



# Warning for the Wealthy

## Kicking It Off

What is one purchase you've made that you thought would bring you lasting happiness or security, but ended up being disappointing or less meaningful than expected?

## Read

James 5:1-6

## Summary

We say we trust God, but when things get tough, where does our security actually come from? For most of us, if we're honest, it comes from our bank account. We might not call money a god, but we sure act like it has power to protect us, give us happiness, and keep us safe. The problem is that when money becomes what we worship, even unconsciously, it changes how we see right and wrong. If Jesus is our guide, He tells us what's right. But if money is secretly running the show, then whatever makes us more money becomes what's right. That's how good people end up cutting corners, underpaying workers, or stepping on others to get ahead. It's not that they're bad people, it's that they're following the wrong compass.

James is pretty blunt about this. He says when you stand before God, your pile of money won't justify you. All those treasures you built up will just show what you really loved. And here's the kicker, money doesn't even last. You can't take it with you. But when you show kindness to someone struggling, when you treat people fairly even when you could exploit them, that matters forever. The warning isn't really about being rich or poor. It's about where your heart is. Are you the person who comes to God saying "I need you, everything I have is yours," or are you keeping a tight grip on your stuff, demanding God give you what you think you've earned?

If you believe God can actually take care of you, really believe it, then you'll stop clinging so tightly to your money and start living with open hands. That's where real security comes from, not from your retirement account.

## Discussion Questions

1. Was there anything from the sermon or the passage that stuck out to you?
2. We know the right answer is to trust God, yet our actions reveal where our security actually lies. When you face financial uncertainty or unexpected expenses, what is your gut reaction, and what does that reveal about where you find security?
3. The morality of money says that whatever helps you gain more wealth is right, which can lead us to justify cutting corners or treating people unfairly. Can you think of a time when financial pressure tempted you to compromise on treating someone with fairness or generosity?
4. James warns that our treasures will bear witness at judgment to who or what our god truly was. If someone examined your bank statements, calendar, and possessions, what would they conclude you worship or value most?
5. When we say "I surrender all" to God, we often hold back certain areas like our finances, homes, or security. What is one specific area of your life or possession that you find hardest to truly surrender to God's control?

## Significant Quotes from Sermon

"If your god is wealth, you will be led down a path of injustice. The reason for this is because if your god is money, then your god dictates your morality. As Christians, as people who follow Christ, Jesus dictates your morality. He dictates what is right and what is wrong. But if your god is money, then your morality, then what is right and wrong, is only dictated by what money dictates as right and wrong."

"When you die, when you face judgment, your treasure will bear witness to you. The treasure you build up in your life will bear witness to who your God is. It comes down to who do you believe in? Or maybe in other words, what do you believe in? Your actions are not showing that your security is in the Lord. Your security is in your gold. It is in your silver. It is in your possessions, your garments, your security of feeling accepted amongst your peers."

"If you have a closer relationship with the real Lord, you will have more security. Not that God will grant you more security, but that you will feel that He is in control to a greater degree because the relationship you have with Him is living and active. The god of money is not a living and active relationship. It is a dead and mute idol that has no ability to guide and lead you to righteousness."

"Do you recognize that the blessings, the material blessings that you have in your life, are meant to be sacrificed unto the Lord? We are called as believers, as followers of Christ, to take up our cross daily, that we would die to ourselves. This life is not my own. Now it belongs all to Him. We say 'God, all to you. My life is in your hands. I surrender all.' And I think God is saying, 'You sure? Do you really mean that?' 'No Lord, I surrender all.' 'What about your bank account? Do you surrender that?' 'No Lord, not my bank account. But I surrender all.'"

