

THE EPISTLE OF JAMES

JAMES 5:1-12, FAITH TEST 6: INJUSTICE

- A. A warning to the wealthy (1-6)
1. Trouble is on the way (1), ***Come now, you rich, weep and howl for the miseries that are coming upon you.***
 - a. *come now*, a rebuke as in James 4:13, *Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and make a profit"*
 - b. *you rich*
 - 1) The focus is on those who gain wealth in an ungodly manner and use it for ungodly purposes.
 - 2) The emphasis of this passage is not on who these people are but on a godly perspective on wealth.
 - 3) Robert Wuthnow, sociologist at Princeton University, *Many people are going to church, but not many are finding their faith relevant to the ways in which they work or handle their money.... They want help with the anxieties they face, but they also need to be challenged to cut back, to be less materialistic, to be more generous, and to behave ethically.*
 - c. *weep and howl for the miseries coming upon you*
 - 1) Present troubles, 1 Timothy 6:9-10, *But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction.*
 - 2) Thomas Constable, *...The Bible nowhere condemns the rich for being rich. Money is not evil. Nevertheless God's Word consistently warns the rich of the temptations that financial abundance brings with it. These temptations include a false sense of security, a desire to control others, and personal pride. The rich should not rejoice too much. Material misery may be just around the corner.*
 2. Wealth is temporary (2-3)
 - a. There will be loss of material possessions (2-3a), ***Your riches have rotted and your garments are moth-eaten. 3 Your gold and silver have corroded,***
 - 1) Perishable items like food and clothing will be ruined, Matthew 6:19, *Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal,*
 - 2) Non-perishable items will corrode when they are hoarded.
 - a) Hoarding precious metals instead of using them for the work of the Lord will bring judgment.
 - b) Warren Wiersbe, *The Bible does not discourage saving, or even investing; but it does condemn hoarding.*
 - b. There will be judgment (3b), ***and their corrosion will be evidence against you and will eat your flesh like fire. You have laid up treasure in the last days.***
 - 1) The rich anticipate leisurely consumption.
 - 2) But, laying up treasure in the last days brings judgment.
 - a) Matthew 6:19-21, *Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, 20 but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. 21 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.*
 - b) Thomas Manton, *Present delights will prove future torments.*
 - c) James Adamson, *...in the Judgment their wealth will not be an asset but evidence against them.*
 3. Examples of the misuse of wealth (4-6)
 - a. Oppression (4), ***Behold, the wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, are crying out against you, and the cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord of hosts.***
 - 1) Landowners withholding the wages of laborers.
 - a) Not paying the wages of honest laborers is fraud, Leviticus 19:13, *You shall not oppress your neighbor or rob him. The wages of a hired worker shall not remain with you all night until the morning.*
 - b) Philip Hughes, *First, the poverty-stricken workers were living hand-to-mouth, and a day without wages was a day without food. Second, the owners were doing this at harvest-time when their barns were full and the wine red in the press.*

- 2) Laborers crying out to God
 - a) God is the Lord of hosts Who has a heart for justice.
 - 1] Deuteronomy 24:15, *You shall give him his wages on the same day, before the sun sets (for he is poor and counts on it), lest he cry against you to the LORD, and you be guilty of sin.*
 - 2] Colossians 4:1, *Masters, treat your bond servants justly and fairly, knowing that you also have a Master in heaven.*
 - b) A. T. Robertson, *God hears the cries of the oppressed workmen even if the employers are deaf.*

b. Self-indulgence (5), ***You have lived on the earth in luxury and in self-indulgence. You have fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter.***

- 1) Attitude of the wealthy
 - a) Job 21:13-15, *They spend their days in prosperity, and in peace they go down to Sheol. They say to God, 'Depart from us! We do not desire the knowledge of your ways. What is the Almighty, that we should serve him? And what profit do we get if we pray to him?' Behold, is not their prosperity in their hand? The counsel of the wicked is far from me.*
 - b) Thomas Manton, *Vain man thinks he can never honor his pleasures enough or scorn God and holy things enough.*
 - c) The sermon of our day, *You are children of the king-live like it!*
- 2) A warning
 - a) A day of judgment is coming for those who are rich toward themselves and poor toward God.
 - b) A. T. Robertson, *They are fattening themselves like sheep or oxen all unconscious of the day of slaughter...*
 - c) 1 Timothy 6:17-19, *As for the rich in this present age, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy. 18 They are to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, 19 thus storing up treasure for themselves as a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is truly life.*

c. Murder (6), ***You have condemned and murdered the righteous person. He does not resist you.***

- 1) It speaks of abuse by rich Christians, James 2:6-7, *But you have dishonored the poor man. Are not the rich the ones who oppress you, and the ones who drag you into court? 7 Are they not the ones who blaspheme the honorable name by which you were called?*
- 2) It refers to Jesus, the Righteous One Who did not resist evil for our benefit, Acts 3:14-15, *But you denied the Holy and Righteous One, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, 15 and you killed the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead.*

B. The proper attitude toward wealth (7-12)

1. A command to be patient (7-9)

a. Concerning time (7- 8), ***Be patient, therefore, brothers, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient about it, until it receives the early and the late rains. You also, be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand.***

