

## Symptoms of the Love of Money Part 2

*Epistle of James*

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**Bible Text:** James 5:1-6  
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Please turn with me in your Bibles to James 5, and as you turn, I do want to remind you of the season of prayer that we began last Sunday, September 30<sup>th</sup>. We've asked the congregation to join us in praying, the elders have asked you to join us in praying for the next six weeks in just a particularly focused way for God's will to be done in this body. We've had space issues. I just figured out our problem we just need to send people camping every week. No problem. Problem solved. One week of prayer. Okay, no, forgive me. But really seriously, we have started having space issues, parking issues, and probably the biggest area of concern when we have a large attendance on Sunday is the nurseries, and so we're trying to figure out how to accommodate, minister well to the people that God has given us and so we have asked you to pray with us that we would just follow the Lord; that we would not miss the mark of really keeping the main things the main things and what we talked about is the main thing is building the spiritual building, not the physical buildings, the main thing to God is the spiritual building that the church is; that we are all as Peter says in 1 Peter 2, each believer is a living stone being built into a spiritual house. So we're all stones being built together into a spiritual house for sacrifices of praise to be offered to God, so the church itself is the building. Not the church building, we like to think that the church is the building. No, the church isn't the building, the church is the people and that is the spiritual building.

So we want to keep priorities where priorities need to be so that's one of the reasons we've asked for prayer as we consider this, as well as there are a number of options and we want to be wise in the way that we do go about doing physical buildings if we do that, because those are tools that God uses to build the spiritual building. So anyway, be looking again for a prayer guide. If you didn't get the prayer guide last week, let us know. Send an email to Bethany White [bwhite@providenceduluth.org](mailto:bwhite@providenceduluth.org) is her email, first initial, last name is how we all our emails work except for me, I go ahead and add my second [tyblackburn@providenceduluth.org](mailto:tyblackburn@providenceduluth.org) instead of tblackburn. Anyway, so Bethany, send her a note and she'll be happy to send you that email from last week and we'd like to ask you to consider using that in your family devotions as a means of praying with us during this season and we'll be sending a new one out tomorrow. Each Monday you should receive one for the next five weeks.

James 5:1-6. We began looking at this message a couple of weeks ago and talked about the love of money and the danger of the love of money, and then last week we titled our consideration of these verses "Symptoms of the Love of Money," and began looking and looked at the first symptom and I want to look at the next two today, the second and third symptoms of the love of money that I think James is talking about in this chapter, this passage, verses 1 to 6. I want to remind you what we said last time and as we read it in a moment you'll see this, that what's interesting about this passage is that James is, in a sense, has turned aside from his main audience that he's writing his letter to. The letter, the epistle of James is written to believers throughout Palestine, the surrounding areas, Jewish believers who've been dispersed through persecution and times of famine, things like that. They've been spread out and so James was basically the pastor of the church in Jerusalem essentially, key leader at the church in Jerusalem, and so he has a shepherd's heart for these believers, these Jewish believers in Jesus, and so he writes this letter to encourage them to walk in a manner worthy of the calling which they've received; to be doers of the word.

So he's dealing with very practical issues of faith in their lives and encouraging them but in these verses, what we noted last time is that there's no encouragement and it's just judgment because James, in a sense, turns aside from the people he's writing to, the believers, and he speaks directly to the ungodly rich who are oppressing the believers. He does this in the spirit of the Old Testament prophets. You see this throughout the Old Testament prophets, Isaiah to Malachi, they will pronounce woes upon enemies of Israel. You know, "Woe upon Edom. Or woe upon Philistia. Woe upon Babylon. Assyria." When they do that, it wasn't that Isaiah or Jeremiah or Ezekiel believed that they were supposed to go themselves and hand deliver the message to Moab or Philistia or Edom. No, they were pronouncing God's judgment on them but it was really, the reason that judgment was being pronounced verbally in the words of Scripture was to comfort the people of God. He was saying it in their hearing, the Old Testament people of God, in their hearing so that they might take comfort that God sees the oppression that they're under and that they also might flee from this kind of ungodliness. And James is doing the same thing. He's not intending this six verses to be a tract that are sent out to the ungodly rich, it's part of this letter he's writing to believers but he's writing to them and he turns aside and he chastises these ungodly rich people that are oppressing them for the comfort of those to whom he had originally been addressing. To encourage them, "God sees. God knows what you're going through and God is not a dispassionate observer. He is passionately committed to his people, faithful to his promises. He will deal with those who oppress his people."

