

WOE TO THE WEALTH WORSHIPERS

James 5:1-6

INTRODUCTION

Shepherd's Conference – 12 Men from San Tan Bible Church – a wonderful time of fellowship, teaching

Robb Provost invited me to sit in on Board Meeting of Lincoln Global Group – looking to duplicate ministry in other countries

Jer 29:7 – “**And seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the LORD on its behalf; for in its welfare you will have welfare.**”

- I was blessed to sit in
- Robb said they would like a pastor on the board
- “your bi-vocational approach and understanding of ministry in the marketplace adds great value.”

Erez Soref, Pres of Israel College of the Bible affirmed what Robb has been reading in the book *In Ishmael's House: A History of Jews in Muslim Lands*.

“Historically, Jews have been better treated in Islamic countries than in Christian countries.” - Dr. Erez Soref

- this comment pierced me
- How can this be?
- God's chosen nation – the apple of God's eye
- part of it comes from a failed eschatology
- part of it comes from everyone who professes to be a Christian is not a Christian
- reminded of a book titled “*Neighbors*” – reports the historical account of what happened in the town of Jedwabne, Poland. The population of the town was about 50% Jewish and 50% Gentile and they lived as neighbors – trading and sharing as neighbors do. One day, the Gentile population rose up and killed their Jewish neighbors.

Why? Because Nazism was rising and the societal, moral, ethical and religious restraints were lifted and they had the ability to kill them to get their stuff. And they did.

→ Greed

READ James 5:1-6

James 5:1 – “Come now, you rich, weep and howl for your miseries which are coming upon you.”

“**Come now**” – a challenge – a signal for attack

- only these 2 times in NT – also in **4:13**

“**you rich**” – probably non-Christian Jewish rich

- the term “brethren” does not appear in these verses

“**weep**” – summary command

- aorist imperative – urgent command
- to shriek – loud expression of grief → wailing for the dead

“**howl**” – present participle

- like the howling of wolves at night
- only appears here in the NT
- however, it is used in the Septuagint (LXX) to express the violent grief of people when Day of the Lord comes
- translated in the LXX as wail:

Isa 13:6 – “Wail, for the day of the LORD is near! It will come as destruction from the Almighty.”

Isa 15:3 – “In their streets they have girded themselves with sackcloth; On their housetops and in their squares Everyone is wailing, dissolved in tears.”

James 5:1-6 is rich in OT imagery and has the spirit of the OT prophets in their fiery attacks against social injustice.

God is not condemning anyone for being rich. Always the question is what kind of mind does one have towards their

- long loose outer robes richly embroidered and decorated
- they were handed down through generations as heirlooms

3) 5:3a – “Your gold and your silver have rusted;”

Rust is a deposit that forms on the surface of iron and steel. Rusting occurs because iron is a reactive metal and combines with oxygen in moist air. Chemically, *rust* is hydrated iron oxide $\text{Fe}_2\text{O}_3 \cdot \text{H}_2\text{O}$ (one water molecule per Fe_2O_3).

Gold doesn't rust. Gold can't rust because it can't form an ion oxide. Gold also doesn't *corrode*, a more general term for eating away of a metal's surface as a result of chemical reactions. Among the metallic elements, gold is one of the least reactive. It doesn't react with the oxygen in air.

Gold is not reactive, whereas iron is reactive. The answer has to do with how tightly an atom holds on to its *electrons*. Gold atoms hang on to their electrons very tightly, whereas iron atoms hold theirs more loosely.

Because gold is so non-reactive, it is used in making jewelry, dental crowns and corrosion-free contacts in the semi-conductor industry.

“gold and silver” do not “rust”

- James is using the impossible to drive home the severity of God's judgment (he doesn't use iron – which does rust)
- This is a warning – James is a pastor and he has a heart for the gospel
- He wants these rich pagans to turn from trusting in themselves and their riches to trust in God

The language James uses – the tense in Greek refer to it as a past act – all 3 (rotting, moth-eating, rusting) – the future judgment is so certain can be spoken of as already having happened with continued ramifications

“and their rust will be a witness against you”

“rust” – only 3 times in NT –

- Other two times - the word is poison
- **Rom 3:13** – “the poison of asps is under their lips”
- **James 3:8** “tongues full of deadly poison”
- the “**rust**,” the poison of their wealth becomes “**a witness**” against them

4) “**and will consume your flesh like fire.**”

- their ill-gotten gains will eat into their pampered “**flesh**” like a festering sore, torturing while it devours

“**rust**” consuming iron is a slow process, James accelerates the process with his next vivid illustration, “**fire**” → fast consuming fire

1) “**fire**” burns and hurts.

