

James: Faith Works

Sin to Him it is! (Part 2)



Bro. Ricky Cunningham
James 5:1-6

Every time I see how the United States compares to the rest of the world in the newspaper I read, they always say we only have 4% of the world's population. I don't know if that is true, but I am assuming it is. In other words, citizens who live in the United States of America compose 4% of the world's population. That means 96% of the world doesn't live within the boundary of the United States of America. Let me share with you how we are doing financially compared with the rest of the world. If you have a job where you, by yourself, make \$100,000 or more then you are in the top 1% of the world's wage earners. Wow! The good news is if you are married and you make \$100,000, but your spouse doesn't contribute to the income, you are still in the 1%. Now the bad news — if you have kids and you make \$100,000 per year, you aren't in the 1% anymore, you are in the top 3% of wage earners in the world. I know many of you would love for you family to make \$100,000!

If you are single and make \$75,000 per year in income, you are in the 1%. But if you get married and your combined income is \$75,000 or more (but

not at \$100,000) you are now in the top 2.1%. Those kids mess it up every time though — you drop to 5.8% of the world's population when it comes to wages. Some of you have been longing for the day you make \$75,000! Ok, let's say \$50,000. Am I getting closer to where your family is? If you are single and you make \$50,000, I am sorry, you aren't in the top 1%. You are in the top 1.5%. If you have a spouse, you are still in the top 5% of wage earners. If you have a family, you are in the top 10.6%. Wow, you are ahead of 89% of the people in the *world* if together your family has an income of \$50,000.

Have I hit yours yet? Ok, I understand. What about \$40,000? If you just got out of college and you have your degree, a great job, you are single, and you make \$40,000 per year, guess what? You are in the top 3% of the world's wage earners. But when you get married, it will dent your income and you are going to go to 7.3%. When you add those kids, it is going to drop you to 14%, but you are still ahead of 86% of the world's population. You still don't make that much? I understand, so let's drop it down to \$30,000. If you and your spouse, combined, make at least \$30,000, you are in the top 11%. If you stay single, you are in the top 5%. You don't want to know about the kids here, but you will still be in the top 20%.

Can we be real here? As a single person, if you have a job where you get to work 40 hours a week at \$10 per hour, you make \$20,800 per year. You are still in the top 10% of wage earners in the world. Did you hear that? You have more disposal income, more income to live on, than 90% of the world's population and you only make \$10 per hour! If you get married, you will fall out of the top 10%, but you will still be in the top 20%. When those kids come along, if after two of them are born and you are still making \$10 per hour, you are still in the top 26% of the world's wage earners.

This sermon, preached to Hardin Baptist Church in 2021, is completely different in context than to the church James preached to. Let's keep that in mind as we make application of this text to our personal lives.

Scripture

"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 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. 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. 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 doesn't resist you."

Before we go into the lifestyles of the rich, I want you to see the link between chapter 4 verses 13-17 and the text we are looking at this morning. Last week we learned (as Yoda would say it) 'To know to do right and fail to do, sin to him it is.' In the context, what is, 'To know what is right?' Here is what James says...each one of us should never make plans without acknowledging God's will for our life. Long before we got to church this morning, we should have already realized that because we have God's breath in us, today is a gift to us. Therefore, today is not about what we want to do, it is about what He wants us to do since it is because of Him we are alive. Every opportunity I am going to face today, whether I choose to do this or to do that, I am not going to make that choice on my own, I am going to consider what the Lord's will would be. As a Christian, to live any day, to take advantage of any opportunity without acknowledging God's sovereign will for my life, would be sin for us.

Now, here is the link between chapter 4:13–17 and the text here. I believe James is now going to show us what a life could look like if we believed life was about us and not about God, in other words, if we live the way we want to live rather than the way God wants us to live. James is going to address a group of people and he describes them with the term, "rich." Now, the experts I read aren't sure whether this group of rich people are Christians in the church or non-Christians outside of the church. It is just

really hard to believe you could be a Christian and have the lifestyle of these people James is talking about, so most scholars believe this is a group of people who aren't Christians; they are outside of the church. However, James is writing to the church, so here is the question: Why would he address somebody outside the church who is probably not going to read this letter? Good point, right? I like what Craig Blomberg believes...James addresses non-Christians who are rich for the benefit of the Christians in the church that he's writing to — so he is going to talk about somebody else. Why is he talking about somebody else? Because they are the example of a group of people who know what is right but fail to do what is right, and their lifestyle of being rich is sinful. He wants the church to benefit from that picture. Let's first examine what he says.

