

## XI. Misplaced Treasure

February 24/26/27, 2020 James 5:1-6 OT: Pr. 3:27-28; 11:4; Amos 8:4-10; Mic. 2:1-5  
NT: Mt. 6:19-21, 24

**Aim:** To use our wealth and resources in a godly fashion to further the kingdom and glory of God, rather than hoard them to ourselves for our own pleasure at the expense of our fellow men.

*Hughes:* James' attack in the opening paragraph of chapter 5 can only be described as seething.

*Moo:* James' style is that of the prophets pronouncing doom on pagan nations. He unrelievedly attacks these people, with no hint of exhortation. The 'rich' whom James attacks in this paragraph are wealthy landowners, as v. 4 reveals. This was a class of people frequently criticized in the OT.

*Morgan:* James 5:1-6 stands out as perhaps the sternest warning in the New Testament about the sins of the rich. It really could be seen as an elaboration on Jesus' words in Matthew 19:24: 'It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.' Old Testament prophets such as Hosea, Amos, Micah, Joel, and Habakkuk similarly condemned the wealthy among God's people who trusted in and worshipped their wealth more than their Lord.... Outward riches certainly do not guarantee righteousness; in fact, according to James, worldly riches can be one of the worst enemies of true righteousness. James' purpose in verses 1-6, carried over from Chapter 4, is to prevent Christians from placing their hope in earthly wealth. Ultimately, all earthly riches will perish, so it is pointless to build our lives around them.

*Doriani:* James 5:1-6 sounds more like a short blast from a prophet of old. Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Amos, Obadiah, and Nahum denounced nations such as Egypt, Edom, Babylon, and Assyria even though no one from those nations would hear them. To this day, speakers at demonstrations and rallies address political and economic leaders who are *not* in attendance.... The prophetic oracles against foreign oppressors accomplished three things. 1) They promised that wicked oppressors would not last forever. They assured God's people that the Lord defends the righteous and punishes the wicked on the day of reckoning (cp. Gen. 12:3b). 2) They comforted God's people, assuring them that He knows their suffering (Is. 40:1-2; Jer. 31:10-14; Zech. 1:14-17). One day He will wipe every tear from their eyes (Rev. 7:17; 21:4).... 3) They revealed God's standards. When God tells the rich that hoarding, oppression, and wage fraud lead to judgment, it notifies every listener that those sins violate His will and nature.

### A. Condemnation of the Unsaved Rich (James 5:1)

#### 1. The Unsaved Rich (5:1)

*MacArthur:* James's sharp rebuke of the wicked wealthy is in keeping with the tradition of the Old Testament prophets (e.g., Is. 3:14-15; 5:8-10; 10:1-4; Amos 4:1-3; 8:4-10; Job 24:2-4; Jer. 5:27-29; Mic. 2:1-5; Mal. 3:5).

<sup>1</sup>*Come now, you rich, weep and howl for the miseries that are coming upon you.*

## James – Lesson 11

### a) *Come Now (5:1a)*

<sup>1</sup>*Come now...*

*MacArthur:* James begins his denunciation with a forceful pronouncement of impending judgment.... The phrase ‘come now’ is an insistent call for attention. In our contemporary vernacular it means ‘Listen up!’ or ‘Get this!’ or ‘Pay attention!’ Here, it also serves to introduce a new group; in 4:13 it was addressed to those presumptuous fools who planned their lives as if God did not exist.

*Morgan:* The tone of the epistle changes with the opening of Chapter 5. Now James speaks with the thundering voice of a prophet as he pronounces judgment on the rich. This passage is meant to encourage James’ readers who are oppressed by the rich. They have little of this world’s goods and take comfort from knowledge of the future demise of the rich.... ‘Come now’ has the same sense as in 4:13, ‘attend to this, listen: give me your attention!’

### b) *You Rich (5:1b)*

*...you rich...*

*Morgan:* The Greek word for ‘rich’ here consists of two words, *ploutos*, meaning ‘wealth,’ and *krateia*, meaning ‘rule or control.’ Wealth and power are often linked.

*Moo:* *You rich people...* are not among the (Christian) readers of the letter. They are, rather, wealthy non-Christians who are oppressing the Christian community.... Although some traditions appear to condemn the rich merely because they are rich, in the NT, at least, condemnations of wealthy people are almost always attributed to a *misuse* of wealth. Certainly James’s enumeration of the sins of the rich people that he condemns show that this is the case here. It is particularly obvious that James does not intend to pronounce judgment on all rich people [since] ... James 1:10 implies the presence of rich Christians among James’s readers. The designation *you rich* in verse 1, therefore, essentially means, as so often in Scripture, the *unrighteous* rich.

*Doriani:* In a letter written to scattered believers (1:1), we wonder who these rich people might be. Specifically, are they Christians or not? There are reasons to believe James is addressing rich Christians. First, who would read or hear James’s letter but believers who have assembled for worship or fellowship? Second, all Christians are prone to the temptations of their age and social group. If rich believers adopt the lifestyle of their social peers, they could forget the biblical principles of justice and brotherhood that prevent abuse. It is all too easy to follow the standards of one’s age.

*Doriani:* But there are also reasons to believe James is speaking to unbelievers. First, he calls them ‘you rich’ not ‘brothers’ (cp. 5:7, 12). Second, when he exposes their sin, he summons them to ‘howl,’ not to repent (cp. 4:6-10). Third, he anticipates their judgment, not their salvation. Looking back, we see that James is rough with his readers in 4:13-17 as well. But in that passage he still expects that his readers want to pray properly (v. 15) and desire to do what is right (v. 17).

*MacArthur:* Nothing more clearly reveals the state of a person’s heart than his view of money and material possessions. Many who profess faith in Christ invalidate their claim to genuine saving faith through their opulent, indulgent, materialistic lifestyles—a clear indication that they serve wealth, not God (cp. Mt. 6:19-21, 24; Lk. 16:13).

## James – Lesson 11

*Hughes:* James' invective is aimed at his wealthy, nonbelieving countrymen who were exploiting the poor, many of whom were in the church. Specifically, James' targets were wealthy farmers who owned large tracts of land and were squeezing everyone and everything for profit. But though these persons were the calloused unbelieving rich, the message is also meant to benefit the church. James understood that the natural human tendency to envy the rich, if sustained, would lead many Christians astray. Thus, this scathing warning to the ungodly rich is also meant to steel His people against such folly. In addition, James' terrifying description of the judgment awaiting these rich countrymen is meant to ensure the exploited poor that justice is coming and they ought to bear their indignities with patience.

### c) *Weep and Howl (5:1c)*

...weep and howl...

