



CAPITOL COMMISSION™

THE “POOR” RICH”: PART TWO– JAMES 5:2-3

COLORADO

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James 5:1-6 may not be written about you, but it is written for you. What can you learn about wealth and material possessions? Are you focused on earthly treasures or eternal riches? Perhaps nothing more clearly reveals a man’s heart than his/her view of money. We must keep in mind that God is the One Who supplies all our riches. As believers we are called to be rich in good works which reveals our true salvation. True wealth, true riches are found in a relationship with Jesus Christ alone. If that is true, then earthly wealth will be viewed in light of our Lord’s purpose, will and good work!

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.”

James warns and rebukes those who pursue transitory, temporary, fleeting riches rather than eternal, lasting riches of good works. It results in inescapable judgment that is fatal and final. God never says that wealth or riches are wrong, but rather the love of them. What is your true love, your focus, passion and pursuit? Is it for material wealth and riches? Jesus said in Matthew 6:24, “No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will hold to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.” You cannot say you love God and yet have a love for earthly riches. Here James describes those who have great, earthly wealth but actually are poor because they have nothing more than temporal, fleeting riches of this world. James condemns those who treasure earthly possessions over the true eternal riches found only in Jesus Christ. The miseries in James 5:1 that will come upon these will not be an earthly, temporal suffering, but rather the eternal, punishment given by Him on the coming day of judgment. These verses stand as a warning to any believer not to fall prey to those attitudes.

I. TRANSITORY WEALTH OF THE POOR RICH-JAMES 5:2-3A

James 5:1-3a “(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...”

Earthly riches are temporary and will not last as these verses instruct so don’t let that be your pursuit. They result in inescapable, eternal

judgment that’s fatal and final. James 5:2 begins with “*your riches*”. The Greek word for riches is one that describes all forms of wealth that people accumulate. James describes here what happens to any and all earthly wealth in the end.

A. ROTTED RICHES - JAMES 5:2A

James 5:2a: “Your riches have rotted ...”

James begins by describing earthly possessions as “*rotten*” riches. Few if any would think of wealth like that.

%rotten+Greek **%sepo**” meaning decayed, perishable, worthless, describing rotten wood, decayed flesh, rotten fruit, used only here in New Testament.

James is saying to the rich that your wealth has decayed and become worthless. Your earthly wealth is not something that will last but is perishable. Often in Biblical times, wealth was evidenced by the accumulation of vast amounts of grain. Luke 12:16-21 describes the one who amasses such amounts of grain. His life was invested in what he believed accrued wealth for his future. His investment was in perishable grain. But earthly wealth can never provide a source of security for our lives because it is fleeting and it will decay. We are fools if we think earthly riches can gain anything eternal. So this man gathers all this wealth invested in perishable grain thinking his life is safe and secure. But what happens? He dies. Luke 12:20-21 says, “*But God said to him, “you fool! This very night your soul is required of you; and now, who will own what you have prepared? So is the man who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God.”*”

James says that when your riches are invested in perishable, earthly treasures, your wealth has decayed, become worthless, perishable and rotten. It will never last. It can never provide security for this life or the one to come. *That security is found in Jesus Christ alone!*

B. MOTH-EATEN RICHES – JAMES 5:2B

James 5:2b: “Your riches have rotted and your garments have become moth-eaten.”

Next James describes the hoarding and accumulation of riches as “*moth-eaten garments*”.

%garment+Greek **%himitia**” describing outer garments, robes or cloaks which were often embellished with jewels.

These fine clothes which looked great on the outside and were a display of wealth were described as “*moth-eaten*”. They were eaten by moths and rendered useless, again demonstrating that material possessions are temporary and will not last. What’s the point of accumulating material possessions such as clothes because they won’t last? “James sees all this as senseless – what’s the point of feeding moths?”¹

BIBLE STUDIES

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

STAFF, LOBBYISTS, JOURNALISTS & SERGEANTS: TUESDAYS AT NOON, CAPITOL BASEMENT, ROOM 0109

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THE “POOR” RICH”: PART TWO – JAMES 5:2-3

James says that when you invest your life in earthly treasures such as garments or clothing that can eventually become moth-eaten, your wealth has become moth-eaten, worthless and perishable. It can never provide security for this life or the one to come. *That security is found in Jesus Christ alone!*

C. RUSTED RICHES – JAMES 5:3A

James 5:2-3a: “Your riches have rotted and your garments have become moth-eaten. Your gold and your silver have rusted...”

