

# Book of James

## Sermon #10: Live for the Reward

James 5:1-6

Dr. Matt Cassidy ---- November 6, 2022

Why don't we turn in our Bibles on our phone in real life to James chapter 5 as we study those first six verses together. Months ago, people said, "Let's study James!" "It'll be fun!" they said.

### James 5:1

**Now listen, you rich people, weep and wail because of the misery that is coming on you.**

Here's chapter 5, verse 1: "Now listen, you rich people, weep and wail because of the misery that is coming on you."

*[Chuckles.]* It's going to be a great day. If you're visiting here at Grace, don't forget to get the cookies on the way out. You probably won't be back. Thanks for coming.

Anyway, let's get going here. James' tone is a different volume now. The first three chapters James was coming at us like an old-school coach. I kind of like it. He's frank and he tells us the way it is. In chapter 4 he puts his whistle down and puts on his master sergeant uniform and starts yelling at us. Now in chapter 5 he's abandoned that and he's full-blown Old Testament prophet. He's a street preacher, hell fire and brimstone. He's bringing it. It's at an eleven at this point.

You need to know this, though. When he's talking this way, he is a street preacher. He's kind of changed his audience somewhat. Most scholars will tell you that in this paragraph he's talking to nonbelieving wealthy people that were needing to be preached to. And while he's preaching to the outside nonbelieving wealthy person that's abusing their power, he wants the Church to be listening carefully, because they need to learn something too. So, you see, he kind of has two audiences going.

When I was looking at this, what it reminded me of and what I pictured in my head was our three grown children. We are so proud of our children. They are courageously living out the radically different dreams that God gave each of those kids. Those children are so completely different in the way God made them and in the ways they responded in acting out. Our oldest son Ryan, when he acted out, would go this way. [*Points one direction.*] And our second born, Carey, when she would act out, she would go that way. [*Points another direction.*] Our third born, Amy, didn't act out that much. And I think she was just observant. I don't think she was any more intelligent than the other two. She just saw where this went and where that went, and sometimes if you just do the opposite of bad you end up doing good and you stay out of trouble.

And that's what we're going to do today. We're going to read through this section and we're just going to do the opposite. Whatever these wealthy men and women are doing in the way that they're using their power and their wealth, let's just do the opposite, and I think God will be pleased with that.

## **The Power of Wealth**

There are two aspects of the context of this section that will be important for us to understand before we read it. That way we'll make the most of it. The first principle that you need to know is about the power of wealth—the power of wealth itself. You can't find a verse in the Bible that says that riches are bad or that someone is wrong for being wealthy. Money is not evil. Now the love of money—and you don't have to be rich—you can be rich or poor—the love of money leads to all kinds of evil. And the kinds of evil that James is dealing with, particularly, are two kinds.

One is the thinking that they have power over other people to hurt them. And the other one would be that they are independent. Power and independence—the power to ruin a person's life because they can; and the idea that they're independent of God and independent of final justice when answering to God.

So, when we're reading through this section, I want you to be looking for the abusive power over other people, but also, kind of the idea that they're going to live a life without consequences. That's one of the issues of the context.

## Living in Light of Eternity

The second issue of context that you need to grasp is a repeated reference to an eternal judgment; that we are temporal but we're living for eternity; that the very short lives that we live, the choices that we have, will echo into eternity. There is a final judgment. There is a reckoning that's coming. And he's going to bring this up at least three times. I've underlined it so that you know that's what I'm making a reference to.

