

Living in Light of the Lord's Return By Mark Jarvinen

Now listen, you rich people, weep and wail because of the misery that is coming on you. ² 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. 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. ⁵ You have lived on earth in luxury and self-indulgence. You have fattened yourselves in the day of slaughter. ⁶ You have condemned and murdered the innocent one, who was not opposing you.

⁷ Be patient, then, brothers and sisters, until the Lord's coming. See how the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop, patiently waiting for the autumn and spring rains. ⁸ You too, be patient and stand firm, because the Lord's coming is near. ⁹ Don't grumble against one another, brothers and sisters, or you will be judged. The Judge is standing at the door!

¹⁰ Brothers and sisters, as an example of patience in the face of suffering, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. ¹¹ As you know, we count as blessed those who have persevered. You have heard of Job's perseverance and have seen what the Lord finally brought about. The Lord is full of compassion and mercy.

Upon first reading, **James 5:1-6**, which serve as an indictment against unbelieving rich people, and **James 5:7-11**, addressed to "**brothers and sisters**," seem unrelated. However, after a closer look, a common thread emerges. Notice **v. 3** and a reference to the "**last days**," **v. 7** – "**until the Lord's coming**," **v. 8** – "**the Lord's coming is near**," and finally, **v. 9** – "**The Judge is standing at the door!**" We discern from this that the overriding focus of this text is the

second coming of Christ. How shall we live in light of the Lord's second coming?

I. HANDLE WELL YOUR RESOURCES (5:1-6).

In the first century Middle Eastern culture of James, wealth was measured in three ways: grain, garments, and gold. Note James description in vv. 2-3 -

²***“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 rich of that time had so much food that it was rotting in their bins. Their fancy clothing was full of holes, the luxurious fabric eaten away by moths. Their most durable form of wealth, gold and silver, had lost its luster, corroded by neglect under piles of other possessions of which they had too much.

James, in prophetic fashion, warns these unbelieving rich folk in v. 1 – ***“... weep and wail because of the misery that is coming upon you.”*** Hard times lie ahead, according to James. Their wealth was not the problem; it was their misuse of it that prompted James' warning. It wasn't the fact that they had money and possessions per se, but that they had hoarded it and taken advantage of those who had less. **Notice v. 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.”

Apparently, the social injustice of the rich had even cost the lives of innocent people – ***“You have condemned and murdered the innocent one, who was not opposing you (v. 6).***

Here we have another one of those biblical passages that seem to apply only to someone else. After all, most of us tend to say, “I’m not wealthy.” But anyone who has ever packed food at **“Feed My Starving Children”** knows that Americans are far better off than most people in the world. Besides, Scripture doesn’t teach – “Don’t possess wealth.” Rather, it challenges our attitudes regarding our possessions – ***“For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil ...” (1 Timothy 6:10).***

Application: (Questions to Ask Ourselves in Light of the Text.)

- ***Am I generous with what God has given me?*** God was certainly generous in sending His Son, Jesus to this world to be our Savior. I love **Romans 8:32** in connection with this: ***“He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all – how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?”*** This refers to whatever is necessary to bring to fulfillment the work begun in our lives at the cross. Generosity flows from the heart of God to us in Christ, and he invites us to share in his heart by being generous toward others. I think it was Randy Alcorn who said, ***“God prospers me, not to raise my standard of living, but to raise my standard of giving.”*** Not bad, Randy! I’m reminded of Jesus’ words in **Luke 6:38** – ***“Give, and it will be given to you. ... For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.”***

- **How am I treating others?** The rich in our text weren't paying a fair wage to those who were mowing their fields and harvesting their grain. **Luke 18:7** says, ***“And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off?”*** Again, God invites us to share his heart, this time in seeking justice for the poor.
- **Am I living a selfish life?** Check out **James 5:5** – ***“You have lived on earth in luxury and self-indulgence. You have fattened yourselves in the day of slaughter.”*** The idea here is that **true wealth** is made up only of things that we can carry into eternity. Missionary **Jim Elliot** once said, ***“He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.”*** Similarly, it was author, **Joe Bayly**, who once noted that he had never seen a **hearse pulling a U-Haul**. This is all consistent with our Lord who taught His followers to: ***“Store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (Matthew 6:20-21).***

And so, Jesus is coming again. Therefore, take inventory of our attitudes toward our possessions. There's still plenty of Kingdom work to be done by being generous with the resources God has given us.

II. HANDLE WELL YOUR RELATIONSHIPS (5:7-11).

The believers addressed by James as ***“brothers and sisters”*** in **v. 7**, and again in **v. 10**, were stressed out because ...

- Rich people were ***oppressing*** them.

- Other unbelievers were **persecuting** them.
- Certain believers were **annoying** them.

To his readers, James says,

Feeling oppressed?

