

“Gaining the World”
James 5:1-6

June 9, 2013

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A. Introduction

1. If You Ever Need Anything —{2}.

- a. A wealthy man was moving into a new house, and his next-door neighbour happened to be a Quaker. The Quakers, you should know, believe in simplicity and plainness of life. The Quaker neighbour watched as the movers carted in numerous pieces of furniture, a great deal of clothing, and many decorative pieces. Then he walked over to his wealthy new neighbour and said in his quaint Quaker way, “Neighbour, if thee hath need of anything, please come to see me and I will tell thee how to get along without it.”
- b. as Jesus said one day, “... a man’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.” (Luke 12:15 NIV)

2. Possessing Wealth

- a. yet the Bible does not condemn the possession of wealth in itself
- b. in fact, some of its most exemplary characters were men of great wealth: Abraham, Job, David, Joseph of Arimathea, Barnabas; others
 - (A) these were men to whom God entrusted riches
 - (B) they were also men of great faith in God
- c. these men left after them a testimony to the goodness of God
- d. nor are such people restricted to the Bible
- e. Selina Hastings, Countess of Huntingdon, provided assistance to the great revival taking place under John Wesley and George Whitefield, was responsible for founding 64 chapels and contributing to the funding of others. Lady Huntingdon once said she was saved by the letter ‘m’, for 1 Corinthians 1:26 says that ‘... , not many mighty, not many noble, are called’ instead of ‘not any mighty, not any noble.’ —{3}.
- f. what a great blessing wealth can be, and how many poorer servants of God have been the beneficiaries of the generosity of Christians who have taken seriously their stewardship of God’s goodness

3. Possessed by Wealth

- a. but others are instead possessed by their possessions
- b. there is no thought in their minds of the source of their wealth
- c. nor of the responsibilities such wealth brings with it «

4. These Are the Subject of Today's Text – James 5:1-6

- a. 1 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 labourers 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. (NAS)
- b. What has this to do with me? ... I'm not rich! I don't have hired men! »

B. Ungodly Rich 5:1

1. Who Are These?

- a. James has already spoken a couple of times on the subject of rich men
- b. in 1:10, he tells those of his readers who are rich, to glory in the humiliation that brought him to salvation, because life is very short
- c. in chapter 2, he reminds Christians not to fawn over a rich person who comes into their assembly just because he is rich, since after all it was the rich as a class who persecuted the Christian church
- d. but now, it seems eminently clear, that those to whom James is now speaking are neither believers, nor are they those who might attend a Christian service, seeking to know God – the last verse of our text removes any doubt on this score – these are not Christian brethren

2. Why Write to These?

- a. James' letter is to members of the Christian church – a community in those early years the was

- dominated by Jewish believers that Jesus is the Messiah: a belief that cost them dearly in many ways, in that they had to forsake family, friends and possessions for Christ's sake
- b. why then does James now pronounce judgement against the wealthy wicked in a letter to a group of God's people almost uniformly poor?
- (A) 'Pay attention, you wealthy people: cry with wailing upon the wretchednesses which are befalling your.' (RGH)
 - (B) is it because it is easier – and more popular – to point the figure outside of ourselves to the scapegoats of politicians and the rich
 - (C) 'Is this a classic case of James the preacher getting worked up over men who would never darken the doors of a place of worship, and the result of our hearing his words is that we poor folks feel smug? Not at all. ^{-{4}}.'
 - (D) Pastor Geoff Thomas continues, 'There are many good reasons for this passage to be judged and weighed by us all. The seeds of covetousness are in every heart. Poor people are troubled by inordinate desire just as much - if not more - than rich people. There are always those who are mean-spirited and secretly wealthy within every congregation. There is nothing like the word of God on any subject to cleanse and purify all who hear it in faith. We are interested in knowing what does the Bible teach about riches? We want to know everything in the Word of God don't we? The truth will touch us somewhere in our lives. ^{-{5}}.'
- c. there is a second possibility, that not only these words will touch some among the Christian community who have been guilty of some of these things, but also, by the work of the Holy Spirit of God, the warning of coming judgement – the final words of the first verse convey just how imminent it is – will turn them in repentance to God
- d. and judgement did come upon the rich Jews who spent much time and effort – as once did Paul – in persecuting the Christians church and especially those who had abandoned Judaism for life in Jesus Christ – in only a few short years and all their riches did not deliver them; you can find a record of this in Josephus' 'Wars of the Jews.' ^{-{6}}.
- e. so, what are some lessons James has for us in these words?

