

LESSON NINE – JAMES & JUDE

JAMES 5:1-12

1) **Against Covetousness. vv. 1-6.**

a) **James' topic is clear and his teaching is plain; he addresses the wealthy concerning the use and abuse of wealth.**

i) Who are these rich people?

(1) Some suggest that they are not Christians, but outsiders.

(a) This is generally the result of the doctrine of “once saved, always saved”; after discussing their conduct James makes no call to repentance and leaves no hope for their salvation and, if they are not going to be saved at last they could not have been saved at any time prior. It is worth noting that it would be hard to imagine a stronger call to repent than v. 1. (This is not the time for a discussion of that false and unscriptural doctrine, but you can read discussion of it in many other places on this web site. Suffice it to say here that it is amazing that commentators who admit that, while James is addressing Christians everywhere else in his writing, he suddenly changes here. It is not James who is changing; it is commentators trying to change James to comport with the theology that they bring to the passage. They would rather change James than change or even question their theology. It is not James' purpose to discuss what those whom he addresses need to do to return to good standing with God.)

(b) Even John Calvin, the great proponent of eternal predestination of both the saved and the lost, of which “once saved, always saved” is an integral part, could not bring himself to say that James was addressing non-Christians.

(i) He wrote in his commentary on James 5:1: “ Many commentators . . . consider that the Apostle here refers at the beginning of this chapter not to professing Christians, but to unbelieving Jews. There is nothing that can be said that can lead to such an opinion: and if the two preceding chapters were addressed (as admitted by all) to

those who *professed* [emphasis by Calvin] the faith, there is no reason why this should not have been addressed to them; the sins here condemned are not worse than those previously condemned.”

- (ii) Although it does not harmonize with his use of the term *professed* in the beginning of the paragraph, Calvin may attempt to leave room for arguing that those here addressed were only *professing* Christians and not really saved, but if so it could only mean that all those addressed in chapters 3 and 4 were in the same condition, and that would be so erroneous that no reasonable person could believe it.
- ii) The sad truth is that they were Christians who had drifted so far off course that they were even oppressing their brethren.
  - (1) “Come now, you rich” in 5:1 is parallel with “Come now, you who say” in 4:13; clearly the latter are Christian business men and there is no reason to think that James uses the expression differently in 5:1.
  - (2) We have learned that James has affinity to Old Testament prophets, and those prophets often condemned the people of God for their oppression of the poor.
    - (a) Amos is a good example; one commentator calls Amos “The Cry for Social Justice.”
      - (i) Amos 3:10 – For they know not to do right, saith the LORD, who store up violence and robbery in their palaces.
      - (ii) Amos 5:11 – Forasmuch therefore as your treading is upon the poor, and ye take from him burdens of wheat: ye have built houses of hewn stone, but ye shall not dwell in them; ye have planted pleasant vineyards, but ye shall not drink wine of them.
      - (iii) Amos 8:4-7 – 4 Hear this, O ye that swallow up the needy, even to make the poor of the land to fail, 5 Saying, When will the new moon be gone, that we may sell corn? and the sabbath, that we may set forth wheat, making the ephah small, and the shekel great, and falsifying the balances by deceit? 6 That we may buy the poor for silver, and the needy for a pair of shoes; yea, and sell the refuse of the wheat? 7 The LORD hath sworn by

the excellency of Jacob, Surely I will never forget any of their works.

- (iv) Isaiah adds his voice (5:8) – Woe unto them that join house to house, that lay field to field, till there be no place, that they may be placed alone in the midst of the earth!
  - (v) Proverbs speaks (11:28) – He that trusteth in his riches shall fall: but the righteous shall flourish as a branch.
  - (vi) Luke adds the words of Jesus (6:24; 18:24) – 6:24 But woe unto you that are rich! for ye have received your consolation. 18:24-25 And when Jesus saw that he was very sorrowful, he said, How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God! 25 For it is easier for a camel to go through a needle's eye, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.
  - (vii) William Barclay writes: “One of the mysteries of social thought is how the Christian religion ever came to be regarded as “the opiate of the people” or to seem an other-worldly affair. There is no book in any literature which speaks so explosively of social injustice as the bible, nor any book which has proved so powerful a social dynamic. It does not condemn wealth as such but there is no book which more strenuously insists on wealth’s responsibility and on the perils which surround a man who is abundantly blessed with this world’s goods.”
- b) V. 1 – James begins by calling the rich to repentance because they are in serious trouble – “weep and howl for your miseries that are coming upon you.
- i) The word for “weep” is the same word used to describe Peter’s weeping following his denial of Christ (Luke 22:62); the rich should weep such tears because judgment is coming upon them.
  - ii) Not only should they weep, but they should literally “howl” for the miseries that are to come upon them; “misery” is the strong word used by Paul in conjunction with destruction in Romans 3:16, a direct quotation of the prophet Isaiah’s warning (Isa. 59:7-8).
- c) Vv. 2 -3 – Four statements concerning the results of the wrong use and abuse of riches.

