

James Series #9, July 13th, 2014  
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Menomonie, Wis



## JAMES 5

- 1 Come now, you rich, weep and howl for your miseries that are coming upon you!
- 2 Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are moth-eaten.
- 3 Your gold and silver are corroded, and their corrosion will be a witness against you and will eat your flesh like fire. You have heaped up treasure in the last days.
- 4 Indeed the wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, cry out; and the cries of the reapers have reached the ears of the Lord of Sabbath.
- 5 You have lived on the earth in pleasure and luxury; you have fattened your hearts as in a day of slaughter.
- 6 You have condemned, you have murdered the just; he does not resist you.
- 7 Therefore be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, waiting patiently for it until it receives the early and latter rain.
- 8 You also be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand.

A few years ago, the pop singer Madonna recorded a song called "Material Girl." The lyrics went like this:

*Some boys kiss me, some boys hug me, I think they're O.K.  
If they don't give me proper credit, I just walk away*

*They can beg and they can plead, But they can't see the light, that's right  
'Cause the boy with the cold hard cash, Is always Mister Right, 'cause we are*

*Living in a material world, And I am a material girl  
You know that we are living in a material world, And I am a material girl*

While Madonna seems to encompass our modern thoughts concerning wealth and material gain, **James** opens this chapter with a serious slap against those who he refers to as 'rich.' Now the problem we have with this passage is that it can so often fail to find its target because none of us feel we are rich! Yet statistics defy that stance, telling us that we are operating here in the US with the highest expendable income of the developed world. We average incomes that are 12 times that of the Philippines, and that's *average* Philippines. The people we deal with there are far from 'average.' (<http://www.worldsalaries.org/total-personal-income.shtml>) But still, our definitions of rich generally encompass a social group that is *just above* where we stand economically. In other words, 'rich people' are always 'richer than we are!'

Now the world is perhaps forgiven for playing that game...they are after all, good at lying to themselves. But we that are born again believers are without excuse. We need to be honest and admit that much of what we hold to be necessities are in fact at least 'moderate' luxuries. Examples...2 cars (maybe 1 car? I know a lot of folks in other countries that survive without one!)...air conditioning, fast food, smart phones, cable TV, personal computers, big TV's, (TV's in general?), pets, etc...etc... But because of such a high level of perceived personal entitlement, we reject the luxury aspects of such things and feel rather that we deserve them or they are necessary for our survival.

Now we need to state for the record that it is not a sin to be rich. Some guys just have a knack and money inexplicably finds them. Money is not a sin, but scripture tells us that the "love of money" is! When we exalt such beyond its place, it becomes an idol or a false god, and we need to seriously deal with this truth. Yet the suggestion of such a fact can be met with serious resistance even by the evangelical world where we have rebranded Christianity to fit the American dream and prosperity doctrine is quietly accepted if not overtly embraced.

The fact is, money and pursuit of money is one of greatest cop-outs we as Christians have to excuse ourselves from obedience and service. We don't say we *won't*...although that is the truth of the issue, we say rather "we *can't*." We *can't* serve because we have to work to pay the bills. We *can't* tithe to the church...(even though God calls us to do so without qualifiers) because we can't afford it, and the same certainly when it comes to missions. Money plays such a central roll for many of us that it is incredulous that we still want to claim it is not. In such a position, money becomes our God, and we are then guilty of breaking commandment number one of the big ten. Jesus had plenty to say about this himself, and He too put the heat not on the money, but upon our hearts and attitudes toward it. Matthew 6:19-20 "*Don't store up treasures here on earth, where moths eat them and rust destroys them, and where thieves break in and steal. Store your treasures in heaven, where moths and rust cannot destroy, and thieves do not break in and steal.*" Thus it is not the fact that someone *has* money, but rather the problem lays in the hoarding of such, as well as the priority of such.

If God has allowed us to be born in this country...*and we could have landed anywhere*, then as children of God there is a responsibility...*an obligation even*, to use our finances to further the kingdom of God. Some guys came to understand where and how money should fit into our lives. Guys like JC Penny who tithed 90% of his vast income, and yet scripture notes rather the widow who gave her small coins to God. Jesus said she had in fact given more than those who contributed large amounts because for her, her giving would cause her to do without some "necessities", but for the others, it was merely their left-overs. Jesus clearly saw the danger when He warned us that "where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." So perhaps we all should take a deep breath and ask that poignant question: *where is my heart?* And frankly, if we are unable or honestly unwilling to answer that question with any degree of honesty, maybe we should ask instead...*where is my treasure?* Because an honest answer to that question will lead us to our heart...