Now, I think we need to have a basic definition of rich. I am not rich. I don't have as much as some of you have; you are rich. I have a feeling when I get to where you are at, you are going to have more than you have now so I am still not going to be rich because rich is a moving target, so to speak. Everyone has different opinions on what it means to be rich, agreed? So let's see if we can have a working definition, a basic floor of being rich because I don't think anybody believes a person making \$20,800 in America and raising a family of four is rich even though they are in the top 26 percentile living in the world. So, could we use this as just a basic definition of rich? Based on what the Apostle Paul talks about when he talks about godliness with contentment is great gain, he basically says you ought to be content if you have a change of clothes and you have food on the table for this meal. Anything above that means you have more than what you need. If you have more than you need, you are probably rich. That changes things. The reason James is going to talk about people having more than they need is to benefit us, the church, ultimately so that we don't live a lifestyle of sin.

Are you ready? Listen up! Pay attention! Don't be distracted! That is what the words, "Come now," mean. "You rich," you, who have more than you need, listen up — you ought to be weeping and wailing right now. This word, "wail," is a Greek word that has a name to it I can't pronounce, but

the pronouncing of the name pictures the activity. In other words, if I were to have said this word, it would sound like I was in distress. If someone was around the corner and they heard me saying that word, it would sound like I was wailing. If we have more than we need and we are a non-Christian, James says we ought to be wailing. Why? Because misery is coming upon us. We are deceived about life. Our present condition might look ok, it might look good, but there is some misery coming. If we were to do an inventory, our riches are rotted, our garments are moth eaten, and our currency, because of the alloys that were mixed with it, is rusting and corroding.

Now, you have to remember that in the biblical world when James was writing to the church, wealth was measured primarily in three ways. The first way was grain. If you had grain, you could feed your animals and your family. Second was clothing, and the third way was silver and gold coins. James says you have so much grain it is rotting. It is a picture of the farmer who has had a bumper crop. He has so much grain in his barn that he can't feed it all to his animals, his family can't eat it all, so they are hoarding it, saving it for a rainy day, so to speak, and it has already started to rot. They have so many clothes in the closet that the moths have made nests in the clothes that haven't been worn in a month or so, and they are now worthless. Their coins have been taken out of circulation, and because they aren't rubbing in their pockets and in their hands, they have started to corrode. They aren't as valuable as they once were. Man, I am so thankful we aren't rich! I am so thankful that there has never been a time that we have had so much food in the pantry that we couldn't eat it all and we had to throw some of it away. I am so thankful I just have two suits, two pairs of pants, and two shirts in the closet, and there aren't those extra shirts back in the corner that I haven't worn in so long they are ruined. I am so thankful that we don't have any extra money just lying around.

See, the sin here of being rich is that you have a tendency to hoard. You have a tendency to store up treasure in the last days. 'Last days' is a reference to the time period between the first and second coming of Jesus; it is not just referencing the last days before Jesus comes back. Please note that. The 'last days' is the life we live physically right now. Here is a

group of people who are trying to have treasures for these last days, but they are laying up treasures and things that rot, corrode, and moths can eat. Didn't Jesus warn us about that — not laying up treasures on earth, but lay up treasures in Heaven? See, the sin these people were committing was they were living in the last days but they were not living in light of the last day. Christians don't live for the last days; we live for the LAST day. Amen? Now do you see the benefit? He is writing to a group of people who are living in the last days, investing in things that won't last, instead of living in light of the *last* day and investing in things that will last. Then ultimately, on the Day of Judgment, everything we have invested in that is of this world? It will so eat at our flesh that it is going to burn us alive, that is what James says under the leadership of the Holy Spirit. These non-Christian rich are hoarders (they grabbed all of the toilet paper that they could grab!) because they were living in the last days.

