



CAPITOL COMMISSION™

THE “POOR” RICH”: PART FOUR– JAMES 5:5

COLORADO

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Here in James 5 we find the wealthy rich exploiting the poor instead of being generous as commanded by Scripture. We must always remember that our wealth, no matter how great or small, is to be enjoyed as a blessing from God, used to fulfill His will and meet the needs of our neighbor!

THE “POOR” RICH - JAMES 5:1-6

James 5:1-6 “(1) Come now, you rich, weep and howl for your miseries which are coming upon you. (2) Your riches have rotted and your garments have become moth-eaten. (3) Your gold and your silver have rusted; and their rust will be a witness against you and will consume your flesh like fire. It is in the last days that you have stored up your treasure! (4) Behold, the pay of the laborers who moved your fields, and which has been withheld by you, cries out against you; and the outcry of those who did the harvesting has reached the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth. (5) You have lived luxuriously on the earth and led a life of wanton pleasure; you have fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter. (6) You have condemned and put to death the righteous man; he does not resist you.”

Pursuing the selfish pleasures of this world is deceiving. Wealth that is hoarded and unjustly gained especially by oppressing the poor together with indulgently spent riches on selfish pleasures is condemned by James and God. These next verses reveal the third reason why the “*miserias*” from James 5:1 will come on the wicked rich who live selfishly for themselves. There will be judgment because they have lived in luxury and self-indulgence while the poor suffer amongst them.

I. JUDGMENT OF THE “POOR” RICH-JAMES 5:5

James 5:5-“You have lived luxuriously on the earth and led a life of wanton pleasure; you have fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter.”

James will use three aorist indicative verbs to summarize the self-indulgent lifestyle of the rich. This is with a contrast between those who are selfishly wealthy and those who are poor in this life.

A. “YOU HAVE LIVED LUXURIOSLY” - JAMES 5:5A

James 5:5a: “You have lived luxuriously on the earth ...”

James uses a verb which is used only here in the New Testament; “*lived luxuriously*”.

“lived luxuriously”+Greek **αἰσχροψαλαίσω** meaning softness.

James condemns the wicked rich for living luxuriously, extravagantly at the expense of others. He is clearly depicting a sinful, self-

indulgent lifestyle. It is a life which is spent in “*soft*” extravagance. When James uses the phrase “*on earth*” he reveals the contrast between the pleasures the rich enjoy in this world and the torment that awaits them in eternity as revealed by Jesus in Luke 16. Their pleasures are limited to this world. Their riches on this earth will be and condemning them for hoarded wealth and oppressive, self-indulgent the sum of their desires and aspirations for sadly they are blind to Heaven and eternity.

The story of the rich man and poor Lazarus in Luke 16 clearly depicts how the ease of the rich and the suffering of the poor in this life will be reversed in the life to come. You have lived in high style. You have indulged in delights pertaining to the senses. You have pursued enjoyment in this life rather than investing in the eternal life after.¹

B. “LED A LIFE OF WANTON PLEASURE” – JAMES 5:5B

James 5:5b- “You have lived luxuriously on the earth and led a life of wanton pleasure...”

This verb is used in only one other place in the New Testament; 1 Timothy 5:6 where Paul describes those who are dead while living as they squander their riches in self-indulgence. It refers to giving oneself to the pursuit of pleasure. It is a Greek word that refers to extravagant and unrestrained self-indulgence.²

Luke 15:13 refers to the Prodigal son and how he squanders everything on loose living. James is referring to a vain attempt to satisfy insatiable desires. It is a life without self-denial. Those who pursue pleasure and luxury frequently close their eyes to the needs of others and the work of God, living solely to gratify their selfish, sinful desires. And, apart from faith in Christ, they face eternal ruin and loss.³

Those with money can easily be blind to the needs of others and the work of God. Are you? No matter how much or how little we have, we are to use it to help those in need and further the work of God. Is that your focus regarding the wealth God has given you?

C. “YOU HAVE FATTENED YOUR HEARTS”– JAMES 5:5C

James 5:5c- “You have lived luxuriously on the earth and led a life of wanton pleasure; you have fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter.”

The picture James portrays here is fearfully vivid because it clearly reveals the real significance of a life of luxury and self-indulgence.

BIBLE STUDIES

LEGISLATORS, GOVERNOR & SPOUSES: TUESDAY AT 7:15AM, CAPITOL BASEMENT, ROOM 0109

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Essentially James accuses the wicked rich of fattened hearts.

"fattened+Greek %*repho*" meaning to nourish, to feed, to satiate with food, to fatten.

Jeremiah 46:21 uses this idea to speak of fattened calves. The striking picture James paints is of oppressive, self-indulgent rich, who have satiated themselves even on the plunder taken from their poor victims. The desire for luxury led to vice, which led the unjust hoarders to seek to selfishly indulge every desire of their "hearts"⁴

This word for "your hearts" is used to denote inner life with its desires and affections. James would say their desires of life, their concerns are to indulge in the luxuries of this earth and there seek satisfaction.⁵

And then James concludes with this warning: "*in a day of slaughter*". James would say that you are blind to Heaven and deaf to God's warnings. You are headed for your doom and you need to repent and turn from your sinful ways. Often a slaughter in battle would be referred to judgment. James is say you are headed for the day of slaughter or the day of divine judgment like cattle being fattened for the kill...for the day of slaughter. (Jeremiah 12:3, 50:26-27, 57:40)
The imagery is clear.

The picture is fearfully vivid. The fattened cattle who have gorged themselves, careless of the fact that each day, each hour, brings them closer to the butcher. Only the 'thin' beast is safe in that day. The well fed have made itself ready for the knife. James saw wealth blind alike to heaven and hell, living for this life and forgetting the day of slaughter.⁶

James' point is this; the rich are selfishly and blindly accumulating wealth for themselves and wastefully spending it on their own personal pleasures. Judgment is imminent, yet the rich, instead of acting to avoid judgment, ignore it. And ironically, the rich become the fattened cattle for the day of slaughter when God will judge.

Solomon, the wisest man who ever lived wrote about the futility of self-indulgence. He pursued pleasure in this life and found those pursuits were futile, referring to them as "*vanity*". Vanity means of no profit, no gain and a striving after the wind. Read Ecclesiastes 2:1-11 and see what Solomon said and remember:

"And all that my eyes desired I did not refuse them. I did not withhold my heart from any pleasure, for my heart was pleased because of all my labor and this was my reward for all my labor. Thus I considered all my activities which my hands had done and the labor which I had exerted, and behold all was vanity and striving after the wind and there was no profit under the sun." Ecclesiastes 2:11-12

¹Moo, Douglas J., *The Letter of James*. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co: Grand Rapids, Michigan, 2000. Pg.217.

²Hiebert, D. Edmond, *James*. Moody Bible Institute: Chicago, Illinois, 1992. Pg. 266.

³MacArthur, John, *MacArthur Commentary on James*. Moody Press: Chicago, 1998. Pg.247.

⁴MacArthur, John, *MacArthur Commentary on James*. Moody Press: Chicago, 1998. Pg.248

⁵Hiebert, D. Edmond, *James*. Moody Bible Institute: Chicago, Illinois, 1992. Pg. 267.

⁶Motyer, J.A., *The Message of James*. InterVarsity: Downers Grove, Illinois, 1985. Pg.168.