Lesson 10
James 5:1-6 Commentary
King James Version

Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further follow the verse-by-verse *International Bible Study Commentary*. **Study Hints for Discussion and Thinking Further** will help with class preparation and in conducting class discussion: these hints are available on the *International Bible Study Commentary* website along with the *International Bible Lesson* that you may want to read to your class as part of your Bible study. You can discuss each week's commentary and lesson at the *International Bible Study Forum*.

(James 5:1) Go to now, ye rich men, weep and howl for your miseries that shall come upon you.

Jesus, James, and Paul knew the spiritual dangers rich people faced, but many rich people are generous and sincere followers of Jesus Christ, as Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea demonstrated (see John 19:38-42).

As James wrote, some love money and power so much they have become enemies of God, and miseries will eventually come upon them in this life and in the life to

come. For example, in Luke 16:14, Luke gave one reason the Pharisees hated Jesus: "The Pharisees, who *were lovers of money*, heard all this, and they ridiculed him." "This" referred to Jesus' teaching in Luke 16:13 on the love of money: "No slave can serve two masters; for a slave will either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth." The Pharisees thought they could serve both, as some in the church still think. If we are lovers of money, Jesus and the Bible warn us about riches so we will repent of our sins, follow Jesus truly, love God, and escape the judgment to come.

For example, after Jesus cleansed the temple, some of those he drove out may have turned away from seeking wealth to seeking God and finding Jesus, because in Matthew 21:13, Jesus declared to them, "It is written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer'; but you are making it a den of robbers." Hopefully, James' warning in his letter led some to repent as well.

James wrote his letter to the rich church members who, contrary to the teachings of Jesus, used their riches in self-centered ways and did not love their neighbors. James' letter served as a warning to church members who did not intend to become more faithful followers of Jesus Christ, but who joined the church to achieve selfish goals. In John 14:21, Jesus said, "They who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me; and those who love me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal

myself to them." God deserves all the love that our hearts, minds, and souls can give. In Luke 10:27, Jesus commanded, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself."

When Paul wrote to Timothy, he gave good advice to the poor (and as we learn from his letters, the Apostle Paul was one of the poorest of people). In 1 Timothy 6:6-8, Paul wrote: "Of course, there is great gain in *godliness combined with contentment*; for we brought nothing into the world, so that we can take nothing out of it; but *if we have food and clothing, we will be content* with these."

In 1 Timothy 6:9-10, Paul warned the poor who sought riches and the rich who wanted more riches, "But *those who want to be rich* fall into temptation and are trapped by many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For *the love of money* is a root of all kinds of evil, and in their eagerness to be rich some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pains." Remember what Jesus said about the love of money in Luke 16:13 (see above).

In 1 Timothy 6:17-19, Paul told Timothy (and everyone in the church) how to help the rich in the church remain faithful followers of Jesus Christ: "As for those who in the present age are rich, command them not to be haughty, or to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but rather

on God who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. They are to do good, to be rich in good works, generous, and ready to share, thus storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may *take hold of the life that really is life*."

(James 5:2) Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are motheaten.

James continued to warn unrepentant sinners inside and outside the church to consider their real situation. Someday, the rich will lose all the riches they have gained. Even if they die rich, when they die, they will have lost all the worldly riches they have acquired, and they will have no heavenly treasures—only miseries. Someday, the possessions of the wealthy will lose their value and eventually be taken to the trash heap. Their clothes will become moth-eaten, whether they give them to a charity or not. No matter what they may think, in one way or another, lovers of money will lose all their wealth and gain nothing in the end.

(James 5:3) Your gold and silver is cankered; and the rust of them shall be a witness against you, and shall eat your flesh as it were fire. Ye have heaped treasure together for the last days.

"Cankered" (KJV) or "corroded" (NIV) may be better translations than "rusted" (NASB and NRSV). Silver can tarnish and blacken. Gold can lose its gleam as impurities

settle upon it. Very descriptively, James wrote that the misuse of wealth is evidence (as in a trial) that someone has not used their wealth as Jesus intended; furthermore, there are consequences that follow the misuse of wealth—"it will eat your flesh like fire."

As we have learned from our study of the Bible, having wealth and riches is not wrong; rather, how we use these good gifts that God has given us can be right or wrong. Some who are rich and some who love money store up their treasures for what they consider "the last days" or for "the days after they retire," which is not wrong if they also use their wealth before and after they retire as Paul described in his letter to Timothy (see 1 Timothy 6:17-19 above). Jesus gave the same warning in some of His parables.

