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Attitude toward Money

—The A in James

This lesson is the second of five lessons from the letter written by James. Here in this second lesson, James warns us about money on three counts...

1 *Money does not last*

Money is not lasting. You can lose it, if not through misfortune, then through death.

James 1:10-11 "As the flower of the grass, the rich man will pass away, he will fade away in the midst of his business."

James 5:1-3 tells the rich to weep because "your riches have rotted, and your garments have become moth-eaten; your gold and silver have rusted." James was probably thinking of the words of Jesus...

Matthew 6:19-20

"Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth,
Where moth and rust corrupt,
And where thieves break in and steal;
But lay up for yourselves treasure in heaven,
Where moth and rust do not corrupt,
And where thieves do not break in and steal."

2 *Life and happiness do not depend on money*

Our lives are in God's hands. Our lives do not depend upon how much money we have.

James 1:17 Life's good things all come from God, and we depend upon him for them. "Every good thing and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father"

James 3:13-18 One of the gifts upon which our lives depend is "wisdom from above". There is an "earthly, sensual, demonic" wisdom that engenders "bitter envy and self-seeking", resulting in "confusion and every evil thing". Heavenly wisdom creates a life "rich in good fruits". Such a life is safe from the lust for earthly and sensual pleasure and power so often associated with the gaining and holding of excessive material wealth.

James 4:13-15 Even life itself is totally dependent upon God's will. "Come on now, you who say, 'Today or tomorrow we shall go to such and such a city and spend a year there and engage in business for profit' -yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. For what is your life? It is just a puff of steam that appears for a little while and then vanishes away. Instead you ought to say, 'If the Lord wills, we shall live, and do this or that.'"

Paul's teaching runs along the same lines, that the only true gain is in devotion to God, and dependence upon him.

1Timothy 6:6-8 "Godliness with contentment is great gain. For just as we brought nothing into this world, so we can carry nothing out. And if we have food and covering, with these we shall be content."

2Corinthians 9:8 "And God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that always having all sufficiency in everything, you may abound to every good work."

3 *The love of money can make a person proud, covetous, and unkind*

Both James and Paul (following from what we have just been reading) show that the pursuit of money beyond our needs will spoil us spiritually.

James 4:16 "But you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil."

1Timothy 6:9-11 "But those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts, which drown men in destruction and ruin. For the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil, and this love has caused many to stray from the faith and to pierce themselves with many a sorrow."

James has a lot more to say about the spiritual and moral corruption that the pursuit of money leads to...

James 2:1-9 James says that "God has chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which he promised to those who love him" and the rich are oppressors of the poor.

James 4:2-4 This terrible condemnation, apparently directed to certain members of the church, shows to what depths the lust for money and possessions can drive a person.

James 5:1-6 At the beginning of this lesson we noticed the first part of this reading. Now we look at how, in this passage, James goes on to condemn the oppression of the poor by the rich, whether it be withholding wages from poor labourers so they cannot feed their families and pay their bills, or even murdering the righteous in order "to live on earth in pleasure and luxury".

Is James's teaching about money still as relevant and applicable today, as it was 2000 years ago, or are things different now?

Things to Avoid

A difficulty with the Bible's teaching about money is that some of the terms and concepts are capable of manipulation. For example, "a high standard of living" should express a reasonable sufficiency of blessings under the good providence of God. It can, however, be a euphemism for luxury and excess at the expense of the poor, and of your own soul.

The real issue is not how much you've got, or are trying to get, but what it means to you, what your motives are, whether others are being deprived, whether God is taking second place to mammon, and whether you know that living high is living dangerously.

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