**Sermon Notes****James 5:1-6**

*Come now, you rich, weep and howl for the miseries that are coming upon you. 2 Your riches have rotted and your garments are moth-eaten. 3 Your gold and silver have corroded, and their corrosion will be evidence against you and will eat your flesh like fire. You have laid up treasure in the last days. 4 Behold, the wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, are crying out against you, and the cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord of hosts. 5 You have lived on the earth in luxury and in self-indulgence. You have fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter. 6 You have condemned and murdered the righteous person. He does not resist you.*

## Outline

### 1. THE ILLUSION OF SECURITY (vv. 1-3)

- a. The Eschatological Warning
  - i. James 5:1-3 speaks about end times and judgment, not temporary circumstances
  - ii. Gold and silver do not corrode on human timelines, this is eternal perspective
  - iii. Your treasures will bear witness at judgment to who your god truly was
  - iv. Money cannot justify you before God or provide eternal security
- b. Treasures on Earth vs. Heaven
  - i. Matthew 6:19-21: Do not store treasures on earth where they decay
  - ii. Store treasures in heaven where your heart truly lies
  - iii. Money provides temporary security but is powerless in eternity
  - iv. The god of money is a dead, mute idol unable to guide you to righteousness
- c. The Morality Question
  - i. God dictates morality for those who follow Christ
  - ii. Money dictates morality for those who worship wealth
  - iii. Money's ethical system: more is always better, tip scales in your favor
  - iv. The lie: "Once I get rich enough, then I'll be content"

### 2. THE CRY OF INJUSTICE (v. 4)

- a. The Wages Kept Back by Fraud
  - i. James 5:4: Wages of laborers kept back by fraud cry out to God
  - ii. Worshiping money leads inevitably to cheating the system
  - iii. The god of money exploits the vulnerable: day laborers fighting for poverty wages
  - iv. Poor are trapped because the wealthy have rigged the system
- b. God's Justice and Our Need
  - i. God sees injustice and will bring judgment, like Abel's blood crying out against Cain
  - ii. This points to our need for a Savior who can save us from deserved justice
  - iii. Even the wealthy who repent are welcomed when they recognize their sin
  - iv. Opportunity exists to repent for fraud, theft, stepping over others for advancement
- c. The Call to Righteousness
  - i. Zechariah 7:9-10: Render true judgments, show kindness and mercy
  - ii. Do not oppress the widow, fatherless, sojourner, or poor
  - iii. Serving the Lord requires fairness, generosity, action as worship
  - iv. Following God's ways brings blessing because He designed creation this way

- v. The god of money sees vulnerable people only as opportunities for exploitation
- vi. Greater blessing comes from loving the vulnerable, treasure stored in heaven echoes in eternity

### 3. FATTENED FOR JUDGMENT (vv. 5-6)

- a. Living in Luxury and Self-Indulgence
  - i. James 5:5-6: You have fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter
  - ii. Like calves fattened for sacrifice, comfort leads to spiritual danger
  - iii. The world constantly tries to make us stagnant, focused on security and success
  - iv. Material blessings are meant to be sacrificed unto the Lord
- b. The Call to Surrender All
  - i. We are called to take up our cross daily, die to ourselves
  - ii. We sing "I surrender all" but hold back bank accounts, homes, possessions
  - iii. Living in contentment means recognizing many things we don't need
  - iv. When everything belongs to God, we worship in freedom, not tied to worldly things
- c. Hard Hearts vs. Soft Hearts
  - i. Romans 2:3-5: God's kindness leads to repentance, hard hearts store up wrath
  - ii. We are rich by God's gift, recognizing this should cause us to trust Him more
  - iii. We often forget God has saved us, developing hard, unrepentant hearts
  - iv. A hardened heart loves the god of money and judges others
  - v. A soft heart understands grace received, maintains continual repentance
  - vi. When you repent, God always forgives, restores, leads you to build heavenly treasures
- d. The Two Brothers
  - i. Prodigal son learned riches run out, repented, returned to father's embrace
  - ii. Older brother had wealth but heart of judgment: "Where's my reward?"
  - iii. Older brother leaned toward god of economics, focused on what he deserved
- e. Both needed to learn: life alone is hard, but Father offers true security

## Notes

We all know the right answer. When storms hit our lives, when difficulties arise, when we face uncertainty, we know exactly what we're supposed to say: cling to Jesus. Trust in God. Follow the Lord. It's the answer we've sung about, the truth we affirm, the foundation of our faith. And yet, despite knowing this answer intellectually, many of us live as though we serve an entirely different God. This other god doesn't sit on an altar. We don't bow down to it or light incense before it. We might not even recognize it as a god at all. But we absolutely believe it has power. We believe it can save us, protect us, provide security, grant us happiness and joy. We trust it to give us what we need and want. This god is wealth. This god is money. The reality is that when we encounter difficulties, our actions often reveal a different security system than the one we profess. We may know that God is good, that He is sovereign, holy, righteous, and in control of all creation. We understand that He alone is infinite and omnipotent. Yet when financial concerns arise, when we worry about the future, when we calculate our security, where do we actually place our trust?

