

James 5
Hope For The Oppressed

J.D. Farag

All right. Sunday mornings, we're going through James verse-by-verse. And Lord willing, today our text will be verses 1-6 of Chapter 5. And boy is it a doozy. For those of you that read ahead to stay ahead, you already know what's ahead.

So I'll ask you to stand if you're able. You can follow along as I read. If not, where you're seated is fine. James by the Holy Spirit writes, verse 1, Chapter 5. **"Now listen, you rich people, (Chuckling) 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 [Verse 3] 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."** Some of your translations render that "the Lord of Sabbath." We'll talk about that more in a moment. **"You [Verse 5] 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 one, who was not opposing you."**

Should we just close in prayer or should we...? Let's pray. Father, wow, Lord. So I think as I say this and pray this, there's not one here in this service, in this church that I'm so privileged to pastor that would disagree that we desperately need for the Holy Spirit now to give us eyes of understanding as You teach us and guide us and show us what it is that You have for us in this passage that's before us today. Lord, it's here for a reason. Every word in Your Word is here for a reason. So – And that's why we're here. We want to know why it is that You would inspire James to write this. And how it is that this applies to our lives today. So Lord, would You speak into our lives in and through Your Word? Speak Lord, Your servants are listening. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen and amen. You can be seated. Thank you.

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So I want to talk with you about why it is that those who suffer at the hand of oppressors who defraud them and get wealthy off of them, off their backs, can actually have hope. This because James is addressing quite bluntly, I might add, a problem that seemed to persist in that day. And I would argue that it is also a problem that persists and is pronounced in our day as well, specifically that of those who will exploit and take advantage of the poor for the sole purpose of making money as ill gotten gain. Now, before we jump in, I think it's incumbent upon me to point out, and this is very important, this is not about being wealthy. It's about how some get wealthy. In other words, there's absolutely nothing wrong with having wealth. The problem is when having wealth ends up having you. That's the problem. That's what's being addressed here.

And by the way, a couple of things to note by way of a preface, Joseph of Arimathea, very wealthy man. So wealthy that he gave his tomb to the Savior for His body to be buried. Nothing wrong with being wealthy; ask Solomon. Actually don't ask Solomon. That didn't end well for him. Nothing wrong with being wealthy. There's nothing wrong with having wealth. It's when wealth has you. It's not what you possess. It's what possesses you.

Now you might be surprised to know that Jesus talked more about money, wealth, and possessions than He did about heaven and hell combined. Did you know that? He had a lot to say about money. In fact, He talked more about money and wealth and possessions than He did about anything else. Do you get the impression that this is an issue? It is.

Money is neutral and amoral. I can use money to do immoral things or I can use money to do moral things. It's not the money. It's what we do with the money or in the context of our text, how we go about getting the money, in our pursuit of the money.

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I want to draw your attention to the Gospel of Matthew, the 6th chapter, very well-known passage, the Sermon on the Mount. I like to affectionately refer to it as the sermon of the amount because that's what He's really talking about here. Listen to what Jesus said, verse 19, Matthew 6. **"Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal; for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."**

Notice it's not the other way around. It's not where your heart is, there will your treasure be also. No, where your treasury is, that's where your heart is. He goes on and this is an idiom of sorts, well-known in that day, in that culture in the Middle East, certainly in my culture as an Arab. The evil eye. Jesus goes on to say, and they would have got this when Jesus said this, **"The eye is the lamp of the body; so then if your eye is clear, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light that is in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!"** [And then he says this.] [Very well known.] **"No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth."**

Notice He doesn't say you shouldn't. Probably be a pretty good idea if you didn't. No, He said you can't. It's impossible. It's either or. It's one or the other. You're either serving God, devoted to God, or you're serving wealth, or devoted to wealth. Who's your master?

Where's your treasure? Because we're talking about two in everything that He says here.

There's two places to lay up for yourselves treasures: Earth or heaven. There's two eyes: The light or the dark. And there's two masters: Either God or wealth. The choice is ours. Who are you going to serve?

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Of those who are wealthy, the question should be asked and answered: Oh, you own your own business, or does that business own you? I'm thinking of a myriad of proverbs. Many of which speak to this principle concerning wealth. We know from Scripture that our lives do not consist of the abundance of that which we possess. And of wealth, one of my favorite proverbs, of course they're all my favorite, but this one in particular, because it's very picturesque. It basically goes like this. Hey, don't fix your eyes on wealth. Because wealth certainly grows wings and flies away to heaven. Bye bye.