Finally James describes the accumulation of earthly riches as “*rusted*” riches, using the example of gold and silver that “*have rusted.*”

%rusted+Greek **%katiao**” compound word that means thoroughly and completely corroded with the added proposition that intensifies the force of the verb, not referring to mere surface rust.

James says that even gold and silver, which were a valuation of wealth, will be thoroughly useless as if it were rusted completely. In the day of God’s judgment, earthly riches have the utter inability to save us, to rescue us from God’s judgment. Calvin wrote, “God has not appointed gold for rust, or garments for moths, but, on the contrary, He has designed them as aids and helps to human life.”²

James says that when you invest your life in earthly riches like gold and silver, it will be as useless to you as if it were corroded and rusted thoroughly and completely. Earthly riches can never provide the security for this life or more importantly the one to come. *That security is found in Jesus Christ alone!*

II. ACCOUNTABILITY OF THE POOR RICH-JAMES 5:2-3

James 5:2-3: “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!”

A. YOUR WEALTH IS A WITNESS AGAINST YOU – JAMES 5:3B

James 5:3b: “and their rust will be a witness against you...”

Not only are all forms of accumulated riches temporary, will decay, will rust and will not last beyond this earthly and temporal short life, but their worthlessness will stand as a witness against you. Your accumulated riches will speak as a mighty witness against you and this witness cannot be silenced. It will declare your undeniable guilt. What you have invested your life in: the temporal, futile, earthly riches will stand against you; will accuse you as a witness before God. Rust stands as a witness of the fleeting, useless, earthly riches that you have invested your life in rather than true, eternal riches found only in a relationship with Jesus Christ Who offers what is needed not only in this life, but also the one to come.

B. YOUR WEALTH RESULTS IN JUDGMENT – JAMES 5:3C

James 5:3c: “and will consume your flesh like fire...”

You have pursued earthly treasure at the expense of heavenly treasure.³ Your chief concern has been to provide for your own physical comforts – the comforts of your “*flesh*”. And now their vain pursuit will bring inescapable, fatal, final and eternal judgment on them. James refers to the judgment of hell.

C. “THE LAST DAYS...” – JAMES 5:3D

James 5:3: “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!”

It is senseless to spend your life accumulating what is worthless in the end. Instead of using their wealth to help those in need, they have hoarded it for themselves and for their own selfish enjoyment in the future. “*Last days*” refers to the days preceding the return of the Lord Jesus Christ and future judgment that will come. The “*stored up*” treasure refers to a wealth that is hoarded. The Revised English Bible puts it this way, “*You have piled up wealth in an age that is near its’ close.*”

%stored up+Greek **%thesaupiste**” to store up, to lay up treasure, hoarded.

This treasure you have selfishly stored up, hoarded, will stand as evidence against you on the day of judgment. And wealth stands in line with others under the doom of things that will fade in this world and can provide no foundation for the world to come.⁴

Those who store up earthly treasures are ignorant of having to give an account to God for all things. In Matthew 25:24-30 Jesus gives the account of how condemnatory hoarded wealth is in the day of divine scrutiny and how “*foolish*” is the man who says he has more than enough stored away for many years and overlooks he will be promptly called to account before God. (Luke 12 also)⁵

Because earthly riches are fleeting and transitory, hoarding makes no sense. Scripture exhorts that we are not to pile up a fortune for ourselves to spend or accumulate without regard for God and His purpose. Job 27:13-17, Psalm 39:6. God entrusts us with wealth for a purpose, His purpose. We are to use our riches for God’s glory, to help those in need and share the Gospel, win the lost and support His work! So ask yourself...is that how you view wealth?

¹Motyer, J.A., *The Message of James*. InterVarsity: Downers Grove, Illinois, 1985. Pg.150, 165.

²Calvin, J., *Commentaries on the Catholic Epistles*, trans. J. Owen (reprint; Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1948.)

³Moo, Douglas J., *The Letter of James*. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co: Grand Rapids, Michigan, 2000. Pg.214.

⁴Moo, Douglas J., *The Letter of James*. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co: Grand Rapids, Michigan, 2000. Pg.213.

⁵Motyer, J.A., *The Message of James*. InterVarsity: Downers Grove, Illinois, 1985. Pg.166.