*MacArthur:* James commanded the wicked rich to 'weep and howl.' 'Weep' is from *klaiō* which means 'to sob out loud,' or 'to lament.' It was used to describe the wailing that took place when someone died (e.g., Mk. 5:38-39; Lk. 7:13; 8:52; Jn. 11:31, 33; 20:11; Acts 9:39). It also depicted the outward reaction that sometimes accompanied intense shame and guilt (e.g., Mt. 26:75; Lk. 7:38). James used it in 4:9 to describe the sorrow that accompanies repentance. But where there is no lament of repentance there is no grace of forgiveness, so James adds another word, 'howl.' *Ololuzō* ('howl') appears only here in the New Testament. This onomatopoeic word goes beyond mere lamenting and refers to shrieking or screaming. Taken together, 'weep and howl' picture an intense outburst of despairing, violent, uncontrollable grief.

*Moo:* The condemnation that James pronounces over them is issued in the tones of the OT prophets. *Weep* (*klaiō*) and *wail* (*ololyzō*, an onomatopoeic word, sounding like what it describes) occur frequently in the prophets to depict the reaction of the wicked when the day of the Lord arrives (e.g., Is. 13:6; 15:3; Amos 8:3). In fact, *ololyzō* ('wail') is found only in the prophets in the OT and always in the context of judgment (Is. 10:10; 13:6; 14:31; 15:2-3; 16:7; 23:1, 6, 14; 24:11; 52:5; 65:14; Jer. 2:23; 31:10, 31; Ez. 21:17; Hos. 7:14; Amos 8:3; Zech. 11:2).

*Morgan:* 'Weep' (as in 4:9, *klausate*) is shown in the Old Testament as a proper response to disaster (Lam. 1:1-2; Is. 15:2, 5; Jer. 9:1; 13:17), and that is precisely what they will soon face. Their weeping should be characterized by 'howling,' a word that sounds like what it expresses – *ololuzontes*. This is the only occurrence of this descriptive word in the New Testament.

*Hughes:* James, in commanding the rich to mourn, is not necessarily calling them from a state of happiness to mourning. He is calling the unrighteous rich (be they happy or not) to mourn because of what awaits them in the final judgment. Their materialistic focus places them in terrifying peril.... To such comes James' drastic command to 'weep and howl'—'howl' being the onomatopoeic word *olouzo*.... The picture is of sobbing lament punctuated with repeated howlings as they face the final judgment. We out to let the subjective horror of this seep into our hearts. This is God's Word!

*Doriani:* Echoing the voice of many prophets, James tells the rich to 'weep and wail' (NIV) or 'weep and howl' (ESV). The judgment of God is coming and will bring them misery.

### d) *For the Miseries... (5:1d)*

...for the miseries that are coming upon you.

## James – Lesson 11

*MacArthur:* James then gave the reason the rich are to respond with such overwhelming grief: their ‘miseries which are coming upon’ them. *Talapōria* (‘miseries’) appears only here and in Romans 3:16 in the New Testament. It describes overwhelming hardship, trouble, suffering, or distress. Overwhelming trouble will be visited upon the wicked rich when they stand before the Lord in judgment (cp. Lk. 16:19-25).

*Morgan:* Such a mournful reaction is justified because of the ‘miseries’ (*talaipōriais*) coming upon them. The only other use of the term is in Romans 3:16 where Paul marshalled forth Old Testament evidence to describe the woe and misery of the human condition in sin. The plural form of the word is used to show the weight of the gloom they soon faced (cp. Lk. 6:24-25).

*Moo:* This [OT] background makes clear that *the misery that is coming upon* the rich refers not to earthly, temporal suffering, but to the condemnation and punishment that God will mete out to them on the day of judgment.

### 2. Not All the Rich

*Moo:* What can be said about the ‘rich’ in this passage...is that they are condemned not simply for their wealth; they are condemned for their sinful use of wealth. Applying the text to all wealthy people, then, would be a misreading of the passage. On the other hand, we cannot avoid the serious reminder about money and possessions that we confront in this text.

*Morgan:* The question may arise, ‘What about believers who are blessed with much wealth in this life?’ Is this passage directed necessarily at them? Is it inherently wrong to possess worldly riches that are gained honestly and used ethically? No, but such possessions must never be our priority or our god.

*MacArthur:* The Bible does not teach that possessing wealth is sinful in and of itself. In fact, everyone possesses wealth and material goods to one degree or another... What *is* wrong is to misuse one’s wealth. ‘The love of money,’ wrote Paul in 1 Timothy 6:10, ‘is a root of all sorts of evil’; but he later wrote that it is God ‘who richly supplies us with all things to enjoy’ (v. 17). James, like Paul, cautions against the love of money that leads people to misuse the wealth with which God has blessed them for their own selfish, sinful ends.

*Hughes:* James is not making an indiscriminate attack on the rich. Some notable saints have been rich: Abraham, Job, David, Josiah, Philemon, Joseph of Arimathea, and Lydia, for example. Moreover, there is not a word here against riches *per se*. The Bible does not say money is the root of all evil, but that ‘*the love of money* is a root of all kinds of evils’ (1 Tim. 6:10). The focus, again, is on those who gain their wealth in an ungodly manner, make it the center of their lives, and fail to use it to benefit others.

*Dorani:* On the one hand, James does not condemn everyone who is rich. Chapter 1 shows that among his readers were some rich believers (1:10). Further, many heroes of the faith were wealthy: Abraham, Joseph, Job, David, and Solomon in the Old Testament; Joseph of Arimathea and Zacchaeus in the New. Riches are not evil in themselves. On the other hand, Jesus says, ‘It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God’ (Mt. 19:24). The desire for wealth is often insatiable. ‘Whoever loves money never has money enough; whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with his income’ (Eccl. 5:10).

## James – Lesson 11

### 3. Why the Rich?

*Moo:* Why does James preach this message of denunciation of non-Christians in a letter addressed to the church? Calvin appropriately isolates two main purposes. James ‘has a regard to the faithful, that they, hearing of the miserable end of the rich, might not envy their fortune, and also that knowing that God would be the avenger of the wrongs they suffered, they might with a calm and resigned mind bear them.’

*Dorani:* Even if James 5 primarily addresses rich unbelievers, it still has value for Christians. Even if we are not ripe for judgment, we need to know how God sees the lifestyle that leads to judgment. Further, no Christian is entirely immune to the sins that James describes.... So, everyone needs James’s warnings.

### 4. Lessons for the Rich

*Hughes:* These words suggest a solemn, forgotten truth—that wealth is not an advantage, but rather a *spiritual handicap*. Toward the end of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus says, ‘No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money’ (Mt. 6:24). In answer to a question that precipitated the Parable of the Rich Fool, Jesus began, ‘Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions’ (Lk. 12:15). After the parable He stated, ‘For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also’ (Lk. 12:34).... ‘Jesus said to them again, “Children, how difficult it is to enter the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God”’ (Mk. 10:24b-25).... Jesus’ unrelenting point is, it is *impossible* for one who trusts in riches to get into Heaven.

