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Tillamook, Oregon

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## *A Faith that Works The Epistle of James*

***You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone. (2:24)***

***“James Calls Out the Wicked Wealthy Man”***

**October 11, 2015**

**Sermon Text:** James 5:1-8

**Scripture Reading:** Matthew 6:19-34

### **Introduction-**

James 5:1-8 Come now, you rich, weep and howl for the miseries that are coming upon you.

(2) Your riches have rotted and your garments are moth-eaten. (3) Your gold and silver have corroded, and their corrosion will be evidence

against you and will eat your flesh like fire. You have laid up treasure in the last days.

(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.

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

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

(7) 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. (8) You also, be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand.

Injustice in this world abounds. Not only is this world filled with evil, that evil oppresses the *righteous* person, the *weak*, and the *innocent*. Evil craves power and one of the primary sources of that power is *wealth*. Here we have the Apostle James thundering from his pulpit, calling out the wicked power-brokers, some of whom were even trying to put themselves off as Christians. We know this because:

James 2:1-7 My brothers, show no partiality as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory. (2) For if a man wearing a gold ring and fine clothing comes into your assembly, and a poor man in shabby clothing also comes in, (3) and if you pay attention to the one who wears the fine clothing and say, "You sit here in a good place," while you say to the poor man, "You stand over there," or, "Sit down at my feet," (4) have you not then made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts? (5) Listen, my beloved brothers, has not God chosen those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom, which he has promised to those who love him? (6) 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?

Our churches must never be places where evil is comfortable. Unfortunately, today many wicked people are able to parade as Christians and they bring much harm to the name of Christ. The remedy is preaching like we see here by James, and for every Christian to affirm these truths in their own lives.

1 Timothy 5:21 In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus and of the elect angels I charge you to keep these rules without prejudging, doing nothing from partiality.

We have seen this in this church in years past. More than once some wealthy person has threatened to give or withhold their money according to whether decisions were made the way they wanted. These are the kinds of people James is addressing here.

### **No Partiality**

We must all guard against this temptation to show partiality for those who have the means to benefit us, while dismissing those who lack those means. But Christ the Judge shows no partiality in His judgment and neither must we if we are to reflect His image. And we must also be on guard against the temptation of our own sin *to any*

*attitude of entitlement* to special favor. The gospel of Christ is about sinners receiving *grace* freely through faith alone. No one enters this world entitled to the Lord's salvation! Nothing we have is given us because we merited it, but ultimately is a free gift from God. And so our own actions and lives must illustrate these principles. Beware then of *entitlement thinking*.

***“Your true character is shown in how you treat those who can do nothing for you.”***

Luke 6:34 And if you lend to those from whom you expect to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to get back the same amount.

Luke 14:12-14 He said also to the man who had invited him, "When you give a dinner or a banquet, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, lest they also invite you in return and you be repaid. (13) But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, (14) and you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you. For you will be repaid at the resurrection of the just."

Let's look more closely at what he has to say –

## **A Call to Mourning**

We are tempted to admire the wealthy, the rich, the famous. We see them in the news on their yachts, mixing it up with the “beautiful people” seemingly without a care in the world. Of course their “careless” lives in reality are anything but careless, as the same news media often report. Drugs, suicides, failed marriages, infighting and more are characteristic of such people. And yet, we are tempted to envy them.

Here, James gives the wealthy (and us) a reality check. I suppose I should say, *the wicked wealthy*, lest anyone think that the Bible is teaching that wealth itself is evil. It isn't. The question is, *how does the wealthy person use his wealth?* And in this case James is hammering those who use their wealth for evil.

The wicked wealthy, says James, should be *weeping and howling* in terror because of what he calls “the miseries that are coming” upon them. He is, as we see a few verses later, referring to the Day of the Lord when Christ returns to judge all men. These are intense words.

Luke 16:19-24 "There was a rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day. (20) And

at his gate was laid a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, (21) who desired to be fed with what fell from the rich man's table. Moreover, even the dogs came and licked his sores. (22) The poor man died and was carried by the angels to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried, (23) and in Hades, being in torment, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham far off and Lazarus at his side. (24) And he called out, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the end of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am in anguish in this flame.'

Weeping and howling. I don't know if you have ever heard that level of agony expressed, but I think that I have heard it at least once or twice when I have been in the home of an ungodly person when death struck. Instead, what do we see –

### **Wealth Perishes**

Most probably with the Lord Jesus' own words in mind, James informs the wicked wealthy of the fleeting nature of their riches:

James 5:2-3 Your riches have rotted and your garments are moth-eaten. (3) Your gold and silver have corroded, and their corrosion will be evidence against you and will eat your flesh like fire.

You have laid up treasure in the last days.

The irony is that these wicked wealthy have “laid up treasure” in the last days. But that treasure is not true, it is not enduring true wealth, in fact, it is eternal misery. Like a wooden building, their supposedly indestructible gold and silver are rusted away and even their fine clothes are destroyed as they stand naked before the Lord.

*“How we use our riches will be evidence for or against us on that Day. For the wicked wealthy, that evidence will lead them to eternal destruction in the lake of fire.”*

[Notice that James' language here does not leave a lot of optimism that he expects these people to repent].

### **The Specifics of their Crimes**

James 5:4-6 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.

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

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

If you study the history of any nation you will find these evils, but as we are most familiar with America and Great Britain, we will consider some examples from our own history. The “fat cat” industrialists were so often prime examples of what James speaks about here in regard to withholding what is due to workers.

