

DG Guide: James 5:1-11

Opening Prayer

Starter Question

Think about how you spend your money.. Food, clothing, accessories, coffee, furniture, etc.. do you know where it comes from? Have you considered the global supply-chain, and our part in it? When you think about rich people, are you imagining billionaires, or only people richer than yourself? How might we think about riches in light of the whole of humanity right now, and our place in a historical setting?

Key Takeaways from the Sermon

1. **The whole passage is one argument hinged on the word "therefore" in v.7.** Verses 1-6 drop a hammer on the rich who exploit others with their riches and power; verses 7-11 turn and comfort the brothers and sisters. They aren't two unrelated paragraphs. Don argued that the judgment oracle against the exploiter is the very ground of the patience command to the faithful. One coming of the Lord settles both accounts at once: judgment for the one who withheld, vindication for the one who was wronged.
2. **When the Bible says "rich," the most honest thing we can do is assume it means us.** A person on the median Australian wage sits in roughly the top couple of percent of people alive today. Add clean water from a tap, a hospital that'll treat us, no concern about our next meal, a roof that doesn't leak, and our normal Tuesday looks like staggering abundance to most of human history. Don didn't say this to heap on guilt. He said it so the warning of scripture to the rich can actually reach us instead of bouncing off onto billionaires.
3. **The cry of the unpaid worker reaches the ear of the Lord of Armies.** In v.4 the withheld wage doesn't go quiet, it goes up. It cries out, and the cry arrives at the ear of the Lord of Hosts, the warrior-God who fights for the defenceless. Don pressed that this reaches past literal employers to ordinary consumers. Fast fashion is the clearest worked example, but it's one example among several: supply chains we never see, ultra-cheap goods, etc. The category isn't economics, it's the God who hears the cry of injustice itself.
4. **Patience here is the farmer waiting for the rains, not gritted-teeth stoicism.** The farmer has ploughed and sown, but he can't make it rain or pull the wheat up faster, so he waits. And the waiting isn't despair, because he knows the harvest is coming. Don drew the contrast sharply: stoicism lowers expectation so nothing can hurt you, while biblical patience raises expectation because the outcome is certain. So don't tear up the field in week three. Strengthen your heart, because the Lord's coming is near.
5. **Job's "outcome" reveals God's character, not a refund.** Don guarded hard against the prosperity reading of Job. The lesson of v.11 is "the Lord is compassionate and merciful," and James draws no promise that endurance gets your stuff back. We've read the last chapter, so we know the character of the Author even while we're stuck in the middle of our own story. And the Judge at the door (v.9) is the same righteous one who was condemned and murdered and didn't resist (v.6): Christ, coming

back not only to repay the exploiter but to gather the people he died for.

Scripture Reading

James 5:1-11

Discussion Questions

Weep, You Rich (vv.1-3)

1. James opens with "Come now, you rich people, weep and wail." Be honest as a group: when you first heard that, who did you picture? Someone up the ladder, or the average Aussie? Why is our instinct to send this warning on to someone wealthier?
2. Read vv.2-3. The verbs are striking: rotted, moth-eaten, corroded. Don pointed out that gold doesn't actually rust, so James is making a deliberately impossible image. What's James saying by describing the hoard as already destroyed while the owner still thinks he's rich?
3. Don said the warning targets what the man did with his wealth: he hoarded it, he trusted it, he used the last days to store up rather than to be generous or build something. Which of these is the live temptation for a comfortable congregation like ours?

The Wages That Cried Out (vv.4-6)

4. Read v.4. In the ancient world a day labourer was paid at the end of each day because his life depended on it. So withholding the wage wasn't a cash-flow inconvenience, it was taking food off his table that night. What does it do to you to know the missing wage "cries out" and reaches the ear of the Lord of Armies?
5. Don argued that v.4 reaches past literal employers to ordinary consumers: we're the demand that makes a cheap wage worth paying. He was careful to call fast fashion one example among several, and to keep it pastoral rather than a guilt-trip or a political lecture. Where do you feel the pinch of this in your own buying? How do we take it seriously without sliding into either guilt or a new list of banned purchases?
6. Verse 6 says the righteous one "doesn't resist." Don said that detail points beyond the exploited poor to Jesus, silent before his accusers. Hold that thought for later. Why does it matter that the Judge who's coming was first the victim who didn't resist?

Therefore, Be Patient (vv.7-9)

7. Don called "therefore" the pivotal word of the passage. Walk through it together: how does the judgment on the unrighteous rich in vv.1-6 become the ground of the command to be patient in vv.7-11? Why can you wait under injustice precisely because the Judge has already heard the cry?
8. Read vv.7-8. Don showed how the farmer rescues "be patient" from meaning "grit your teeth and feel nothing." What's the difference between the farmer's hope-filled patience and a stoic shrug? Where do you need that difference right now?
9. Don tied this back to week 2, where James told us to count trials as joy because testing produces steadfastness (1:2-12). How does it change things to see the patience of chapter 5 as the same call as the endurance of chapter 1, the letter closing a loop?
10. Read v.9. Don observed that the pressure comes from outside, but the place it tends to leak out is inside, against one another. Why does a suffering group so naturally turn on the nearest brother or sister? Have you seen that happen, or felt it in yourself?