## B. Crimes of the Unsaved Rich (James 5:2-6)

*MacArthur:* James notes four sins that precipitate the severe judgment pronounced on the wicked rich. They are condemned because their wealth was uselessly hoarded, unjustly gained, self-indulgently spent, and ruthlessly acquired.

### 1. Hoarding (5:2-3)

#### a) Futility (5:2-3a)

<sup>2</sup>Your riches have rotted and your garments are moth-eaten. <sup>3</sup>Your gold and silver have corroded...

*Moo:* These verses together provide the first reason for the condemnation that the ‘rich’ of verse 1 stand under: they have used their wealth for their own selfish purposes. A few commentators think that James might refer to the three main categories of material wealth in the ancient world: agricultural products (*wealth*), *clothes*, and precious metals (*gold and silver*).

*MacArthur:* Hoarding, tragically, is one of the most widespread sins of our time. God entrusts believers with material goods so they may use them for His glory.... In his condemnation of hoarding, James described the three main ways wealth was valued in his day (apart from land and houses).

## James – Lesson 11

*Hughes:* Hoarding is obscene, as James makes so clear in verses 2-3.... The agrarian ancient world had three standard sources of wealth: harvested grain, clothing, and precious metals and jewels, and James points out that hoarding is ruinous to all three.

*Doriani:* Because material wealth is transitory, fleeting, and easily spoiled, hoarding is senseless. Nonetheless, materialists hoard. We should expect this, if money is their god. Yet since money is a weak god—no god—we expect plans to store wealth for another day to fail.

### (1) Rotted (5:2a)

<sup>2</sup>*Your riches have rotted...*

*Moo:* But *wealth* (Gk. *ploutos*) is a very general word, covering money or possessions of any kind; and we have insufficient basis to give it a restricted meaning here. To be sure, a literal interpretation would restrict James's reference to those possessions that are capable of 'rotting.' But the occurrences of this verb in the LXX (it does not occur anywhere else in the NT) show that it can be applied metaphorically to anything that is transitory.

*Morgan:* 'Corrupted' is from *sēpō*, 'to rot or destroy.' It occurs only here in the New Testament.

*MacArthur:* *Ploutos* ('riches') may refer to wealth in general (cp. Mt. 13:22; 1 Tim. 6:17). But James's use of 'rotted' suggests a more narrow reference to foodstuffs. *Sēpō* (the word from which 'rotted' derives) appears only here in the New Testament. In extrabiblical Greek, *sēpō* was used to describe rotten wood, decayed flesh, and rotten fruit. James indicts the wicked rich for uselessly hoarding food (meat, grains, fruit, etc.) that would inevitably rot. Like the rich fool in our Lord's parable (Lk. 12:16-21), they believed their hoarded food would allow them to 'take [their] ease, eat, drink, and be merry' (Lk. 12:19) for years to come. But in the end, it would only rot and be of no use to anyone.

### (2) Ruined (5:2b)

*...and your garments are moth-eaten.*

*MacArthur:* Wealth in biblical times was also measured in terms of 'garments' (cp. Gen. 45:22; Jos. 7:21; Jdg. 14:12; 2 Kgs. 5:5, 22; Acts 20:33; 1 Tim. 2:9; 1 Pe. 3:3). *Himitia* ('garments') referred to outer garments, such as robes, mantles, or cloaks. Often richly embroidered (Jdg. 5:30; Ps. 45:14; Ez. 16:10, 13, 18; 26:16; 27:16, 24) and embellished with jewels, such 'garments' were frequently handed down as heirlooms. But hoarding them was a foolish and useless as hoarding food, since such garments were in danger of becoming 'moth-eaten' (Job 13:28; Is. 50:9; 51:8; Mt. 6:19-20).

*Morgan:* 'Moths have eaten your clothes,' literally, 'have become moth-eaten.' Moth-eaten is a compound word from *sēs* (moth) and *brōtos* (to eat, as in John 6:13).

*Hughes:* Their clothing, so important to their status and maintenance of position—the changes of robes for occasions throughout the day, etc.—are ruined in storage. Moth-eaten, they are worthless!

*Moo:* *Moths have eaten your clothes* reminds us of Jesus' similarly worded warning about the fragility of 'treasures on earth' that are consumed by moths (Mt. 6:19; cp. also Job 13:28).

### (3) Rusted (5:3a)

<sup>3</sup>*Your gold and silver have corroded...*

## James – Lesson 11

*MacArthur:* Finally, wealth in James’s day could be measured in precious metals, chiefly ‘gold and silver.’ Even such seemingly indestructible commodities, James noted, can become ‘rusted.’ The verb translated ‘rusted’ (*katioō*) is a compound word; the added preposition intensifies the force of the verb. It thus means ‘to thoroughly and completely rust or corrode.’ James may have meant that the gold and silver could literally become rusted; some evidence suggests the coinage of his day was not pure but contained alloys and could rust under conducive circumstances. Or James may have been speaking figuratively, declaring that in the day of God’s judgment, gold and silver will be as useless as if they were rusted. The utter inability of riches to deliver individuals from God’s judgment is a frequent theme in Scripture (e.g., Pr. 11:4; Is. 2:20-21; Ez. 7:19; Zeph. 1:18; Mt. 16:26).

*Moo:* More unusual is James’s claim that *Your gold and silver are corroded*. The word ‘corroded’ translates a Greek word (*katioō*) that means ‘rust’; yet, of course, gold and silver are metals that cannot rust.... The word seems to have taken on a general sense of ‘decay’ (see also Ez. 24:6, 11, 12).

*Morgan:* Although James knew that these metals do not rust in the technical sense of the word, silver does corrode and gold will tarnish. Nevertheless, the word is appropriate because it parallels the loss of other forms of riches. ‘Rust’ is from *katioō*, a compound word found only here in the New Testament. It is another perfect tense verb that vividly shows the future as a present reality. The picture is a sad one: when the worldly wealthy open their wallet, they find rotten money; when they open their closets, they find moth-eaten clothes; when they open their treasure chest, they find rust.

*Hughes:* And their gold and silver? James knew they could not corrode, but he appropriates the language of wisdom literature to emphasize that even these are temporal, despite careful accumulation.... James’ conscience-convicting meaning is, ‘While God’s needy children are all around you, your heartless act of stockpiling to preserve your wealth has turned it to spiritual rot in your souls!’

*Dorani:* James, like Jesus, says gold and silver rust—although everyone knew they did not—to make a point. As Sophie Law puts it, ‘Gold and silver might as well be base metals for all the worth they really are for their possessors.’