Your “**gold and silver**” can burn and hurt you.

2) “**fire**” is an active aggressive force

Our “things” can burn and hurt us.

3) “**fire**” spreads.

The more fuel you give it, the faster and farther it will spread.

Greed spreads.

The more fuel we give to our greed in weak moments, the faster and farther it will spread.

“It is in the last days that you have stored up your treasure”

The book of James is teaching same lessons as Sermon on the Mount – the teaching of his half brother and Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Sermon on the Mount – wisdom literature – Kingdom living now

Matt 6:19-21 – “**Do not lay up for yourselves treasures upon 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 or steal; ²¹for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.”

- Notice that Jesus didn't condemn the possession of treasure
- He condemned the hoarding of treasure – same as James

Illustration: One of only two original Tyndale Bibles in existence displayed at the Shepherd's Conference – what is amazing about these ancient Bibles is that they are not behind a glass case but displayed out in the open for people to look at and turn the pages – the idea being that these were “meant to be used.”

In the same way, the resources you have were given to you by God and God intends for you to use them – your gifts, your resources etc...

Application: Be careful how you hoard your wealth!

Eccl 5:10 – “He who loves money will not be satisfied with money, nor he who loves abundance with its income.”

Transition: Wealth Hoarded ...

2nd Idol at the Altar of Wealth ...

II. Wealth Stolen 5:4

Point – They have grown fat in their riches on the backs of the poor workers they have defrauded.

- They are thieves – not just thieves, but thieves of the oppressed

Proof – **James 5:4 – “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.”**

“has been withheld” – these workers have been defrauded, stolen from and cheated

8th Commandment – “**You shall not steal**” – **Exod 20:15**

Lev 19:13 – “**You shall not oppress your neighbor or rob him. The wages of a hired servant shall not remain with you all night until the morning.**”

Deut 24:14-15 – “**You shall not oppress a hired servant *who is poor and needy, whether *he is* one of your countrymen or one of your aliens who is in your land in your towns.*** ¹⁵**You shall give him his wages on his day before the sun sets, for he is poor and sets his heart on it; so that he may not cry against you to the LORD and it become sin in you.**”

The pay of these workers, you see, is literally their “daily bread”

- we have almost no concept of the meaning of “daily bread”

Their pay that is withheld from them “**cries out *against you*; and the outcry of those who did the harvesting has reached the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth.**”

1st the “**rust**” of their wealth testifies against them, now the “**pay**” stolen by these thieves “**cries out**” as well – **Two Witnesses**

“**cries out**” – a loud cry or scream like the cry of the demons being cast out by Christ in **Mark 9:26** – also used regarding inanimate objects crying out for the Justice of God!

- The Blood of Abel – **Gen 4:10**
- The Sin of Sodom and Gomorrah – **Gen 18:20**

“**has reached**” – literally “has entered” - the ears of the God who hears the cry of the oppressed

“**the Lord of Sabaoth**” – Commander of the Hosts of Heaven

- James is the only NT writer to use this nomenclature for God – it is basically a NT equivalent to the OT **Lord of Hosts** – Heb *YHWH Tsebaoth*
- It is a Military Name of God – God of War

- Describes God as Commander in Chief of the entire host of heaven
- Used in the OT when the people of God are in great misery and danger – needing defense, protection, and encouragement from God

To give you an example, the Lord of Hosts is used 97 times in the 12 Minor Prophets, it is used 6 times in Micah through Zephaniah, in the three post-exilic books, the Lord of Hosts is used 91 times in Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi.

Mal 3:5 – “Then I will draw near to you for judgment; and I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers and against the adulterers and against those who swear falsely, and against those who oppress the wage earner in his wages, the widow and the orphan, and those who turn aside the alien, and do not fear Me,” says the LORD of hosts.”

Illustration: MacArthur – *Strange Fire*, book and conference coming in October. The following statistics are described:

- 90% of charismatic movement believes in prosperity gospel.
- 87% live below the poverty line → SCAM

Application: The Lord Jesus says, "**Where your treasure is there will your heart be also.**" (Matt 6:21) Now that is one of the great threats that hangs over our Christian lives.

Eph 4:28a – “Let him who steals steal no longer;”

Transition: Wealth **Hoarded**, Wealth **Stolen**, ...

3rd Idol at the Altar of Wealth ...

III. Wealth Wasted

5:5

Point – NOT indictment against a Christian being rich ...

