

Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript

Misusing Wealth and Power Brings God's Judgment
James 5:1-6
Part Two

“Come now, you rich, weep and howl for your miseries which are coming upon you. (2) Your riches have rotted and your garments have become moth-eaten. (3) Your gold and your silver have rusted; and their rust will be a witness against you and will consume your flesh like fire. It is in the last days that you have stored up your treasure! (4) Behold, the pay of the laborers who mowed your fields, and which has been withheld by you, cries out against you; and the outcry of those who did the harvesting has reached the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth. (5) You have lived luxuriously on the earth and led a life of wanton pleasure; you have fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter. (6) You have condemned and put to death the righteous man; he does not resist you.” James, in this passage, is very forcefully condemning the ungodly rich.

Again, I would like to say that the Bible does not teach that possessing wealth is sinful in and of itself (Prov. 10:22). Everyone possesses wealth and material goods to one degree or another. In fact, it is the Lord Himself who blesses us with wealth. Listen to **Prov. 10:22, “It is the blessing of the Lord that makes rich.”** I would also like to say that the Bible does not teach that we cannot enjoy the wealth that the Lord has given to us (1 Tim. 6:17). Listen to what Paul writes in **1 Tim. 6:17, “Instruct those who are rich in this present world not to be conceited or to fix their hope on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly supplies us with all things to enjoy.”**

We should not necessarily feel guilty if we buy a new pair of shoes or microwave oven or go on a trip. This is not a problem. God is the one who has blessed us with wealth and he actually wants us to enjoy what He has given us. If wealth is not the problem, if the enjoyment of wealth is not the problem, then what is the problem? The love of money is the problem (1 Tim. 6:10). Listen to what Paul writes in **1 Tim. 6:10, “the love of money is the root of all sorts of evil.”** When people love money more than they love God, this is a problem.

When people love money so much that they begin to behave badly and to inflict pain on others, then they have fallen over the precipice of wickedness and can plummet into all kinds of vile behaviors. Throughout the Scriptures, the Lord has consistently condemned the behaviors of the ungodly rich who have fallen over this precipice. James is doing exactly that in **James 5:1-6**.

Were these individuals that he was denouncing in **James 5:1-6** actually in the church? I don't believe so. Why do I say this? Though he addresses those who were abusing their wealth in **VV. 1-6**, he does not in any way exhort them to change their behavior. He simply lists their sins in respect to their abuses and pronounces judgment. This is very much in contrast to the exhortations we find in **VV. 7-11**, which are directed at the brethren in light of the behavior of the rich.

James' denunciation appears to be aimed at his wealthy, unbelieving countrymen who were exploiting the poor; many of whom were in the church. Specifically, James targets the wealthy farmers who owned large tracts of land. But though these individuals were the target of **James 5:1-6**, the message is meant to benefit the church. First of all, hopefully, we would not be tempted to envy the ungodly rich in light of their future judgment.

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And secondly, I hope that as we look at these verses, we will examine our own lives to see if the “love of money” has begun to manifest itself in the kind of behaviors that characterize the ungodly rich.

The passage begins by calling the ungodly rich to weep and howl for the miseries that were coming upon them. But why were those miseries coming? James lists four different indictments against the ungodly rich.

The rich are first of all indicted for hoarding. Let us read **James 5:2-3**, “**Your riches have rotted and your garments have become moth-eaten. (3) Your gold and your silver have rusted; and their rust will be a witness against you and will consume your flesh like fire. It is in the last days that you have stored up your treasure.**” What good is hoarded wealth in light of the judgment? The answer is that “It is of no good at all.” Hoarded wealth in the time of judgment is worthless. In fact, it is worse than worthless because it will testify against ungodly wealth.

What is the first indictment that James brings against the ungodly rich? The indictment of hoarding. What is the second indictment?

INDICTMENT FOR FRAUD

“Behold, the pay of the laborers who mowed your fields, and which has been withheld by you, cries out against you; and the outcry of those who did the harvesting has reached the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth.” This is a gripping picture of the pain caused by rich landowners withholding wages from poor laborers. We see this pain expressed in two different ways.

