

Life after Faith – James

James 5:1-6

“Warnings to the Wealthy (...that’s us)”

1. DON'T BE SHALLOW IN STORING RICHES

A. The excess that goes to waste

B. The end that gives a warning

2. DON'T BE SINFUL IN SECURING RICHES

A. The greed that defrauds the poor

B. The God that defends the poor

3. DON'T BE SELFISH IN SPENDING RICHES

A. An indulgence to be condemned

B. An indictment to be considered

1. Every year, *Forbes* magazine publishes a list of the wealthiest people in the world. For the third time in three years, there is a *new* richest man in the world.

2. With a fortune estimated at \$53.5 Billion, Mexican tycoon, Carlos Slim Helu is listed as the wealthiest man in the world. Helu comes in just ahead of Bill Gates at \$53 billion, and Warren Buffett with his measly \$47 Billion.¹

3. James 5:1 begins with the words, “*Go to now, ye rich men...*” Most of us, when we read that address, think James is talking to someone else, someone like Slim Helu or Bill Gates.

4. Before we skip over these first 6 verses of chapter 5, however, we need to consider ourselves and our wealth, not in comparison with the people on Forbes’ list, but with the rest of the world.

5. There is a very helpful and informative website called *globalrichlist.com*. On this site there is a place for you to enter your annual income. I did this, and was very surprised by the results.

6. It turns out that I am the 56,311,295th richest person in the world. That doesn’t sound very impressive until you realize that this means I fall well within the top 1% of the richest people in the world.

7. When we wake up and realize that 3 billion people on earth live on less than \$2 a day, then we have to read James 5:1-6 a little more closely.

8. If God judges all men equally (and He is no respecter of persons), then we are among the rich of this world, and we have to listen carefully to what the Spirit of God says to us here in the Word of God.

9. In this passage, Bro. James does not condemn the rich simply because they are rich. His strong words and warnings are based upon what they did with their riches.

10. There are three warnings that I believe we can draw from this stern and serious passage of Scripture. The first warning is this:

I. DON'T BE SHALLOW IN STORING RICHES

1. Look with me at the last line of verse 3. Bro. James says, “...*Ye have heaped treasure together for the last days.*”

2. James is addressing a group of people who had accumulated piles of stuff. They had taken their wealth and used it to heap up treasures.

3. One writer says that James is indicting these people for “hoarding”ⁱⁱ. These first-century people of prosperity had been shallow with their wealth, and rather than using it, they had piled it up.

4. God gives us what we have, not so that we can sit on it and hoard it away, but so that we can put it to good use for His glory.

5. Notice how James addresses these shallow scrooges with stored-up riches. First of all, James describes:

A. The excess that goes to waste

1. Look at verse 2. James says, “*Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are moth-eaten.*” The word “corrupted” there literally means rotted.

2. Speaking to that first-century society, James says, “The resources you have piled up in your barns are rotted. The clothes you have stacked in your closets are eaten up by moths.”

3. Look at verse 3. Bro. James continues and says, “*Your gold and silver is cankered...*” The word translated “cankered”, literally means corroded or rusted.

4. James says, “You stacked all your money up, and now it is corroding because you haven’t put it to use. It isn’t helping anybody. It is just sitting there, wasting away.”

5. What James is confronting is the sin of living with excess, and letting the blessing of that excess go to waste without putting it to good use.

6. In 2007, Americans spent \$20 Billion dollars renting storage space for all our excess stuff. 1 in 10 households now rent a place to store the overflow of things they have but are not using.ⁱⁱⁱ

7. There is nothing wrong with having stuff, but when we have so much stuff that we end up piling it up and letting it go to waste, then we are living with a shallowness that cannot be pleasing to the Lord.

8. James not only describes the excess that goes to waste, but he also points to:

B. The end that gives a warning

1. Look back at verse 1. James says, *“Go to now, ye rich men, weep and howl for your miseries that shall come upon you.”*

2. One writer describes this verse like the warning given to the passengers on a plane that is about to crash. It is as if James says, “Brace yourselves; judgment is coming.”^{iv}

3. Look back at verse 3. James says, *“...Ye have heaped treasure together for the last days.”* The New American Standard Version renders that phrase this way: “...It is in the last days that you have stored up your treasure.”

4. In other words, these rich people were stockpiling money and materials even while living in the last days and drawing ever closer to the final judgment.

5. James says in verse 3 that all those goods they had stored up and let go to waste, on the day of judgment they, *“...shall be a witness against you, and shall eat your flesh as it were fire.”*

6. The implication is that nobody will be glad to have a full garage and fat savings when they stand before Christ! On that day, all the goods they wasted will testify against them and indict their selfishness.

7. Do you understand this warning? In light of the end that is coming, and the account we are going to have to give to Christ, it is shallow and sinful for us to store up and hoard up a bunch of stuff we don't need and won't use.