### (4) Reality

*Moo:* Together, then, the three clauses in v. 2 and v. 3a remind the rich people whom James condemns that the money and material possessions in which they place so much stock will not last. In fact, the perfect tense that James uses in all three clauses (*sesēpen*, *gegonen*, *katiōtai*) suggests that the material possessions of these rich people are already in the state of being ‘rotted,’ ‘moth-eaten,’ ‘rusted.’ ... Although the rich people do not, or cannot, see it, their great wealth has already lost its luster. It stands already under the doom of the things of this world that will fade away and can provide no foundation for the life to come.

*Morgan:* The tenses change here to dramatic perfects – action that happened in the past and is now ongoing. The storehouses of their wealth are now useless; the fruit of their labors is rotting before their eyes.

## James – Lesson 11

### b) Finding (5:3b)

#### (1) Witness against You (5:3b)

*...and their corrosion will be evidence against you and will eat your flesh like fire.*

*MacArthur:* Having exposed the sinful futility of hoarding wealth, James then described the judgment pronounced on the hoarders. Personifying the ‘rust’ that depicts the futility of hoarding riches, James declared that it ‘will be a witness’ for the prosecution against the wicked rich. In the judgment, their hoarded, rotted, moth-eaten, corroded treasures will give graphic testimony to the unregenerate state of their hearts. Their covetous, selfish, compassionless, earthbound approach to life will provoke their condemnation.

*Morgan:* ‘Corrosion’ is *ios*, translated ‘poison’ in 3:8. James prophesied that gold and silver will lose their value because what is impossible – their corrosion – will take place. God’s judgment will make it a reality. And this corrosion will witness (*marturia*) against the wealthy who use their riches to oppress the poor and control the courts.

*Moo:* And not only will wealth bring no lasting benefit to its possessors; it will even stand as a witness against them. The Greek of *testify against you* could also be taken in a positive sense: ‘testify on your behalf’ (the Greek word is *eis*). But such a rendering would run counter to the denunciatory tone of the whole paragraph as well to the imagery of this verse.

*Doriani:* Indeed, for those who hoard wealth, gold and silver are worse than useless; they are harmful.... They ‘testify against you,’ for hoarding is a culpable abuse of wealth.... The wealthy should share their riches with the poor.

#### (2) Flesh-Eating Fire (5:3b)

*...and their corrosion will be evidence against you and will eat your flesh like fire.*

*MacArthur:* Not only does James portray rust as a witness, but also as executioner; it ‘will consume’ the ‘flesh’ of the wicked rich ‘like fire.’ ‘Fire’ symbolizes fast, inescapable, fatal, and final judgment. That is a vivid picture of hell. That the ‘fire will consume’ the flesh of the wicked rich reveals hell to be a place of physical torment.... The Greek word translated ‘flesh’ is plural, indicating James was addressing the wicked rich not collectively but individually; his warning was both pointed and personal.

*Morgan:* The corrosive activity of the precious metals symbolically portrays the ‘eating of their flesh’ in the Day of Judgment. Rust consuming iron is a slow process, and James greatly intensifies the terror of the process by likening it to a fire, a familiar element in God’s judgment scheme (Mt. 5:29-30; 10:28; 1 Cor. 3:13; Rev. 20:15).

*Moo:* *Eat your flesh like fire* is an image of God’s judgment.... Why does the transitory nature of their wealth spell doom for these rich people? James does not make clear the logical connection, but we can easily infer it from biblical teaching elsewhere. The very fact that they have accumulated so much suggests that these rich people have been guilty of focusing on ‘earthly treasure’ at the expense of ‘heavenly treasure,’ showing plainly just where their ‘heart’ really is (Mt. 6:19-21; cp. Ez. 7:19).

*Doriani:* Paul says Christians should use wealth in three ways: to meet basic needs for food and covering (1 Tim. 6:8), to enjoy (6:17), and to be generous to others (6:18). Saving is permissible, but hoarding contradicts all three points. Hoarders trust in wealth rather than in God

## James – Lesson 11

(Mt. 6:19-21). They brood over *possible* future catastrophes, but ignore the *certain* catastrophe of facing God's judgment without faith. On the last day, their useless metals will 'eat [their] flesh like fire.'

### c) Foolishness (5:3c)

*You have laid up treasure in the last days.*

*Moo:* The last clause of verse 3 is again short and abrupt.... The NIV rendering fails to bring out the striking metaphor James employs here. For the verb that he uses (*thēsauroizō*) means 'lay up treasure' and normally has, as we would expect, a positive sense. James might, therefore, simply mean that the rich people are investing their money for 'their last days,' for example, their retirement. But the shift to judgment imagery in the previous sentence, as well as the NT use of the phrase 'the last days,' forbids this neutral interpretation. Following on the OT prophets' prediction of a period of time, 'the last days,' when God would intervene decisively to bring deliverance to His people and judgment to His enemies, the early Christians used this phrase in a theological sense (see Acts 2:17; 2 Tim. 3:1; Heb. 1:2; 2 Pe. 3:3).... What James is saying...is that those who are avidly accumulating wealth in his day are particularly sinful because they utterly disregard the demands made upon people by the display of God's grace in Christ, and especially foolish because they ignore the many signs of the rapidly approaching judgment.... Like the rich fool, they failed to reckon with sudden judgment (Lk. 12:15-21). As those who live in these 'last days,' we, too, should recognize in the grace of God already displayed and the judgment of God yet to come a powerful stimulus to share, not hoard, our wealth.

*MacArthur:* Compounding their sin of hoarding was that 'it is in the last days' that these rich fools 'stored up' their 'treasure.' The 'last days' encompass the period between Christ's first and second comings (Acts 2:16-17; Heb. 1:1-2; 9:26; 1 Pe. 1:20; 4:7; 1 Jn. 2:18; Jude 18). James sharply rebuked them for hoarding their wealth without regard for God's timetable, the flow of redemptive history, or the reality of eternity. How utterly unthinkable to amass and hoard wealth as the day of judgment draws near! (cp. Rom. 2:5-6). Wealth is to be enjoyed as a blessing from God and used to fulfill His will in meeting needs and advancing the gospel. Those who fail to do that suffer judgment.

*Morgan:* The verb translated 'stored up' means 'to gather, accumulate, save.' Here it is used in the literal sense, but the word is used in the Gospels in the figurative sense of storing up treasures in heaven (Mt. 6:20). 'Last days' indicates that James believed in the nearness of the coming of the Lord and the climax of history. Indeed, His coming could be very near, but we should not misinterpret His delay as a broken promise or an inability on His part to consummate the age.... These people had left God out of their plans and treasured up riches as if they would last forever, but the end times, in which they have a chance to repent and put their wealth to righteous use, are already upon them. The kingdom is here *already* in Jesus, but still *not yet* finally and fully realized. That will happen at the grand finale of history.

