



Until the Lord Comes
James 5:1-8

The Church at Canyon Creek, Austin, Texas
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Last Saturday, we were at a wedding, and did not hear about the incident in Charlottesville until Sunday night. So, this morning, I want to respond to Charlottesville.

On behalf of the elders of The Church at Canyon Creek, we stand, and ask you to stand with us, condemning the hate, violence, and racism we witnessed in Charlottesville last weekend. We grieve this event that reveals the ugly truth that racism still exists in our country. And we believe this grieves the heart of God as well. His love, and His grace through His Son Jesus, extend to every person on this earth. The Bible says, "God shows no partiality ... in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him" (Acts 10:34). When the Apostle John was allowed a glimpse into heaven, this is what he wrote. "I saw a vast crowd, too great to count, from every nation and tribe and people and language, standing in front of the throne and before the Lamb" (Revelation 7:9). Heaven will be filled with every color, because the gospel is for every color. May God purify our hearts of any racism or hate or discrimination that lingers in us. May the Lord help us be healers of our land. And may the Lord empower us to share the gospel of hope, the only hope, that is found in Jesus Christ. We hope you believe that, and that it will shape the way you live your life.

I want to explain my personal disdain for racism.

- I grew up in a segregated town of 3,000 people in North Louisiana.
- I grew up seeing "Whites Only" signs over water fountains, restroom doors, and in restaurant windows. The local theater was segregated too; blacks had to sit in the balcony.
- In 1966, our school "complied" with integration by allowing one black girl to attend our high school. I was a first grader, and I remember the day in the lunchroom when several white high school boys took tomatoes and bombarded that black girl.
- A few years later, when integration was fully enforced, private schools popped up all over the South, many with Christian in the name. The same thing happened in North Louisiana. I remember one Sunday morning in our church, families who sent their children to the new private school sat on one side of the church and families who kept their children in integrated public school sat on the other side of the church. The town, the church, and the youth ministry were split.
- I remember one Sunday morning, when a well-dressed black man walked into our church, only to be abruptly turned around and escorted out by one of the deacons.
- I remember the day we were eating lunch at a local cafe, and the cafe owner cursed a black man who came in and ordered him to get out of his restaurant. After which, all the white people laughed and went back to eating their lunches.
- I hate that past. And for a time, I thought we were beyond that and had made progress.
- While I was in Atlanta, our pastoral staff took a field trip to the Martin Luther King Center. We were looking at one sobering display and overheard a black high student say, "This is why I hate white people." That grieved us.

- Another thing that grieved me was the experience of a black friend of mine in our small group. I'll call him James. James is a family man, well-educated, dresses professionally. There's nothing about James that would indicate he is dangerous. James has several daughters, and he told me that time and time again, when shopping for his daughters in the little girls' section, white mothers pull their children close and keep a safe distance away. That breaks my heart. This is one of the most godly men you'll ever meet.
- The Senior Pastor of our church in Atlanta was African-American. This was a big deal because our church of 3,000 only had a handful of black families. Over time, we were proud to see our church become about 25% diverse. One Sunday, he and I sat on stage and shared our personal experiences with race. Our experiences were very different. That Sunday, we displayed a friendship that respected color, that worked together, that loved each other. And that day, we challenged our people to love like Jesus. We challenged parents to raise their children in a different way, refusing to pass on the attitudes of the past.

What I witnessed as a kid left a sour taste in my mouth, and thankfully, God gave me a disdain for racism. I hope you share that disdain as well.

This morning, I want to take that emotion and disdain and use it as we look at James 5. If we condemn the sin on the streets of Charlottesville, we must be willing to condemn the sin in this room. Of course, we must confess any racism in our hearts. But we must also condemn and confess *any sin* in our hearts. Because any sin in this room is just as grievous to God as racism. So, here's the challenge. ***Are you willing to take the disdain you feel for the sin in Charlottesville and apply it to the sin in your own life?*** Are you willing to hate the sin exposed in James 5? Are you willing to hate the sin exposed in you?

What sin am I talking about? Let's find out by reading James 5.

¹Come now, you rich, weep and howl for the miseries that are coming upon you. ²Your riches have rotted and your garments are moth-eaten. ³Your 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.

⁴Behold, 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.

⁵You have lived on the earth in luxury and in self-indulgence. You have fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter. ⁶You have condemned and murdered the righteous person. He does not resist you.