For example, in Luke 12:16-21, Jesus described a type of retirement that was possible in His day: "The land of a rich man produced abundantly. And he thought to himself, 'What should I do, for I have no place to store my crops?' Then he said, 'I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.' But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your life is being demanded of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?' So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not *rich toward God*." Rich and poor followers of Jesus need to be "rich toward

God;" rather that live and retire to "relax, eat, drink, and be merry." The Bible teaches the followers of Jesus how to live *rich toward God,* and what they should avoid and do as they earn an income and save for the future.

(James 5:4) Behold, the hire of the labourers who have reaped down your fields, which is of you kept back by fraud, crieth: and the cries of them which have reaped are entered into the ears of the Lord of sabaoth.

God condemns dishonesty and injustice. Some become rich because they have not paid their employees or have not paid them what they promised to pay. Some have not paid a fair wage, because they did not love their neighbors as themselves. They have loved wealth instead of God or their neighbors. People can commit fraud in many ways, for we read about them or learn about them every day. They may or may not receive in this life what they justly deserve for their crimes. If they escape just punishment in this life, James wrote that "the ears of the Lord of hosts" hears about those who love riches and steal from others, and they will be condemned in the life to come if they do not repent and turn to God for salvation as the Bible describes, for Jesus will forgive repentant sinners and cleanse them from all sin. A repentant rich person who truly repents will say something like Zacchaeus said, and they will receive the blessing of Jesus as described in Luke 19:8-10, "Zacchaeus stood there and said to the Lord, 'Look, half of my possessions, Lord, I will give to the poor;

and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will pay back four times as much.' Then Jesus said to him, 'Today salvation has come to this house, because he too is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost.'"

(James 5:5) Ye have lived in pleasure on the earth, and been wanton; ye have nourished your hearts, as in a day of slaughter.

As we have learned, James' sincere warnings should lead a rich person to repent. If they do not repent, they will be slaughtered, perhaps by those they have used unjustly and who take the law into their own hands or by a just judge in a court of law passing a just judgment. Either by the way they have acquired their riches and/or by the way they have used their riches there will be evidence against them and they will suffer eternal and just condemnation if they do not change their ways and turn to God.

In Luke 16:19-31, Jesus told another parable to describe those who love riches more than God or their neighbors: "There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day. And at his gate lay a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, who longed to satisfy his hunger with what fell from the rich man's table; even the dogs would come and lick his sores. The poor man died and was carried away by the angels to be with Abraham. The rich man also died and was buried. In Hades, where he was being tormented, he

looked up and saw Abraham far away with Lazarus by his side. He called out, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am in agony in these flames.' But Abraham said, 'Child, remember that during your lifetime you received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner evil things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in agony. Besides all this, between you and us a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who might want to pass from here to you cannot do so, and no one can cross from there to us.' He said, 'Then, father, I beg you to send him to my father's house—for I have five brothers—that he may warn them, so that they will not also come into this place of torment.' Abraham replied, 'They have Moses and the prophets; they should listen to them.' He said, 'No, father Abraham; but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.' He said to him, 'If they do not listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.'" What Jesus foretold in this parable has been and will be fulfilled in life and death by those who love riches instead of loving God and their neighbor as the Bible teaches.

(James 5:6) Ye have condemned and killed the just; and he doth not resist you.

With only a few exceptions, the chief priests, the scribes, and the Pharisees condemned and murdered Jesus "the righteous one," who did not resist them because He came to die for our sins. He died to make our salvation from sin

possible and so all who believe in and follow Him can receive the gift of eternal life. Even today, the unrepentant rich condemn and murder in many ways those who seek righteousness as followers of Jesus. In Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, He promised in Matthew 5:6, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled." He solemnly foretold and joyfully promised in Matthew 5:10-12, "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you." As followers of Jesus Christ, we may be condemned and persecuted in a variety of ways and even murdered for "righteousness' sake," but in the kingdom of heaven we will receive all the blessings and rewards that Jesus and the Bible have promised us.

Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further

1. Is it wrong to be rich? Give a reason for your answer.

2. What can bring contentment to rich and poor (see 1 Timothy 6:6-8)?

3. How can a Christian rightly prepare for retirement or "the last days"?

4. What did James promise those who have been cheated?

5. In the New Testament, how was “the righteous one” condemned and murdered by the rich and powerful? Today, to increase their riches, do some still condemn and murder those who do not resist them?

© 2022 by L.G. Parkhurst, Jr. All Rights Reserved.
Permission Granted for Not for Profit Use.
Contact: lgp@theiblf.com.