*Dorani:* This is especially serious since believers are 'in the last days.' In the Old Testament, 'the last days' meant the time of judgment (Is. 2:2). In the New Testament, 'the last days' usually mean the time of Jesus and His salvation (Acts 2:17; Heb. 1:2). James may have both ideas in mind. It is folly to hoard wealth in days when salvation has come, in days when judgment is near.

## James – Lesson 11

### d) For Today

*Hughes:* What does this warning mean to us today? While the Bible does not discourage saving and prudential provision for one's needs, it is dead set against the vast accumulation of self-directed wealth focused solely on perpetuating one's own comforts and pleasures. Jesus was very clear about this, using words that James consciously borrowed: 'Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also' (Mt. 6:19-21). A wise Christian will submit to these convicting words of God.

## 2. Exploitation (5:4)

### a) Crime Against Laborers (5:4a)

<sup>4</sup>*Behold, the wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud...*

*Moo:* The first accusation that James levels at the unrighteous rich is...muted and somewhat indirect. Not so the second: they have cheated their workers of their pay. James's *Look* (Gk. *idou*) draws attention to this accusation. But its precise wording is unclear. Most Greek manuscripts have the verb *apostereō*, which means 'defraud,' 'rob' (Mk. 10:19; 1 Cor. 6:7, 8; 7:5; 1 Tim. 6:5). But two of the best manuscripts read *aphystereō*, 'withhold' (the word does not occur in the NT; and only in Neh. 9:20 in the LXX). A decision between the two is difficult; but we would have expected James to have used the former word, since it taps into a rich biblical tradition that informs his treatment of the poor and helpless throughout his letter (cp. Lev. 19:13; Dt. 24:14-15).

*Moo:* As this text in James makes clear, such admonitions were still needed in the first century. This period witnessed an increasing concentration of land in the hands of a small group of very wealthy landowners. As a result, many farmers were forced to earn their living by hiring themselves out to their rich landlords. Jesus' parable about the workers in the vineyard (Mt. 20:1-16) is cast against this familiar rural background, and it is significant that the workers expect their pay at the end of the day. Prompt payment would have been very important for the laborer, who often got by at a barely subsistence level and who needed a steady income to provide 'daily bread' for himself and his family. In a society where credit was not readily available, the failure to pay workers promptly could jeopardize life itself.

*Morgan:* James uses 'behold' (*idou*) six times in his epistle (3:4, 5; 5:4, 7, 9, 11) for emphasis. Earlier, James spoke in general about impending judgment; here he is very specific. The 'wage's (*misthos*, as in Mt. 20:8) of hired 'laborers' was being dishonestly withheld by rich landowners. 'Laborers' is *ergatōn*, anyone who works for hire, especially agricultural workers (as in Mt. 9:37). These day laborers mowed (*amaō*, only occurrence in the New Testament) and harvested the fields of absentee landlords. Such modestly paid workers were numerous in first-century Palestine. Their earnings were meager at best, and survival was a serious matter if they missed or could not find work. James is describing such modest, powerless employees who toiled under a blistering sun only to be bilked by powerful magnates who owned large estates. 'Fields' suggests extensive, large tracts of land. The landowners systematically held back their wages. 'Held back' is from *aphusterēmenos* and means 'to hold in reserve dishonestly and thus defraud.' This is a pitiful picture of rich Jews abusing their own people.... The practice of defrauding the

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worker of his wage is ancient, and a host of laws and prophetic threats demonstrate God's disapproval (Lev. 19:13; Dt. 24:14-15; Jer. 22:13; Mal. 3:5).

*MacArthur:* The wicked rich were not only guilty of sinfully hoarding their wealth; they had also sinfully acquired it. Far from being generous to the poor as Scripture commands (Dt. 15:9-11; Mt. 6:2-4; Gal. 2:10), they exploited them. Specifically, they had withheld 'they pay of the laborers who mowed' their 'fields'—a practice so shocking that James introduced the statement with the arresting word, 'behold.' The perfect tense of the verb translated 'withheld' suggests that the wicked rich completely withheld at least a part of their laborers' pay; they did not merely delay payment. Day laborers were an essential part of Israel's agrarian economy (cp. Mt. 20:1-16), and withholding their wages was strictly prohibited by the Old Testament (Lev. 19:13; Dt. 24:14-15).

*Dorani:* James has a specific complaint against the rich: they have defrauded their field laborers of their wages.... This could mean several things: 1) they pay, but after undue delay (Lev. 19:13; Dt. 24:14-15); 2) they pay less than they agreed, less than a living wage; 3) they refuse to pay at all. (Proverbs 11:24 and Jeremiah 22:13) may address all three sins. Biblical law emphasizes the need to pay fair wages to day laborers and to do so at the end of the day, because a laborer and his family would otherwise go hungry.

*Hughes:* The Old Testament repeatedly warns against defrauding workers (cp. Dt. 24:14-15; Lev. 19:13; Pr. 3:27-28; Jer. 22:13; Mal. 3:5).... Nevertheless, these landlords were doing this to the poor, so James erupts.... This was a heinous crime for two reasons. 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.

### b) *Crying Against You (5:4b)*

*...are crying out against you...*

*MacArthur:* As he earlier did with the rust that would act both as witness and executioner, James personified the 'pay' that had been unjustly withheld.... That pay, James warned the wicked rich, 'cries out against you.' *Krazō*, ('cries out') means 'to shout' (Mt. 15:22-23; Acts 19:32, 34; 24:21), or 'to scream' (Lk. 9:39). It is used in Mark 9:26 to describe the shrieks of a demon being expelled from its victim in Matthew 21:9 of the joyous cries of the crowd during Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem, and in Matthew 27:23 of the hate-filled cries of the bloodthirsty mob for Jesus' execution.

*Morgan:* James dramatically portrays the withheld wages' shrieking cry (*krazei*, another onomatopoeic word as in 5:1). The idea is that the poor and starving workers are so weak that their wages have to cry out instead!

*Moo:* In an echo of Dt. 24:15, which describes defrauded workers 'crying out' to the Lord against their employees, James claims that the wages themselves *are crying out against you*. The imagery reminds us of [Abel's] blood crying out to God for justice (Gen. 4:10).

*Hughes:* James says two cries go up here. The cry of unpaid wages rises again from the bank accounts of the rich, like the blood of Abel (Gen. 4:10). This cry is *loud* like the scream of an expelled demon and demands vengeance.

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### c) *Crying Above to the Lord of Hosts (5:4c)*

...and the cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord of hosts.