- indictment of resources that are abused, squandered in exorbitant self-indulgence

Proof – James 5:5 – “You have lived luxuriously on the earth and led a life of wanton pleasure. You have fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter.”

“**lived luxuriously**” – gluttonous feasting and drinking

“**led a life of wanton pleasure**” – a life lived in self-indulgence

- excessively satisfying one's own appetites and desires

“**you have fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter.**”

- more vivid imagery
- like a pig being fattened and taken to the slaughterhouse

LXX – Jer 12:3 – “Drag them off like sheep for the slaughter And set them apart for a day of carnage!”

James is using this OT imagery - their bodies will be the fuel of the all-consuming fire of the wrath of God in His Day of Judgment, the Day of Vengeance, the Day of Carnage, the Day of Slaughter ... these are all biblical descriptions of the Day of the LORD

- all pointed to the significance of the message that James is hoping will pierce the heart of the one who reads this whose heart is trusting in riches rather than in God

Illustration: Turn to: Amos 4:1-3, 12-13, 6:1-8 → 5:18-20

Wealth **Hoarded**, Wealth **Stolen**, Wealth **Wasted**, ...

4th Idol at the Altar of Wealth ...

III. Wealth Perverted

5:5

Point – James describes men whose treasures are material things and they are totally ruthless hanging onto them. They will trample on other lives and condemn and murder to keep their treasure.

Proof – James 5:6 – “You have condemned and put to death the righteous *man*; he does not resist you.”

The “**rich**” controlled the courts there

- they are able to “**condemn**” whomever they wanted

“**put to death**” – Murder!

- recall in **James 2:11; 4:2**– “murder” - James has used this language before – the behavior may not be using a knife to kill but this behavior has the same effect
- **Matt 5:21-26; 1 John 3:15** – “**Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer; and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him.**” – Jesus gave same message

v. 6 reminds us → What is the one thing that darkness cannot tolerate? Light

- the character of the “**righteous**” is intolerable to the unrighteous.

Illustration: Election of **Pope Francis** from Argentina

Martin Luther – spoke against the heresies of the Roman Catholic system and the papacy. Many of his 95 theses were strongly worded against:

21: Those who preach indulgences are in error when they say that a man is absolved and saved from every penalty by the pope's indulgences.

48: Christians should be taught that, in granting indulgences, the pope has more need, and more desire, for devout prayer on his own behalf than for ready money.

50: Christians should be taught that, if the pope knew the demands of the indulgence-preachers, he would rather the church of St. Peter were reduced to ashes than be built with the skin, flesh, and bones of the sheep.

82: Why does not the pope liberate everyone from purgatory for the sake of love (a most holy thing) and because of the supreme necessity of their souls? This would be morally the best of all reasons. Meanwhile he redeems innumerable souls for money, a most perishable thing, with which to build St. Peter's church, a very minor purpose

86: Since the pope's income to-day is larger than that of the wealthiest of wealthy men, why does he not build this one church of St. Peter with his own money, rather than with the money of indigent believers?

Now ... watch this → Martin Luther also said,
“I am more afraid of my own heart than of the pope and all his cardinals. I have within me the great pope, Self.”

→ The pope on the outside is not as dangerous as the “pope” on the inside.

Application: That is the key. We need to fall on our knees before God and say Lord, what is in my heart? Thank you for the resources you have given me. Help me to be a good steward.

A Christian cannot simultaneously maintain exorbitant self-indulgence and conscience. One of them has to be sacrificed. You either have to put to death self-indulgence and keep your conscience or you can keep your self-indulgence and smother your conscience. That is the challenge.

CONCLUSION

James 4:6 – God “**opposes the proud**”
→ this is the height of God’s opposition

There is nothing like wealth to make it hard for us to enter the kingdom of God. It dulls the sense of spiritual urgency, and the reality of divine judgment

Illustration: You see a child with a new toy, how fascinated he is with it, taking it to bed and unhappy when it is not in his hands. He had begged for it and even prayed for it, and at last he has it and is overwhelmed with delight, but a week later the toy is discarded. It has lost its fascination.

In the same way, as Christians, we understand that all the things we have gets discarded, but the treasures we store up in heaven will remain for God's glory.

A Prayer of Augustine – *“You have made us for yourself and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in thee.”* Only in God can we find patience in suffering and one who hears our prayers

1 Tim 6:17-19 – **“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.¹⁸ Instruct them to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share,¹⁹ storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is life indeed.”**

Ephesians 4:28 – **“He who steals must steal no longer; but rather he must labor, performing with his own hands what is good, so that he will have something to share with one who has need.”**

3/17/13