At the heart of this issue lies a simple question: where do you find your security? This isn't a comparative exercise about how much money you have versus someone else. It's not about whether you have ten thousand or fifty dollars in your checking account. The people in wealthy areas of the United States represent the top one percent of global wealth. We have running water, roofs over our heads, access to abundant food, education, and countless resources. By any historical or global comparison, we are extraordinarily wealthy. But the question remains personal and searching: where is your security actually rooted? Temporary security found in wealth feels good. It feels good to know you can pay bills, put food on the table, take vacations, handle emergencies. The feeling of financial cushioning brings genuine relief. But in the grand scheme of things, in the context of eternity, does money actually provide security? When we draw near to God, we become more like Him. This is a truth most Christians understand and have experienced. Drawing close to the Lord is an act of humility and surrender, saying "not my will but yours be done." But here's the unsettling parallel: the same process happens when your god is money. When you draw near to the god of wealth, it impacts your morals, shapes how you view the world, and dictates your behavior. If your god is wealth, then wealth dictates your morality. As Christians, Jesus dictates our morality, defining what is right and wrong. But if your god is money, then money alone determines your moral framework. What is right becomes whatever helps you gain more wealth. What is wrong becomes whatever causes you to lose it.

James chapter 5 opens with stark language: "Come now you rich. Weep and howl for the miseries that are coming upon you. Your riches have rotted and your garments

are moth-eaten. Your gold and silver are corroded and their corrosion will be evidence against you and will eat your flesh like fire. You have laid up treasure in the last days." This passage speaks about the end times, about judgment. It's not discussing temporary joy or temporary misery. Gold and silver don't corrode, at least not on any human timeline. James is speaking about eternity. He's explaining that when you die, when you face judgment, your treasure will bear witness to who or what your god truly was. The treasures you build up in life will testify about where your security rested. Your actions reveal whether your security was in the Lord or in your gold, silver, possessions, and social standing. The question becomes: will your treasures stand up for you at judgment and say, "This person can be saved by money, justified by wealth"? Money is an illusion of security. It makes you think that in the temporary timeline you're safe. Imagine having enough wealth to hire guards, build fortifications, install security systems, and protect yourself from every earthly threat. You might have temporary security because of money. But in the time frame of eternity, forever and ever, what good does that god do? Jesus said it clearly in Matthew 6: "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal. But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your hearts will be also." Your treasures bear witness to where your heart truly lies. In our materialistic, capitalistic society, we get so focused on our temporary existence that we imagine standing before God with our financial statements, our net worth, our portfolios, as if God should be impressed. Everything in our culture tells us that financial security equals freedom, independence, and success. But the god of money does not stand the test of time.

If following Jesus truly leads to a fulfilled life, one filled with joy, peace, patience, kindness, and love, why don't we simply follow Him? Why do we hedge our bets, trying to love both Jesus and a full bank account? The issue is this: if wealth becomes what you prioritize, what you worship in practice if not in name, you inevitably adopt the morality of money. James doesn't pull punches here. He writes: "Behold, the wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, are crying out against you, and the cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord of Hosts." This isn't just about having wealth. It's about what you worship and how that worship shapes your behavior. If you worship money, you will inevitably try to cheat the system. Why? Because the name of the game becomes accumulating more money. If getting more money is the ultimate goal, then anyone you can take advantage of is simply playing the game poorly. It's their fault for being vulnerable. If you follow the Lord, you follow His righteousness, His rules, His morality. If you follow the morality of money, you follow an entirely different ethical system based on markets, supply and demand. You learn to tip

