



# CAPITOL COMMISSION™

## Hold Lightly to This World (James 5:1-12)

Brent Alderman / PO Box 2060, Annapolis, MD 21404 / [brent.alderman@capitolcom.org](mailto:brent.alderman@capitolcom.org) / 240.818.3053

*We are nearing the end of the book of James. The practical lessons we have come to expect from this epistle keep coming and this passage is no exception. How much more practical can one get than considering what our priorities should be? What will drive us each day and motivate our decisions? It is amazing that the teaching of James is as relevant now than it was in the first century. He is addressing the human condition, experiences common to us all in any time in history or in any culture. As we look at the verses under each point in this study, we must ask ourselves this overarching question: "How deeply invested am I in this world?"*

### I. PROBLEM WITH SECURITY (5:1-6)

*James 5:1-6 Come now, you rich, weep and howl for the miseries that are coming upon you. <sup>2</sup> Your riches have rotted and your garments are moth-eaten. <sup>3</sup> 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. <sup>4</sup> 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. <sup>5</sup> You have lived on the earth in luxury and in self-indulgence. You have fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter. <sup>6</sup> You have condemned and murdered the righteous person. He does not resist you.*

The chilling warnings in these verses resonate with wisdom and authority. There are no options left for the rich who are addressed here. Destruction is their end if they do not repent. But not all of those who are wealthy are the targets of this message.

The context of the entire paragraph condemns an attitude, not an economic status. Not all rich people fit this category, but all should take heed to the admonition given here. For the one who pursues earthly wealth with no desire for God, seeking the ease of a rich lifestyle with no regard for whom they trample to achieve success, misery awaits.

Scripture makes clear in many places that overinvestment in this world is nearsighted and pointless. Riches are fleeting and will not last. Consider these words that are consistent with James:

*Psalms 52:7 See the man who would not make God his refuge, but trusted in the abundance of his riches and sought refuge in his own destruction!*

*Proverbs 11:28 Whoever trusts in his riches will fall, but the righteous will flourish like a green leaf.*

*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, <sup>20</sup> but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. <sup>21</sup> For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.*

Verses such as these prove that possessions are not the problem. Having wealth can be the Lord's best for someone who gives God glory and seeks His ways. The core of the matter is the heart. What is it that we treasure? In what do we really trust? If the rich person's dependence lies in earthly gain, it will eventually crumble. This world is wasting away, but trusting in the Lord and making investments now for the world to come is wise.

### II. PATIENCE THROUGH SUFFERING (5:7-9)

*James 5:7-9 Be patient, therefore, brothers, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient about it, until it receives the early and the late rains. <sup>8</sup> You also, be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand. <sup>9</sup> Do not grumble against one another, brothers, so that you may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing at the door.*

Suffering is a major theme in James' letter. While some may avoid the topic, here it is directly and honestly shared, even promoted as something to be embraced. These verses echo what James wrote in the first chapter, namely that suffering is a reality not to be feared, but humbly accepted as a gift from God to grow more patient.

The example of the farmer is striking and one that even we can understand in our culture. What patience it takes for the farmer to plan, till, sow and nurture, knowing that months of waiting are required before reaping the harvest. Our society today cares little for waiting and is characterized by rushed decisions and self-interest. These verses are as pertinent to us now as ever.

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**RESTLESSNESS AND IMPATIENCE CHANGE NOTHING EXCEPT OUR PEACE AND JOY. PEACE DOES NOT DWELL IN OUTWARD THINGS, BUT IN THE HEART PREPARED TO WAIT TRUSTFULLY AND QUIETLY ON HIM WHO HAS ALL THINGS SAFELY IN HIS HANDS.**

**- ELISABETH ELLIOT -**

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# Maryland

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### III. PICTURE OF SAINTS (5:10, 11)

*James 5:10, 11 As an example of suffering and patience, brothers, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. <sup>11</sup> Behold, we consider those blessed who remained steadfast. You have heard of the steadfastness of Job, and you have seen the purpose of the Lord, how the Lord is compassionate and merciful.*

A cursory glance at the prophets of the Bible show difficult, painful outcomes for the ones who faithfully served God. The nature of their ministries involved declaring God's messages to leaders or nations which were not always popular or well-accepted. Their treatment by others was often harsh and there were times when God himself called them to demanding situations. These conditions lasted for years and many times ended in martyrdom.

**Jeremiah** was known as the weeping prophet, spending his life in ministry heartbroken for the direction of his nation. In Isaiah 20, God told **Isaiah** to walk around naked for three years as a sign of coming exile. **Elijah** spent lonely time in depression and asked God to take his life. **Daniel** was taken into captivity and eventually spent a night in a lion's den. **John the Baptist** spoke truth to power (King Herod), was imprisoned and finally beheaded.

James' readers would have known the stories of prophets well and their examples would have flooded their minds. They also knew the plight of **Job**, who is described here as steadfast and the recipient of mercy. His story also reinforces what we discussed about the wealthy in the first point. His heart was true even though he had wealth.

Job was rich and feared God. God allowed Satan to take away his earthly possessions, his children and his health. The rest of the book of Job consists of Job's painful thoughts and spiritual struggles, questionable advice from his wife and friends, and direct messages from God himself. Job proves the wealthy are not always destined to misery, because God restored even more to him after he patiently endured the time of testing.

*Job 42:10 And the LORD restored the fortunes of Job, when he had prayed for his friends. And the LORD gave Job twice as much as he had before.*

Yes, Job was wealthy, but after intense, strenuous suffering he persevered and displayed his trust in God. The **heart** of the rich person is the deciding factor, as Job proves. He also bears out James' teaching for the purpose of suffering, as we saw earlier in the book.

*James 1:2, 3 Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, <sup>3</sup> for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness.*

There's the full circle. God's plan for suffering presented in the first few sentences of the book and historical examples in the last chapter verify that **steadfastness** is the Lord's gracious goal for trials in life. Paul explains the high stakes of holding lightly to this world or not.

*Romans 2:6-8 He will render to each one according to his works: <sup>7</sup> to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life; <sup>8</sup> but for those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, there will be wrath and fury.*

### IV. PREVENTION OF SNARES (5:12)

*James 5:12 But above all, my brothers, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or by any other oath, but let your "yes" be yes and your "no" be no, so that you may not fall under condemnation.*

Promises fence us in and can make us liars. It's a snare of our own making that requires a good memory, especially if conflicting promises are made. In the world of politics, campaign speeches are rife with oaths of many kinds. Constituents base their votes on these promises and become disillusioned when the promises are broken.

The wisdom of this verse (and proof of one's character) is just to be honest in all of our dealings. Jesus echoed this same idea in his teaching in the Sermon on the Mount.

*Matthew 5:34-37 But I say to you, Do not take an oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, <sup>35</sup> or by the earth, for it is his footstool, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. <sup>36</sup> And do not take an oath by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. <sup>37</sup> Let what you say be simply 'Yes' or 'No'; anything more than this comes from evil.*

When we address people in honesty, we solve a major relational issue, namely hypocrisy. In fact, the word translated here as "condemnation" is *hypokrisis*, from which we get our English word. We intentionally avoid hypocrisy when we approach each answer with transparency and integrity.

Holding lightly to this world entails trust – in God, in his provision, in his plan for suffering and in his call to truthfulness in all things.