A. Be Patient – used 4 times (twice in v. 7, once in v. 8, and again in v. 10). The Greek actually combines two words, which mean **“long-tempered.”** The idea is self-restraint that doesn’t hastily retaliate against a wrong. James illustrates patience by using a **farmer** who waits for the land to yield its valuable crop, patient for the autumn and spring rains (v. 7). The patience has a goal – **“until the Lord’s coming.”** When we’re sick and tired of the way things are in this world, take comfort in verses like ***II Corinthians 4:17*** – **“For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.”** When our kids are annoying us, choose to see things as **“a light and momentary trouble,”** which will certainly lend perspective. For others being persecuted, this passage is a veritable **life-line**. When we’re at our weakest point, patiently endure in the grace of God, which is sufficient for all our needs. The Lord came to the Apostle Paul in his distress saying, **“My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness,”** (***II Cor. 12:9***). It’s worthy of note here that **“sufficient”** doesn’t mean **“the bare minimum,”** but **“plenty of”** or **“enough.”**

Feeling persecuted?

B. Stand Firm - Check out v. 8 – **“You too, be patient and stand firm ...”** As Christians we’re called to stand firm in our faith. We know there’s a culture war going on right now. Christianity is not

holding a most favored position in the hearts and minds of many these days. If you think the stock market is capable of volatility these days, listen to what Scripture says in **II Timothy 3:1-4** –

But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days. ² People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, ³ without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, ⁴ treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God—

It's not surprising in this type of cultural climate that Christians would be taking a certain amount of criticism, or that our motives might be misjudged. But remember, even though some will fall away in the last days, for others, the gospel will start sounding like the good news it is. Therefore, hear and be encouraged by the words of **Galatians 6:9** –

“Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.”

And also, **I Corinthians 15:58** –

“Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.”

Finally, are you feeling annoyed?

C. Don't Grumble - James suggests that our fellow Christians can be a source of irritation, especially in times of stress. – ***“Don't grumble against each other, brothers, or you will be judged. The Judge is standing at the door!”(5:9)***. It was crunch time in the milieu of the early church. Oppression and persecution were the order of the day. James reminds the Church to stand together under fire and remember that they need to have each other's back. Commentator, **Warren Wiersbe**, borrowing from the earlier farming analogy, says ***“If we start using the sickles on each other, we will***

miss the harvest.” On a related note, one thing I’ve learned through being a **Police Chaplain** is the importance of the entire force having each other’s backs. It’s what enables them to put their lives on the line each and every day - to serve and protect.

Isn’t it true that when things aren’t going well, when the stress is high and the pressure is on, it’s easy to take it out on those closest to us? When we’re irritated, we tend to attack others, blame others, and point out their flaws. Some of us (dare I say all of us) are natural born grumblers. Pastor **Brian Bill** says, “We like to go to a camp called **“Camp Complaining.”** He goes on to say, ***“Friends, lets not be “grumpsters” who throw each other in dumpsters!” (Sermon Central).*** Under pressure do we simply cave to the dictates of the old nature? Here’s where our theology needs to inform our actions. Think about what’s true about us because we are in Christ. **Galatians 2:20** is a great verse of Scripture to keep close at hand Paul writes –

“I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.”

Here’s how we process this: When stress rises, check yourself, take a moment to let your stress recede, and turn to Jesus. Remember that our old nature, with its short fuse and all the junk we could simply label as **“selfishness and pride,”** has been nailed to the cross with Christ. It’s been killed – it’s dead. Therefore, I now live my daily life in my earthly body (I’m not in heaven yet) by faith in Christ, who sacrificially gave His life for me on the cross. He has proven His love for me and has forgiven me of all my sins, therefore, I’ve got nothing to prove to anyone. In fact, I can now go to the person against

whom I've held a grudge or a complaint, share my feelings while respecting theirs, and hopefully make peace, with the intention of moving forward together. Depending on the depth of the issue, this may take time and require a process, perhaps with the help of a counselor, but in Christ, the Holy Spirit gives us the tools to work it through.

CONCLUSION

James wraps things up with an admonition to persevere. James says in v. 10 – “... ***as an example of patience in the face of suffering, take the prophets.***” In v. 11 he reminds his readers of “***Job’s perseverance.***” Human examples are helpful, even inspiring, but in the end, James gives credit where credit is due, saying, “***The Lord is full of compassion and mercy.***” Compassion simply means “***to recognize the suffering of others, then take action to help.***” It is the Lord who knows our deepest need – our suffering if you will. We need His mercy. By nature we are sinful rebels living for ourselves. Luther described human nature with the Latin term, “***Incurvatus in se,***” which simply means “***curved inward on ourselves,***” describing a life lived “***inward***” for self rather than “***outward***” for God and others. **This inward curvature has been remedied in Christ. God took action on our behalf,** sending His only Son to die on the cross to pay for our sins, and by offering us the gift of faith, to turn us outward toward Himself and others. The best way to live in light of the Lord’s second coming is to simply heed the words of **Heb. 12:2-3** – “... ***fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.*** ³ ***Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.***”

In short, it's not what we do, as much as to whom we turn, as we seek to live in light of the Lord's return. Let's keep our eyes fixed on Jesus, giving thanks for all He's done, while we serve others. ***A-men.***