⁷Be 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. ⁸You too, be patient. Strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is near. (James 5:1-8, ESV).¹

Wealth is dangerous. Yes, we have to make a living to eat and put a roof over our heads. We've got to make money to survive. But wealth is dangerous. Because wealth allows us to buy pleasure, comfort, and security. And when we're able to buy those things, we tend to trust God

less. We also tend to enjoy this world more. Wealth allows us to make our lives more and more comfortable. Without noticing, our energy is spent on things that don't matter and don't last. And instead of living for God's purpose, we live for our pleasure. I've said it before, and I believe it. The greatest threat to the American Christian is suburban comfort.

Our greatest need is to hear the Apostle John's great statement of commitment. Our greatest need is that John's prayer become our prayer. John said, "He must increase, but I must decrease" (John 3:30, NAS). I believe John's words sum up what James was saying. John wanted his life to be more and more about Jesus, and less and less about him. That's the attitude we should have in response to James 5. Our prayer should be ... *May my life be more and more about Your purpose, and less and less about my comfort.*

TO THE RICH ... AND THAT INCLUDES ALL OF US

James is writing to Christians, when he says, "Come now, you rich, weep and howl for the miseries that are coming upon you" (James 5:1, ESV). Who is James addressing? The rich. And who are the "rich?" Anyone who makes more money than you, right? Because we don't think we're rich, but we are.

Compared to the rest of the world, we are very rich. The average household income for our area of Austin is \$100,000 a year. So let me ask you, how rich are you if you make \$100,000 a year. You rank in the top 1% of the richest people in the world. You make more than 99%, or 6.93 billion people in the world. Let that sink in. In fact, you only need to make \$34,000 a year to be in the top 1% of the richest people in the world. But you probably don't feel rich do you? I don't either.

This shirt cost about \$40, so did these jeans. My belt cost about \$40 too. My shoes cost \$100 and my socks about \$6. If I add my wedding ring, which was about \$500 34 years ago, everything I'm wearing cost about \$726. Would you say I'm rich? Well, \$726 is the annual income for 50% of the world's population. About 3.5 billion people in the world live on \$2 a day!

Compared to the rest of the world, we are rich.

And James is telling us that wealth is dangerous. Be careful with what you do with your wealth, and be careful what it does to you. Because if your source of pleasure and comfort and security is your wealth, then one day you are going to experience great grief. That's why James said, "Weep and howl for the miseries that are coming upon you." One day, that which you have trusted and taken so much pleasure in will be gone.

"Your riches have rotted and your garments are moth-eaten. 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" (James 5:2-3, ESV). James is saying the same thing Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount.² Jesus said, "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Matthew 6:21). Don't put your security in stuff. Because stuff rots and stuff rusts.

Paul told Timothy, “Instruct those who are rich in this present world not to be conceited or to fix their hope on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly supplies us with all things” (1 Timothy 6:17, NAS).

James said that materialism will be “evidence against you ... in the last days.” The wealth you have hoarded will one day be evidence against you when you stand before God.

James went on to confront those who got wealthy by cheating other people. “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 ... You have condemned and murdered the righteous person. He does not resist” (James 5:4, 6, ESV). Their cries “have reached the ears of the Lord.” God knows how you made your money. If you got rich by cheating other people, you will be held accountable by God.

But verse 5 is the main indictment. “You have lived on the earth in luxury and in self-indulgence. You have fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter” (James 5:5, ESV). “A day of slaughter,” that’s the third time James referred to the judgment of God. So what’s the crime?

“You have lived on the earth in luxury and in self-indulgence.” That’s why wealth is dangerous. The Greek word for “luxury” refers to extravagance, to softness, to comfort, to having a lot of stuff. The second Greek word for “self-indulgence” refers to satisfying our desires. From the size of your house to the car you drive, from the restaurants you eat to the vacations you take, from the toys you buy to the entertainment you enjoy, it’s indulging in anything you want.

The problem with wealth is best described in parable by Jesus, in which He warns us about putting security in our wealth. Jesus said,

“Beware! Guard against every kind of greed. Life is not measured by how much you own.” Then he told them a story: “A rich man had a fertile farm that produced fine crops. The rich man said to himself, ‘What should I do? I don’t have room for all my crops.’ Then he said, ‘I know! I’ll tear down my barns and build bigger ones. Then I’ll have enough room to store all my wheat and other goods. And I’ll sit back and say to myself, “You have enough stored away for years to come. Now take it easy! Eat, drink, and be merry!” ’ But God said to him, ‘You fool! You will die this very night. Then who will get everything you worked for?’ ” And then Jesus said, “A person is a fool to store up earthly wealth but not have a rich relationship with God.” (Luke 12:15-21, NLT).

A lot of money can buy a lot of stuff; but a lot of money cannot buy happiness or provide ultimate security in God.