Does that sound like your paycheck when you run out of money before you run out of month? In other words, riches and wealth are fleeting. Why are you serving it? Why is that your master? Why are you pursuing it? the Apostle Paul writes, "**Instruct those who are rich in this present world.**"

In other words, you can be wealthy and still be a Christian. But here's the exhortation, the instruction to those who are rich in this present world: "**Do not be conceited or to fix their hope on the [Listen] uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly supplies us with all things to enjoy.**"

Now, earlier in Chapter 6 of 1 Timothy, we have the most misquoted verse in all of the Bible. And you know which one it is, right? Let me start reading in verse 9, 1 Timothy 6. "**But those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful desires which plunge men into ruin and destruction.**" [And here's the verse] [Most misquoted verse in all of the Bible.] "**For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, [Not money] [The love of money] and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.**"

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Okay, we have a problem that I want to really kind of resolve before we move any further.

And the problem is, is that heretofore James has clearly been writing to brothers and sisters in Christ. Replete throughout the epistle, brothers and sisters, brothers and sisters, brothers and sisters. But here, I don't think these guys are saved. Do you? Your flesh is going to be consumed by fire. And it's going to testify, that gold and silver that you've stockpiled. Stay with me. We need to understand this and address this to better able take and tackle the tough topic in today's text concerning wealthy oppressors because that's what this is about. That's what this is, too. Well, wait a minute. That's not me. What? Why? Why do we need to know this? Because nonbelievers amass large amounts of wealth by defrauding, abusing and even murdering the innocent to obtain it. Do you see where I'm going with this?

I want to come back to this. But I really believe that this is the purpose of this. And if you're one of those like me who will oftentimes ask the why question of, God, why is this in my Bible? Why did You inspire the writer of this passage to write this? There has to be a reason. And I truly believe that the reason that the Holy Spirit inspired James to write this is to encourage Christians who suffer because of this.

Oh, come on. Every single one of us can raise our hands. It's happening right now. This is happening right now. It was happening to them then in a much different way of course, you cannot compare. We live in a very different world. But this is happening right now. And it's like God's saying, I want you to encourage the brothers and sisters in Christ that are being crushed under the weight of these wealthy oppressors that I'm going to have the final say. Oh, yeah, they think they're getting away with this? They're not. The reason that Christians who are oppressed in this way can have hope is really twofold in our text. First, because of what happens to the oppressors when God has the final word, and God will have the final

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word. We'll see this in verses 1-3. Then secondly, and very graphically in verses 4-6, we'll see not only what happens to these oppressors, but why it is that it happens to them.

This actually sort of ties into and dovetails into what we've been talking about as of late, especially in Jeremiah, when Jeremiah just very humbly asks God the why question of, 'why do you let the wicked prosper?' Why do you let these evil people continue to amass large amounts of wealth? Why are the wicked so prosperous and prospering? And why are the righteous suffering? It doesn't add up. Doesn't make any sense. Psalm 73. We talked about that as well. Same question, the psalmist, Asaph, asks God – In fact, it's kind of interesting because he's having such a difficult time with these wealthy oppressors, these wicked people prospering when he's suffering, that he wouldn't even go to church. He would not talk to anyone because he didn't want to stumble them. I don't even want to talk to anybody about this because I'm really struggling with this and I didn't want to stumble them. I'm having a crisis of faith here because this isn't adding up here. How? How are they—? Better asked, what – I'm sorry I'm yelling. I'm not mad, really. Why? Better asked, Why are you allowing them to continue to get away with this? Why? Here's James going... I'm again, I'm speechless. That happened first service too which is a miracle by itself. I have no words. They're not getting away with it. God's going to take care of it.

You'll see. You'll see what's going to happen in the end. So first, we're going to see what will happen and then we'll see why. Verses 1-3, what's going to happen? Well, James again, makes it very clear in no uncertain terms that if these wealthy oppressors actually knew what was coming, they would wail. And he explains what they will weep and wail about being that of their wealth rotting, their clothes eaten and their precious metals corroding, so

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much so that the corrosion of their hoarded investments of gold and silver will testify against them and eat their flesh like fire.