We're to get comfort from that but we also in getting the comfort from that, we said that there's another point to this in that he's speaking directly to those ungodly rich, indirectly to the believing Jews to whom he writes, and the direct message is judgment is coming to the ungodly. The indirect message is be comforted and be warned. Don't aspire as a temptation, don't aspire to become wealthy for the purposes for which these people are wealthy. Don't be like them. If God gives you the blessing of wealth, don't misuse it the way they have. In fact, it's better not to desire it. In fact, that's essentially what 1 Timothy 6 says, that those who want to be wealthy enter into many temptations. Well, if we saw

wealth correctly, we would see it's something that if God gives you that, it's a responsibility to steward it well. Be careful. It's not that it's bad, no, it's a blessing but it's a potential danger.

So that's essentially what he's doing, he's warning us. So what we have then is at the same time we have a direct message and an indirect message. The direct message is essentially charges against the ungodly rich. He basically charges them with, it's a four-count indictment. You're hoarding. You're withholding wages. You're living for pleasure and you're mistreating righteous people. Four charges. We looked at the first last time. But those four directly to them, four charges are indirectly to us four symptoms that we need to watch out for in our own hearts. Do you follow that? So that's what we're doing, we're looking at the charge to the ungodly and then indirectly at the warning to us. Last time we looked at the issue of hoarding. This time we're going to look at the second and third, withholding pay from those who have earned it, and living for pleasure.

So let's read verses 1 to 6, James 5.

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 mowed 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.

Let's go to the Lord in prayer.

*Our Father, we thank you for your precious word. We thank you that it speaks to every area of life. It is an all-sufficient word. It gives us everything that is necessary for life and godliness. It gives us everything that is necessary to equip and to furnish us for every good work to which you call us. We pray now that your Spirit might apply it to our hearts to that end that you might convict of sin and righteousness in judgment; that you might call out more repentance from those who have already become believers; that we might repent more fully and believe more fully. And for those who have not yet come to salvation, may today be the day of salvation. Lord, grant your grace through the power of your word and the ministry of your Spirit we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.*

So today we're going to look at two points. So today is point 1 and point 2, but in a sense it's point 2 and point 3, right, of the whole outline. We're looking at the second charge which is also the second symptom and we're looking then at the third charge and the third symptom, okay? We're going to sort of look at two points under part A and part B. We're going to look at them directly and indirectly.

So the second charge that he makes against the ungodly rich in this passage is there in verse 4, "Behold, the pay of the laborers who mowed 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," the Lord of the heavenly armies. The first word that we want to look at here is the word "pay." In the NASB, the pay. Other translations say the wages, the ESV and the NIV say the wages. Behold the wages of the laborers. The King James says the hire of the laborers. In fact, the verb form of this word means "to hire out workers." It was a word familiar to the people that received this because many of them, probably most of them, the bread earners in the church were day laborers because that's what the working poor were in the first century. They were people who worked jobs, they worked for farmers, rich farmers and they were paid a daily wage, a denarius. They were paid what they were hired to do, a wage that was agreed upon, accepted beforehand.

