

Riches, Trials, and Oaths – James 5:1-12

Introduction

- The context of this chapter is a continuation of James address on the wealthy traders who were overconfident in their material wealth.
- James considered the accumulation of large amounts of material wealth to ‘waste,’ which is accurate and evidence selfishness and the mental pathologies that persist in narcissism.
- This lesson will illustrate the importance of sharing possessions (instead of hoarding material wealth) and sharing patience (in the face of persecution).
- READ James 5:1-12

Share in Possessions (vv. 1-6)

- QUESTIONS: What happens when people don’t share? What happens when people don’t want to share, an unwillingness? What happens when people don’t have enough to share, an inability? Where do the unwillingness and inability come from?
- In this section, James’s tone is harsh as continues to address the rich and their false sense of control from wealth that began in chapter 4.
- The ‘rich’ are believers (1:10) and unbelievers (2:6).
- MacArthur defines the ‘rich’ as “those with more than they need to live... [and] misusing their resources”.
- The error of the love of money always leads to grief and consternation (see 1 Timothy 6:10).
- Walvoord notes “the corrosion of wealth is testimony to the sickness of the wealthy... it is not the wealth itself that is condemned, but the greedy attitude toward it and the grisly actions with which it is obtained. God it not deaf to the cries of the injustice that rise both from wages withheld in fraud and from the laborers who have been oppressed by the rich.”
- The setting in James’s time was so wicked that the rich would use the courts and role of ‘justice’ to kill those innocents who stood in the way of profits and the accumulation of insatiable wealth – sounds familiar to our day and time too.
- Walvoord recommends “a believer who seeks spiritual growth dare not become caught up in the accumulation of wealth... he should share his possessions for God’s glory and the good of others.”

Share in Patience (vv. 7-12)

- The tone in this section is markedly different, moving from harsh condemnation of the rich, James now gently provides consolation to the restless ‘brothers’ with a long aim toward the future – look to the ‘last lap’ of the race.
- Patience for most people is never an easy disposition – but in a time of testing of our faith and even persecution it becomes even harder to be patient.
- The agricultural example (vv. 7-8) is a valid example of the patience required for the crop to be yielded (also note the growth and harvest are out of the control of the farmer in many ways, just like the control of wealth is out of the auspices of the rich).
- The believer should be on guard as the Judge is ‘at the door’ (v. 9), meaning Christ’s soon return could happen any moment – this truth is the basis of verses 10-12.
- An example of patience (vv. 10-11) from the perseverance of the prophets and Job are clear and would have been familiar to the Jewish audience.
- James’s summary “the Lord is full of compassion and mercy” is a compound adjective used only here in all the New Testament.
- The evidence of patience is found in our confidence in God (v. 12).

Conclusion

- Walvoord concludes “those who truly demonstrate the persistence and patience described for believers, there is no need to invoke an oath ‘by the heaven or by the earth,’ that their word should be certain... when one says ‘yes’ it means ‘yes’... and says ‘no’ it means ‘no’... the soon return of the Lord, the Judge who stands at the door (5:9), is motivation enough for this kind of honesty and trustworthiness.”
- My prayer is that we seriously consider the warnings about wealth and encouragements of patience and sharing in this lesson and apply them to our lives for God’s glory alone – He is coming soon!