the scales in your favor. You become skilled at exploiting people who don't understand the system. Those with more money gain the power to make even more money. They can not only tip the scales but remove the scales entirely from others. The core essence of worshiping money is greed, the constant desire for more. This becomes visible in how people treat those with less power. When you see day laborers working for their daily bread, people who must secure wages just to eat, the god of money asks: how little can I pay them and still get their labor? It becomes a game of exploitation dressed up as smart business. The poor become trapped because they have no ability to change the system. The wealthy have already rigged it. Workers end up competing for poverty wages, desperate for anything. But God sees this. Our God is a just God, and you cannot mock Him. It echoes the story of Cain and Abel, where Abel's blood cried out against Cain after the murder. When you defraud others for the sake of riches, for the sake of getting ahead, for the sake of accumulating more, you will be judged. God will bring justice. This brings us to a critical point: this reality points us to our need for a Savior who can save us from the justice we deserve. Even the wealthy who repent are welcomed into the kingdom of God when they recognize that they obtained their wealth by serving the god of money rather than the God of the Bible. God is able to forgive this.

Zechariah 7 says: "Thus says the Lord of Hosts, render true judgments, show kindness and mercy to one another. Do not oppress the widow, the fatherless, the sojourner, or the poor. And let none of you devise evil against one another in your heart." Serving the Lord requires fairness, generosity, kindness, and mercy. It requires action because that action is worship unto God. Not because it makes financial sense, but because He commands that you act in a fair and just way. His morality, His ethics are fair and just and good. He calls you to emulate His character. If you follow His ways, you will profit and benefit because He's a good God. He designed creation such that if you are kind, merciful, and fair in your judgments, you will experience His blessing. This is completely opposite to the god of money. When those who worship wealth see widows, orphans, foreigners, and the poor, they see opportunities for exploitation. How can I squeeze money from the widow? How can I get cheap labor from the immigrant? How can I use the fatherless for my own gain? The god of money has no interest in these vulnerable people except as potential resources. This contrasts sharply with what God says about blessing. You will find greater blessing if you love the widow, the poor, the sojourner, and the fatherless. Will that blessing be monetary? Maybe, but probably not. When you die, you can't take money with you. But when you treat a widow with fairness, kindness, and mercy, the impact of that action echoes in eternity. God will remember. When you serve the least of these with love, you are loving God Himself. The treasure is stored in heaven.

James continues in chapter 5 verse 5: "You have lived on the earth in luxury and in self-indulgence. You have fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter. You have condemned and murdered the righteous person. He does not resist you." Those who treat money as their god get comfortable. They have what they want and need. But James uses a dark metaphor: they're like calves fattened for slaughter. They're being prepared for sacrifice. There are forces in this world that constantly try to get you fattened, to make you stagnant, to convince you that life is all about your security, your assets, your resources, your power, your popularity, your success. But here's the application: do you recognize that the material blessings in your life are meant to be sacrificed unto the Lord? We are called as believers to take up our cross daily, to die to ourselves. This life is not our own; it belongs to Him. We sing songs declaring that we surrender all to Jesus, that we give Him everything. Yet when God asks for our bank account, we hesitate. When He asks about our homes, we claim ownership. We say "all to you" but add silent exceptions for the things we truly want to keep for ourselves. Even if we've become comfortable, even if worldly success has made us complacent, God still asks: "Will you give it to me?" There's something powerful about living a lean lifestyle, not in the sense of poverty, but in contentment. It means understanding there are many things you don't need, many things you'd be happy without. Why does this matter? Because when God comes asking for something, it's not a painful sacrifice. If you live recognizing that everything belongs to Him and rest in that contentment, then you live in freedom. You can worship Him freely because you aren't tied down to worldly things that cause you to say no to God.