**The Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire** in Manhattan, New York City on March 25, 1911 was the deadliest industrial disaster in the history of the city, and one of the deadliest in U.S. history. The fire caused the deaths of 146 garment workers – 123 women and 23 men<sup>[1]</sup> – who died from the fire, smoke inhalation, or falling or jumping to their deaths. Most of the victims were recent Jewish and Italian immigrant women aged 16 to 23;<sup>[2][3][4]</sup> of the victims whose ages are known, the oldest victim was Providenza Panno at 43, and the youngest were 14-year-olds Kate Leone and "Sara" Rosaria Maltese.<sup>[5]</sup>

Because the owners had locked the doors to the stairwells and exits, a common practice used to prevent workers from taking unauthorized breaks and pilferage,<sup>[6]</sup> many of the workers who could not escape the

burning building jumped from the eighth, ninth, and tenth floors to the streets below. The fire led to legislation requiring improved factory safety standards and helped spur the growth of the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union (ILGWU), which fought for better working conditions for sweatshop workers.

The factory was located in the Asch Building, at 23–29 Washington Place in the Greenwich Village neighborhood of Manhattan, now known as the Brown Building and part of New York University. The building has been designated a National Historic Landmark and a New York City landmark.<sup>[7]</sup>

And of course we could find many, many other such examples of the wicked wealthy living in opulence while their laborers worked and toiled under terrible conditions and were paid a pittance. These things still go on today even in this country and certainly in other parts of the world, often utilized by industry in this country.

The Bible, and thus the Christian religion, is most certainly not socialist or communist. It does not teach that all industry and commerce or even wealth is evil in itself. What it does expose however is the wickedness at work within ANY economic or political or

religious entity that exploits the poor and empowers the wicked wealthy.

***“The laborer is worthy of his hire.”***

The laborer must *labor*. We are not to reward a sluggard and in fact the Apostle Paul said that if a man won't work, neither let him eat. And we all know that the opposite evil exists today in which people who are sluggards expect and *are given* pay! But here James is speaking of a wicked wealthy employer who cheats the workers who harvest his wealth for him.

One of the greatest joys of owning your own business and employing people (who are hard workers) is to know that you are providing jobs and incomes to them and their families. This is why industry and corporations and business are not evil in themselves at all (just check out the Old Testament law which assumes businesses will exist; Paul was a tent-maker). But it is their motive and what they do with the wealth they make that determines if God blesses or curses them.

Every Christian business then must be a model of how the Lord generously blesses His people. Far too often you have heard it said or perhaps have experienced this thought yourself –

“that’s the last time I do business with a ‘Christian’ owned company!”

All of these evils rise up to the sight and hearing of the Lord, says James. He sees. He knows. And He is coming to give recompense to the wicked for their crimes.

### **Living in Luxury**

Of course one of the most common things we visualize when we think of wealth is the luxurious lifestyles the wealthy enjoy. *They spend their wealth upon themselves and they even create their own version of the gospel – the health and wealth and prosperity gospel.* James has touched on that very wickedness already –

James 4:3 You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions.
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The point of the wealth for the wicked, despite what they claim, is so that they can spend it all on themselves and live in luxury regardless of the suffering of others (see the story of the rich man and Lazarus). *“You have lived on the earth in luxury and in self-indulgence.”*

Amos 6:3-8 O you who put far away the day of disaster and bring near the seat of violence? (4) "Woe to those who lie on beds of
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ivory and stretch themselves out on their couches, and eat lambs from the flock and calves from the midst of the stall, (5) who sing idle songs to the sound of the harp and like David invent for themselves instruments of music, (6) who drink wine in bowls and anoint themselves with the finest oils, but are not grieved over the ruin of Joseph! (7) Therefore they shall now be the first of those who go into exile, and the revelry of those who stretch themselves out shall pass away." (8) The Lord GOD has sworn by himself, declares the LORD, the God of hosts: "I abhor the pride of Jacob and hate his strongholds, and I will deliver up the city and all that is in it."

The wicked wealthy, you see, are fattening themselves *for the Day of slaughter*. Because they ignored the suffering and oppression of the weak and innocent who were being slaughtered, they shall be slaughtered.

And their evil goes beyond this-

James 5:6 You have condemned and murdered the righteous person. He does not resist you.

How much wicked wealth and corruption has been covered up by the rich and powerful condemning and murdering the righteous person? It

happens every day. If you doubt that, just try being a whistle-blower and see what happens!

### What Are We to Do?

James 5:7-8 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. (8) You also, be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand.

You see then an interesting thing. James points both the wicked wealthy AND the righteous *to the coming of the Lord!* It is the hope of the righteous and it will be the terror of the wicked. James does not tell the righteous to rise up in rebellion and effect some kind of social revolution – though certainly Christians in history have effected much good in various forms of societal revolution:

- Care for the poor
- Working for better wages
- Lobbying for equitable legislation
- Civil disobedience

And sometimes, *sometimes*, actual revolution against a wicked, ungodly king who attempted to oppress people with a power that God had not given

him. But ultimately and finally our hope and salvation from tyranny is not from armed revolt, but from the certain coming of the King of kings.

His coming is at hand. These are the last days. Weep and howl all who hate the Lord and live now in luxury and oppress the weak. Misery is coming for you.