

THE SIN OF PRIDE (3): RESTING ON EARTHLY SECURITY

James 5:1-6

Introduction

The last topic of the sin of pride in relation to stewarding the world's resources and goods entrusted to us by God and our dependence on them. How a person feels about and handles wealth is a test of his humility and living faith.

1. The utterly worthlessness of all worldly riches (verses 1-3).

- Matthew 6:19-21, *“Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”*
- No new teaching.
- Why do we keep our earthly treasure?
- Three common treasures in the Middle-East during James' time:
 1. Produce of the earth (Lk 12:16-21). The Greek word for *“riches”* comes from the name of the ancient Greek god which means the abundant yielding of the earth. Hence *“riches”* refers to the food, vegetables and grain. They will all rot when kept and not eaten.
 2. Garments (Lk 16:19). Only garments which are not used and stored away are moth-eaten.
 3. Gold and silver. No one expect gold and silver to corrode. They corroded because they are not pure. The rich are deceived by the appearance.
- James' point is so basic: How sinful, how foolish and how stupid to hoard food, to hoard clothing, to hoard money when it all rots.
- Wealth not used is wealth that does not exist and a possession is worth no more than the use we make of it.

2. The detestable character of these rich people (verses 1-6).

- (i) *Put their confidence and security in their wealth and possession.*
- James wrote his letter (45 to 50 AD) during a time of great need (Acts 11:28—Claudius' reign is between 41 to 54 AD).
 - About this time the saints in Jerusalem were also scattered as mentioned in Acts 8:1. James 1:2, *“Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds.”*
 - This is the reason for a severe condemnation from James on the rich who stockpiled their wealth for their own security and ignoring others who were greatly in need.
 - The Bible is not against Christians making investments/buying insurance. We are not to be irresponsible about our life. See Prov 6:6-8; Prov 21:20; Prov 13:22; 2 Cor 12:14 with 1 Tim 5:8.
 - Deu 8:18, *“You shall remember the LORD your God, for it is he who gives you power to get wealth, that he may confirm his covenant that he swore to your father, as it is this day.”*
 - The judgment of God is coming to them soon (verse 1).

- (ii) *Gained their wealth by injustice (verse 4).*
 - The farm-workers are day labourers which is a normal.
 - Mat 20:1-2, “*For the kingdom of heaven is like a master of a house who went out early in the morning to hire labourers for his vineyard. After agreeing with the labourers for a denarius a day, he sent them into his vineyard.*”
 - The OT law was very strict on how the employer paid day labourers (Lev 19:13; Deu 24:14-15).
 - They “*kept back by fraud*” or to withhold by default. It does not indicate delay which is already forbidden by the law, but it indicates total default, they refused to pay.

- (iii) *Used their wealth selfishly (verse 5).*
 - They stole from the poor to self-indulge in luxurious living.
 - Thomas Manton: “There were but two common parents of all mankind, Adam the Protoplast (the first created), and Noah the Restorer, and both miscarried by appetite; the one fell by eating, and the other by drinking.”
 - They “*have fattened*” their “*hearts in a day of slaughter.*”

- (iv) *They are murderers (verse 6).*
 - To sustain the high-roller life-style, the rich use the courts to condemn and murder the righteous who does not even resist them.
 - Who is this the “*righteous person*”? We do not know for sure. Some understand it collectively.
 - There was one who was fit the description, our Lord Jesus Christ.

Conclusion

- Is the Bible against the rich and for the poor?
- Lk 6:24, “*But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation.*”
- Generalization is typical of the Bible’s style (G. B. Caird, “Language and Imagery of the Bible”).
- To understand what the Bible teaches about the rich, we must study the whole Bible.
- There is no absolute value attached to material things in the Bible. Wealth can be good or evil (Prov 30:8-9).
- But the Bible is against trusting in wealth (Psa 52:7; Prov 11:28; Mk 10:24; 1 Tim 6:17). The Bible is also against obtaining riches unjustly (Jer 17:11).
- A. Barnes: “there is no sin in merely being rich; where sin exists among the rich, it arises from the manner in which wealth is acquired, the spirit which it tends to engender in the heart, and the way in which it is used.”
- James says nothing of the great good that those who possess wealth can do: “the actual doing of good still leaves those who are rich within the high risks he has outlined. Good may be done with all the implicit arrogance, and sense of self-importance, that is more plainly seen when riches are wreaking their more obvious ill-effects on the human spirit”—Alec Motyer.
- From the treasures of heaven God chose to send us not money or temporal pleasures that pass away, but an ultimate gift of glory that has no equal and no end.