A little bit of context here. Bear with me. You have to understand that in that day, if you owned more than one set of clothes, you were considered wealthy. And apparently these people had quite the wardrobe. Imagine them opening up their closet, going, I've got nothing to wear. I wore that last week. They had a lot of clothes. You should have seen their wardrobe.

Interesting, the detail that were provided with: Moths ate their clothes. Why is that interesting? Because moths don't eat clothes that you're wearing. Okay, let me try that again. Moths eat the clothes that you're stockpiling. Maybe I'll do better with the gold and silver here. Gold and silver is corroding. How did that happen? When did that happen? It's just been sitting there. You've been stockpiling it. You've been amassing all of this wealth and it's rotting. That wardrobe you're all proud about; the moths got to it. It's ruined. That gold and silver – Which by the way, can I just get this off my chest?

You know those commercials – And by the way, if this is your industry, God bless you, we love you. But I'm still quite puzzled. I have to confess that there's all of these ads that are pressuring me to buy gold and silver and give them my dollars. Wait. You want my money and you're going to give me gold? I think I'll keep my money. Why are you after my money? Oh, you need gold because of the money. Well, that's what I'm paying you with. I'm not doing too good today, am I? [Laughter] What's your point? Maybe you're asking, better asked, Do you even have a point? I have a point here, okay? This was there master. This is what they were serving and the lengths that they were going to in order to amass this wealth that would do nothing for them on judgment day. There's a... I just thought of this.

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I got to believe it's the Holy Spirit, but I hate to refer to movies, but for lack of a better illustration, the movie The Titanic, where a really wealthy guy was trying to give somebody money to let him take their place on that lifeboat. And he had no takers. Ya think! What? Am I going to float on the money? [Laughter] You want to give me some gold coins? I think it just sunk to the bottom. What good is it going to do? Here they had amassed this wealth. It means nothing now, it's of no value now. But apparently you've placed such value on it. You've amassed it. And what you did to get that, God's going to hold you to an account. It seems that god, your god is money, your god is wealth. Your god is that which you've been able to amass. Again, nothing wrong with having wealth.

When I was a very young believer, courting my wife of 34 years this year. Courting I know is a very foreign word to young people. It's you guys, I don't even think you call it dating anymore. I don't know what you call it. I don't want to know what you call it. Back in my day, we called it courting. We courted for a couple of years and when I was courting my wife at the time, I was working for Mercedes Benz and I had a Mercedes. I didn't own it. I couldn't even afford the gas to put in it. But I had a company car. Picked up my bride to be. Pulled up to church. Leather seats. Just the smell is coming back to me right now in the hypothalamus of my brain. [Laughter] Palomino was the color. Cabernet red just right there. [Wow] Yeah, that's what I was thinking just now, too. And I pulled up to church and there was no parking. So, you know, being the godly man that I am, I pulled up in front of the church to let my bride to be out so that she wouldn't have to walk as far and I would go park the car. Guys, you do that, right? Okay. Sorry.

So I pull up and this guy comes up to the passenger side window, knocks on the window, and I'm I'm like, you know, so I roll it down a little bit. And then he's like, I'm like, Hello? I don't

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know the guy. And he says, Brother, I need to ask you to forgive me. I'm like, what did you do? He says, I judged you. I said, what are you talking about? He said, I judged you in my heart because I said to myself, You cannot be a Christian and drive a car like that. So I just rebuked him in Jesus' name and said, Get thee behind me, Satan. [Laughter] No.

I'll never forget this. Because see, man judges, we talked about this last week, by the outward appearance, but God sees the heart. Imagine the shock on this brother's face when I told him, Brother, you have no idea. First of all, it's not even my car. I couldn't afford to renew the registration when the license comes due on this car. I can barely afford to put gas in this thing. Thank God the company pays for the gas. I just – And then, poor guy, I felt bad for him afterwards. He's repenting and asking for forgiveness. And I'm driving it home. How dare you judge me! [Laughter] Okay, here's my point. God doesn't notice the cars we drive, the clothes we wear. He sees the heart. So this is what's going to happen: It's all going to corrode and get eaten, and it's all going to rot. It's all going to burn anyway. Whenever somebody would get a new car, a good friend of mine and I would always go up to him and look at him, and of course it was totally in the flesh, we would say to them, it's going to burn, you know? (Laughing) Just made us feel better, just, you know.