- i) Your riches are corrupted (v. 2). Again, James echoes the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 6:19). In short, your riches and your clothes will be condemned. Paul wrote that it was a great mistake to think that there was security in wealth (1 Tim. 6:17).
  - (a) Clothes were a measure of wealth in the ancient world.
    - (i) Joseph gave changes of raiment's to his brothers (Gen. 45:22).
    - (ii) Achan brought disaster upon himself, his family, and his nation for a beautiful mantle from Shinar (Joshua 7:21).
    - (iii) Samson promised changes of raiment's to anyone who could solve his riddle (Judges 14:12).
    - (iv) It was garments that Naaman brought as a gift for his cleansing and to obtain which Gehazi sinned (2 Kings 5:5, 22).
    - (v) Paul told the Ephesian elders that he had coveted no man's apparel (Acts 20:33).
  - (b) These splendid garments that men so prize are food for moths; James sees all this as senseless – what is the point of feeding moths?
- ii) Your gold and silver are corroded (v. 3). Once more James echoes the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 6:19-20).
  - (1) Is James mistaken? Gold and silver are base metals that do not rust.
  - (2) James' point in using the destruction of the indestructible is that even that which man considers most permanent is but temporary; it proves the impermanence and ultimate valuelessness of all earthly things.
  - (3) Moreover, it is a dire warning that the desire for and love of these things is like a dread canker eating into men's souls.
- iii) Their corrosion will be a witness against you (v. 3).
  - (1) James becomes more personal in his warning.
    - (a) He no longer talks about inanimate objects, money and clothing.
    - (b) Instead, he talks about persons who are rich and who have misused their wealth.
    - (c) The corrosion of their riches will be a witness against them.
  - (2) This testimony is the same kind as that which is given in a court of law, and it will be very incriminating.
- iv) And will eat your flesh like fire (v. 3).

- (1) Many have had the experience of a burn – acid or fire.
  - (2) The rich will suffer not just the destruction of their wealth and clothing, nor merely the witness of corroded gold and silver, but by the destruction of their very flesh.
- d) James' warning does not take place within a void; to the contrary he presents specific reasons that lead to the problems of the rich (vv. 3d-6).
- i) You have heaped up treasure in the last days (v. 3d).
    - (1) To heap up treasure just for the sake of having it is at the very heart of sin; it becomes our god and leads to trusting the treasure for security and power.
    - (2) This was the problem with the rich farmer who Jesus described in Luke 12 and whose foolish soul was required of him and whose treasure was left behind.
    - (3) James use of "last days" does not establish that he and the early Christians believed that the return of Christ was imminent.
      - (a) The word can also be translated "extreme," but is most often associated with the end of time.
      - (b) To speak of Christ's coming as "soon" is to do no more than is still done 2000 years later when it is urged that constant preparation is needed because we "know neither the day nor the hour."
        - (i) To speak of laying up treasure for the "last days" is to do no more than to speak of laying up treasures upon the earth in contrast to heavenly treasures.
        - (ii) Finally, Christ came soon for them and will come soon for us since, being judged based on the things done in the flesh (2 Cor. 5:10), our position for the literal coming of Christ is sealed at death.
  - ii) You have stolen from your laborers whose unpaid wages cry out (v. 4).
    - (1) The rich think that they have gotten away with it, but the cry of those injured by the conduct of the rich has been heard by the Lord of sabaoth.
    - (2) Sabaoth is derived from a Hebrew military term that is used to denote the sovereignty of God.
      - (a) Many people believe that they have succeeded in cheating others and God, but James warns the rich that such a belief is pure deception.

- (b) Ultimately, the Lord rewards the righteous and punishes the wicked.
  - (c) The Lord of Sabaoth (some translate “Hosts” or “Almighty”) has heard the cry of the oppressed and will comfort and reassure His beleaguered people.
    - (i) He is sovereign and has within Himself and at his sovereign command every possible potency and resource.
    - (ii) No power, however great to the earthly eye, is beyond his capacity.
    - (iii) No need, however pressing, is beyond His means or outside his attention.
    - (iv) What can the powerless laborer do against the all-powerful employer? Nothing for himself, but he can be sure that his very situation has already registered an appeal in the highest court of all. Here the all-powerful Lord sits as judge of the oppressor and the all-sufficient God attends to the needs of his people.
- iii) You have lived . . . in pleasure and luxury (v. 5).
- (1) Having wealth is not a sin itself as evidence by some of the Lord’s faithful servants – Abraham, David, and Solomon.
  - (2) However, there is a misuse of wealth that is contrary to the very essence of spiritual living.
    - (a) The word translated “*luxury*” (*pleasure* in the KJV) is not found elsewhere in the New Testament, but has a well established meaning; it points to extravagant comfort, stressing the softness of luxury; it does not suggest dissolute living.
    - (b) The word translated “*pleasure*” (*wanton* in the KJV) does suggest the breaking down of divine restraints, going beyond pleasure to vice.
    - (c) Together the words offer a picture of a life without self-denial, not necessarily corrupt in every way, but certainly offering no resistance to sin where there is promise of comfort and enjoyment.
  - (3) These people lived for their extravagance and not for God.
  - (4) They had become ungodly hedonists who lived for the pleasures that could be derived from wealth.
  - (5) They lived for their money and not for God.