You see this actually, Jesus uses this same imagery in Matthew 20:1-8, the parable of the workers in the vineyard and you see as he introduces that parable, he says there was a certain man who had a vineyard, and he goes out to find and hire laborers for the vineyard. There was a place where people who wanted to work, day laborers, gathered and people who had work would go and hire them. The crop is in, I need laborers. I don't need them every day. I don't pay you a salary every day like many of the jobs nowadays are. No, you go and you hire somebody for that day and so you hire them for that day, many times they've been doing without as it is, they need their pay and you agree upfront. That's what happens, Jesus meets the people and there is a 12-hour work day was the standard Jesus talks about and he gets those guys at the beginning of the day and he says, "Okay, you're going to work for me the whole day and we agree to a denarius." That's the agreed upon wage. "I've hired you for a day." A denarius is the standard day's wage and so that's what they agree upon. Then of course, later he hires at the third hour, the sixth hour, the ninth hour, and the eleventh hour, that is some guys worked 12 hours, some guys worked nine, some guys worked six, some guys worked three and some guys only worked one and the scandal of it, remember, is that they're all paid from the last to the first, the guys who get there last get paid first, so the guys that have been working 12 hours get to watch the first guys that work one hour get paid, remember, and what do they get paid? The guy that's worked one hour gets paid a denarius and the guy that works three hours gets paid a denarius. Anyway, the guys that worked 12 hours are thinking they're going to get more money and they don't. They get a denarius and the landowner says, "Did we not agree? Is it not the right and fair wage? Isn't that what we agreed to? Are you envious that I am generous to these other guys, I'm good to them?"

Now I want to tell you, we read that in family devotions not too long ago and we had a long discussion on that because it is a tough one. Hey, shouldn't they have gotten 1/12<sup>th</sup> of a denarius, that guy that worked one hour? You know, 3/12<sup>th</sup>, a quarter of a denarius, a half of a denarius, three quarters of a denarius. I can do the math for you if you need some help. No, he gave a denarius to all of them because God is generous and God's free to give more than what is earned, but he doesn't give less. That's the key and we'll talk

more about that in a moment when we talk about the application of how we need to learn to apply this to the symptom of the love of money.

But the point is you would hire out workers and you would agree to pay them and apparently these rich people are withholding the pay they agreed to give. In fact, the word "withheld" in verse 4 has the idea and is translated by the ESV this way, "kept back by fraud; by deceit; unfairness; fraudulent terms." You know, "You didn't do what you needed to do. Even though you did, I'm saying you didn't and I'm not going to pay you. Or I'll pay you when I'm able to." Kept back by fraud. This image would have had a powerful resonance with most of James's readers because as I mentioned, they were part of the working poor. In the first century, particularly in the land of Palestine and Syria and these areas, the chasm between rich and poor was great and there really wasn't a middle class. Most people lived hand-to-mouth working day-to-day.

Listen to what Moo says, Douglas Moo says in his commentary on James 5. He says the strongly marked socioeconomic class distinction that James described which is presupposed in his correspondence, this strongly marked socioeconomic class distinction corresponds closely to what we know of conditions in first century Palestine. A small group of wealthy landowners and merchants accumulated over time more and more power while large numbers of people were forced from their land, to sell their land and they grew even poorer. Most of James's readers probably belonged to this class of poor agricultural laborers. They were people whose families formerly owned farms and had a measure of wealth and now they don't, and not only are they living hand-to-mouth but they're being oppressed by the wealthy who are withholding their pay. It's a lot bigger deal to withhold the pay of someone who lives hand-to-mouth, especially in that day, than it is for us to be late on paying a bill. In our society where credit is freely available, we have social programs that provide food, imagine if you lived in a day when what you get at the end of the day is what you go buy the food that your family is going to eat that night and the next day, and when your boss is supposed to pay you and he doesn't pay you because maybe he's just too busy, "Couldn't get back. I had so many things going on. I couldn't get back to give out the paychecks, to give out the denarii, so we'll get it to you when I can." That means the worker goes home and his family, his children go to bed hungry. There's no food to prepare for the next day.

That's a big deal. That's a big deal to them. It's not a big deal to the wealthy person, though, because he's only interpreting things in view of his own circumstances. He's not thinking about that person, and if he is, he doesn't care, but God cares and that's the emphatic emphasis of this verse. The money that you've withheld by fraud, look at the next word I want to call your attention to, "cries out." The pay is crying out against you. Then he says, "and the outcry of those who did the harvesting has reached the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth." I think James is using those words which you find in a couple of different passages in the Greek Old Testament, this verb "cries out" you find in Genesis 4 where Cain, remember Cain kills his brother Abel and God then comes and says, "Where is your brother?" "Am I my brother's keeper?" God says, "His blood is crying out to me from the earth." The blood that you spilled that went in and mingled with the earth and

the dust of the earth, that blood is crying out to God. What does that mean? The injustice, the wickedness is crying out to God for his righteous wrath to be revealed.