But it's true. It's all going to burn. Just keep it into perspective. Don't put your trust in those things. Well, that's what's going to happen. But beginning in verse 4, James turns a corner of sorts and goes from what will happen to why it will happen to those guilty of doing this. First, notice they defrauded their employees of their rightful wages. That's a biggie. Don't think for a second that God doesn't take notice. I'm thinking it's either Proverbs 19:17 or 17:19. But it goes something like this: The one who gives to the poor lends to the Lord. You

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ever thought of it like that? They were taking advantage of these poor people, defrauding their employees. And second, they were living in this self-indulgent luxury.

I mean, again, it's not about having wealth, but especially in this world that we're living in today. People who have two houses, how do you, you can only stay in one at a time, right? I better be careful. I don't want to come off like that, but it's self-indulgence.

I'm going to refer to another movie again, this one, Schindler's List. Remember that movie? True Story based on Oskar Schindler during the Holocaust. There's this one scene I'll never forget it. It is indelibly etched in my mind and heart. It is so powerful. At the end, Oskar Schindler walks out and they're taking him to his car. And as he nears his car, he just crumbles and falls to the ground and starts weeping bitterly. Why? Because the value of that car could have saved more souls. Wow! That puts that into perspective.

Again, it's not the wealth. It's what do we do with the wealth? By the way, it's not even ours to begin with. That's God's money. He's the owner of everything. We are only the stewards of everything that He's entrusted us with. We're the owner of nothing, the manager of everything that God has given to us. There are those who have the gift of giving. That's actually a gift. And when God gifts somebody with the gift of giving, they also have to have it packaged with the gift of getting. Because see, God, whose eyes are searching to and fro throughout the earth, looking for a heart fully devoted to Him so that He can be strong on their behalf for His glory, He's searching throughout the earth and says, Can I trust them with that much? What are they going to do with it?

Oh, don't give it to him. He's going to go buy a yacht. Okay, well, forget that. Next! Oh, He's going to, He's going to give it to the poor. He's going to give it to that missionary. He's going to honor the Lord with his wealth, the first fruits of his income. The late Larry Burkett,

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founder of Christian Financial Concepts, had many sayings he's famous for. But one of them was that the way a Christian handles their money is a spiritual barometer. Because I can tell you about a Christian by looking at their checkbook. That was of course, back when they actually wrote, you know, physical checks with the carbon. I still have those, by the way, I'm just saying. Just look at their checkbook register. What do they spend their money on? It tells you a lot. It's a spiritual barometer, how they handle their money, what they do with the wealth that God has entrusted them with. So they're living these lives of luxury and self-indulgence. They're defrauding their employees, and they're just making all this money to buy more and more and more. And it's making them more and more and more miserable. You know, again, going back, you'll forgive the personal reference again to my days working for Mercedes Benz, but I had occasion to meet very wealthy people, wealthy by the worlds standards, and many of them became my friends. They were the most miserable people I have ever known. No, I'm young at the time, I was back in my twenties, had hair. (Chuckling) And I got to know these guys and I'm thinking to myself, I'm young, I don't know. I'm thinking, man, these people, man, they must be really happy.

They were the most miserable people. They would sit across the desk from me in my office. Here I am, commission only, I'm like, I want to talk about this. And they're wanting to talk to me about how they're in divorce court. They want to talk to me about how their kids want nothing to do with them. There was a couple of occasions where the Lord, as a ministry opportunity, gave me the privilege to pray with these wealthy people because they got the diagnosis. And money doesn't matter when you hear the C-word or you hear words like, You better get your affairs in order. You can have all the money in the world, it doesn't matter. The futility of riches.

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But I guess they're going to learn the hard way because it gets even more graphic when James by the Holy Spirit – and it maybe needs to have this sanctified strength. You know what you're doing, basically, you guys, you're amassing all of this wealth and you're fattening yourself up for the slaughter man. That's pretty graphic imagery. But here's where it's going to get real. They had gone as far as condemning and even murdering people under the banner of amassing this wealth.

And notice James, by the Holy Spirit says, And they didn't even do anything to you. In fact, they're working for you. They didn't do anything to you. They're not even opposing you, and you're doing this to them? I guess it is true. **"The love of money is the root of all kinds of evil,"** even the evil of murder.