*MacArthur:* The painful cries of the robbed, defrauded laborers reached the ears of God—and they would echo there until He acted in righteous judgment. ‘Sabaoth’ is an untranslated Greek word which derives from the Hebrew word *tsaba* meaning ‘hosts,’ or ‘armies.’ The phrase ‘The Lord of Sabaoth’ describes God as Commander of the armies of heaven (cp. 1 Sam. 17:45). He is the One who hears the cries of the defrauded poor and will call His angelic armies to act in judgment (cp. Mt. 13:41-42; 16:27; 25:31; Mk. 8:38; 2 Th. 1:7-8). A frightening judgment awaits those who unjustly hoard the wealth they rob from the poor. Their victims will cry out for justice to the Righteous Judge and He will not disappoint them.

*Morgan:* We sometimes use the quip, ‘money talks.’ This is certainly true in the case of those who wickedly defraud others – their sin will speak loudly at God’s judgment... ‘Outcry’ is *boai*, a different word from ‘cry out’ in the previous phrase that fills out the pitiful sounds of the oppressed. When God’s people utter cries in the Bible they are usually praying for deliverance from danger and for justice (for example, see Ex. 2:23; 1 Sam. 9:16; 2 Chr. 33:13). Harvesters’ (*therisantes*) complements ‘mowers’ in the previous clause. Their cries have reached God. The Greek tense here is significant – it is perfect tense, meaning the cries have reached God and will continue to be heard by Him. ‘Sabaoth’ is a transliteration of the Greek word that derives from the Hebrew *tsaba* meaning armies or hosts. The name points to the characteristics of God’s might and power. Surely the Lord of all power, who has the authority to dispatch heavenly armies, will come to the aid of the suffering... Here James definitely evokes the experience of Israel in Egypt. At the burning bush Yahweh says to Moses, ‘I have seen the affliction of My people in Egypt and I have heard their shouts’ (Ex. 3:7).

*Moo:* When God’s people utter ‘cries’ (Gk. *boai*) in the Bible, they are often pleading with God for deliverance from danger and for justice (see, e.g., Ex. 2:23; 1 Sam. 9:16; 2 Chr. 33:13). What the rich think they do in secret, and without danger of prosecution, is not hidden from *the Lord Almighty*. *Almighty* captures the sense, if not the form, of the Greek here, which has *sabaōth* (transliterated in KJV; NASB), the transliteration of a Hebrew word that means ‘army.’ The title *Lord of hosts* pictures God as the powerful leader of a great army.... Therefore, when James affirms that the wrongdoing of the rich has become known to God, he makes clear that this God is holy, powerful, and determined to judge those who infringe His commandments.

*Hughes:* The other cry is a shout from the workers. This pathetic duet does not go unheard, for it reaches ‘the ears of the Lord of hosts.’ The hosts are the angelic armies of Heaven.... This awesome, martial God hears and will avenge!

### d) *Christian Application*

*Hughes:* This prophetic cry is against any person or nation who reaps riches at the expense of the poor. It is against unbelievers. But sadly it is also sometimes true of Christians. Christian employer, it is far better to pay your employees what they are worth and to provide good benefits than to increase your profit and give more to ‘Christian causes.’ All who employ others must ask themselves if there are any voices calling out to God because of them.

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### 3. Self-Indulgence (5:5)

#### a) *Days of Sumptuous Living (5:5a)*

##### (1) Luxury (5:5a)

<sup>5</sup>*You have lived on the earth in luxury and in self-indulgence.*

*MacArthur:* Having increased their wealth by robbery and hoarding, the wicked rich added to their sin by using their wealth for their own selfish indulgence. James described their self-indulgence by using three verbs. *Truphaō* ('lived luxuriously') appears only here in the New Testament. The related noun *truphē* has the basic meaning of 'softness.' James condemned the wicked rich for living in soft, extravagant luxury at the expense of others. Far from being first-century Robin Hoods, stealing to give to others, they stole to line their own pockets.

*Morgan:* Such flamboyant living in itself is indeed sinful, but doing so with such little regard for the poor and suffering is unspeakable evil. 'Lived in luxury' (*truphan*) translates a verb that can have both a positive and a negative sense. Positively it means to take pleasure or delight in something. For example, Eden is called the Garden of Delight in Genesis 2:14; 3:24; Joel 2:3. Or, one can delight in goodness or good things (Neh. 9:25). Negatively, it means to live luxuriously and to be soft or wanton. The latter is the meaning here.

*Dorani:* The verbs James uses mean 'luxuriate' and 'indulge oneself.' The word for 'luxuriate' (*truphaō*) does not always suggest wickedness. It appears in the Greek translations of Nehemiah and Isaiah to describe the life of abundance and ease that God provides for His people (Neh. 9:25; Is. 66:11).

*Moo:* James...introduces yet a third explanation for the 'misery that is coming upon' the rich. Judgment will overtake them because they have *lived in luxury and self-indulgence*. James uses two separate verbs to get his point across. The former verb (*truphaō*) need not have a negative connotation; it occurs in Neh. 9:25 (LXX) to describe the ease of life that God granted the Israelites for their obedience in conquering the land (cp. also Is. 66:11). But the cognate to this verb has a negative connotation in the NT (Lk. 7:25; 2 Pe. 2:13), and James clearly uses it here to depict a sinful, self-indulgent lifestyle.

*Hughes:* Self-indulgence in the accumulation of wealth is progressively addictive.... James' reference to luxurious living is very descriptive in its literal rendering: 'You have *lived delicately*'—a soft, pampered life.

##### (2) Indulgence (5:5a)

<sup>5</sup>*You have lived on the earth in luxury and in self-indulgence.*

*Dorani:* But the second word (*spatalaō*) describes those who live for their pleasures, fat and unconcerned about others (Ez. 16:49; 1 Tim. 5:6). The phrase 'on the earth' adds the thought that they think nothing of God in heaven. They live for the pleasures of this age and forget the needy (Lk. 16:19-31).

*Moo:* The second verb (*spatalaō*) is more exclusively negative. Its only other biblical occurrences are in 1 Tim. 5:6 ... and Ez. 16:49, where the people of Sodom are condemned for being 'overfed and unconcerned' and for not helping 'the poor and needy.' The easily overlooked phrase *on earth* contributes to these negative connotations, suggesting a contrast between the pleasures the rich have enjoyed in this world and the torment that awaits them in

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eternity. Although the wording is not the same, a very similar nuance occurs in Abraham's words to the rich man in Jesus' parable (Lk. 16:25). Indeed, this parable stands as a key witness to a widespread eschatological teaching in the Bible: that the ease of the rich and the suffering of the poor in this life would be reverse in the life to come.

