 6)

READ (blue)

Paul's instruction in another New Testament letter compliments James' teaching and helps us focus our conclusions: **(1 Timothy 6:3-19 READ)**

2 Conclusions based on 1 Timothy 6 and James 5:1-6:

1. **God's concern is not with actual wealth, but with our attitudes toward wealth (vv.8-10)** – The phrases indicating attitude are: (v.9) *“those who desire to be rich,”* (v.10) *“the love of money,”* (v.10) *“some have strayed from the faith in their greediness.”* What is the correct attitude? Paul says in verse 8, *“And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content.”*
2. **God's counsel is not against people who are wealthy, but against the wrong priorities of the wealthy (vv.17-19)** – Being wealthy raises one's risk factor and adds pressure that can threaten to twist priorities. Pride and self-reliance, especially on what one has and can provide for himself seemingly independent of God, can easily take over. Instead of fixing our hope on the uncertainty of riches, we are to focus our attention on God. Listen to Paul's words in 1 Timothy 6:17-19, *“¹⁷ Command those who are rich in this present age not to be haughty, nor to trust in uncertain riches but in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy. ¹⁸ Let them do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to give, willing to share, ¹⁹ storing up for themselves a good foundation for the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life.”*