"*Come now, you rich, weep and howl for your miseries that are coming upon you!*" James sounds like an old Testament apocalyptic prophet! But his grandiose verbage gets the point across. As the old saying goes...*and we all know it*, "money doesn't buy happiness." However, it does dramatically change one's life, and James is not seeing such as a good thing. Instead of putting their money to work, ...feeding the hungry, clothing the destitute, providing medicines for the sick, and spreading the gospel, ...the rich were saving their money for a "rainy day." It benefited no one, and it caused the possessor to trust in that same wealth...and thus ultimately to trust in himself as the possessor of that wealth. Nowhere is there the necessity it seems for the rich man to need God or at least to trust in God, for he has it all under his control via his bank account.

And yet, I have lived long enough to watch the rich die just as surely as the poor. Because finally, all the money and riches of the world will not stop a man from dying! And then...passing into judgment and eternity, all that money will mean nothing. You will leave the big car, the lake cabin, and the comfortable bank account. At that moment, the only thing that will matter is that which was 'sent ahead.' That which was invested in God's kingdom.

There awaits only a sure condemnation for those who held back such because they could have changed the world with what they had, but instead they failed to see the bigger picture and all was lost upon self and comforts and possessions. God had entrusted them with money and the power that went with it and instead of investing such for the kingdom...to lead the lost to Christ...to bless others, they "buried it," as did the "wicked and lazy servant" in Matthew 25. And those who were guilty of such, Jesus called for them to be '*cast into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.*'

Yet some folks see things very different. Life and priorities are different and they intend to leave nothing behind. Carl Reiner playing Saul Bloom in the movie Oceans 12 said "I want the last check I ever write to bounce." You see...I understand that I don't really own anything. I am just a steward for what God has given me to invest. Someone asked a grieving relative how much the deceased left behind in his will and the relative said, "Everything." One of the great secrets of life and joy in it, is to grasp the fact that my Father owns everything! A constant theme of Jesus' parables was stewardship, because God seems to be constantly seeking people who, during their brief sojourn on planet earth, will wisely steward His resources and then pass them on to the next tenant.

And all of this is to be heard by more than just the individual. We as the greater church must hear it also. It's astonishing to me today how much churches will spend for their building and their amenities. Certainly in some cities and areas, a church would be hard pressed to find a 60,000 dollar building like we did, but when you start calculating in millions you had better step back from that and ask if it is really worth it. Because a church is not a building but a living entity...a community...a body of believers. And to have that, you do not have to spend millions. It is essential for every church to be able to clearly and substantially see beyond their doors. This church specifically was raised with a missional heart and now 25% of everything that comes in here goes out to the mission field. That's important to us.

Certainly James uses some serious descriptive language in this passage. Verse 5 tells us "*You have lived on the earth in pleasure and luxury; you have fattened your hearts as in a day of slaughter.*" He likens those who have failed to live out the Christ centered life in terms of money, possessions, and time spent, as animals who have been fattened up to be butchered. Such animals never know what's coming, and many of us live with blinders on so we can be like them. Such a life only says that I am living in denial. Denial of my mortality. My limited time on this earth and the fact I will leave with what I came with: **nothing**. Ahh...but we do have the ability to "send it ahead." Meaning we can...if we play our cards right, be able to see the results of our money and spending for the rest of eternity. Can you imagine running into someone on the streets of heaven who says to you...*hey, I used to go to the church you helped finance in India...I was your sponsored child at the Shofar Learning Center...I was part of your group at the youth camp in the Philippines...?* What could matter more at that moment? What could matter more as the eons of time march on and the short stop on earth becomes but a brief memory in the forever of eternity?