Last week when I was talking to you merchants, guys who run your own business, the ones who trade, sell, and make profit, it was one thing — but now James addresses a land owner, and I own land. He addresses farmers. This hurts. Now, he is talking about rich, non-Christian farmers. This was an agricultural society. He says, "Behold..." *gaze, give me your attention, focus in* "...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." Whoa...This land owner had so much land, he had such a big crop, that he couldn't get it all in by himself so he hired people to help him. But he defrauded them! This word, "fraud," here means to fall short. When it came down to it and the job was done and the fields were mowed, and the grain had been cleaned and stored in the barn, do you know what the farmer did? He didn't pay the workers what they deserved to be paid; he kept back what they were really entitled to, and it padded his profits. He could put more grain in the bin. If you hold the expenses down and don't honor those who help you make what you make as a farmer, there is more for you to keep for yourself. James personifies wages, he personifies a salary, he personifies minimum wage, he personifies an average working rate, and he said it falls short! And that falling short is crying out because you, the

owner, have more, but the more you have is not yours. It belongs to the labor, it belongs to the worker, it belongs to the person who helped you with it! The church ought to say to the non-Christian rich, SHAME ON YOU! Amen? To accumulate wealth on the back of labor and not acknowledge how important labor is, shame on you!

But listen, if you are the laborer you may not be able to take it to him and get anything done, but guess who heard you? God did. And guess who James calls God? The Lord of Hosts. If you read that in the Old Testament, every time the Lord of Hosts rose... whoa... he had brought a heavenly army with him. So, here is the picture...if you are the rich, non-Christian farmer who is defrauding your workers, you may live such a lifestyle that you don't hear or see, but God does. I can't tell you how much consolation that has given Christians throughout history, to know that even though the people they worked for on earth didn't value them, they knew God valued their work.

James is talking about the farmer here. This hurts...it is not just the business owner; it is the farmer! This is the guy who ought to know that he can plant the seed but God has to give it the rain, the sunshine, and help him with weed control; there are a lot of factors that are outside of him. But, here is a farmer and he is living in luxury! Now, we have always believed that farm life is a hard life compared to what a lot of other people do, but this word, "luxury," literally means to be soft. It's not having it hard anymore, not being oppressed anymore, but you are accumulating luxury items that make your life easier — you are self-indulgent; you only think about yourself. God ought to zap those non-Christian rich people living like this. Can you imagine somebody living in luxury, getting soft in their old age, being self-indulgent, and only thinking about themselves? They are living a life where the big decision today is what do I want to do, what do I want to get, and when am I going to do it?

Now, if you aren't a farmer, you won't get this but if you are a farmer, you should. He says your luxury and your standard of living is just "fattening your hearts for the day of slaughter." On our farm, we have what we call a

steer pen. Can I just say this? The steers (that aren't our Angus) have life made. Most of the time they have grass, but they aren't grass fed only, their owner, Memish, believes in free choice. So they can choose to eat grass or they can just walk a few yards and they have a big feeder. It has the best feed that can be bought in Western Kentucky. They have a place to drink water, they have shade, and those things are as close together as they can be. Those steers are happy cows! They are getting fatter and fatter, and softer and softer. I have to be honest with you, they are the envy of the farm. See, we have the cow herd fenced in across a little lane from the steers, and they are envious of the steers. You can just tell when those steers walk through the field and look over at the cows —kind of arrogantly, pridefully. Every time the Mule drives up, the cows come running. When the gate opens and the feed truck comes, the cows come running, they want to get in the steer pen because those steers have free choice feed! But not the cows... they just have grass because they are working cows. They aren't fat; they are slim. They are in working shape. Now, I don't know if the cows will ever realize it or not, but every year those steers go to slaughter. And the cows are usually on the farm for a long time...do you get it? The non-Christian rich seem to have a life most envy, but one day when the last days are over and the last day is here, we are going to be thankful we weren't fat on the things of the world but only use the things of the world to keep us in working shape so that we can produce for our master (that is God) and fulfill His plan.