The problem is not being rich. The problem is loving the comfort that money can buy. The problem is trusting in the security that money can buy. There’s nothing wrong with being rich, but there is everything wrong when riches replace one’s love and trust in God. “When they became satisfied, they became proud and forgot Me” (Hosea 13:6). As Jesus said, “For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (Matthew 6:21).

James confronts the rich. Most of us don’t feel rich, but we are. Most don’t think we live in luxury, but we do. So, what are we to do with James 5?

Here's my answer. Ask the Holy Spirit. *Ask the Holy Spirit if there are any adjustments you need to make.* Do you need to change your attitude about money? Do you need to admit that you love comfort too much? Do you need to admit that you put your security in money, rather than trusting in God? Do you need to adjust your spending? Or your giving? And what about your spiritual temperature? If we spend more time agonizing over paint colors for your house, than agonizing about the lost in your neighborhood, then James 5 exposes your spiritual complacency.

What should you do with James 5? Ask the Holy Spirit if there are any adjustments that you need to make. And make this your prayer. *May my life be more and more about Your purpose, and less and less about my comfort.*

UNTIL THE LORD COMES

James writes to the rich, and that includes all of us. And what he writes next is for all of us too. It is an exhortation. An exhortation is a challenge, a warning, a word of urgency. It's like teaching a child that they must look both ways before they cross the street. It's that fundamental and it's that important.

“Be patient, therefore, brothers, until the coming of the Lord” (James 5:7, ESV).

James used the word “patient” three times in these verses. The Greek word means long-suffering. He's talking about endurance, about perseverance. He's talking about being faithful. He's talking about waiting and watching, and living in anticipation of the coming of Jesus Christ. James is saying, “Hang on! Jesus is almost here.”

He repeats himself in verse 8, “You too, be patient. Strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is near” (James 5:8, NAS). “Strengthen your hearts.” Stand firm. Hold on to your faith. “Hang on! Jesus is almost here.”

The Bible says that one day, “The Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God ... (and we) meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord” (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17). Jesus said, “Be on the alert, for you do not know the day your Lord is coming” (Matthew 24:42). And then in the book of Revelation, He promised, “Behold, I am coming!” (Revelation 22:7). And the Bible also promises this. “When He appears ... we shall see Him just as He is” (1 John 3:2).

It will be a great day of joy. It will also be a sober day of accountability. Instead of living to make your life more comfortable, live for the day when you will see Jesus. Live with an eternal perspective. “Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth” (Colossians 3:2).³ “Do not love the world or the things in the world” (1 John 2:15).

What does it mean to have an eternal perspective?

- an eternal perspective looks to God for the definition of life and for direction in life
- an eternal perspective finds purpose in God's purpose

- an eternal perspective shapes our priorities; instead of wanting to make life comfortable, wanting to make life count
- an eternal perspective lives in humble submission to God, rather than living with pride and self-reliance
- an eternal perspective changes how we view ourselves; our identity is not in our resume or our achievements; our identity is as children of God
- an eternal perspective changes who we're trying to please; choosing to please God, living according to His values, instead of living to please self
- an eternal perspective realizes that one day we will be held accountable by God, one day we will have to answer for how we lived this one and only life
- an eternal perspective helps us see pain as temporary
- an eternal perspective allows us to see death as a door
- an eternal perspective makes everything in this world less attractive
- an eternal perspective realizes that this world is not our home

Paul said, "For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ" (Philippians 3:20, NAS). And, it was with that eternal perspective that Paul also said, "For me, to live is Christ and to die is gain" (Philippians 1:21, NAS). For Paul, life was about faithfully serving Jesus. And death was about finally seeing Jesus. So, whether he lived or died, it was all about Jesus.

CONCLUSION

What should you do with James 5? One, beware of wealth. Wealth is dangerous. You may not feel rich, but when compared to the rest of the world, you are. Be careful what wealth does to you. Don't spend your life making it more and more comfortable. And don't put your security in wealth.

Two, ask the Holy Spirit if there are any adjustments that you need to make. Any adjustments to your attitude. Any adjustments to your spending or giving. Any adjustments to your spiritual focus. And make this your prayer. ***May my life be more and more about Your purpose, and less and less about my comfort.***

Three, "Strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is near" (James 5:8). "Hang on! Jesus is almost here." I want us to end by focusing on the words of this hymn as our final prayer.

*Turn your eyes upon Jesus,
Look full in His wonderful face,
And the things of earth will grow strangely dim,
In the light of His glory and grace.*

NOTES

¹ Verse 8 is NAS, as the translation “strengthen your hearts” is more accurate.

² See Matthew 6:19-21.

³ See 2 Corinthians 4:18 which says, “Fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.”