Another one of the words, that word "outcry" is found in Genesis 18 and 19 in the Greek translation of the Old Testament. Genesis 18 and 19 is the story of Sodom and Gomorrah. Three times the Lord speaks of the outcry from Sodom and Gomorrah. What is that? The incredible wickedness that is going on, the oppression, the sexual oppression and sin that is going on in unmitigated fashion that's evidenced, remember, when the angels go down, the angels look like people, they go down and remember the people of Sodom surround the house and they want these two men to be given by Lot so that they can have sexual relations with them, to gang rape them. Such is the wickedness of the place of Sodom God said, "The outcry has reached my ears." And what does God do when the outcry reaches his ears? He deals with it.

So imagine you're now a person who hasn't been thinking about how you've been impacting people, you haven't been paying your wages on time, you've had workers you've been taking advantage of them because you want to maybe earn a little more interest on your money before you pay, and James says the outcry of their pain has reached the ears of God. Then he says not the ears of God, he said the ears of Lord Sabaoth, the Lord of the heavenly armies. Lord Sabaoth occurs like 245 times in the Bible and like 223 of them are in the prophets, and the prophets are always saying this, "Judgment is coming. The Lord of the Heavenly Armies is on the move and he is coming to dispense justice." It's a terrifying word to those who are oppressing and it's to comfort us that God sees the oppression of the wicked.

Now that's the direct focus of this charge, let's look at the indirect call to us to look at this. Is this a symptom in my life? Is this a symptom in your life? Do you withhold the wages of those who have worked for you? Do you treat fairly the people who serve you, offer goods and services to you? Do you pay them on time? Now I know generally because credit, plastic and stuff, most people have access to still eat but this really says something. Do you think about? Really the bigger issue is do you care about the people who serve you? Do you see them as people with needs or are you just trying to always save back yourself and to withhold money from them for your own benefit? How do you treat the waiter or the waitress?

Now unbelievers, you know, God's more concerned about believers but he's concerned about all people. He doesn't want us to mistreat anyone. He tells them in the Old Testament, "You're to treat the stranger and the foreigner with kindness. When they come into your land and they're strangers and foreigners, you treat them with kindness because you were strangers and aliens in Egypt." So we're to treat all men with kindness. We're not to mistreat any but especially you'd better be kind to believers. You'd better be kind to everyone but especially those who have been bought with the blood of Christ.

Peter makes this kind of distinction when he says in 1 Peter 2, he says, "Honor all men. Fear God." Then he says, no I'm sorry, I messed it up. He says, "Honor the king. Fear God. Honor all men. Love the brotherhood." Do you see the distinction? You honor the

king, you honor all men, but you fear God and you love the brotherhood because God calls us to that.

Well, the question is: how do we do? Are we mindful? I think that's the thing. Is our heart moved? Is it concerned about others? Are we only thinking about the poor service we received? Are we thinking about this person's soul? I'm not saying that we should overtip. I'm not trying to tell you, get into your business that much except to say that what you need to understand and I need to understand is every spending decision, every single one, every spending decision is a spiritual decision for which you are accountable to God. Every single one. He owns everything and we're just stewards and we're going to give an account and he cares about how we spend our money.

Back to the parable of the workers in the vineyard, think about how God is. We're representatives of God. If you belong to Jesus Christ, you bear his name and you are to extend his kingdom, you are to be an ambassador for him to unbelievers. You're to be like him. You're to be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect. Well, what is he like? That comes right after he says, "You've heard it said love your brothers and hate your enemies, but I say to you love your enemies. If you want to be sons of your Father who is in heaven, love your enemies because your Father who's in heaven causes it to rain on the just and the unjust." He blesses the unjust and the ungodly so he shows love to all people. That's what he's saying, God loves all people. There's a sense in which God loves everyone, yes, and the only reason people are in hell is because they reject his love, and there's also the sense of his electing love, the mystery of how that works. But the point of a passage like Matthew 5 is God loves all, why don't you and I love everyone? If we want to be like our Father, we must seek that. We need to pray for that.