Romans 2 says: "Do you suppose, oh man, you who judge those who practice such things and yet do them yourselves, that you will escape the judgment of God? Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance? But because of your hard and impenitent heart, you are storing up wrath for yourselves on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed." God is saying something crucial: you are rich, and the riches you have are given to you by God Himself. When you recognize that you've been given such a great gift, that He has forgiven you and loved you, it should cause you to trust Him even more. It should change your thinking away from the lie that money can solve your problems. You begin to recognize that all your problems are actually in God's hands, not solved by your bank balance. But what we often do is neglect and forget that God has saved us, that He's given us entrance into His kingdom, adoption as His children. We develop hard, unrepentant hearts. A hardened heart will not store treasures in heaven because a hardened heart loves the god of money. The alternative is a soft heart, one that understands grace. If you recognize that you've been given grace you

don't deserve, not by your own work or morality, but freely through Christ's love, then your relationship with God becomes one of continual repentance. You draw closer to Him by maintaining a soft, repentant heart. The beauty is that when you repent, God always forgives, always restores, and leads you by His Spirit to build up treasures in heaven. The danger of an unrepentant heart is that it becomes hard, and judgment begins to flow from it. You start thinking: "They're poor because they don't work enough. I work so hard, and yet God doesn't bless me like He blesses others. When will He throw a party for me?"

The story of the prodigal son illustrates this perfectly. The prodigal son had to learn the hard way that riches eventually run out. He came to the end of himself, developed a repentant heart, and ran back to his father. The father ran to meet him. The son gave up all the false gods he'd been serving: wealth, pleasure, indulgence. He repented and said, "I no longer want the world. I want your house. I want life with you." The father responded, "Let's have a party. My son who was dead is now alive." But there was an older brother, one who was wealthy, living in the father's house, dwelling with the father. Yet his heart was one of judgment, hard as stone. He complained to his father: "I've worked for you all these years. I've done everything right. Where's my reward? Where's my party?" The older brother was likely drawn to the god of money because that god's ethics say the younger brother should never be forgiven. The god of money operates on a system where the prodigal son must repay his debt, become a servant or slave until it's paid back, and even then never regain his status as son. The betrayal can never be erased. The older brother leaned toward the god of economics, the god of supply and demand. He thought: "While my brother was out there living wildly, I was here doing good, following the rules, doing everything right. So father, where's my paycheck? Give me what's mine." That's the warning. The prodigal son understood that it's better to be in the father's house, better to be humble, repentant, and forgiven, embraced by the father, because he couldn't live life alone. He needed the father. He wanted to be in his presence. The older brother needed to learn the same lesson through repentance: that life on your own is hard. Life on your own means worrying about security, resources, performance. But you have the opportunity to go to a Father who loves you and say, "Father, I need you."

The warning for the wealthy is simple: repent. Humble yourselves and repent, because you are only wealthy by the blood of Jesus. The blood of Jesus is the only thing that will withstand the test of eternity. It's the only thing that will stand up against the judgment of God because His blood is the only correct and acceptable sacrifice for the sins we've committed. Do not delude yourself into thinking that the treasures you have in this world can bring you security. Look at your budget, your resources, your assets, and truly say, "Lord, it's all yours." Look at your life and mean it: "It's all yours." Then observe

the areas where you don't actually mean it. Notice the parts of your life that don't truly belong to the Lord, that aren't under His sovereignty, that you keep under your own control. This all comes back to repentance. When you repent, especially in the area of finances, possessions, and materialistic attachments, God will work powerfully in your life. It becomes important to share testimonies of how God provides, how He protects and guides us despite economic conditions and world events. There's a witness that comes from showing that even when everything around us seems unstable, our God is looking after us. The question stands before each of us: do you actually believe He can take care of you? Do you believe He can provide during an economic downturn? Do you believe that He looks at you and says, "I love you and you are my child and we are going to celebrate you repenting and coming home"? Or are you like the older brother, asking "Where's mine? What can I get out of it?" The call is to humble ourselves and repent, to recognize that the one true God offers security that no bank account can provide, to understand that treasures stored in heaven through acts of justice, mercy, and love will outlast any earthly wealth. The warning for the wealthy isn't ultimately about condemnation. It's about recognizing which god we're truly serving and choosing to return, like the prodigal son, to the Father's house where real security, real treasure, and real life can be found.

## Blog

When James writes "Come now, you rich, weep and howl for the miseries that are coming upon you," he isn't making a suggestion. He's delivering a verdict. This is prophetic confrontation in its rawest form, the kind of language the Old Testament prophets used when announcing certain judgment. There's no softness here, no invitation to repent. James speaks with the authority of someone who knows what's coming, and what's coming isn't good.