### James 5:1-6

**Now listen, you rich people, weep and wail because of the misery that is coming on you. <sup>2</sup> Your wealth has rotted, and moths have eaten your clothes. <sup>3</sup> Your gold and silver are corroded. Their corrosion will testify against you and eat your flesh like fire. You have hoarded wealth in the last days. <sup>4</sup> Look! The wages you failed to pay the workers who mowed your fields are crying out against you. The cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord Almighty. <sup>5</sup> You have lived on earth in luxury and self-indulgence. You have fattened yourselves in the day of slaughter. <sup>6</sup> You have condemned and murdered the innocent person, who was not opposing you.**

So, let's read these six verses together. He says, "Now listen, you rich people, weep and wail because of the misery that is coming on you. Your wealth has rotted, and moths have eaten your clothes. Your gold and silver are corroded. Their corrosion will testify against you and eat your flesh like fire. You have hoarded wealth in the last days. Look! The wages you failed to pay the workers who mowed your fields are crying out against you. The cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord Almighty. You have lived on earth in luxury and self-indulgence. You have fattened yourselves in the day of slaughter. You have condemned and murdered the innocent person, who was not even opposing you." So there.

## A General Rebuke

### James 5:1

**Now listen, you rich people, weep and wail because of the misery that is coming on you.**

The general rebuke here is found in the first verse, and then the rest of the section is going to explain why you should be wailing and mourning. He says, “Now listen, you rich people, weep and wail because of the misery that is coming on you.” This is the street preacher James, just yelling on Wall Street or Madison Avenue or wherever it might be, saying, *Hey, you wealthy unbeliever, you should be weeping and wailing. You shouldn't be laughing right now. You should be shrieking with some deep sense of regret. Shame and remorse should be what is generating inside of you.*

And why all the hell fire and brimstone? Because James is saying, *Look, you have bills to pay. You bet your one and only life on a dead horse. Really? And you have gambled that you won't be accountable for all the blessings that God has given you. Whether you acknowledged the source of that or not, you're going to give an account for that.*

And so, that's the general threat here. And now he's going to give us four ways that these people were abusing their wealth. And we're going to look at those and then do just the opposite of that.

## 1. Hoarding

### James 5:2-3

**Your wealth has rotted, and moths have eaten your clothes.  
3 Your gold and silver are corroded. Their corrosion will testify  
against you and eat your flesh like fire. You have hoarded wealth  
in the last days.**

The first one is when he's talking about them hoarding in the time of the last days. Verses 2 and 3: "Your wealth has rotted, and moths have eaten your clothes. Your gold and silver are corroded. Their corrosion will testify against you and eat your flesh like fire. You have hoarded wealth in the last days."

So, James is looking at the wealthy people back then. It's very similar today. They express their wealth in opulence, in this case, by the excessive food they had just in storage—not daily bread. And they had more clothes than they could even wear, and then coins filling vaults. And they can't even possibly use them in their own lifetime. They have all these blessings that God has given them, and they're just storing it up, so much so that the food is rotting, the clothes are being eaten by moths, and even the coins they have are showing tarnish. All the while, there are needs all around them that need to be met. And they're stockpiling.

### **Application: Don't Hoard—Let's Be Responsible with Our Wealth**

So, hoarding ... wrong. Let's just do the opposite of that and be responsible with the wealth that God has given us. Be responsible, be insightful. Think forward. Don't be like this. The poster child for this is Ebenezer Scrooge. We know that story from Charles Dickens, *The Christmas Carol*. You're looking at this man and saying, "Ebenezer, what are you going to do? What are you going to do with all of that wealth, all that gold? You're so old we already have a headstone carved for you. We're just waiting for the month to carve at the end of it. Meanwhile, you're paying your employee as little as possible. All the while you're mounting up gold coins for what purpose? And all the while there's Tiny Tim just needing a little help financially so he can walk again."

James specifically says, “You’re hoarding wealth in the last days.” And the point is that there’s important, eternal work to be done. We’re running out of time here. There is a cause that’s everlasting. We do have a command from a king on high. And you’re doing what?

When Jesus spoke in this area, He talked about laying up your treasures in heaven. And the idea was that we are only stewards for what we have here. In other words, we don’t own anything; we’re just managing someone else’s assets. And the way we manage those assets, we can send those forward to eternity. In other words, what we save and invest for the kingdom of God, we can be rewarded for forever for that.

