

James 5:1-6

New International Version - UK (NIVUK)

5 Now listen, you rich people, weep and wail because of the misery that is coming on you. 2 Your wealth has rotted, and moths have eaten your clothes. 3 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. 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. 5 You have lived on earth in luxury and self-indulgence. You have fattened yourselves in the day of slaughter. 6 You have condemned and murdered the innocent one, who was not opposing you.

Luke 12:13-21

New International Version - UK (NIVUK)

13 Someone in the crowd said to him, 'Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.' 14 Jesus replied, 'Man, who appointed me a judge or an arbiter between you?' 15 Then he said to them, 'Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; life does not consist in an abundance of possessions.' 16 And he told them this parable: 'The ground of a certain rich man yielded an abundant harvest. 17 He thought to himself, "What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops." 18 'Then he said, "This is what I'll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store my surplus grain. 19 And I'll say to myself, "You have plenty of grain laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry." 20 'But God said to him, "You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?" 21 'This is how it will be with whoever stores up things for themselves but is not rich towards God.'

Morning everyone, today we'll be continuing our series looking at the book of James and learning about the challenges that James has for us in terms of living out our daily lives as disciples of Christ.

I thought I'd start today with a quick quiz just to make sure that you're all awake and alert! After Bruce Forsyth's performance at Glastonbury last weekend, I thought we could play a slightly tweaked version of Play Your Cards **Right**. You have to work out whether the value of something is higher or lower than the one before it.

Examples of wealthy people, who amass wealth - picture, name, wealth - end on Steve Jobs.

Now that you're awake, you'll see that today's passage follows on nicely from the passage we heard last week, where James shows us just how miniscule the human life is. In chapter 4 verse 14, human life is described as a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. **Think** about a mist. If you've ever woken up early in the morning in the countryside, it can be there one minute and then a wind blows and the mist is gone. If you breathe outside at winter, how long does the mist last after you've breathed out? It takes very little for the mist to be removed. Our lives, as humans, are just as fragile and just as short-lived if you look at them compared to eternity. Therefore, we should be living our lives with a sense of urgency. These things that James calls us to do aren't general things to improve and test out timidly, we need to go out and do them eagerly. So that's the context we need for today's passage, let's have a look at it now.

Read James 5:1-6

This is a very straight-speaking passage isn't it? It's very condemning of rich people, who should howl and wail. It speaks to us directly today, and there are some important messages that we need to take from this passage. It would be very easy to only see people who earn over a certain amount as rich, but if you compare the living standard in this country to those in countries such as Zimbabwe and Congo, you'll see a huge difference. The **average** income in the UK is around £25,000. In Congo, it is around £240. Therefore, although this passage seems, at first glance, to be relevant only to people who have lots of money, this passage is relevant to us all here, regardless of how we might differ in wealth within this room. To understand this passage this morning, I've got two main points, **firstly**, the hollowness of human wealth, and secondly, looking at heavenly wealth.

So **firstly**, the hollowness of human wealth. Before I get started though, I just want to say that James is not saying that it's wrong to be rich, but as it says in 1 Timothy 6, the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil. It is the love of wealth that James is concerned about here. If you look back earlier in the book of James Chapter 2, you will see that he talks about Abraham, showing him as an example to follow; yet Abraham was one of the richest people in the Old Testament. In Genesis 13:2, Abraham is described as being wealthy in livestock, silver and gold. But notice in James 2 that James doesn't talk about Abraham's wealth, but instead refers to his righteousness – that Abraham had a strong relationship with God. Are rich Christians known for their relationship with God or are they known because they're rich? Being rich isn't bad, it's the motivation behind your wealth that needs to be examined and tested. Do you live to make yourself better off or do you live to work out God's plan for you, and use the wealth you've got for God's purposes? This passage is also an encouragement for those who are

exploited by the rich people. We see in v4 that God hears the cries of the harvesters, and that on judgement day, God will hand out judgement on those who exploit the poor.