- (6) They gave no thought to a heaven to be gained or a hell to be avoided; this is the thought that comes to the fore when James says that they have fattened their hearts in a day of slaughter.
- iv) You have condemned . . . and murdered the just (v. 6).
  - (1) The ultimate manifestation of the rich who trust in their wealth rather than in God is that they are never satisfied with what they have; they must always have more.
  - (2) To gain more, they condemn the just and even murder them to get what belongs to them.
    - (a) The greed of Ahab and Jezebel led to the murder of Naboth in order to steal his vineyard (1 Kings 21).
    - (b) The same greed is the motivation for the rich to condemn and kill the just who do not even resist (v. 6).
    - (c) Never should we forget that it was the love of money that betrayed the Lord Jesus Christ. How often has the Lord taken second place to possessions, and has been much less than the Lord of our financial arrangements?
- e) No wonder James warns against the sin of the misuse of wealth; it is a deadly sin that leads to destruction.

## 2) How to be patient (vv. 7-11).

- a) Having addressed the oppression of poor Christians by those who misused wealth, James urges those who have been oppressed to be patient until the coming of the Lord.
- b) James makes three contentions related to the believer and patience.
  - i) Be patient until the Lord's coming (vv. 7-9).
    - (1) In urging patience James uses the example of the farmer who waits for the early and latter rains.
      - (a) James wrote in an environment that received its early rain in late October and early November and its late rain in April or May.
      - (b) That is a long time to wait for the harvest, yet the farmer patiently waits realizing that he cannot hurry the process.
    - (2) In the same way James assures us that God is always on time and that we cannot hurry the process.
      - (a) Instead, we should establish our hearts, which means to fix or strengthen.

- (b) The same verb is used in Luke 9:51 where Jesus “set his face” to go to Jerusalem and to all that awaited him there.
  - (c) In this one example we feel the whole force of the word: determination, steely resolution, persistence.
  - (d) James looks for a heart fixed on the harvest, fixed on the returning Lord, a heart that leaves no room for the double-minded.
  - (e) Isaiah shared the same advice with slightly different words: “Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee” (Isaiah 26:3).
- (3) Moreover, as we wait, we should not grumble one against another, a practice that can lead to our own condemnation because the Judge standeth at the door (v. 9).
- (a) We know the terror of judgment so we persuade men to prepare (2 Cor. 5:11).
  - (b) Yet the Judge is our own loving, caring Savior, and our constant thought should be how we can delight him at his coming by having something of eternal, lasting value to lay at his feet.
- ii) Be patient in the face of suffering (vv. 10-11).
- (1) James is writing to a suffering church.
- (a) He writes not only to instruct, but also to comfort and encourage.
  - (b) As he encourages his readers to be patient in the midst of their suffering, he gives two vivid examples from the Old Testament that should serve as great encouragement to each of us.
    - (i) First, James encourages us to consider the prophets who have spoken in the name of the Lord as examples of patience in suffering (v. 10).
      1. The Hebrew writer describes some of the things these men suffered.
      2. They were stoned, sawn asunder, slain with the sword; they wandered in sheepskins, being destitute, afflicted, and tormented (Heb. 11:37).
      3. Jeremiah is a vivid example. Known as the weeping prophet, he was beaten, placed in stocks, imprisoned, and thrown in a cistern. Still he trusted in the Lord.
    - (ii) Second, he urges that we look at Job.



1. Job suffered for no humanly apparent reason, and yet he trusted in the Lord.
  2. God's purpose was accomplished and God blessed Job for his perseverance and endurance.
- iii) Third, be patient and you will be blessed (v. 11).
- (1) "We count them blessed that endure."
  - (2) James again echoes Jesus – "11 ¶ Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. 12 Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you" (Matthew 5:11-12).
  - (3) To be blessed is not the same as being happy, despite the trend of modern translations to so render it.
    - (a) "Happiness" normally suggests a subjective, emotional reaction.
    - (b) "Blessing" is the objective, unalterable state derived from the approval and reward of God.
    - (c) We cannot persevere unless there are trials in our lives; there can be no victories without battles; there can be no peaks without valleys.
    - (d) If you want the blessing, you must be prepared to carry the burden and fight the battle.