C. Hoarding

1. Temporary, Transient Treasure 5:2
 - a. 'Your wealth has putrefied, and your garment become moth-eaten' (RGH)
 - b. one of the forms of wealth is what are called commodities
 - c. as you travel through Ontario – even a few miles from here – you will see the silos that are used to store the food for the animals for the winter; and, in going across the prairies you will see grain elevators, where the grain is stored waiting for a suitable time to send to market
 - d. this was also true in Bible times – which is why we read the parable of the rich but foolish farmer – the produce of the fields and the vines
 - (A) of grain and olive oil (these were the commodities with which Solomon paid Hiram, king of Tyre, for the cedar logs that he provided for the building of the temple)
 - (B) these could be stored until ready for trading or sale
 - e. another form of wealth – of a more ostentatious kind – was that of clothing; for many today this is their way of showing off their wealth
 - f. but one day you go to your silo, and the corn has begun to ferment; or to your barrels of oil, and it has turned rancid; so you have to turn away holding your nose in disgust
 - g. or you go to your wardrobe and all your finery flies out on the wings of moths, leaving but the tatters behind
 - h. these things, which could have benefited the poor, hungry, naked, have been wasted, instead of fulfilling their proper purpose
 - i. 'The old prospector was dying. He knew he was dying. Calling Elviry his wife, he at last told her where he had hidden the box with his life savings. "I'm going to take them with me," he told her, "so put it by the window in the attic, and I'll grab it on the way by." After the funeral a few days later she remembered the box of money and went up to the attic. The box was still there. "I knew it," she said, "I just knew it; I should have put it by the basement window."—{7}.
 - j. do not, is James' message to Christians, envy those who are rich in this world's wealth, because it's here today and gone tomorrow; for yourselves, use today such wealth as you have for God's purposes
2. Treacherous Treasure 5:3
 - a. 'Your gold and your silver is all rusted, and their rust will be to you for a witness, and will eat your bodies

as a fire. You began to hoard treasures in what are the last days.' (RGH) ^{-{8}}.

- b. now I have translated it that way in order to bring to the surface some of the truth and impact of the original Greek.
- c. the word 'rust' is found twice in this verse: the second, use is the word for what you see on the garden tools when you leave them out in the rain – or on your car after it has been covered with salt in the winter
- d. the first use is as a compound word with the prefix conveying the idea of completeness: their gold and silver is totally rusted away
- e. but wait, 'gold and silver do not rust,' you are going to object
- f. quite right – in fact, gold does not even tarnish and only a special mixture of two acids can touch its surface to damage its lustre
- g. it was for this reason it was considered a 'noble,' and therefore a valuable, metal – there is some iron-y here: what you are trusting in, your wealth, what you consider untouchable has no real value
- h. but there is more: as that rust has eaten up your so-called wealth, so it will be a testimony in judgement against your use of wealth
- i. furthermore, in beginning and continuing to hoard wealth, you have taken no note of the times in which you live.
- j. the NT clearly speaks of this entire age of grace as the 'last days' – they began with the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost and they will culminate in the coming of the Lord Jesus in glory.
- k. the coming of judgement upon Jerusalem in 70AD, through the Roman general Titus, was a foreshadowing to Christ's second coming
- l. that coming may be at any instant – this is not the time to be piling up earthly treasure, is the message of James
- m. be wise stewards, is James' message to Christians, in your use today of the possessions that God is giving you

D. Cheating and Cheap. 5:4

- 1. Ill-Gotten Gain – 'Look! the wages which you delay paying and are due to the workers reaping your fields is crying out along with the cries of those harvesters; it has come unto the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth.'