If we look at v1-3, we see an example of what many people are doing today. Just think back to those examples of wealthy people we looked at earlier. They aren't losing their wealth, year by year, their wealth is increasing. What does that tell us? It tells us that they are using money to get more money, and many of those people have little concern about how they go about it. It's very easy to criticise our non-Christian society, because we're on the outside looking in. Here, James is also looking inwards at the rich people within the church and challenging them about their attitude towards wealth. James is addressing rich Christians. He's not complaining about the state of the society he was in. If you look back at Chapter 4:13, James is addressing Christian business people, and he uses a similar introduction of 'now listen' at the beginning of this chapter, and let's not forget that the book of James is addressed to the twelve tribes in the dispersion – it's addressed to Christians around the world. Therefore, we can assume that James is also addressing Christian rich people in these verses.

So, what happens to the wealth that people have hoarded? As James describes, it rots and it corrodes; it gets eaten by moths. Let's try and understand this from James' time. Back in the time of James, wealth tended to be hoarded in grain stores. The problem is that grain rots if it's left alone for a long time. I think one of James's points from this passage is to warn those who have wealth against hoarding it. He's urging rich people to make use of their wealth for the promotion of the Gospel, not for personal gain. In verse 3, James tells us that the corrosion and decay will be witnesses against you. Rot and decay will be evidence of wealth being hoarded. On the day of judgement, the day of slaughter as James puts it, the corrosion will be a witness of the selfish, money-driven person who acquired the wealth and did nothing with it. For those of us here today who are living comfortably, would you survive spiritually without your possessions and money? For those of us here today who have little, do you trust in God to provide for you or are you constantly driven by the desire to live comfortably rather than to live for God?

Let's look at what Jesus Himself tells us about storing up wealth in the book of Luke.

Read Luke 12:13-21 – Two **slides**

Here, Jesus is pretty clear about the pointlessness of storing up wealth. "You fool!" God says. It's not a gentle telling off from God is it? They are words of doom. In two words, Jesus has summarized what it means to store up your wealth. As Jesus says, "life does not consist of an abundance of possessions". The rich people in the passage from James were so obsessed with wealth that they failed to pay their workers for working in their fields. In the book of Matthew, Jesus tells a parable about a king who forgave a debt owed to him by a servant, which was worth over 100,000 years worth of wages. Compare that generosity with the hoarding nature of the rich people James is talking to in v1-6. They are hoarding their wealth so much that they are exploiting the people who are working for them. Think of the sweatshops in Bangladesh where people are exploited for long hours and low pay, working in buildings that are unsafe, as we found out earlier in the year when a factory collapsed and killed over 1100 people. The owners hoarded the money and exploited the lives of their workers. The ethics of where we buy our clothes from is a whole other topic to discuss, so I'll let you think about that in your own time. Rather than looking at which companies to boycott, what I want to focus on today is how to actively use the wealth God has given us to help those most in need by bringing them to a fuller knowledge of the Gospel.

As James says in v5, the people are living a life of luxury and self-indulgence. What they don't realise is that the day of slaughter is upon them. This is referring to livestock such as cows and sheep which fatten themselves up by eating as much as they can in the field without realizing that they could be killed for meat at any moment. If they knew, they might eat a bit less and save themselves from slaughter. In the same way, those who live for luxury and self-indulgence today forget that there will be a day of judgement for them. As we saw last week, James teaches us to prepare for the eternal future of heaven, and not to look to our immediately future. I know it sounds a bit like a cliché, but there really is more to life than wealth. That's why we're here this morning isn't it? Some of you are here because you realise that there must be more to life and you're looking for answers. Others here know that Jesus is the answer to having a life to the full, and you come here to praise God for that, and also to learn how to live that full life through the teaching of His word. If you put your trust in wealth, how hollow is that trust? Money won't love you in return, it won't give you eternal happiness, and you can't take it with you when you die. Do you remember the last rich man we looked at? Steve Jobs - can anyone tell me where he is now? Can he do anything with his wealth now? His body is in the ground; his wealth has been passed to someone else. He can no longer do anything with it and it's no longer his. Here's a quote from a commentary on James written in the 1800s by Albert Barnes: "There is no sin in merely being rich; where sin exists among the rich, it arises from the manner in which the wealth is acquired, the spirit which it tends to engender in the heart, and the way in which it is used."

