

Riches - A Blessing or a Curse **James 5:1-6 (NKJV)**

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 Sabaoth. 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.

James spends quite a bit of time talking about the rich.

First he says that the rich man should be glad when he is humbled.

James 1:10 but the rich in his humiliation, because as a flower of the field he will pass away.

And that the rich will not endure.

James 1:11 For no sooner has the sun risen with a burning heat than it withers the grass; its flower falls, and its beautiful appearance perishes. So the rich man also will fade away in his pursuits.

He tells them that it is better to rich in faith than in money.

James 2:5 Listen, my beloved brethren: Has God not chosen the poor of this world [to be] rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him?

And that the rich because of their advantage oppress the poor.

James 2:6 But you have dishonored the poor man. Do not the rich oppress you and drag you into the courts?

Now he becomes the severest yet.

James 5:1 ¶ Come now, [you] rich, weep and howl for your miseries that are coming upon [you]!

So is it bad to be rich?

Were not Job and Abraham both extremely wealthy and still in God's favor?

Is it morally wrong to be better off than others?

Or would we be better off to live in poverty.

Let us look at what God has to say.

I. The curse of riches

A. Come now, you rich, weep and howl for your miseries that are coming upon you!

1. For these people it was real not just a metaphorical threat.
 2. For within 10-20 years all they had would be taken away and they would be killed or become slaves.
 3. If they would only weep and mourn for their sinfulness they would have had an eternal reward.
- B. 2 Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are moth-eaten.
1. Everything we own has to be mowed, sweep, washed, painted, or something.
 2. Material things do not last, they are like us, temporary.
 3. Think of someone spending all their lives accumulating more and more stuff and realizing in the end is that they have the biggest bunch of junk ever.
- C. 3 Your gold and silver are corroded,
1. Even the things that we consider enduring in this life are temporary.
 2. Men and women have spent their lives to gain a fortune only to really have nothing in the end.
 3. We had here in America two men who were billionaires whose lives are an example of the futility of riches. Both of them were remarkable men who built great financial empires. **Howard Hughes** was one of them, but in his last days, from all we can learn, he was a recluse and a sick man. He could not have been happy in those years. All that money just didn't seem to do him very much good. The other man, **J. Paul Getty**, was reported in the press to have made this statement: "I'd give all my wealth for just one happy marriage." How tragic! *J. Vernon McGee, Thru the Bible Commentary: The Epistles (James), electronic ed., vol. 53 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1991), 104.*
- D. and their corrosion will be a witness against you and will eat your flesh like fire.
1. The corrosion has the idea that it has been setting idle and not being put to use.
 2. Finances that are never put to use have no practical purpose.
 3. The idea here is someone who has much more money than they will ever be able to use.
 4. The rest is a waste.
 5. Like the farmer we talked about who tore down his barns and built bigger ones. There was another option. He could have given it to some who had

not had a good a year as he had.

6. Remember the parable of the talents and how they were all rewarded except the one who had buried the talent where it did no one any good.
 7. Matthew 25:25 'And I was afraid, and went and hid your talent in the ground. Look, [there] you have [what is] yours.'
 8. And they witness against you.
 - a. The dross is a witness of what was not done with the money.
 - b. It is the dross of missed opportunities.
 - c. And there it stands as a witness of your guilt.
- E. You have heaped up treasure in the last days.
1. The idea is that the world is coming to an end and yet you are continuing to pile up gold that you will never be able to use.

II. The sin of the rich

- A. 4 Indeed the wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, cry out;
1. Some come by riches by honest and just means. There is no condemnation just for being rich.
 2. Proverbs 13:11 (NKJV) 11 Wealth gained by dishonesty will be diminished, But he who gathers by labor will increase.
 3. Ecclesiastes 5:19 (NKJV) 19 As for every man to whom God has given riches and wealth, and given him power to eat of it, to receive his heritage and rejoice in his labor--this is the gift of God.
 4. Genesis 13:2 (NKJV) 2 Abram was very rich in livestock, in silver, and in gold.
 5. Genesis 24:35 (NKJV) 35 The LORD has blessed my master greatly, and he has become great; and He has given him flocks and herds, silver and gold, male and female servants, and camels and donkeys.
 6. But some are ruined by riches. **Ruined by Riches** Do not be over-anxious about riches. Get as much of true wisdom and goodness as you can; but be satisfied with a moderate portion of this world's good. Riches may prove a curse as well as a blessing. I was walking through an orchard, looking about me, when I saw a low tree laden more heavily with fruit than the rest. On a nearer examination it appeared that the tree had been dragged to the very earth and broken by the weight of its treasures. "Oh!" said I, gazing on the tree, "here lies one who has been ruined by his riches." ,

Biblical Illustrator – James, (Rio, WI: AGES, 2005), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, Under: "Chapter 5".

7. The tense implies that the case indicated by *ταλαιπωρία* is already present. The **tarnishing** of the gold and silver is an accomplished fact. The words bring out the thought that the wealth wrung from the poor by injustice and cruelty is of no service to the rich man himself *Arthur Carr, The General Epistle of St James, Cambridge Greek Testament for Schools and Colleges (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1896), 59.*
- B. and the cries of the reapers have reached the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth.
1. The judges of this world my turn a deaf ear to justice but the Judge of all the earth will not.
 2. He hears the cries of the poor the oppressed.
 3. This is a reoccurring theme in the Scriptures.
- C. 5 You have lived on the earth in pleasure and luxury; you have fattened your hearts as in a day of slaughter.
1. The stupid thing today is those that live in pleasure and luxury are the main ones who claim to be concerned about the poor.
 2. They are all for the poor as long as it doesn't cost them anything.
- D. 6 You have condemned, you have murdered the just; he does not resist you.
1. They are helpless to resist their oppressors.
 2. They put nets around the buildings in China to keep the people who are making those \$1000. I-phones while Apple executives set themselves up as our moral judges.
 3. And it is the same with many other executives of the largest corporations.

Don't seek after riches.

Riches bring their own curse.

Let us be satisfied with such as God has put within our control.

Do not envy the rich nor hate them.

God has dealt to each person according to God's own plan.

Luke 12:21 (NKJV)

21 So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God."

Proverbs 1:19 (NKJV)

19 So are the ways of everyone who is greedy for gain; It takes away the life of its owners.

Lot & Abraham

Genesis 36:7 (NKJV)

7 For their possessions were too great for them to dwell together, and the land where they were strangers could not support them because of their livestock.

James 2:14–16 (NKJV)

14 What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him? 15 If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, 16 and one of you says to them, "Depart in peace, be warmed and filled," but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit?

What makes this doubly tragic is that they do so **in the last days** and thus underline the folly of their actions. *Ralph P. Martin, James, vol. 48, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1988), 178.*

Luke 19:8 And Zacchaeus stood, and said unto the Lord; Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have taken any thing from any man by false accusation, I restore [him] fourfold.

It is as much as if he had said: **The rust shall be a certain evidence against you**, and which will as effectually convict you, as any living witness could do, of your folly in putting your trust in perishing things, your greediness in hoarding them up, your unmercifulness in not supplying the wants of others, and your unreasonableness in denying the use of them to yourselves, when you had rather let them lie by and perish, than enjoy the comfort of them, or do good with them. *John Gill*