Then, we cannot imagine this but it does happen — sometimes the non-Christian rich condemn a righteous man. They take his job, take his land, take his house, and starve him to death, so to speak. Maybe literally or maybe metaphorically, they murder him. They take away his livelihood. They take away his opportunity to feed his family and be useful in the life of others. Do you know what that righteous person does? Do you know what the Christian does? He doesn't "resist." Boy, there are some times that I just want to rip some of these verses out of the Bible...What do you mean I cannot resist?! What do you mean I should not resist?! What do you mean I should not stand up for my right?! What do you mean this is not about me?! I am sorry, but I cannot read this without seeing Judas

betraying Jesus for thirty pieces of silver...and He didn't resist. He didn't resist when they arrested Him. He didn't resist even though His disciples wanted to revolt. He would not let them. He didn't pull His hands back when they put those spikes in His wrists. He hung on that cross because He ultimately believed that the circumstance He was in was not according to His will, but God's will. He didn't take matters into His own hands. He trusted in the hands of God. He trusted in the will of God. Wow!

How do we keep this in light of the whole Bible? We remember this: the Bible never teaches that money is the root of all kinds of evil. It is not. The Bible says THE LOVE of money is *a* root of all kinds of evils. That is why Paul says to Timothy...*Those people in your church? You warn them if they have a desire to be rich. Warn them if they have a desire to have more than they need, because when that desire comes to have more than you need, with it comes temptation and a snare and a trap.* That desire leads people to go into areas that they never would have gone into if they hadn't had the desire to want more than they needed. Remember when you believed that camper was a gift from God and you praised God for it? Now you have forsaken God's people because you are never in church anymore, you are always at the campground. Do you remember that boat? With a lifestyle where we want more than we need, comes temptation, even as a Christian.

Now, I want to make sure you understand this; it is not money — it is the desire for money that is the temptation. When you examine this passage, it falls into two categories. James is writing this to encourage us as Christians in how we acquire wealth and then how we use wealth. So, in my acquiring of wealth, here is practical application: I, as the farmer, can never believe that I am more important because I provide the capital, and therefore my labor is not important. I can never let the desire I have of what I want and what I want my lifestyle to be like to cause me to forget about the lifestyle of the one who is helping me plant my crop, getting my crop in, and managing my cows. I have to be very conscious before I get my second home, and my third home, and my fourth home when the person who is helping me get the second, third, and fourth cannot even afford a home.

Therefore, the lifestyle of the non-Christian farmer is going to look different than a Christian farmer, because the Christian farmer doesn't misuse his wealth. He uses his wealth, not to be rich in grain, clothes, and currency, but as Paul says to Timothy, to be rich in good works...and be generous. Not tearing down my barn so I can build a bigger barn and enjoy a luxurious lifestyle, but I recognize that God gave me the day, gave me the help, and gave me the opportunity. Instead of storing it away for the last days, I want to live in light of the *last* day and *share* with those who I know God has put into my life to contribute to the lifestyle that I have. I am not going to get fat! I am not going to get easy! I am going to stay in working shape because I am living in light of the last day. Therefore, I am not ever going to settle for *this* life; I am using this life for the *next* life.

When it comes to acquiring, I am not going to be immoral or unethical. I am not going to be ruthless. I am not going to condemn a righteous person. I am going to recognize that I may have been gifted to make wise decisions, but I am not going to put myself in the position where I take my neighbors farm because I can. I am not going to do it. I am not going to have anything that contributes to my lifestyle that really belongs to my laborer. I am going to live conscious.

But do you know what? God may just have designed my life — not just my life in church but my life outside the church, my life in the community — to be lived in such a way that I have been gifted to help others live the best possible life they can live too. So remember James chapter 1...if we are humble and trials come, we get exalted. But if you are rich and a trial comes, you get humbled. It is really amazing the things that God can use to humble those of us in the church who have more than we need. Sometimes those trials reveal a heart that's really more about us than Him and them. Praise God we have the opportunity to repent if we are believers in Christ.