8. Many of you remember the story of Ferdinand and Imelda Marcos, the former president and first lady of the Philippines. When they were deposed from office due to corruption, their lavish lifestyle was revealed to the world.

9. One detail that seemed to fill the news at that time was the fact that Imelda Marcos had 2,700 pairs of shoes. That is a different pair of shoes everyday for over 7 years.

10. I wonder if when Mrs. Marcos stands before Jesus, there won't be a pile of shoes poured out around her to testify to her shallow use of wealth.

11. The first warning then is this: *Don't be shallow in storing riches*. Consider a second warning we draw from this text. It is this:

II. DON'T BE SINFUL IN SECURING RICHES

1. James continues with his indictments in verse 4. He says, *"Behold, the hire of the labourers who have reaped down your fields, which is of you kept back by fraud, crieth: and the cries of them which have reaped are entered into the ears of the Lord of sabaoth."*

2. We need to remember the context in which this letter was written. James was writing to the first century Jewish Christians who were scattered throughout the Roman Empire.

3. This was primarily an agricultural society. People made their money off of the land. In that society, the wealthiest people were the land owners.

4. James confronts some of these land owners who had cruelly taken advantage of those beneath them on the social rung.

5. Even though much is different about the society in which we live, the sins are still very much the same. There are still people who line their pockets through sinful means.

6. Notice what James addresses in verse 4. He confronts:

A. The greed that defrauds the poor

1. In this fourth verse, James indicts wealthy citizens who had "kept back by fraud" the wages that rightfully belonged to the laborers who had worked in their fields.

2. It could have been that they were not paying a fair wage. Their sin may have been that of starving their workers for the sake of their own profits.

3. Or, it could have been that they were not paying the full wage. In other words, when they paid the laborers, they were not paying them all they had been promised or all they had earned.

4. Either way, they kept back for themselves what rightfully belonged to the poor workers they had hired.

5. At the heart of this practice is a sinful greed that will cheat others for the sake of personal gain. It is a practice that is alive and well today.

6. There are still a lot of people who abandon all ethics and convictions when it comes to making money. For many, the profit is more important than the principle.
7. Unfortunately, I have too often heard stories of men who were members of churches, and claimed to know Christ, yet their ruthless business practices spoke much louder than their profession of faith.
8. No Christian will be able to stand before Christ and excuse unethical and ungodly behavior by saying, "That was just business, Lord."
9. It matters to Christ not only how you spend your money, but also how you make it. That is why Bro. James exposes the greed that defrauds the poor.
10. Looking again at verse 4, we see not only the greed that defrauds the poor, but we also see:

B. The God who defends the poor

1. James says, "...*the cries of them which have reaped are entered into the ears of the Lord of sabaoth.*" This is a chilling statement.
2. James says that the cries of those who suffered because they were cheated out of their pay had reached the ears of "the Lord of sabaoth".
3. That title, Lord of sabaoth, refers back to the Old Testament. It was the name for God that David used when standing before Goliath. The name means, "Lord of Hosts", and describes God as the Head of the armies of heaven.
4. What James is saying is this: "You rich men did not listen to the cries of those you were cheating, but the God who leads the armies of heaven did hear, and He will avenge."
5. Psalm 12:5 says, "*For the oppression of the poor, for the sighing of the needy, now will I arise, saith the LORD...*"
6. We that are the people of God ought to care for and stand up for those who are poor, because that is what our God does.
7. Psalm 82:3 says, "*Defend the poor and fatherless: do justice to the afflicted and needy.*" Proverbs 14:31 says, "*He that oppresseth the poor reproacheth his Maker: but he that honoureth him hath mercy on the poor.*"
8. There is nothing wrong with succeeding and prospering in your life. However, while you make your money, you had better make sure that you do not secure it through sinful means.

9. When notorious gangster, Al Capone, found out that the government was going to charge him with tax evasion, he said, "They can't collect legal taxes from illegal money."

10. God knows where our money comes from. With that in mind, we must be careful that we do not stoop to sinful practices when making our money.

11. There is a third warning we draw from this passage. The first two are these: *Don't be shallow in storing riches, and don't be sinful in securing riches.* Consider also this last warning:

III. DON'T BE SELFISH IN SPENDING RICHES

1. It is important that we understand that there is nothing inherently wrong with riches. The Bible does not say that money is the root of all evil, but rather that *"...the love of money is the root of all evil (I Timothy 6:10)..."*

2. James is not confronting the rich merely because they have money and goods. No, the heart of his indictment is what they have done with their money and goods.

3. This is clear when you read verse 5. James says, *"Ye have lived in pleasure on the earth, and been wanton; ye have nourished your hearts, as in a day of slaughter."*

4. Rather than taking their blessings and using them to be a blessing, these rich people had spent their riches on selfish things.