And so, there’s a difference between hoarding and saving and investing. When it comes to saving and investing, you use those resources that you have and you say, *Oh, they will be used for something.* Not, *They might be used. They’re going to be used.* When people hoard, they’re never going to be used.

People that save and invest do so for the purposes of God. They don’t know what’s going to happen in the future and they want to have resources available for opportunities for the Gospel, the message of God, to help people become like Christ in all of life, all around the world, or just down the street. So, they save and invest for the Gospel’s sake. They save and invest for opportunities to help people in need. Sometimes in a tragedy, true victims need help and they need resources. People save and invest for godly reasons to help their families, and their families in the future.

The idea here is that it’s going to be used. Assets will be used for godly things. Hoarding—whether it’s food or clothes or coins, they’re rotting away. They won’t be used. And if they ever are used, they’re not going to be used for the benefit of others.

Listen to the motive of a person who hoards and see if it’s true in you. The motive is, *I just need a little bit more. I need a little bigger pile, and then something.*

So, don’t hoard. Do the opposite. Live like you’re an eternal being, because you are. Make your investments echo into eternity and have eternal consequences. Be responsible. Let’s be responsible. Let’s not hoard; let’s be responsible. That’s what we can learn from this section.

## 2. Cheating

### James 5:4

**Look! The wages you failed to pay the workers who mowed your fields are crying out against you. The cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord Almighty.**

The second abuse of wealth and power comes in the next sentence. He's talking about cheating people, particularly the most vulnerable. In verse 4 it starts off, "Look! The wages you failed to pay the workers who mowed your fields are crying out against you. The cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord Almighty."

Now in the context of this he's talking about what we would call day laborers or even migrant farmers. It would mean a person who had so few assets or no assets—they were so impoverished that every day that's what they lived on. They could not save. And so, if you didn't pay them that day's wage, their family didn't eat. And the idea of caring for people that are giving you services and particularly those who are less fortunate than you—when you have assets and resources and are caring for those people, it goes all the way back to Moses.

### Deuteronomy 24:14-15

**Do not take advantage of a hired worker who is poor and needy, whether that worker is a fellow Israelite or a foreigner residing in one of your towns. <sup>15</sup> Pay them their wages each day before sunset, because they are poor and are counting on it. Otherwise they may cry to the LORD against you, and you will be guilty of sin.**

When Israel is being given a constitution in Deuteronomy, it says, "Do not take advantage of a hired worker who is poor and needy, whether that worker is a fellow Israelite or a foreigner residing in one of your towns. Pay them their wages each day before the sun sets, because they are poor and are counting on it. Otherwise they may cry out to Yahweh against you, and you will be guilty of sin."

That value and that judgment was mentioned by Isaiah talking to Israel. And then later, Malachi as well. And then here comes James saying, *This is what evil looks like. This is an abuse of wealth and power.*

**It is the teaching of the Bible in its every part that the Lord of the universe is concerned for the rights of the laboring man.**

**--- William Barclay**

Here's a great summary from a Bible scholar, William Barclay: "It is the teaching of the entire Bible in its every part that the Lord of the universe is concerned with the rights of the laboring man."

I want to mention here that these laborers are not crying out, *I want to talk to the manager*. They're crying out to God Almighty. I'll talk to you about that in just a minute.

### **Application: Don't Cheat—Let's Be Generous Instead**

I want to emphasize here that the first application is: Let's not cheat people that we owe money to. You know what? Let's do the complete opposite of that. Let's be generous, as generous as we possibly can be.

The crime here is that the person is using people because they love money. So, just do the opposite of that. Love people and use money. Use money to show them that you love people. So, everyone who comes to work at your house or fix your car, whatever they ask, pay them. If you're really impressed with their work, tip them. I would suggest that you tip them big. When someone comes to trim your trees or paint a room, make them glad that they came to your house. Have them bragging about you being the person who's giving them cash.

I started doing this a few years ago because I watched friends of mine do this. It is fun to see on their face, *What?* And you say, *Yep, I want you to be happy that you served at this address.*

The first application: Don't cheat a laborer; bless them. Be generous every chance you get.