Verse 6 then comes along but is quickly dismissed as certainly aimed at someone else: *You have condemned, you have murdered the just*; After all, we certainly haven't condemned and killed people! But before we write this off completely, let us be reminded once again that sin comes in the form of *omission* as well as *commission*. Meaning, not doing what we know to be right is as much of a sin as committing a wrong straight up. Does it make any difference really whether we pulled the trigger, or whether we withheld the escape...the rescue, from the one ultimately killed? Not to the person who is dead either way! When I look at life from that position, it makes me tremble at the prospect of living a trivial, self-serving, comfortable, middle-class, ordinary, untroubled American life. I can't keep eternity out of my mind. Life is short and eternity is long. *Very long*. It is a long time to regret a wasted life.

All of us as believers need to deal with this issue. However hard it may seem to be. We need to ask ourselves: how much money do we really need to live the life we have prescribed ourselves? And have we honestly set the bar too high? I wonder how many of us are spending all of our time attempting to obtain a level of living that we then have no time to actually live? Pursuing careers and jobs that hold us in bondage as life passes by outside our doors, and our purpose is never realized and our joy is never experienced? Spiritual priorities are lost in the pursuit of the world, beyond what is really necessary to live? All because I am unwilling to step back and see that indeed, the best things in life ARE free, but I will never know them, because I am a prisoner.

Haggai 1:5-8 *Now therefore, thus says the LORD of hosts: "Consider your ways! "You have sown much, and bring in little; You eat, but do not have enough; You drink, but you are not filled with drink; You clothe yourselves, but no one is warm; And he who earns wages, Earns wages to put into a bag with holes." Thus says the LORD of hosts: "Consider your ways! "Go up to the mountains and bring wood and build the temple, that I may take pleasure in it and be glorified," says the LORD.*

Matt 6:19-31 *“Don’t store up treasures here on earth, where moths eat them and rust destroys them, and where thieves break in and steal. Store your treasures in heaven, where moths and rust cannot destroy, and thieves do not break in and steal. Wherever your treasure is, there the desires of your heart will also be. “Your eye is a lamp that provides light for your body. When your eye is good, your whole body is filled with light. But when your eye is bad, your whole body is filled with darkness. And if the light you think you have is actually darkness, how deep that darkness is! “No one can serve two masters. For you will hate one and love the other; you will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money. “That is why I tell you not to worry about everyday life — whether you have enough food and drink, or enough clothes to wear. Isn’t life more than food, and your body more than clothing? Look at the birds. They don’t plant or harvest or store food in barns, for your heavenly Father feeds them. And aren’t you far more valuable to him than they are? Can all your worries add a single moment to your life? “And why worry about your clothing? Look at the lilies of the field and how they grow. They don’t work or make their clothing, yet Solomon in all his glory was not dressed as beautifully as they are. And if God cares so wonderfully for wildflowers that are here today and thrown into the fire tomorrow, he will certainly care for you. Why do you have so little faith? “So don’t worry about these things, saying, ‘What will we eat? What will we drink? What will we wear?’”*

James continues in verses 7 and 8 saying *Therefore be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, waiting patiently for it until it receives the early and latter rain. You also be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand.*

In the church age which we now live in, it seems we have lost this critical cornerpost of the faith in the understanding that this life here is merely temporary and the real thing is yet to come. I don't hear lot of preaching on that anymore. I wonder if we are really expectant and anticipating the return of Christ anymore? Or have we become so focused ...individually and as a greater church, upon the immediate and the here-and-now that we have forgotten that as true believers, this world is not our home.

What this all comes down to is not your bank account, but your heart. James calls upon us to "establish our hearts." 1 John 3 says *"See how very much our Father loves us, for he calls us his children, and that is what we are! But the people who belong to this world don't recognize that we are God's children because they don't know him. Dear friends, we are already God's children, but he has not yet shown us what we will be like when Christ appears. But we do know that we will be like him, for we will see him as he really is. And all who have this eager expectation will keep themselves pure, just as he is pure."*

I wonder if we need to remind ourselves? "Perhaps today...perhaps today..." Romans 13:11-12 tells it straight...*"This is all the more urgent, for you know how late it is; time is running out. Wake up, for our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. The night is almost gone; the day of salvation will soon be here. So remove your dark deeds like dirty clothes, and put on the shining armor of right living."*

How will we spend our time here? Is *your* heart "established" in Him, before all else?