*MacArthur:* The phrase 'led a life of wanton pleasure' derives from a single Greek verb *spatalaō*, used only here and in 1 Timothy 5:6. It has the connotation of giving oneself to the pursuit of pleasure, or plunging headlong into dissipation. Those who pursue pleasure and luxury often descend into vice in a vain attempt to satisfy their insatiable desires. A life without self-denial soon goes out of control in every area. Paul described such people as dead even while they live (1 Tim. 5:6) because, like the foolish son in our Lord's parable, they squander everything on loose living (Lk. 15:13).

*Morgan:* 'Self-indulgence' derives from a single Greek verb, *spatalaō*, used only here and in 1 Timothy 5:6. It carries the idea of giving oneself to the pursuit of pleasure or plunging into dissipation. In 1 Timothy 5:6, Paul used the word to speak of those who are dead even while they live. In Romans 1, Paul describes this kind of person whom God gives over to greater and greater depravity. Such ease and luxury in the present highlights the contrast that awaits the ungodly rich, namely the torment and misery that are being stored up for them (5:3b).

*Hughes:* His mention of 'self-indulgence'—literally 'taken your pleasure'—evokes the wasteful living of the prodigal, wanton self-indulgence. This is *conspicuous consumption*, a sin that assaults us every hour as we walk through a shopping mall, watch television, or go through the day's mail.

### b) *Day of Slaughter (5:5b)*

*You have fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter.*

*Amos 4:1 – Hear this word, you cows of Bashan on Mount Samaria, you women who oppress the poor and crush the needy and say to your husbands, "Bring us some drinks!"*

*MacArthur:* Finally, James accused the wicked rich of having 'fattened' their 'hearts.' *Trephō* ('fattened') means 'to nourish, feed, or fatten.' The Septuagint...used it in Jeremiah 46:21 to speak of fattened calves. The striking picture James paints is of oppressive, self-indulgent robbers who have satiated themselves on the plunder taken from their victims. The desire for luxury led to vice, which led the unjust hoarders to seek to selfishly indulge every desire of their hearts.... In keeping with the metaphor of the wicked rich having fattened their hearts, James warns of a coming 'day of slaughter'—a frightening picture of judgment. In vivid language, he depicts the self-indulgent hoarders as fattened calves, headed for the slaughterhouse of divine judgment. And apart from saving faith in Christ, that is the reality that awaits them.

*Morgan:* This wantonness, luxury, and injustice are an affront to God and to the needy, and James pronounces a terse and grim judgment on the perpetrators.... The descriptive word 'gorged' is *ethrepsate*, 'indulging or fattening oneself.' The idea is that of indulging one's passions and lusts. They are growing fatter and fatter,, but not for the end that they expect. 'In the day of slaughter' is the key phrase in this verdict against the rich oppressors. In vivid language, James depicts the rich as cows – they have enjoyed their luxury, allowing themselves to get fat and not realizing that such a condition prepares them for the slaughterhouse of divine judgment. The principal thrust of James' warning to rich oppressors is that there is to be a judgment. Those who abuse wealth are going to be punished at that judgment.

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*Doriani:* The Bible never censures the rich per se. But it often says that those who live for pleasure in this world will suffer sorrow in the next. God's judgment brings reversals. James says the self-indulgent rich have fed themselves in 'the day of slaughter.' The phrase 'day of slaughter' may mean they sat by idly on a day when the poor were slaughtered. More likely, the point is caustic: they are fattening themselves up for the day of *their* slaughter. They are like animals—grazing, stuffing themselves, heedless that every bite moves them close to the day when they meet the slaughterer.

*Moo:* *Days of slaughter* could refer to any time when the poor suffer horribly while the rich are indulging themselves.... But the 'reversal of fortunes theme...along with the parallel between v. 5b and 'you have hoarded wealth in the last days' (v. 3), suggests rather that *the day of slaughter* is a specific eschatological point in time.... James seems to connect this day of judgment with the *Parousia* of the Lord (5:7); and. That word becomes virtually a technical term to denote the return of Christ in glory at the end of history. It is, therefore, far more likely that *the day of slaughter* is a vivid description of the day of judgment.... James's point then, as in verse 3, is that the rich are selfishly and ignorantly going about their accumulating wealth for themselves and wastefully spending it on their own pleasures in the very day when God's judgment is imminently threatened. The 'last days' have already begun; the judgment *could* break in at any time – yet the rich, instead of acting to avoid that judgment, are, by their selfish indulgence, incurring greater guilt. They are like cattle being fattened for the kill.

*Hughes:* This is a powerful temptation, but the divine statement for those who reject God's grace and pursue an indulgent lifestyle is even more powerful: 'You have fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter.' What a terrible thought, especially if you have ever dressed out an animal for the table.

### c) *Day of Selfless Living*

*Hughes:* James' scathing words to the unregenerate must also find their mark in us. There are times for sumptuous celebration—holidays, birthdays, or anniversaries. There are times to feast and lavish our loved ones. But a life of conspicuous consumption—delicate, soft luxury—is *not* Christian. Do not be fooled by the evangelistic gigolos who tell eager ears, 'You are children of the King—live like it!'

## 4. Injustice (5:6)

### a) *Violence (5:6a)*

<sup>6</sup>*You have condemned and murdered...*

*Moo:* James has accused the 'rich' of hoarding wealth (vv. 2-3), cheating workers (v. 4), and living self-indulgently. Now, in the climax of his denunciation, he accuses them of condemning and murdering *innocent men*.... James's use of the word 'condemn' (Gk. *katadikaō*) points to some kind of judicial verdict – and this reflects OT and intertestamental teaching directed to situations in which rich people use their wealth and influence to deprive the righteous poor of their rights and of their living...(see especially Amos 2:6; 5:12; Mic. 2:2, 6-9; 3:1-3, 9-12; 6:9-16; Ps. 10:8-9; 37:32; James 2:5-7). But how can James claim that the rich have *murdered innocent men*? He probably has in mind the practical outcome of the actions that the rich take against the poor to cheat them of their land and take away their gainful employment: the poor starve to death.

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*MacArthur:* This is the final progression in the downward spiral followed by the rich people James rebuked. Having unjustly hoarded the money they robbed from the poor day laborers and spent it on their self-indulgent desires, they went even further and ‘condemned and put to death the righteous man,’ They would literally kill to maintain their opulent lifestyle. ‘Condemned’ is from *katadikazō*, which means ‘to pass sentence upon,’ or ‘to condemn.’ The Greek verb translated ‘put to death’ (*phoneuō*) is translated ‘murder’ in all of its other New Testament appearances (Mt. 5:21; 19:18; 23:31, 35; Mk. 10:19; Lk. 18:20; Rom. 13:9; James 2:11; 4:2). The implication is that the wicked rich were using the courts to judicially murder some of the abused poor.