## Application: As the Laborer, Your Prayers Are Heard

But there's a second application here. It's for the laborer himself. Maybe you're on the receiving end of not getting the check that's due to you. James is not being subtle here. He says that your prayers are being heard. And I want you to see the multiple ways he's going to express this. He's going to show that there are two things crying out, not just one. The wages are crying out and the laborers are crying out. And they're not crying out to Jehovah-Jireh. That's the title of God meaning "God provides." *Oh, dear God, provide for me.* These cries are being heard by God Almighty. Look what verse 4 says again: "Look!" Wake up! "The wages you failed to pay the workers who mowed your fields are crying out against you. The cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord Almighty."

Who are the cries addressed to? The Lord Almighty. Let's say it a different way: The Lord Sabaoth, as in the Old Testament Hebrew. The Lord of Hosts ... You still don't know? It's the Lord of the armies. They're calling out to the God of war and He's listening. There are only two times where the God Almighty, that title, is ever appealed to in the New Testament. The other one is just quoting the Old Testament. This is the only time it's actually implied. God Almighty is saying, *Hey, war angels, tack up. There are some brothers and sisters who aren't getting paid, and I'm hearing their prayers.* When someone appeals to God Almighty, the Lord Sabaoth, they're appealing to the sovereign, all-powerful God of the universe. So, if you're that laborer, your wages are crying out and God Almighty is hearing that as well. It may appear that you don't have a defender here, but you do. God hears. God Almighty is going to defend you.

So, look, let's don't cheat people that we owe money to. Let's do the opposite. Let's act like we're not from here, that we're just on temporary visas. And since we're here for such a short time, we're going to give, and we're going to be generous every chance we get.

### 3. Wanton Pleasure

**James 5:5**

**You have lived on earth in luxury and self-indulgence. You have fattened yourselves in the day of slaughter.**

A third way that the wealthy are abusing this power and these resources is with wanton pleasure. Now they're not going to act like they're a God; they're going to act like they're a dog. He says, "You have lived on earth in luxury and self-indulgence. You have fattened yourselves in the day of slaughter."

Self-indulgence means wanton pleasure. It is extravagant waste. It is just completely surrendering to your lustful needs and satisfying those. It's addiction to physical comfort. In a single word, gluttony. It's appealing to the animal side of us. But we're made for so much more. I love how James says, *You want to appeal to an animal? Fine. You have fattened yourself figuratively, even literally, for the day of slaughter.* I think James might have even invented that phrase: The pigs get fat and the hogs get slaughtered. That's what he's referring to. *Eat, drink, be merry, get fat. And then the butcher comes,* James interjects. *And then the butcher comes.*

#### **Application: Don't Be Self-Indulgent—Be Virtuous**

So, the application is pretty simple. Let's not live self-indulgent lives. Let's do the opposite of that. Let's live like we're in the very image of God, that we're more than mammals. And that image of God is everlasting. And so, let's live virtuous lives in every part of our lives.

We're supposed to be taming our passions, not setting them free. We're supposed to be harnessing those urges, not giving them permission.

#### **Buffet (verb) your body, not buffet (noun) your body.**

Here's a great saying: *You're supposed to buffet your body*—that's a verb; *not buffet (noun) your body.* It's spelled the same. *Oh, that's how I'm supposed to be ... okay.*

## 4. Injustice

### James 5:6

**You have condemned and murdered the innocent person, who was not opposing you.**

The last reason for condemnation is James' fire and brimstone sermon here is the abuse of their wealth in expressing injustice, especially upon the innocent and the vulnerable. That's in verse 6: "You have condemned and murdered the innocent person, who was not opposing you."

