

Prayer

Lord Jesus, flow over us with Your love, surround us with Your compassion, cover us with Your protection, and move us forward in Your strength. Take us forward each day on our great journey of life with You, and with all the people who own Your name. We praise You and we love You, Lord Jesus Christ. AMEN

Prayer Suggestions

Prayer ideas

Share what is on your heart with someone you love, and pray about this with them

On-going prayers

- ***This week, give thanks for the blessing of life.*** Pray that God's people will demonstrate to the world God's gift of 'new life' in Christ.
- *Pray about the coming Copenhagen 'environmental' summit*
- *Pray against the prevalent evils of 'suicide bombing'*

Meditation

Grant to us, Lord Jesus Christ, a quality of love
That forgives those who have hurt us,
Overcomes all manner of anger and bitterness,
Focuses us on what is good, not what is bad,
And seeks to build bridges over troubled waters.

Grant to us, Lord Jesus Christ, a quality of faith
That believes problems can indeed be solved,
Displays love towards the most difficult of people
Trusts that God is in control of everything,
And seeks to defeat the works of the evil one.

Grant to us, Lord Jesus Christ, a quality of hope
That sees beyond the troubles of the day,
Longs for peace to be established between people
Is passionate about overcoming all odds, in Christ,
And seeks the ultimate glory of the Father.

Grant to us, Lord Jesus Christ, those special spiritual gifts
Which daily help us live our lives according to Your will.

Bible Study - James 5:1-6

¹ Listen now, you rich people, cry out aloud because of the dire troubles coming to you. ² Your wealth has evaporated, and your clothes are in rags. ³ Your gold and silver have corroded and will be evidence against you; it will eat you up like fire, for you have piled up treasure in the last days.

⁴ Listen to this complaint against you! You have fraudulently failed to pay wages to the labourers who mowed your fields, and the grievance of your crop-gatherers has been heard by the Lord of hosts. ⁵ You have lived an earthly life of luxury and pleasure, and you have fattened up your hearts for the day of slaughter! ⁶ You have condemned and murdered good people who pose no threat to you.

Review

These words of James, which are not often read in church, are the climax of his sustained outbursts against the rich of his church, which began in chapter 2. In yesterday's reading, James gave some advice to the rich about how they should live (4:15), but there is none of this today. Immediately before this passage, the end

of chapter 4 reads 'so then, anyone who knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, commits sin.' (4:17), and this sets the tone of the condemnation we read in these verses.

There are two elements to this passage, each of which adds to the other to make up the whole picture. Firstly, James' warnings about what will happen to the rich (5:1-3), and secondly, his complaint against the rich for their unjust and profoundly selfish practices (5:4-6). Just like much of James' previous teaching (as we saw particularly in chapter 1) these warnings sound like an adaptation of Jesus' teaching from the 'Sermon on the Mount'. For example verses 1 and 2 are similar to the well known phrase 'do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal' (Matt 6:19). Other scriptures relate equally well, however. Jesus' parable of the labourers in the vineyard demonstrates God's supreme generosity to those who have worked in His vineyard even for a short period of time yet still deserve the wages promised (Matt 20:1-16). But here, James describes the meanness of the rich who attempt to increase their own wealth by failing to pay their labourers properly. This demonstrates the exact opposite to the generosity of the Father as found in Jesus' parable, and also breaking the ancient and revered moral code of Leviticus 'You shall not defraud your neighbour; you shall not steal; and you shall not keep for yourself the wages of a labourer until morning' (Lev 19:13). Finally, James' last complaint in verse 6 sounds very similar to Jesus' warning to the Pharisees about those who had 'murdered the prophets' (Matt 23:31). There is no mistake, these are very strong words.

The excesses of wealth and the sins of those who sustain their position of power through fraud and the abuse of the poor is only half the story. The second element in James' attack is his complaint about the consequences of the such misuse of wealth (5:4-6). In the Old Testament, such immoral behaviour was quoted by the prophets as contributing to the downfall of the kingdoms of both Israel and Judah (2 Kings 17; 24ff). These two cataclysmic events in the life of God's people gave rise to Old Testament prophecies about the 'day of the Lord' (Amos 5:8, Joel 2:1, Isaiah 13:9 etc.) and this led earlier Jews to expect the coming of the Messiah, which, in turn, inspired the Early Church to anticipate the second coming of Christ in glory! As Jesus had done before, James now warned that when the 'Day of the Lord' came, riches and wealth, prestige and power, would all be of no consequence before God Almighty; 'it will eat you up like fire, for you have piled up treasure in the last days.' (5:3).

James describes a 'Final Judgement' of the unjust rich, and from this point on, he speaks with pastoral care and sensitivity about the needs of God's people. This passage is unpleasant reading, particularly for people who have relative wealth. These warnings are not unique to James' letter, but they are consistent with the rest of Scripture, being a constant reminder of the power of wealth to draw us into evil. However, by the grace of God, these words never dismiss the possibility of people with means being used by the Lord in productive and remarkable ways, because they are able to make wealth available for all manner of good and necessary work for God's Kingdom, within the church. James' whole theme also reminds us of the importance of being led by God in the use of all we possess. If we surrender all to Him, He will enable us to use our all for Him.

Questions (for use in groups)

1. What do these words of James teach us today, and are there any other passages of scripture that are reflected in this passage?
2. What sermons could be preached upon this passage of scripture?
3. What hope is given in scripture for those who are rich? Can you recall any text that describes hope for eternal life to the rich?

Discipleship

Some of the discipleship issues found in this text

- *The evil trappings of wealth*
- *The godlessness of injustice and corruption*

Personal comments from the author:

It is not easy to read these words from James, though it is helpful to know that this completes a theme that has dominated the letter of James. Perhaps, I often wonder, Satan has directed us away from this important message about wealth in James, by discrediting the book in the eyes of many because of the 'faith verses works' argument found earlier. If that is the case, we should do our best to allow the letter to speak to us as it is, and not coloured by our prejudices.

Ideas for exploring discipleship issues

- *Make an assessment of your 'wealth'. It may be that in common with many people in Western countries, you have a good lifestyle, but little real 'wealth'. Pray about how you use your resources for the Lord.*
- *What does this passage say to you, or is it one of those passages you leave to one side as if it refers to others and not to you?*

Final Prayer

Thank You, Lord Jesus,
For the wonder of love,
For happiness and friends,
For the joy of fellowship,
For overcoming trials,
For all that is past,
For hopes and for the future.
Thank You, Lord Jesus,
For our salvation in You.
AMEN
