

## James

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James 5:1-6

Vss. 1-3

- Here James shifts again, but still staying under the general heading of the mortal poison of Pride. No where in scripture is wealth condemned per se. Rather it is the misuse of wealth and the corruption of our priorities that wealth so often brings, that scripture condemns. 1 Timothy 6:10 says that "...the **love** of money is a root of all sorts of evil", not money in and of itself.
- The two things James is pointing to here are the ultimate worthlessness of material wealth and how wealth like power can corrupt even the best people.
- When James says, "Come now, you rich..." he is referring to the **selfish** rich. Barnabas was rich. Joseph of Arimathea was rich. Obviously King David, a man after God's own heart, was rich. But David is the classic example of how wealth and power corrupts and can cause even the very best person to do terrible things out of Pride. So to those in the church who have been so corrupted, they need to "weep and howl" for the miseries of judgement that are soon to come upon them. The word for "howl" means "to shriek like those suffering the torments of the damned". The riches of the wealthy have rotted. Their garments, which were the symbols of wealth, had become moth eaten. Their gold and silver will have turned to rust. But in reality, gold and silver do not rust, which James and his readers would have known, but he is pointing out that all the material things that the selfish wealthy hold dear will turn to rust and ash. None of it will last. None of it will save them.

Vss. 4-6

- Here James gets specific, likely responding to a concern that had been brought to him: that wealthy people in the church were employing the poor of the church, but were either paying them less than what they should or were withholding their pay altogether. In other words, the wealthy in the church were adding to their wealth by injustice. Of course this flies in the face of the Old Testament Law that James so loved. Deuteronomy 24:14-15 and Leviticus 19:13 are specific (read). Proverbs 3:27-28 joins them. And Jeremiah, like James, speaks of the judgement coming for those who practice such injustice (Jeremiah 22:13).
- A day laborer literally lived day to day, hand to mouth. If he was not paid it meant that he and his family went hungry. This is why the scripture speaks so strongly on the issue, especially on the

subject of the way God's own people treat one another. Again, you are not loving one another as Christ loves you if you are cheating your brother and are the cause for his wife and children to go hungry.

- So James concludes this section by observing how the selfish rich live "luxuriously on the earth" and live lives of "wanton pleasure". The word for "wanton" suggests that the selfish rich have used their ill-gotten gains on prostitutes. And echoing Jesus when the Lord spoke of the "Two Paths" in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 7:13-14), one chosen path leads to destruction and the other to life. James says, that like stall fed cattle, "you have fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter".
- We need to stop here and look at the heart of what James is driving at. If you have never read the Bible and knew nothing about anything God-related, you could not help but notice the large space in the heart of God dedicated to social justice. Martin Luther King, Jr. built his entire mission on those passages of the Bible and he had no shortage of stone to stand on. The great Biblical scholar, J. E. McFadyen said the Book of Amos could be entitled "The Cry for Social Justice". William Barclay agrees and points to how "Amos condemns those who store up violence and robbery in their palaces (Amos 3:10). He condemns those who tread on the poor and themselves have houses of hewn stone and pleasant vineyards--which in the wrath of God they will never enjoy (Amos 5:11). He lets loose his wrath on those who give short weight and short measure, who buy the poor for silver and the needy for a pair of shoes, and who palm off on the poor the refuse of their wheat. "I will never forget any of their deeds," says God (Amos 8:4-7). Isaiah warns those who build up great estates by adding house to house and field to field (Isaiah 5:8). The sage of Proverbs insisted that he who **trusts** in riches shall fall (Proverbs 11:28). Luke quotes Jesus as saying, "Woe to you that are rich!" (Luke 6:24). It is only with difficulty that those who have riches enter into the Kingdom of God (Luke 18:24). Riches are a temptation and a snare; the rich are liable to foolish and hurtful lusts which end in ruin, for the love of money is the root of all evils (1 Timothy 6:9-10)".
- One of the great mysteries of the church over the last 1000 years is how we got to a place where Karl Marx and Frederick Engels could charge that the Christian faith was "the opiate of the people" and make it stick. There is no other book in the world that speaks so powerfully to the question of social injustice as does the Bible. Nor is there any other book that provides a more precise method of correcting the problem than does the Bible! There is no other voice on earth that speaks stronger on the wealthy's responsibility in regards to their money and in regards to the poor, nor any other book that speaks more poignantly to the dangers inherent in accumulating great wealth than God's Word.