And the meaning here is James chapter 2. Previously he was harsh on the wealthy having resources to bring people to court for trivia and wearing people down because they had the power to do that. And now he's bringing that up again. He's saying, *Look, you're going after people who are innocent to take what little they have when you have so much more? Or you're doing it just because you can break them because you can?* And when you deprive a person, a day laborer, for example, of their ability to have an income, it's killing them. He's saying that you're murdering them. He calls them an innocent person. He says that the innocent person isn't even opposing you. He's not even fighting back, sometimes because he can't fight back. He doesn't have the resources. He can't hire a lawyer, he can't get time off, a half day to go to the court. And you know that. So, you're going to win this case again. Or sometimes the person just doesn't fight back. He chooses to let justice be delegated to God Almighty. Either way, he's not fighting back.

**Application: Don't Be Unjust—Let's Do Whatever We Can to Bring Justice**

But the lesson for us is that the wretched are being unjust to people, especially the innocent. Well, let's just do the opposite of that and live our lives because we care so much about our soul. And we know that this is such a short life that we're going to do everything we can to bring justice to the innocent. If what is evil is bringing injustice, then we're going to do the

opposite of that. And we're going to look for opportunities to bring justice to every avenue of our experience.

Are you hearing the bigger theme of what he's talking about, what the problem is and what the solution is? The problem is that people were living as though this were the only life and they weren't going to be answering for it. And so, what we're supposed to be doing is living our lives as though we're dying. We are. Live our lives like we're just passing through, as if we're aliens in a foreign land, because we are. And then this short, alien, out-of-sync life where we're just transient comes to an end. And then ... and then ... and then ...

James is referencing the return of Jesus Christ. And what that means is that justice will prevail. When He comes back He's coming back as a lion. And there are eternal effects, everlasting consequences, for the choices that we make in the temporal, short, painful, alien time. Make the most of those. You'll be rewarded or you'll be regretful.

Maybe the most serious scene in the entire Bible is found in the last book, Revelation chapter 20, when all of the dead—that's everyone—all humans are before what's called the Great White Throne. And in the Great White Throne in this particular judgment, all the books—multiple books—are opened up and everyone is evaluated by the choices that we make in this short, temporary flash of a lifetime. And if there's justice that is lacking in this life, justice will prevail in the next time. It's going to be made right. You want to make sure you're living this life so that you're rewarded for being part of making it right in this life.

Jesus talks about this divine judgment. He tells a story to help us grasp it. He tells a story of a rich man and He won't even give him a name. But it's almost the exact audience that James has here—someone using their wealth and power for their own benefits in multiple ways. And then there's another man whose name is Lazarus. And Lazarus is a very sick, poor, starving individual. And while the fat rich guy is dying big, opulent and hoarding, Lazarus is literally begging for crumbs off his table. And the rich man ignores him. They both end up dying. And Lazarus goes to heaven and the rich man goes to Hades and is tormented. And he calls upon Father Abraham to be his messenger to God. He says, *Look, I can't believe this.* And Father Abraham says, *You had a lifetime of physical blessings and you had a lifetime of choices to use all of those assets, and you chose poorly. And this is the effect.*

And so, he realizes that there's no changing his fate, so he says, *Look, I have five brothers—same income bracket, same choices. Send Lazarus back to them. They'll change, they'll repent.* Father Abraham says, *No.*

So, here's the thing. It's written clearly. Moses and the prophets made it vivid. If they won't listen to the prophets or to Moses, they won't change. The rich man said, *Send Lazarus. If they see a dead man raised they'll repent.*

Jesus says this with a wink: *If they won't listen to Moses and the prophets, they won't be convinced even if a man is raised from the dead.*

Jesus was raised from the dead and people still ignore Him. He tells them the way it is and the way it will be, and we just won't listen. Because they're wealthy? No. Because the people who are being condemned here lived like this is all there is, just the here and now, and there is no ultimate justice. And if you live your life like there is no God and there is no justice, the Bible has a word for that. You're a fool. Moses and the prophets and Jesus, and now James, come to us and say, *You guard your heart. It's everlasting. And you'll make choices in the temporal and you'll live with the in the eternal.*

So, for God's sake, for other people's sakes, for your own sake, keep your soul tender towards the Lord's leading. Because if you do, you'll do things for the Lord and you'll be rewarded for that you'll be glad you did.