We need to understand what we're reading. This isn't pastoral correction aimed at believers who need gentle redirection. This is a prophetic statement of judgment pronounced against oppressors who have crossed a line. James addresses these wealthy individuals directly, not as brothers in Christ but as enemies of God's people. The command to "weep and howl" echoes the language of Isaiah, Jeremiah, and the other prophets who announced God's judgment on nations and rulers. The intensity of the wailing James describes tells us something about the severity of what awaits them.

The first thing James attacks is their misplaced security. Your riches have rotted, he tells them. Your garments are moth-eaten. Your gold and silver have corroded. Now, we know that gold and silver don't actually corrode. That's the point. James uses prophetic hyperbole to make a theological statement. Even the most "permanent" forms of wealth are ultimately worthless when it comes to the things that matter. The very treasures they've trusted to provide security have already failed them. Think about what wealth meant in the first century. Grain represented stored food, security against famine. Fine clothing wasn't just fashion but a store of value, something you could trade or use as collateral. Gold and silver were the ultimate hedge against uncertainty. These wealthy landowners had accumulated all three. They thought they were prepared for anything. But James tells them their preparations are already ruined. The grain has rotted. Moths have destroyed the clothing. And somehow, impossibly, even their precious metals have become corrupted. The corroded wealth doesn't just disappear. It becomes evidence. James uses legal language here. The very riches they hoarded will testify against them at the judgment seat. What they thought would save them becomes the instrument of their condemnation. It's a complete reversal. They stored up treasure, but they stored it up in the wrong place at the wrong time. We're living in the last days, James reminds them. Christ has inaugurated the final age. Judgment is imminent. And they're redecorating cabins on a sinking ship.

This brings us to the specific crimes James lists. The first is fraud. "Behold, the wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, are crying out against you." This isn't a minor financial irregularity. This is systematic exploitation of the most vulnerable members of society. Day laborers in first-century Palestine lived

hand to mouth. They had no savings, no safety net. When a landowner paid them at the end of the day, that money bought food for their families that night. When payment was delayed or withheld, people went hungry. The Mosaic Law was crystal clear about this. Leviticus 19:13 commands, "The wages of a hired worker shall not remain with you all night until the morning." Deuteronomy 24:14-15 adds urgency: "You shall give him his wages on the same day, before the sun sets (for he is poor and counts on it), lest he cry against you to the LORD, and you be guilty of sin." God built immediate payment into His law because He knew the power dynamics at play. Wealthy landowners could easily exploit workers who had no leverage, no recourse, no voice. When humans are silenced, their unpaid wages speak. The Greek word used here means to cry out loudly, to shriek. It's the same word used when the blood of Abel cried out from the ground after Cain murdered him. Unpaid wages have a voice. They testify. They accuse. And most importantly, they reach the ears of the Lord of hosts. This title matters. "Lord of hosts" (Yahweh Sabaoth in Hebrew) means "Lord of armies." It emphasizes God's power as a cosmic warrior. The wealthy oppressors might have earthly power, but God commands the armies of heaven. He fights for those who cannot fight for themselves. This is one of only two places in the New Testament where this Old Testament title appears, and James uses it deliberately. He wants these wealthy exploiters to know who they're up against.

The cries of the harvesters have reached God's ears. That verb "have reached" is in the perfect tense, which means the cries arrived and remain there. God isn't going to forget. He isn't going to overlook this. He heard, He recorded, and He will act. The Judge of all the earth keeps perfect accounts. God cares deeply about economic justice. He pays attention to how we treat workers. He notices when employers withhold wages, when companies exploit vulnerable employees, when systems are rigged to benefit the powerful at the expense of the powerless. Wage theft is still the largest category of theft in many modern economies. The exploitation James condemns hasn't disappeared. It's just taken different forms.