But back to the parable of the workers in the vineyard, think about that, Jesus tells us that parable to say these folks, I mean, they worked these different hours, like I said one hour, three hours, six hours, nine hours or 12 hours. What they needed and a 12-hour denarius was good pay for a 12-hour day and it would give that person what they needed for their family to begin to take care of their family in a good way. But he gave a denarius to everyone. Why? Well, he's showing us the bigger picture about the kingdom. We all get the same reward of heaven however long you serve him. That's part of it but think this way, I said they're living hand-to-mouth, these guys are out there and they're needing a job because their family is hungry. How much do each of those day laborers need to take care of their family? They probably all need a denarius. They need what it takes to provide for a family no matter how much they work. You see, he's not just thinking about what's owed and what's right, he's thinking about what's needed. Do you see that?

So I'm not saying that we should always overpay people 12 times what they're worth. I'm not saying that but I'm saying when someone is dependent, living hand-to-mouth, be extra careful with them. If you're talking to the car salesman who is really wearing the Rolex watch and he's trying to negotiate you into buying, be wise as serpents, harmless as a dove even there. He's not going to go hungry because you worked down to a better price. He's not going to sell you the car for something that he's not going to make money on. Remember he's going to tell you that, "I'm just going to bat for you. I've got to go and

talk to my boss." I've been through that. There's a place for wisdom but when you're talking about somebody who's working for you who's living hand-to-mouth or who might be, be careful, and even in dealing with a car dealer, be godly because every spending decision is a spiritual decision.

So I want to be prudent and not waste money that belongs to God and I think that's so helpful if we just remember that. In negotiation be praying, "Lord, it's your money. I need a vehicle. I think this guy may be trying to take advantage of us. Help me have wisdom." Be prudent, you know, take it and let a mechanic look at it. Talk to somebody about it, whatever, I'm not saying that you don't do that but pray, "I want to do what honors you." And when we're thinking about paying someone whether we think they did a great job or not so great job, pray before you do it and try to do it in love even if it's holding back to say, "You didn't do the work." Be loving and kind and in no case be unjust to your own benefit.

Better to err on the side of being taken advantage of. That's why Paul says that in 1 Corinthians 6. Remember, you guys are going to court against each other as believers, so believers shouldn't be doing that. "What are you doing? I mean, we're going to judge angels and you're letting the ungodly judge disputes in the church? This is insane!" Paul says. He says, "Better to be taken advantage of than to do this terrible witness before unbelievers." It's the kingdom that we want most. So if the kingdom is what we want most, then be wise, be prudent, yes, do what's right but really make it a spiritual act. Pray and ask God for wisdom.

The second thing we're looking at today is the third point. That was our second point. Our first point today, second point was the charge really of injustice if you would put a heading over that one. They treated people in the way they handled money with injustice. The next one we want to look at is the charge of indulgence. Indulgence. This is a charge, remember, from directly a charge against the ungodly rich for what they're doing and then, secondarily, indirectly, it will be a symptom for us to evaluate in our own hearts.

The charge of indulgence. Verse 5 is where this charge is laid out and he says it in emphatic terms by using three different verbs to basically make one charge. He says, "You have," first verb, "lived luxuriously." That's one verb in the Greek, "lived," but "luxuriously," the adverb in English helps us to communicate what that verb really means. "You have lived luxuriously on the earth," first part of this charge; secondly, "You've led a life of wanton pleasure"; thirdly, "You've fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter." I mean, the idea is just complete self-centered indulgence. Living exclusively for pleasure for one's self. The idea of living luxuriously comes from a verb which speaks of delicate living. One of the word study tools I have says self-indulgence that destroys the integrity of both body and mind. This is a Greek word that was used negatively of living so that you actually were messing up who you are as a person. So decadent.