5. One writer calls this kind of selfish spending, "...a sin which assaults us every hour as we walk through a shopping mall, watch television, or go through the day's mail."^v

6. God has blessed all of us above and beyond most of the people living in this world. If we aren't careful, we will spend our blessings as if we are the only one living in this world.

7. Notice what James addresses in verses 5 and 6. Notice first of all that he points out:

A. An indulgence to be condemned

1. James says to these rich people, *"Ye have lived in pleasure on the earth, and been wanton..."* That word "wanton" literally means to live in luxury. The ESV translates it as "self-indulgence".

2. While the poor working in their fields were scrounging for something to eat, and struggling to survive, these rich people had tables filled with food, and they ate until they were stuffed, and then just laid around waiting on their next meal.
3. The feasted and partied. Their lives were nothing but hedonistic romps. Pleasure was all they ever knew, and the only thing they ever spent their riches upon.
4. Though times have changed, many people today still see this kind of existence as being “the good life”, and they spend everything they have trying to experience a piece of this luxurious life of self-indulgence.
5. If you are a Christian, however, then you should recognize that your life of pleasure is not to come on this earth. Your reward and your rest come later. Your best life is *not* now.
6. Jesus said in Luke 6:24 and 25, *“But woe unto you that are rich! for ye have received your consolation. Woe unto you that are full! for ye shall hunger. Woe unto you that laugh now! for ye shall mourn and weep.”*
7. It is not that there are no pleasures for us to enjoy on this earth, and it is not that we should never experience good things. No, what both Jesus and James condemn is a life that is spent on nothing but self-indulgence.
8. When you work only to spend more on yourself, and when you live only to satisfy your desires; that simply is not a Christian life – no matter what you claim to be.
9. The Puritan Preacher, Thomas Manton, said, “God gave us wealth for another purpose than to spend it in pleasure.”
10. James is so disturbed by this indulgence that he compares those who live this way to cattle being fattened up for slaughter. It is a sobering illustration.
11. When it comes to how we spend our riches, notice not only that James points us to an indulgence to be condemned, but notice also further that he writes about:

B. An indictment to be considered

1. Look at verse 6. James says, *“Ye have condemned and killed the just; and he doth not resist you.”* The worst of all allegations James makes is this: he accuses the rich of murder.
2. Now it could have been that some of these rich people had actually killed the poor, or had them condemned and killed.

3. It also possible that what James means is that by their neglect and abuse of the poor they had practically done the same thing.
 4. Think carefully about this. Do those of us who enjoy plenty in this life bear any responsibility for those who have little or nothing?
 5. Remember Cain's question in Genesis 4:9, "*Am I my brother's keeper?*" Could it be that those of us of who have more than we need have some obligation to those who have less than they need?
 6. Let me ask it this way. If I throw away half of my food at the restaurant tonight, and somewhere in Central America, or Africa, or India, a child dies of starvation, am I in any way culpable?
 7. I don't know that I have all the answers to these types of questions. I do know, however, what the Word of God says. I John 3:17 says, "*But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his [heart] of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?*"
 8. Before we dismiss out of hand this indictment of murder in verse 6, we need to make sure we are not selfishly spending all we have, while those who have not perish around us.
 9. Imagine two Christians meeting in heaven; one from America, and one from say the Congo. The brother from the Congo asks, "How did you get here?"
 10. The American says, "I died of diabetes, brought on by obesity, caused by my overeating. What about you?" The brother from the Congo says, "I died of malnutrition."
 11. Let us be careful, and heed the warning of this text. Don't be selfish in spending the riches God has given you.
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1. In I Timothy 6:9-10, Paul writes to young Timothy, and warns him so that he might warn his people.
 2. Those of us who live among the richest in this world ought to have this passage underlined, highlighted, and bookmarked in our Bibles.
 3. Paul says, "*But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.*"

4. British poet, John Oxenham put it this way:

Christ stands at the bar of the world today,
As He stood in days of old,
Let each man tax his soul and say,
“Shall I again my Lord betray,
For my greed, or my goods, or my gold?”

5. By the help of the Holy Spirit may we heed these warnings to the wealthy.

ⁱ Miller, Matthew; Kroll, Luisa, Bill Gates No Longer World's Richest Man, 3/10/10, *Forbes.com*, accessed 4/8/10, <http://www.forbes.com/2010/03/09/worlds-richest-people-slim-gates-buffett-billionaires-2010-intro.html>

ⁱⁱ Hughes, R. Kent, James: Faith that Works, (Crossway Books, Wheaton, IL, 1991), p. 214

ⁱⁱⁱ Vital Statistics of the Self Storage Industry, *Self Storage Blog*, accessed 4/8/10, <http://www.selfstorageblog.com/vital-statistics-of-the-self-storage-industry/>

^{iv} Gregory, Joel, James: Faith Works!, (Convention Press, Nashville, TN, 1986), p. 96

^v Hughes, R. Kent, p. 217