The second crime James lists is self-indulgent luxury. "You have lived on the earth in luxury and in self-indulgence." The Greek words here are strong. Tryphao means to live luxuriously, in softness. Spatalao means excessive pleasure, unbridled indulgence. This isn't merely comfortable living. This is excess. This is consumption without constraint while others suffer. James isn't condemning wealth itself. He's condemning a particular relationship with wealth. These people have built their luxury on the backs of exploited workers. They feast while their laborers starve. They dress in fine clothes while their field hands go without basic necessities. The contrast is stark and deliberate. Their pleasure depends on others' pain. "You have fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter." James borrows agricultural imagery. Farmers fatten animals before slaughter. The animals eat

and eat, thinking they're being cared for, not realizing they're being prepared for death. That's exactly what these wealthy oppressors have done to themselves. They've fattened their hearts, their whole beings, through self-indulgence. But they're not preparing for life. They're preparing for judgment. They cannot see what they're doing. Pleasure has dulled their spiritual senses. Wealth has blinded them to reality. They mistake their prosperity for God's blessing, their comfort for His approval. They're spiritually dead while physically alive, and they don't even know it. It's the ultimate irony. The very lifestyle they thought made them secure has made them vulnerable. The indulgence they thought was life has prepared them for death.

The final crime James mentions is violence against the righteous. "You have condemned and murdered the righteous person. He does not resist you." This violence takes multiple forms. There's legal violence, using corrupt courts to pass unjust sentences. There's economic violence, where exploitation leads to starvation and death. There's physical violence when the righteous threaten their interests or expose their injustice.

The phrase "the righteous person" is singular, which might be a reference to Christ Himself. Jesus was the ultimate righteous person who didn't resist His murderers. But more likely, James uses the singular to represent all righteous poor people who suffer at the hands of wealthy oppressors. It's a pattern of behavior, not a single incident. "He does not resist you." This echoes Jesus's teaching about non-retaliation. Turn the other cheek. Don't resist the one who is evil. The righteous poor don't fight back. They don't seek revenge. They don't form violent resistance movements. Their silence, however, is not consent. Their non-resistance doesn't mean God won't act on their behalf. In fact, their willingness to suffer rather than retaliate is exactly what brings God's judgment on their oppressors.

Who are the rich in this passage? James probably isn't addressing Christians here. The shift in his language suggests he's pronouncing judgment on non-Christian wealthy oppressors who are making life miserable for believers. But that doesn't let us off the hook. By global standards, most of us reading this are wealthy. We have food security, clothing, shelter, discretionary income. We make more money than the vast majority of people who have ever lived. So how do we apply this passage?

First, we need to examine our relationship with wealth honestly. Are we hoarding resources while others go without basic necessities? Are we spending lavishly on ourselves while ignoring the needs around us? Have we become comfortable with systems that exploit vulnerable workers if those systems benefit us? Do we buy products made by people who aren't paid fair wages because we want to save money?

Second, we need to think about how we pay people. If you employ anyone, directly or indirectly, are they compensated fairly? Do you pay promptly? Do you treat workers with dignity? The principle behind God's command for immediate payment to day laborers is that people shouldn't have to wait for money they've earned and need to survive. That principle still applies.

Third, we need to consider our lifestyle choices. James condemns luxury and self-indulgence sustained by exploitation. We live in an era of unprecedented consumer choice. Many of our conveniences come at someone else's expense. Fast fashion depends on sweatshop labor. Cheap food often means farmers aren't paid fairly. Our comfortable lifestyle might be more connected to exploitation than we'd like to admit.

Fourth, we need to think about how we respond to the cries of the oppressed. God hears those cries. Do we? Are we attentive to injustice, or have we become so comfortable that we've stopped noticing? The Lord of hosts fights for the exploited and oppressed. Are we on His side in that fight?

But we can't end here, with just a list of things to examine and change. We need the gospel. The good news is that Jesus, though He was rich, became poor for our sake. He had nowhere to lay His head. He identified with the poor and oppressed. He was Himself the righteous person who did not resist His murderers. And on the cross, He absorbed the judgment we deserve. That's where our hope lies. Not in our ability to perfectly navigate wealth and justice, though we must try. Not in our generosity, though we must be generous. Our hope is in Christ, who became poor so that we might become truly rich. Rich in grace. Rich in mercy. Rich in relationship with God.