The unjustly withheld wages were crying out to God for vengeance. Look at the first part of **V. 4**. **“Behold, the pay of the laborers who mowed your fields, and which has been withheld by you, cries out against you.....”**

And secondly, we see the pain expressed by the laborers themselves as they cry out to God. Look at the last part of the verse **“..... and the outcry of those who did the harvesting has reached the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth.”**

The crimes against these poor laborers that resulted in these cries being lifted up to God were despicable. What made these crimes so heinous?

First, because the poverty stricken workers were living from hand to mouth. A day without pay was a day without food for themselves and their families.

Secondly, while the laborers and their families were forced, most likely, to go without any food, the barns of the ungodly rich were bursting with wealth.

Did the Lord hear their cries? The answer is, yes! It says that their cries had **“reached the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth.”** If the ungodly rich understood that the cry of those they had sinned against had reached the ears of the **Lord of Sabaoth**, it should have terrified them.

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The "**Lord of Sabaoth**" is a very interesting phrase. This phrase only occurs one other time in the NT and then only as a quotation of **Is. 1:9**. It is one of the most majestic titles for God in the O.T. , “expressing not only His majesty and power as creator and ruler of the world, but also as commander of the hosts of heaven.” **Sabaoth** is an untranslated Greek word which derives from the Hebrew word *TSABA* meaning “hosts”, or “armies.” The phrase Lord of Sabaoth describes God as Commander of the armies of heaven (1 Sam. 17:45,16).

It was in the name of the "Lord of Hosts" or the "Lord of Sabaoth" that David confronted Goliath. Listen to **1 Sam. 17:45-46**, “**Then David said to the Philistine (Referring to Goliath), “You come to me with sword, a spear, and a javelin, but I come to you in the name of the Lord of Hosts (Lord of Sabaoth), the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have taunted. (46) This day the Lord will deliver you up into my hands, and I will strike you down and remove your head from you. And I will give the dead bodies of the army of the Philistines this day to the birds of the sky and wild beasts of the earth, that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel.”** Just as assuredly as the Lord of Sabaoth struck down Goliath in the Valley of Elah, he will also strike down these ungodly rich for the sin of fraud.

Can we be guilty of this same sin? The answer is, Yes! We may not have the opportunity to defraud our employees of their wages but there will be ample opportunities to defraud people if we would choose to do so.

Between the 4th and 8th grade in school I collected coins. After I had been actively collecting for about three years, a friend of mine began to collect Lincoln Pennies, but he had no concept of the value of the coins. He was simply trying to fill up all the spaces in his coin album. One day, I was over at his house and I was looking at his album and I saw that he had found a 1909 S Lincoln Penny in very fine condition. Though I had been collecting for three years, I had not been able to find this coin and on my limited income I could not afford to buy this coin. So what I did was to take advantage of his ignorance. I took advantage of his weakness. I offered to give him five pennies that he had not yet found, to fill up the empty spaces in his album ,for this one single penny. I represented this as a good transaction. It was a great transaction for me but a terrible transaction for him. And I knew that I was cheating him out of the true value of the coin. But, I did it. In essence I defrauded him.

The ungodly rich in **James 5:1-6** were indicted by James for hoarding, and for defrauding the poor. What is the next indictment James brings against the ungodly rich in this passage?

INDICTMENT FOR SELF-INDULGENCE

What a great topic to consider in light of our present day American culture. If there is any nation in the world that is more self-indulging than us, I would be surprised. Hopefully, what is all around us in our society has not impacted our lives.

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Let us read **V. 5**, “**You have lived luxuriously on the earth and led a life of wanton pleasure; you have fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter.**” How were these ungodly rich living on the earth? They were living “**Luxuriously on the earth.**” “Lived luxuriously” (ETEPHESATE) literally means “lived delicately” - a soft, pampered life. Some of you here this weekend might think, “What is wrong with this? What is wrong with pampering yourself?” Nothing if it does not become your god. We need to be careful. Why? Because it can get out of control real fast. Look at the next phrase “**and led a life of wanton pleasure.**” “**Wanton pleasure**” (ESPATALESATE) has the sense of giving oneself to the pursuit of pleasure. Those who live luxuriously very often descend into unrestrained indulgence.

