

James Part 11 – Study Notes

Introduction

Great intelligence and hard work can make people wealthy. So can being born into a wealthy family. But it takes God-given wisdom and humility to be able to manage wealth. There are many men and women who became wealthy but could not manage their wealth.

James began by addressing wealthy businessmen who were distracted by their own worldly pursuits. James 5:1 *Now listen, you rich people, weep and wail because of the misery that is coming on you.* James addressed those who spent *their money* as if God wasn't their master. This is the first time that James directly addresses wealthy people. It might initially seem from these scriptures that James has it in for the rich, but this isn't the case.

Scripture teaches that it's not a person's financial wealth and poverty that determines one's relationship with God, but the person spiritual condition. Being outwardly rich or poor refers to how much of the world's goods a person has at his or her disposal. Inward wealth or poverty refers to a person's relationship (or lack of such) with God, expressed through his or her love for others.

For the most part, our definition of **poor** is far different than the Bible's. Poor people in the Bible were homeless, helpless, destitute, and hopeless. By Biblical standards, even most people living by our society's standards of poverty wouldn't have been regarded as poor. The reality is that most of us are blessed with more than we need and are therefore in the position to bless others.

James addressed his comments to the physically rich but spiritually poor unbelievers who oppressed the poor. The warning is clear: trusting in the strength of riches instead of trusting in Jesus Christ will end in disaster. Psalm 62:10 says: *Do not trust in extortion or put vain hope in stolen goods; though your riches increase, do not set your heart on them.*

Physical Condition	Spiritual Condition	Description	Prescription
Poor	Poor	Having few of the world's goods and not living in God's love, the doubly poor are in the most miserable conditions.	Provide essential physical needs to express God's love. For unbelievers we point them to salvation in Christ. For believers exhorting to trust in Christ and to provide both physically and spiritually
Rich	Rich	Having been blessed in both material wealth and heavenly riches, the doubly rich use their prosperity to help others	Provide opportunities for giving and serving others with time and resources
Poor	Rich	Having few of the world's goods. The extremely poor are often in need of food, clothing and shelter; but they have a strong faith and often give what little they have.	Provide essential physical needs and give opportunities to the spiritual needs of others.
Rich	Poor	Having an abundance of the world's goods, the spiritually poor forget that their blessings come from God in order to bless others	Provide correction; for the unbelievers, exhort them to trust in Christ instead of riches; for believers, encourage them to submit their wealth to the Lordship of Christ

James painted an ugly picture of the wealthy unbelievers dark spiritual condition and the Divine retribution that comes with this kind of behaviour.

James rebuked the rich because they were guilty of hoarding their riches. James 5:2-3 *Your wealth has rotted, and moths have eaten your clothes. Your gold and silver are corroded. Their corrosion will testify against you and eat your flesh like fire. You have hoarded wealth in the last days.* In those days people displayed their wealth by feasting lavishly, by dressing extravagantly, by spending wildly. Much like today! James pointed out how foolish it was to centre their lives on those things. By hoarding rather than sharing, the wealth of the rich rots and rusts.

James rebuked the rich because they were guilty of cheating others. James 5:4 *Look! The wages you failed to pay the workers who mowed your fields are crying out against you. The cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord Almighty.* Instead of giving a fair wage to those who worked their fields, the rich cheated them. One side of the selfish rich is their reluctance to pay the bills. Today our world sees the superrich reward them self with bonuses while their employees lose their jobs. It is a sad reality that some of the greediest people are also some of the wealthiest. James rebuked the rich because they were guilty of a selfish lifestyle. James 5:5: *You have lived on earth in luxury*

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and self-indulgence. You have fattened yourselves in the day of slaughter. The wealthy wicked live in the lap of luxury, indulging in pleasures. James painted a picture comparing this playboy lifestyle to a pig being fattened for slaughter. They do not know that as they selfishly gorge themselves on the pleasures of life, they are eating and drinking judgment on themselves.

James rebuked the rich because they were guilty of taking unfair advantage of the righteous. James 5:6 *You have condemned and murdered the innocent one, who was not opposing you.* James said they were guilty of murdering the innocent; just like the Pharisees, Sadducees and religious leaders of the day did to Jesus.

James talked about divine retribution. Unsaved wealthy people are often unhappy, stressed, worried, bitter and empty. Wealthy people discover that money cannot buy happiness; it quite often brings despair.

Riches do not provide relief in eternity. Riches will not buy a place in heaven. Only God's righteousness, a free gift that comes by faith in Jesus Christ, will rescue them on the day of judgement.

Unjust acts of the unbelievers are not forgotten, James 5:4 says *Look! The wages you failed to pay the workers who mowed your fields are crying out against you. The cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord Almighty.* The Jewish hearers of this would have understood this reference. As the voices of the oppressed Hebrews enslaved in Egypt reached God and it brought His judgement, Exodus 2:23-25 *During that long period, the king of Egypt died. The Israelites groaned in their slavery and cried out, and their cry for help because of their slavery went up to God. 24 God heard their groaning and he remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac and with Jacob. 25 So God looked on the Israelites and was concerned about them,* so God today hears the voices of oppressed people.

A lack of judgement today does not mean a lack of judgement tomorrow. James warned his readers of end time judgement. Lets remind ourselves today of this! The judgement of **believers** is behind us. Thank you Jesus. Jesus Christ bore all the punishment of death, paying for all of our sins on the cross. But for the **unbeliever** judgement is ahead of them. Those who die rejecting Jesus Christ face eternal judgement after they are condemned of the Great white throne. Revelation 20:11-15 says *Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. The earth and the heavens fled from his presence, and there was no place for them. 12 And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books. 13 The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what they had done. 14 Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. 15 Anyone whose name was not found written in the book of life was thrown into the lake of fire.*

For a season it may appear that the wicked get away with prospering at the expense of others, in the end their wicked deeds will be remembered.

These verses are important to us because there are practical principles for all **believers** to follow.

God's concern is not with actual wealth, which is neutral, but with their attitudes towards wealth. 1 Timothy 6:8-9 *But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that. 9 Those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction.* God wants us to be content with what we have. Money itself is not the root of all evil, 1 Timothy 5:10 says *For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil.*

God is not against the wealthy but against their misguided priorities, 1 Timothy 6:17-19 *Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. 18 Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. 19 In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life.* The rich have a special obligation to be rich in good works and to be generous and ready to share. God blesses us for the purpose of blessing others. If we maintain the right attitude and priorities then we won't be led astray by riches and become spiritual paupers. This kind of attitude can only come from God given humility. Remember in this section James said that **real faith produces genuine humility**. If we trust in riches we will fall, but humility before God will bring spiritual riches regardless of our economic status.