Endurance and Its Reward (vv.10-11)

11. James points to the prophets as an example. Don noted they weren't failures who suffered for getting it wrong; for them, suffering was the path of faithfulness. How does that reframe suffering for someone who assumes it means God has abandoned them?
12. Read v.11. Don warned hard against reading Job as "endure and you get your stuff back." What does "you have seen the outcome the Lord brought about" actually reveal? How does knowing the character of God help when you're still in the middle of your own struggle?

Personal Reflection

- Where am I hoarding with a closed fist while telling myself I'm just being sensible? What would it cost me to open it this week?
- Is there a purchase, a habit, a convenience in my life where my comfort is cheap because someone else paid for it? What's one place I could trace and change?
- Where am I being wronged, or waiting on God, and tempted either to rage or to give up? What would the farmer's patience look like there?
- Where is my frustration leaking out sideways onto someone in the family who didn't cause it?

Group Commitments

Choose 1-2 of these to commit to as a group:

1. Do the honest arithmetic once this week. Look up where the median Australian wage sits globally, and let the warnings of vv.1-3 actually land: am I hoarding, am I trusting wealth, am I using the last days to store up rather than to build or give?
2. Trace one cheap thing you buy back to the wage at the end of it: a t-shirt, a gadget, a grocery item, a fast delivery. You won't always get a clean answer, and that's fine. Then change one purchase as a result and tell the DG.
3. Open one closed fist. Find a specific generosity you've been seeing and skipping (a person, a need, a gift, a partner like Compassion) and do it this week.
4. Memorise James 5:8 together and text one another midweek to check it has stuck.
5. For one week, catch yourself when frustration that belongs to your circumstances leaks out against a person in the church family, and refuse to let it.

Closing Exercise

Read Job 1:21 aloud together: "YHWH gives, and YHWH has taken away. Blessed be the name of YHWH." Then go around the group and each finish this sentence out loud, kept short: "Right now I'm waiting on God for..." Then read together: "The Lord is compassionate and merciful, and the Judge is at the door."

Closing Prayer

Pray together, focusing on:

- Worship: thank God that he's both Judge and Vindicator, that he hears the cry that no one else hears, and that one coming of the Lord settles every account.
- Confession: name the closed fist and the hoarding, and lay down the wealth we've trusted and the wages we've never thought about.
- Thanksgiving: thank Jesus that the Judge at the door is the righteous one who was condemned in our place and didn't resist, and that he's coming back for the people he died for.

- Commitment: ask the Spirit to turn each of you into people who hold money with an open hand and wait on God like a farmer who knows the harvest is real.
- Boldness: ask God to give the wronged and the worn-down strength to endure to the last page, and to guard the family while you wait.

For Next Week

- Follow through on the group commitment you chose, and be ready to share how it went.
- Memory verse - James 5:8: "You also must be patient. Strengthen your hearts, because the Lord's coming is near."
- Preparation: read ahead into James 5:12-20, the close of the whole letter. Notice how James moves from oaths ("let your yes be yes") to the prayer of faith over the sick, to confessing sins to one another, and finally to restoring the one who wanders from the truth. The letter ends in the life of the praying, confessing, restoring community.

Leader Notes

- The first hazard is the warning bouncing off Aussies in 2026 who don't see their riches. If the group decides vv.1-6 is about billionaires, the text can't reach them. Gently keep returning to Don's point: by global and historical measure, an ordinary Adelaide household is rich, so the most honest move is to assume the Bible means us.
- The second hazard is the opposite: this lands as guilt. Watch the room when you discuss fast fashion and consumer complicity. Don was clear this is one example among several, not a new legalism and not a political lecture. The aim is to start asking different questions at the checkout, not to crush anyone. Aim for Gospel and hope, not a guilt list.
- Guard against the prosperity reading of Job. Someone will hear "the Lord restored Job's fortunes" and conclude that endurance earns a refund. Don pressed that the lesson is God's revealed character (compassionate and merciful), not a promise that your property comes back. Hold the line kindly.
- Someone in the room is likely being wronged right now with nothing changed. Don't let the group rush them to "be patient" as a tidy fix. The farmer's patience is hope grounded in a certain harvest, not pretending it doesn't hurt. Make space for the middle-of-the-story person.
- Land the session on the gospel, not the warning. The Judge at the door is the same righteous one who was condemned and didn't resist. He's coming back not only against the exploiter but for the people He died for. Make sure the group leaves with that, not with a checkout audit hanging over them.
- Leader, before you lead this, do the arithmetic on yourself and find your own closed fist. You'll lead with far more grace if you've already started to open it.

Or, if you just want a bunch of discussion prompts:

1. When you hear "you rich people," what's your first instinct: that's me, or that's someone else? Why?
2. Why does James describe the hoarded wealth as already rotted and corroded when the owner still counts it as riches? What's he trying to make us see?
3. The unpaid wage "cries out" to the Lord of Armies. What changes when you picture God as the warrior who fights for the worker with no advocate on earth?
4. Are we really part of v.4 as consumers, or is that a stretch? Where's the line between conviction and a guilt-trip?
5. "Therefore" is the hinge of the whole passage. How does the warning to the rich become the comfort to the faithful?
6. What's the difference between the farmer's patience and gritted-teeth stoicism? Which one is closer to how you actually wait on God?
7. Why does a community under outside pressure so often turn on itself? How do you stop the sideways grumble?
8. The prophets suffered because they were faithful, not in spite of it. How does that reframe a season of suffering in your own life?
9. "You have seen the outcome the Lord brought about." What does Job's story reveal about God, and what does it not promise?
10. The Judge at the door was first the righteous one who didn't resist. How does that change what the Lord's coming means for you?