(RGH)

- a. among the instructions given by God to Israel so that it be a just society is this one in Deuteronomy 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. 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 will not cry against you to the Lord and it become sin in you.'
- b. there is a strongly etched contrast here between the rich and those labouring for him to bring in his riches; his wealth, their poverty
- c. first the word 'fields', even if it were not in the plural, suggests not just a small, peasant plot, but rather of the extensive lands that remind us of Isaiah's words, 'Woe to those who add house to house and join field to field, Until there is no more room, So that you have(,) to live alone in the midst of the land. (Isaiah 5:8) – on their large estates
- d. for this, many labourers are required for the harvest, and unto the owner they bring its bounty from the Lord and receive ... nothing
- e. while the coins jingle in the pockets of the masters, these workers, on the other hand, cry out in need, in hunger, in want of the necessities

2. God Hears

- a. so Isaiah in that passage continues, 'In my ears the Lord of Sabaoth has sworn, ...' and pronounces judgement against such landowners
- b. so with similar words, James says the Lord of Sabaoth hears
- c. the Lord of Sabaoth is the Lord of hosts; of the hosts of the armies of angels in heaven; of the hosts of the armies on earth; of the starry hosts in the sky – He is the sovereign God; and He shall bring justice
- d. pay what you owe, is James' message to Christians, especially to those who are struggling to make ends meet. (Tip generously!)

E. Extravagant 5:5

1. Luxury and Waste

- a. 'You have lived in high luxury on the earth, have led a live of indolent extravagance; you have satisfied

your hearts desires; all this, but it is a day of slaughter.’ (RGH)

- b. that, I confess, is very much a paraphrase ... but are you getting the force of James’ words? It’s the lifestyles of the rich and famous
- c. James’ words are echoes of the words of Jeremiah who asked, ‘Why are all those who deal in treachery at ease?’, then prays, ‘Drag them off like sheep for the slaughter, and set them apart for a day of carnage.’ (Jeremiah 12:1, 3)
- d. James speaks as a prophet against the ungodly, who are oblivious to the fact that their wealth is from the goodness of God, live lives that are only for themselves, centred on themselves, all by themselves
- e. I hope I have conveyed the waste accompanying such living
- f. social justice – God’s justice – says such waste in the midst of needy and starving nations is sin against both God and man

2. Indifferent

- a. it is the last few words of this verse that bring out the pathos of the situation – living like this while judgement advances towards them
- b. about 800 years before James, the prophet Amos wrote these words, ‘Woe to those who are at ease in Zion And to those who feel secure in the mountain of Samaria, ... Those who recline on beds of ivory And sprawl on their couches, And eat lambs from the flock And calves from the midst of the stall, Who improvise to the sound of the harp, And like David have composed songs for themselves, Who drink wine from sacrificial bowls While they anoint themselves with the finest of oils, Yet they have not grieved over the ruin of Joseph.’ (Amos 6:1, 4-6)
- c. let those who are Christ’s, is the message, grieve over these things

F. Abusive 5:6

1. Persecuting, Murdering

- a. You condemned and murdered the righteous; but he does not resist you.
- b. wealth so often brings with it the desire and exercise of power
 - (A) the feeling of one’s right to control others, to do so ruthlessly
 - (B) that no one should stand in their way

- (C) Jezebel instructed King Ahab in this lesson when she had Naboth killed so the her husband Ahab could have Naboth's vineyard
- (D) you do not have to follow the news very closely to find out that it is still going on today: the rich seem to do as they please
- c. and they slew the righteous; the just man: they crucified Christ; they stoned Stephen; they beheaded James the brother of John
- d. Paul, Peter, this James: history records that all were martyred

2. The Condemnation

- a. 'but he does not resist you'
- b. true of Jesus Christ; true of Stephen; and so for many martyrs
- c. so that those who act this way will have no excuse

