

Introduction

1. When James gave us the outline for his letter back in 1:19, He said to be quick to listen (obey), slow to speak, and slow to wrath (current section)
2. In our passage today he continued to address their in-fighting, but called out a specific group of people:
  - a. Among James's readers, there was a mix of rich, poor, and likely those somewhere in between
  - b. We know there was conflict between these different groups because James has already called out some for treating the rich with favor while dishonoring the poor
  - c. He suggested the absurdity of this behavior by reminding his readers that it was the rich who were dragging some of them into court (presumably for financial reasons)
  - d. That wasn't the only concerning behavior by some of the rich—apparently some were so focused on growing their wealth that they were boasting about it and abusing those who worked for them
3. Outline:
  - a. James rebuked some in the church for their arrogant and boastful pursuit of wealth (4:13-17)
  - b. James warned them of the judgment they would face for how they acquired their wealth (5:1-6)

A. James rebuked some of his readers for their arrogant and boastful pursuit of wealth (READ 4:13-17)

1. To be clear, the Bible doesn't condemn wealth or being wealthy:
  - a. Wealth is often one of the blessings of God and ultimately attributed to Him (e.g. Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, David, Solomon)
  - b. However, the Bible warns about greed and the pursuit of wealth:
    - 1) Luke 12:15: **"Beware, and be on your guard against every form of greed; for not even when one has an abundance does his life consist of his possessions."**
    - 2) Luke 16:13: **"No servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and wealth."**

- 3) 1 Timothy 6:9-10: **"But those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful desires which plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs."**
2. Some of James's readers weren't heeding such warnings (4:13-17):
  - a. They had big plans for growing their wealth (RE-READ 4:13):
    - 1) There's obviously nothing wrong with having a plan to make money
    - 2) In fact, the Bible encourages it (Proverbs 21:5; LSB): **"The plans of the diligent lead surely to profit, but everyone who is hasty comes surely to poverty."**
    - 3) Parable of the talents (First two rewarded; third judged)
    - 4) If these men were simply discussing business plans or how they were going to grow their finances, it wouldn't have been a problem
  - b. However, they had left God out of their planning (RE-READ 4:14-15):
    - 1) They thought their future was completely in their own hands:
      - a) They were "practical atheists" (MacArthur)—those who profess to know God but live as if He doesn't exist
      - b) Back in James 1:9, he encouraged the rich to glory in their humiliation (being made low) because like flowering grass they will pass away and adding that the rich man will fade away in the midst of his pursuits
      - c) Here he implied that the plans they were making were folly because they didn't know what their lives would be like tomorrow, and that they were just a **"vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away"**
      - d) This echoes what Jesus taught in Luke 12:13-21
    - 2) Their plans should have focused on God's Will rather than their pursuit of riches (RE-READ 4:15):
      - a) The Bible declares that we can make all the plans we want, but they are wholly dependent upon God's sovereign will:
        - Proverbs 16:9: **"The mind of man plans his way, but the LORD directs his steps."**
        - Proverbs 19:21: **"Many plans are in a man's heart, but the counsel of the LORD will stand."**
      - b) So, certainly as they made their plans they should have acknowledged that God was sovereign over those plans

c) However, more is implied here: to say “if the Lord wills we will live and also do this or that” implies that one is SEEKING God’s will rather than one’s own

c. Their pursuit of riches was a form of arrogant boasting and it was “evil” (4:16)

d. V. 17 (READ) serves as summary and transition to what comes next: to know the right thing to do and not do it is sin

3. Takeaway: Jesus told us not to store up treasures on earth but treasures in heaven (READ Matthew 6:19-24)

B. James warned them of the judgment they would face for how they acquired their wealth (5:1-6)

1. Since James’s readers were Hebrews, they should have been aware of what the Old Testament said about profit made through wicked means:

- a. Gomer Pyle—“Ill gotten gains”
- b. READ Proverbs 10:2; 13:11; 21:6

2. James issued a warning and then leveled three charges against them:

a. He warned them that they would face judgment (5:1-3):

1) He called on them to “**weep and howl**” because of the “**miseries which are coming upon you**”

- a) The words he used describe a loud, bitter and desperate wailing
- b) “**miseries**”: a wretched state; translated destruction in LXX

2) He said that their riches had become worthless (all perfect tense):

- a. Reflect back on the description James gave in 1:2
- b. This is exactly what Jesus had warned against (READ Matthew 6:19)

3) Ultimately, these things would serve as a “**witness**” against them and “**consume**” their flesh like fire in the “**last days**”:

- a) “**last days**”: refers to the final judgment at the end of time and before eternity; the Great White Throne judgment in Revelation 20:11-15 (READ)
- b) Their rotted, moth-eaten, rusted silver and gold will be all the evidence—the witness against them—that God will use to pronounce judgment upon them

c) James used some irony here—they spent their lives storing up earthly treasure, but in the end the only treasure they stored up for themselves was the misery they would face in the Judgment

b. They were guilty of at least three things (5:4-6):

1) They withheld wages from their workers (4):

- Leviticus 19:13: “**You shall not oppress your neighbor, nor rob him. The wages of a hired man are not to remain with you all night until morning.**”
- Deuteronomy 24:14-15: “**You shall not oppress a hired servant who is poor and needy, whether he is one of your countrymen or one of you aliens who is in your land in your towns. You shall give him his wages on his day before the sun sets, for he is poor and sets his heart on it; so that he will not cry against you to the LORD and it become sin to you.**”

2) They lived lives of self-indulgence (5):

- “**luxuriously**”: to live for pleasure, be licentious, to carouse
- “**wanton pleasure**”: excessive indulgence to please one’s own desires
- “**have fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter**”: had become objects of God’s judgment

3) They condemned and put to death the righteous (6):

- “**put to death**”: murder? Mentioned in 4:2
- “**he does not resist you**”:

3. Takeaway: the Bible condemns taking advantage of others for our own gain, but encourages us to work so we can give and help others:

- a. Dozens of references in the OT regarding the wickedness of using false scales, withholding wages, and taking advantage of the poor
- b. Likewise, it is filled with the opposite: using what God has given us to bless and help care for others
- c. Ephesians 4:28: “**The one who steals must no longer steal; but rather must labor, performing with his own hands what is good, so that he may have something to share with the one who has need.**”