

James 5:1-6

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Verse 1: “Go to now, ye rich men, weep and howl for your miseries that shall come upon you.” James now addresses the impending doom of the physically rich but spiritually poor. It is not inherently sinful to be rich (see 1 Tim. 6:17-19), but it is sinful to be a lover of money (1 Tim. 6:10). Those who sinfully will themselves to riches (by doing sinful things in order to gain money) fall into temptation and a snare, foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition (1 Tim. 6:9).

The destruction of the sinfully rich sometimes comes in this lifetime (being sent to prison for fraud, for example), but it will SURELY come in the next, if it goes unrepented. Oh, if only the rich man from Luke chapter 16 would have just known what miseries awaited him in hell, he would have surely repented! No amount of earthly riches is worth an eternity of misery in hell!

Verses 2-3: “Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are motheaten. Your gold and silver is cankered; and the rust of them shall be a witness against you, and shall eat your flesh as it were fire. Ye have heaped treasure together for the last days.” How foolish! Heaping together corruptible riches such as these, only to have them devoured by moths and rusted into disuse (garments and gold & silver, respectively), is a foolish endeavor. Imagine encountering God on the Day of Judgment, and the only thing to show for the time He gave you is your moth-eaten garments and rusted gold and silver as witnesses against you! These “treasures” will be completely worthless on the Day of Judgment! Instead, live your life so that you can lay up treasures for yourself in heaven (Mat. 6:20).

Verse 4: “Behold, the hire of the labourers who have reaped down your fields, which is of you kept back by fraud, crieth: and the cries of them which have reaped are entered into the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth (or “hosts,” TCG).” James now lists some of the sins of such physically rich but spiritually poor men. One such sin is taking advantage of the poor laborers (from whom the rich profited) by defrauding them of their wages. See Lev. 19:13 and Jer. 22:13-14 for inspired commentary on this evil practice. God promises swift justice “against those that oppress the hireling in his wages” (Mal. 3:5).

Verse 5: “Ye have lived in pleasure on the earth, and been wanton (entirely given to pleasure, TCG); ye have nourished your hearts, as in a day of slaughter.” The sinfully rich (again, remember that riches do not automatically equate to sin) have devoted their lives to sinful pleasure. The latter part of this verse, in the ASV, is as follows: “Ye have nourished your hearts in a day of slaughter.” The idea is that the sinful rich are completely devoted to “nourishing” their fleshly pursuits, blind to their impending slaughter (punishment in hell).

Verse 6: “Ye have condemned and killed the just; and he doth not resist you.” The sins continue. How many people have been falsely accused, falsely imprisoned, and even falsely put to death because of sins involving the love of money? Was not even Jesus our Lord condemned to death, at least in part, due to the love of money? Think Judas Iscariot and thirty pieces of silver (Mat. 26:15)! And yet, the Lord did not resist this evil. “He was oppressed, yet when he was afflicted he opened not his mouth” (Isa. 53:7). Yes, the deceitfulness of riches was one of the sins that sent Jesus to the cross!