So, **what** attitude should we have with our wealth and money then? If it's not used for earthly gain, it must be used for heavenly wealth. So how do we get heavenly wealth? Is it possible for us to get heavenly wealth? Why should we look to get heavenly wealth? This is what Jesus says in Matthew chapter 6:

Matthew 6:19-21 "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. 20 But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. 21 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."

So in **groups** now, I just want you to discuss what heavenly treasure is, how we might get it, what it means in heaven.

So why store up heavenly treasures? We've seen that earthly wealth will rot, decay and fade away. Heavenly wealth is something that, as **Peter** tells us in 1 Peter 1, is secure, will never spoil or fade. It won't rot, it won't lose value and it won't rust. Heavenly wealth is also fulfilling – earthly wealth will always disappoint, whereas heavenly treasure fulfils all of its potential and is used solely to glorify God. If we hoard wealth here on earth, we make wealth our priority instead of having God as our one and only god. We end up using earthly wealth to promote ourselves and not God. By looking to store up treasures in heaven, we see earthly wealth as the temporary thing it is, and this prevents us from being distracted from God.

So what do we do with our worldly wealth then? It is obvious from James that it needs to be used. It is pointless to leave it sitting around doing nothing but rotting and decaying. Does the money in your savings account have a purpose or is it gathering dust? Do you have old phones and laptops just sitting around the house doing nothing? What use is it if they are gathering dust? Here's our starting point - in **Colossians** 3:17, we are told the following: "And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him." Do our possessions do this? Is our wealth doing this? When you're shopping for new shoes, or a new phone, maybe take time to work out whether they will help you to do things in the name of God. Do you really use your full amount of mobile phone usage each month? If you do, are you using it all wisely to bring the Gospel to your contacts? If you don't, maybe downsize your contract and consider how best to use the money you're saving. In essence, for all of us, does wealth blind us to being obedient to God? Ultimately, wealth will rot; houses will be knocked down to be replaced by a newer house, cars break down, clothes decay and need patching up. How tightly do you hold on to your possessions? Personally, I top up my phone when I run out of credit rather than paying a monthly contract - I never use it enough to need a lot of extras. Do you give to charity each month? If you do, maybe think about how you choose the charities you give to – try and base your giving according to their focus on Christian Gospel work - make sure that your income is used for God's purposes because that is the work that will result in God's heavenly kingdom coming closer. If you regularly give food or money to those who need it, that's great because Jesus tells us to do so in Matthew 25. But, do you give them the Gospel too? People in need, need to be saved both physically and spiritually. Try and make sure you use your wealth wisely. Do you really need a new mobile phone just because it's not the newest phone anymore? Do you really need a new pair of shoes or is it because you want to look good out and about? Do you save more than you give to Christian work? For those here with small amounts of earthly wealth, what do you spend your money on? In the UK, it is very easy to go to the two extremes with wealth. You can spend your money and gather as many possessions as possible, or, you can spend very little, but hoard as much of your wealth as you can in a bank savings account. If used in the right way, money is a good thing. If not, it is the root of all kinds of evil. James saw that in the church and society around him, we can see a very similar thing happening today here in the UK.

Here's what the Bible shows us about storing up treasures in heaven: to begin with, it is only after the disciples have dropped their fishing nets, and their possessions that they can follow Jesus. In order to follow Jesus, we must let go of everything we have that is of this earth. If we hold onto anything earthly, it stops us from focusing on Jesus as our true Lord. In 1 **Timothy** 6, Paul teaches Timothy to command rich people in the following way:

"17 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."

Storing up wealth is what we've been commanded to do by God, but it has to be heavenly wealth. Earthly wealth is a poor reflection of heavenly wealth because it doesn't last for eternity, but earthly wealth has the ability to help us store up heavenly wealth. So for those here who have wealth, be prepared to let it go, and use it to bring people closer to God. Don't ignore the cries of those in need. For those here without wealth, don't worry. Jesus tells us in Matthew 6 that God feeds the birds of the air, and are you not much more valuable than birds? Don't make wealth your ultimate aim in life, trust that God will provide for you in times of need. What power do your possessions have over you? Do you own your possessions or do they own you? Let's make God our focus in all parts of our lives, and then we'll be able to see how the possessions we have can be used for His purposes.