G. Conclusion

1. Two Tragedies, —{9}.

- a. the story was told by Pastor John Piper of two pairs of people
- b. The first are a pair of elderly, spinster ladies. Two of them travelled together as a medical mission team in the Camerouns. They forsook medical practice in the United States, deciding not to do the American dream and settle back in a lifestyle of affluence and comfort but instead answered God's call and went onto the mission field to care for the poor in the Camerouns. In about 2003, as they were travelling in their jeep from one village to the next and having to go through this mountain pass, their jeep went off the road and down the mountain and they plunged into eternity. They were killed.
- c. Piper asked his congregation, "Is that a tragedy?"
- d. The second pair are a man and wife who made their lifelong goal that of amassing a fortune so that they could take early retirement. And they achieved both of those goals. At that very moment as Pastor Piper related it, they are living in Florida on the coast where they sail their yacht and they play softball and they collect shells.
- e. Piper told his congregation, "There is the tragedy.
- f. "When those two elderly ladies plunged into eternity and stood before Almighty God and had to give an

account for what they did with what God gave them, what they heard Jesus say was, "Well done, good and faithful servants!"

g. What will that other couple say, when one day they stand before God's sovereign grace? Asked to give an account, what will they say? "Lord, look at my shell collection."

2. Lord God save me, by Your sovereign grace. Save me because I am every day tempted to collect shells.

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Explanatory additions to the Bible text are shown in *(braces)*. Version identifiers are:

ASV	American Standard Version of 1901
AV	Authorized (King James) Version of 1769
NAS	New American Standard version © 1960, 1995 The Lockman Foundation (usually the 1995 edition)
NIV	New International Version © 1984 by the International Bible Society
NKJV	New King James Version © 1979 Thomas Nelson Inc., Publishers
WEY	The New Testament in Modern Speech © 1902, 1912 R. F. Weymouth

Some of my commentaries and resources used in the preparation of this message are identified as follow:

BM	–	Biblical Museum, Editor James Comper Gray, ca 1870
EBC	–	The Expositor’s Bible Commentary, © 1986 Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 49530, Michigan – Volume 12, James, by Donald W. Burdick, Professor of New Testament, Denver Seminary, ISBN 0-310-36540-6

EGT – The Expositor’s Greek Testament, *James*, by W. E. Oesterley, Hodder & Stoughton, 1910 (Liberal, but generally helpful on Greek idiom.)

Lange – Commentary on the Holy Scriptures by John Peter Lange, translated by Philip Schaff, Volume 9 of the New Testament; Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1915 (His interpretations sometimes take strange twists.)

NICNT – The New International Commentary on the New Testament, *Commentary on the Epistles of James and John* by Alexander Ross, Wm B Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1954 – ISBN 0-8028-2192-8

TYN – Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, *The General Epistle of James*, by Professor R. V. G. Tasker, The Tyndale Press, 1956

Kerux – The sermon & illustration data base compiled by Rev. David Holwick at the web-site, www.holwick.com.

2. ‘*Advice On How To Get Along Without It*’ from Fredericksburg Bible Illustrator Supplements – Kerux illustrations #8935
3. Various sources. e.g., Geoff Thomas at http://www.banneroftruth.org/pages/articles/article_detail.php?1317. Further information on this remarkable woman will be found in the book, ‘*Lady Huntingdon and Her Friends.*’ by Helen Knight (available for free via Google books).
4. From ‘*Warnings To Those Who Live For Money,*’ by Rev Geoff Thomas – Kerux sermons #2389
5. *Ibid.*
6. See for example, *Wars of the Jews, VI.ix.4*
7. Adapted from ‘*The Deal of a Lifetime,*’ – Kerux illustration #1770.
8. A good example of the *Ingressive Aorist*; the action begun in the past, not merely with present results (the perfect), but with ongoing present activity.

9. *'Lord, Look At My Shell Collection,'* by Rev John Piper – Kerux illustrations #25707