*Morgan:* Rather than supporting and vindicating the righteous, they ‘condemn’ (*katadikazō*) them. The verb means ‘to pass sentence on’ with the result of condemning. ‘Killed’ or ‘put to death’ is from *phoneuō*, translated murder in all its other New Testament usages (Mt. 5:21; 19:18; 23:31, 35; Mk. 10:19; Lk. 18:20; Rom. 13:9; James 2:11; 4:2). The implication is that the wicked rich are using the courts to judicially murder some of the abused poor.

*Dorani:* If murder is the most egregious sin among men, murder of unresisting innocents is most egregious among murders. As before (4:2), the murder is probably figurative. Yet by withholding their wages, the rich condemn the poor to poverty, even starvation. The word ‘condemn’ suggests the law court. It is likely that the rich used the legal system to deprive the poor of their wages and lands. We must remember that in most societies in antiquity, as in many societies today, there was little concept of rule by impartial law. Those who had power and wealth on their side won in court, not those who had justice. The courts were governed by patronage, clan, and tribe, not objective justice.

*Hughes:* In this final indictment James’ accusations reach the greatest intensity.... James is referring to *judicial* ‘murder’—primarily referring to taking away the means of making a living. The landed gentry controlled the courts. The poor could not oppose them because they had no way to use the system, and thus were helpless.

### b) *Victim (5:6b)*

*...the righteous person. He does not resist you.*

*Moo:* The NIV rendering here is interpretive; the Greek simply has ‘the righteous one’ (*ton dikaion*). The singular construction, with the definite article, has led a number of scholars to surmise that James is thinking of the murder of a particular righteous individual. One identification, which can be traced back fairly early in Christian tradition, is that the ‘righteous one’ is Jesus Himself. But nothing in the context has prepared us for the introduction of Jesus at this point.... The context demands a more general reference. ‘The righteous one’ is the typical follower of God, experiencing persecution at the hands of the wicked rich.... The focus [is] on the nonresistance of the poor, afflicted righteous (cp. Mt. 5:39; Rom. 12:14), who refuse, or are unable, to oppose the power and influence of the rich.... James, on a note of majestic pathos, concludes the paragraph by reminding us that the righteous are helpless victims of the stratagems of the rich and powerful.

*Morgan:* Commentators disagree over the identity of ‘the righteous one’ (*ho dikaios*). Some think it refers to Jesus and others think that James is referring to himself. But the idea is more general – any laborer defrauded in this manner is the victim of such judicial abuse. Many in James’s community of faith are victims of this injustice.... The mistreatment is even more egregious because the righteous do not defend themselves.... Their actions of injustice are

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heinous in and of themselves, but even more so because they are committed against the defenseless and non-resistant.

*MacArthur:* The term ‘righteous man’ denotes someone morally upright (e.g., Gen. 6:9; 2 Sam. 4:11; Mt. 1:19; 10:41; Acts 10:22)—as was James himself, as his nickname ‘the just’ attests. James made it clear that the victims of the rich oppressors were innocent of any crime or wrongdoing. It is best to understand the ‘he’ who did ‘not resist’ the rich as the innocent, abused poor man they hauled into court. That may indicate that the victims were defrauded believers, committing themselves, as did the Lord Jesus Christ, into the care of God when falsely accused (1 Pe. 2:23). By not resisting their oppressors, they lived out the truths taught by our Lord in Matthew 5:29-42.

*Doriani:* James mentions the murder of the *righteous*, not the poor, adding, ‘He does not resist you.’ Theologians occasionally try to identify a particular innocent man who suffered condemnation and murder (the Greek noun is singular). Is it a recent and famous case? Is it Jesus? Certainly Jesus is the case par excellence of an innocent man murdered.... But we cannot tell if James had Jesus in mind. James did intend to join the prophets and wise men of old who condemned the oppression of the innocent as a great sin (1 Sam. 19:5; Ps. 64:4; Is. 5:23; Jer. 2:34-35; etc.).

### 5. Application

*Morgan:* The context shows that he is not writing to all who are rich, but to the rich who abuse their wealth. The judgment will be a time of wretchedness, distress, trouble and misery. The misery will be so immense that people will weep and wail. Weeping and tears can be of anguish rather than repentance, particularly when repentance has been resisted, and it will be too late for repentance then.... This paragraph is a dismal one indeed. For now, sin seems to have dominion, and righteousness seems to be on the losing side. But take courage! The Lord of Hosts will be the equalizer. The meek really will inherit the earth (Mt. 5:3), and the perverse value system of this world will be turned on its end.

*Doriani:* James never condemns riches per se, but riches can lead to sin: 1) if they are accumulated through injustice (5:4); 2) if they are used for indulgence (5:5); and 3) if they breed insolence and lawlessness (5:6). The primary cure for these ills is to use wealth as the Lord prescribes. We must not hoard, for hoarding is wasting. We keep some for proper enjoyment, save sensibly for the future, and give much to the Lord and His work.... A second cure for these ills is to lift our eyes from material things. James says we are living in the last days (5:3). We are near the day of slaughter (5:5). The Lord is coming (5:7); indeed, His coming is near (5:8). By faith, believers are prepared and remain prepared for that day. When our hearts are right, we long for it. So then, let us not live like the godless rich, who grasp, hoard, and indulge themselves. Let us live out the conviction that the riches of this age are fleeting, and that our life with God forever is rewarding.

*Hughes:* James has been so painfully explicit with his pounding indictments of the money-mad, unbelieving world. Material fixation spawns a miserable quartet in one’s life: 1) hoarding; 2) fraud; 3) self-indulgence; and 4) murder. Though this is a characterization of the world without Christ, we must never imagine ourselves to be immune. We must ask ourselves: Do I hoard? Am I guilty of overaccumulation of wealth? Have I ever or am I now defrauding someone? Is there financial deception in my life? Have I succumbed to the culture’s Siren song of self-indulgence? Are there sub-Christian excesses in my life? Have I ‘murdered’ another—that is,

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have I victimized someone because of a power advantage I possess? ... Many of us, in comparison with others, are rich. Our lifestyles, due to modern invention and education, make the lifestyles of the ancients seem very shabby. Depending on our mind-set and soul-dependence, our souls may be in great peril.

*MacArthur:* Wealth may be a blessing, a gift from God bringing the opportunity to do good. But that can only be true of those who are also 'rich in faith' (2:5) and 'rich toward God' (Lk. 12:21). If wealth is to be a source of blessing and not condemnation, it must not be uselessly hoarded, unjustly gained, self-indulgently spent, or ruthlessly acquired.

For next time: Read Hebrews 5:7-12.