You can read this passage and it seems that the application is somewhat obvious. Just do the opposite. Use the short-term wealth and power, if you have that, for eternal gain. Save, invest responsibly, for eternity. Be generous, like you're giving out Confederate money and it doesn't even matter. Be virtuous in every part of your life. Bring justice to every sphere of influence that you can. Because then ... then ... then... it's report card day. Have you ever had a report card where you just killed it and you couldn't wait to get home? Where by God's grace you're becoming like Christ in all of life, and you show up to the throne, the Great White Throne: Look! Look! Because that life, the Bible says, will be crowned by the very King of all kings. That's a promise from the Bible. That's not wishful thinking. That's not from me. It'll be a great day. Live like it's that day.

There's an Italian version of this. It's just a parable. It's *The Christmas Carol*, except with better food, I guess. One of the players is a wealthy landowner, and he's not known so much for his wealth as he is for his cruelty and his impatience. And one of his employees—we'll

call him a slave, a worker—did something wrong. He messed up a whole string of vines in the vineyard. And he's brought to the rich man.

And the rich man says, "You are the stupidest, dumbest person I have ever met." (Sorry about the language. I'm just quoting the story.)

The rich man said, "You know what? Do this." He grabs his staff. "Carry this staff with you the rest of your life. And if you can ever find another person more stupid than you, then you can give them that staff."

Well, the man was a little bit simple, and what should have been hyperbole, he thought was actually a to-do list. So, he went on a journey for two years looking for someone more stupid than he was. He had some close calls. He almost gave it away, but it turns out that he was dumber than everyone he met.

He ended up making his way back to the villa and he was called to the landowner's home and actually into his bedroom. It wasn't just any bed—it was the landowner's death bed.

And so, there the servant stands, and the owner says, "This is the last time we're going to talk. I'm going on a long journey."

And the slave said, "Well, are you going to come back? Are you going to return?"

"No, there's no returning from this."

He said, "Well, did you prepare a place for this long journey?"

And he said, "No, I didn't."

And then the dumb slave said, "You had a chance to prepare, right?"

And the rich man said, "I had a whole lifetime to prepare. I had many opportunities and I squandered them. I wasted them."

And so, the foolish man said, "So, you're going on a long journey that you can't return from, you didn't prepare, but you had all the time in your life to prepare."

And the wealthy man said, "Yeah, that sums it up."

And the foolish man grabbed his staff and said, "You should take this then, because you're the stupidest man that ever lived."

If you live your life as if there is no God and there's no final judgment, God has a word for that. You're a fool.

But He also says this: that if you look at your life as though you're in the very image of God, that you're eternal and everlasting, then this short stay is merely a way to show Him that

you are responsible for your gifts and talents and assets and resources, and just life. When you see life that way and use all of those things to give glory to God and to make your life a reflection of Jesus Christ in your life, you're going to be rewarded. It's a promise from God. He swears by His own name. You'll be glad you did.

James is telling us this is what's right and real and true. Live this way without regret. It's not a bad passage after all.

Let's pray. We can be that way.

*Lord, we are grateful for the clarity of James in this passage, knowing that many of us in this room are wealthy, that we have assets that in the history of mankind could only be envied, even by kings.*

*And so, knowing that, Lord, we want to hear this brimstone sermon that's addressed to other people, and we're listening. We're eavesdropping. We're seeing that maybe we live that way as well.*

*Lord, I'd ask that You'd give us a vision for eternity, that You'd give us an impatience for the temporal; that we would look at souls as fellow image-bearers, not to be used, but to be enjoyed. And money and wealth and all these other things are to be used so that we might enjoy helping people become like Christ in all of life.*

*Lord, I'd pray that we would be good stewards of every opportunity that You bring to us; that we would be people of valor and courage and wisdom, generosity, virtue—these attributes of godly men and women. Help us be that.*

*We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*