If we have a one pound box of our favorite chocolates in the refrigerator, that is a blessing from God and it can be enjoyed. But, we need to be careful. These ungodly rich that James is addressing in this passage not only had a one pound box of their favorite chocolates in the refrigerator, they filled their refrigerator with chocolates and had begun to gorge themselves without restraint. What is James response to this unrestrained consumption?

Look at the next phrase, “**You have fattened your hearts in the day of slaughter.**” In very vivid language, he depicts the self-indulgent hoarders as fattened calves, headed for the slaughterhouse of divine judgment.

The OT often uses this imagery of slaughtering animals to depict God’s judgment. Listen to **Is. 34:5-8** “**For My sword is satiated in heaven, Behold it shall descend for judgment upon Edom. And Upon the people whom I have devoted to destruction. The sword of the Lord is filled with blood. It is sated with fat, with the blood of lambs and goats, With the fat of the kidneys of rams. For the Lord has a sacrifice in Bozrah. And a great slaughter in the land of Edom. Wild oxen will also fall with them. And young bulls with strong ones; thus their land shall be soaked with blood, and their dust become greasy with fat. For the Lord has a day of vengeance, a year of recompense for the cause of Zion.**”

It is fun to indulge ourselves, but it will not satisfy. There is only one way for us to satisfy the deepest needs of our lives and that is to surrender our lives to the Lord. **Matt. 10:39** says, “**He who has found his life shall lose it, and he who has lost his life for My sake shall find it.**”

If you have in fact lost your life for the sake of Christ, then hopefully you will realize that all the wealth that the Lord has given you has not been entrusted to you simply to enjoy, but also to share. Last week we went into a great deal of detail concerning this very specific responsibility. Are you striving to do this?

I know that there are people here this morning who have never enjoyed the blessedness of giving because they are drowning in self-indulgence. They are quick to stop into fast food restaurants on a whim, go out to nice restaurants without restraint, purchase clothes whether they need them or not, go on vacations and call it an absolute necessity, and all the while never seriously considering sharing their wealth with those who are spiritually and physically in need.

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If this describes you, then you need to immediately change your behavior. If you do not know where you might like to give that money, I would encourage you to share it with us. We have recently sent Daisuke and Marcia Okada to Japan and we are desiring to significantly raise their support in the efforts to reach the spiritually needy in Japan. We have recently called Francisco Aceves to be on full-time staff at Valley Bible Church. He is a deaf pastor with a vision not only to minister to our deaf brothers and sisters in Christ here at Valley Bible, but also to reach the deaf community for Christ in the Antelope Valley. Though he is fully funded at this time through the cooperation of an individual, Leona Valley Baptist Church, and the Southern Baptist Assoc., more and more of his support will need to come from us.

The ungodly rich in **James 5:1-6** were indicted by James for hoarding, for defrauding the poor, for self-indulgence and finally for murder.

INDICTMENT FOR MURDER

Let us read **V. 6** “**You have condemned and put to death the righteous man; he does not resist you.**” How corrupting can the love of money be a person’s life? It can lead to murder.

This verse begins with the phrase “**you have condemned.**” This takes us back to **James 2:6** which said, “**But you dishonor the poor man. Is it not the rich who oppress you and personally drag you into court?**” It appears that the ungodly rich used their influence with pagan judges to secure adverse judgments against the righteous poor, which ultimately resulted in their death. Whether that occurred through an execution or simply through starvation, is not clear in the passage. But what is clear, is that the ungodly rich, in their pursuit of wealth, took actions that resulted in the death of righteous people.

How did the righteous respond to these unjust judgments in the courts? It says, “**he does not resist you.**” It very much reminds us of the response of Christ before Pilate.

CONCLUSION

James has been painfully explicit with his indictments of the money-mad unbelieving world. Material fixation can produce a miserable quartet of vices: 1) hoarding 2) fraud 3) self-indulgence 4) and even murder, which will fatten them up for the judgment.

Hopefully, as we have studied this passage, it would have us not be envious of the ungodly rich, but compassionate toward them. Hopefully, as we have studied this passage, the Lord has used these Scriptures to purify us and to prepare us more fully to serve Him fruitfully in the cause of Christ.