Dare I bring up abortion? Do you know how much money is in that? I'm careful. I'll be cryptic and you'll see why. And this is how I want to close. But they're doing that to us right now. They're murdering people because there's trillions with a 'T' dollars in it. The perpetrators of this, those to whom James is writing, are making literally, this is not hyperbole, trillions with a 'T' dollars off of what they're doing to people right now. And this brings us full circle. And it's the take away in closing. And it's really to me the answer as to why it is that we have such a graphic text that almost seems like it doesn't fit here in this this epistle. Can I just ask you, I mean, rhetorically, of course. But when you first read this in your reading of God's Word, were you a little bit taken back by what James wrote about keep fattening yourself up for the slaughter? Can't wait, you're just – I'm going to be careful on the fat part too because... I mean, did it take you back? I mean, did it kind of stop you in your tracks? Like what? Why? Oh, I see why.

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The reason it's tucked ever so tightly into verse 4, where we're told that the Lord heard all of the cry. That's why it's in our Bibles. That's why the Holy Spirit inspired James to write this.

Because we today are in a very similar way crying out to the Lord because of these evil oppressors. And thankfully the Lord, as only He can and is always faithful to do, will hearken unto the voice of our cry in the end. He's going to have the final word. Uh, just bear with me. I'm almost done, actually. During my time off, I just spent a lot of time with the Lord fasting, praying. I fasted from media. All the screens that I, off for about a month actually. So if you notice a twitch, you'll know why. [Laughter]

I just wanted to focus on Lord. I just had my Bible program on one screen and my main computer and that's it. I just wanted to seek the Lord and be with the Lord and cry out to the Lord. One of those cries was, Lord, how much longer? How long oh Lord? like David would write in the Psalms. How long? How much longer are you going to let them get away with what they're doing to people? This is murder. It's a genocide. Oh, Lord! And it's all about the money. We say it like this: Follow the money. That's what's behind this. We're talking about massive amounts of money. And I think that God inspired James, for such a time as this. I know for me, I hope it's an encouragement to you, but it's settled my heart. I mean, when I read a text like verses 1-6 here in James Chapter 5, I go from being angry at them to feeling sorry for them. Man. they are getting fat for the slaughter. All that money, it's going to corrode. It's going to do nothing for them on judgment day. All of that wealth that they amassed and how they did it. The evil perpetrated on people in order to obtain it. And it's like they're getting away with it. And here's another expression: They're laughing all the way to the bank. Well, they ain't going to be laughing anymore.

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Well Pastor, isn't that a little bit, I mean, are you delighting in this judgment that's coming upon them? Even the Lord, we're told, doesn't delight in the punishment of the wicked. Are you doing that? No. (Chuckle) Let me explain. You better. You got some explaining to do. No, there's such a thing called righteous judgment. Because the judgments of God are true and amen and His judgments are righteous.

And again, I'll refer you back to Psalm 73 and Jeremiah 12 too, if you want, because the common denominator in the two is God allowed them to see the end, their end. And when they saw how it ends in the end, they're like, okay. I'm not angry at them. I'm not envious of them. I feel really sorry for them. I might even pray for them. Wow, what a novel idea.

Because they need Jesus, because if they knew what was coming, they would weep and wail and mourn. One last thing. I've said this before, I think it bears repeating, and I know that you'll know what I mean when I say this. If they're still fully human, it's not too late for them. If they're still fully human in their DNA, it's still not too late for them. They can still get saved. And that should change how we look at these people and you know who they are. Their faces are coming to your mind right now because I can read your mind. Just a second. If they're still fully human and their DNA is still human DNA, they can still get saved. They still need Jesus so don't wag your finger at them. Raise your hands in prayer for them because they need Jesus.

Why don't you stand. We'll have pastor Leitu come up and close us in song. Father in heaven, this is a tough passage. I know, tough to teach and certainly tough to be on the receiving end of. But oh Lord, how needed it is, especially with everything that's happening in the world today. Lord, thank You that You're just. Thank You that You'll settle the score, so to speak. Thank You that Your judgments are righteous and fair and true. Lord, thank You

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that You'll have the final word. That settles us. That settles us knowing that. And we wait for that. We wait on You for that, Lord. And to that, we would just simply pray, Maranatha!
Lord, come quickly, in Jesus' name, amen.