- 1) Be patient to the return of the Lord
 - a) *therefore*, be patient in response to injustice from the wealthy.
 - b) Christians are to be patient because the Lord is coming again and will set things right.
 - c) Matthew Henry, *To short-lived creatures a few years seem an age; but Scripture, measuring all things by the existence of God, reckons thousands of years but so many days.*
- 2) Patience is evident in farmers
 - a) A farmer patiently awaits the ripening of his crops.
 - b) He trusts that needed rain will prepare his crops for harvest.
- 3) Christians are to patiently await the justice of God.
 - a) We trust He will return and set things right.
 - b) Charles Erdman, *The return of our Lord has always furnished the supreme motive for consistent Christian living*
 - c) Read Psalm 73.

- b. Concerning people (9), ***Do not grumble against one another, brothers, so that you may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing at the door.***
- 1) Responses to offense
 - a) Injustice can lead to grumbling within the body of Christ.
 - b) Thomas Manton, *...do not begrudge the happiness of those who are not faced with sufferings or with the same degree of sufferings that you face.*
 - c) Do not judge even if the wealth was obtained to the harm of others.
 - 2) Accountability to God
 - a) Allow God His role as Judge, James 4:12, *There is only one lawgiver and judge, he who is able to save and to destroy. But who are you to judge your neighbor?*
 - c) Realize that God will judge righteously in due time, 1 Corinthians 4:5, *...do not pronounce judgment before the time, before the Lord comes, who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart.*
- c. Concerning oneself
- 1) Simplify your lifestyle.
 - 2) Control your spending.
 - 3) Pray for contentment.
2. Examples of patience (10-11)
- a. Prophets (10-11a), ***As an example of suffering and patience, brothers, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. 11 Behold, we consider those blessed who remained steadfast.***
- 1) They suffered unjustly because they *spoke in the name of the Lord.*
 - 2) Those who suffered and remained patient were blessed.
 - a) Philip Hughes, *Notice that it says "blessed," not "happy," for what is meant here is not the subjective, emotional state of happiness, but the objective, unalterable approval and reward of God.*
 - b) Matthew 5:12, *Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.*
- b. Job (11b), ***You have heard of the steadfastness of Job, and you have seen the purpose of the Lord, how the Lord is compassionate and merciful.***
- 1) Characteristics of Job
 - a) Job was faithful despite his circumstances, Job 2:7-10, *So Satan went out from the presence of the LORD and struck Job with loathsome sores from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head. 8 And he took a piece of broken pottery with which to scrape himself while he sat in the ashes. 9 Then his wife said to him, "Do you still hold fast your integrity? Curse God and die." 10 But he said to her, "You speak as one of the foolish women would speak. Shall we receive good from God, and shall we not receive evil?" In all this Job did not sin with his lips.*
 - b) Job had hope, Job 19:25, *For I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last he will stand upon the earth.*
 - c) Job trusted the purposes of God, Job 23:10, *But he knows the way that I take; when he has tried me, I shall come out as gold.*
 - 2) Characteristics of God
 - a) He is compassionate, Mark 6:34, *When he went ashore he saw a great crowd, and he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. And he began to teach them many things.*
 - b) He is merciful, Exodus 34:6, *The LORD passed before him and proclaimed, "The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness.*
- c. A current illustration, a Chinese Christian woman *spent 110 days in jail for meeting with an evangelist from Hong Kong. She was hung upside down and beaten with electrical cords. She told of sensing God's presence and feeling joy rather than resentment.*

3. An example of impatience (12), *But above all, my brothers, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or by any other oath, but let your "yes" be yes and your "no" be no, so that you may not fall under condemnation.*
 - a. Danger of oaths
 - 1) A lack of concern for truth
 - a) Christians should be known as people of truth.
 - b) Adamson, *Swearing is necessary only in a society where the truth is not revered.*
 - 2) A lack of concern for the holiness of God
 - a) Exodus 20:7, *You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain.*
 - b) Euripides, ancient Greek dramatist falsely stated, *"Twas but my tongue, twas not my soul that swore.*
 - 3) A disregard for the consequences of taking oaths
 - a) We are responsible for what we say.
 - b) Matthew 12:36-37, *I tell you, on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak, 37 for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.*
 - b. Ways to develop truthfulness in one's life.
 - 1) Affirm truth, John 4:24, *God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.*
 - 2) Realize what you say reveals your heart, Matthew 12:34, *You brood of vipers! How can you speak good, when you are evil? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.*
 - 3) Fill yourself with the Word which is truth, John 17:17, *Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth.*
 - 4) Follow Jesus Who is true, John 14:6, *Jesus said to him, I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.*

CONCLUSION

- A. James raises tough questions
 1. Am I offended when other Christians have more things and less troubles?
 2. How do I respond when I see others treated unfairly?
 3. Can people trust what I say?
- B. James shares sound advice
 1. Be patient because of hope in the soon return of Christ.
 2. Pursue truth in dealing with others.
- C. God demands that believers respond to injustice with patience, hope and truthfulness.
- D. Wealth is a sin when one is rich towards oneself but poor toward God and others.