It says, "You've been living this way." That's the first part of that charge. You've lived luxuriously. Then he says, "You've led a life of wanton pleasure." This verb speaks of eating, drinking, again luxuriously and in great indulgence, self-gratification to the point



of indulgence. Thirdly, "You've fattened your hearts. You've nourished and fed your heart to the point of fattening," and the picture is pampering one's self. A person who has turned in upon themselves so much that it's all about them, all about pleasure, all about luxury, all about the next enjoyment. He says, "You've done these things in a day of slaughter. You've done them at the most inappropriate time. Judgment is coming. You've done it right before judgment comes. Here you are indulging, indulging, indulging."

I mentioned these three strong verbs. I think he does that, James uses three verbs here to say one thing, in a way that often Scripture does where if you say the same thing three times, it takes it to the superlative degree. He's basically saying, "You are living for your own pleasure to the utmost. That's what you're living for. You're living for pleasure in this world to the utmost and judgment is coming. You're living just for this world and this world is going to end and its end is right at hand. What a fool you've been." That's what he's saying.

Now it's important for us to understand this to really consider that God is not against pleasure. It's very important we understand that. This is a common misconception. Asceticism is not a Christian reality, not strictly speaking. When you say asceticism, strict self-denial for the purpose of making one's self acceptable to God like Buddhist asceticism where you try to have no sense of being moved by pleasure, you have no feeling. That is completely an ungodly mindset. God is not against pleasure. In fact, he created all of the pleasure in the world.

I love that in the "Screwtape Letters," it's one of C. S. Lewis's I think more helpful books even, the "Screwtape Letters," where it's a dialogue. If you've read it, you recall this, but if you haven't read it, it's a dialogue of letters all written by Screwtape to his, Screwtape is a demon who's writing to his nephew who is a demon. So obviously it's an interesting concept for a book. And Screwtape is writing to Wormwood and every letter begins, "My dear Wormwood." He's telling him how to deal with the person that Wormwood is assigned to deceive. Do you get it? So Screwtape giving counsel to this lesser demon, kind of younger demon or whatever, of how to deceive his, he calls, patient. Well Wormwood's patient gets saved and makes Screwtape really mad, and then he's telling him, "Well, now you've got to really work differently but there are still great strategies we have to mess this guy up." So each chapter is about that.

Well, one of the chapters that's really profound, he talks about the pleasures and he says, "Listen, Wormwood, one of the great things that we can use to our advantage is the pleasures of life." He says, "This is something that we have used many times to great effect and gotten men's souls." And he says that the formula is an ever-increasing desire for an ever-diminishing pleasure. Think about that. This is exactly what you see going on in the world all the time, an ever-increasing desire for an ever-diminishing pleasure, and the way that this happens is Satan tries to get us to take the pleasures God has made for our good but to take them in ways or in degrees that God does not intend so that we get outside of God's prescribed means for that pleasure and by doing that, we lose the pleasure itself. That's what Screwtape is saying, that by getting them outside of that or into wanting too much of it or to want it in a wrong way, will actually steal the pleasure

from him. We'll bait it and they'll start having it and they'll go out there and we'll take more and more away so that in the end they have this incredible desire and they're getting nothing in exchange for it. He makes this statement, he says, "That's what really gladdens the heart of our Father," talking about Satan. "What really gladdens the heart of our Father is to get a man's soul and give him nothing in exchange for it."

Think about that. But in the course of that conversation he says, "Listen, pleasures are a great opportunity but remember," now remember these are two demons talking, he says, "whenever we're dealing with pleasure strictly speaking, we are on the Enemy's territory." Do you follow what he's saying? When we deal with pleasure, we're dealing with God's territory, he says, "Because we have never invented a single pleasure," talking about Satan and his demons. "All of our research in trying to build pleasures has become completely fruitless. We haven't invented any pleasures so our formula is to lead people to misuse the pleasures God has given." So what it says is, every pleasure is a gift from God. He's the one that thought of it. He's the one that built it into the fabric of the way he made the world. He's the one who made food to taste good. He's the one who made sex to feel good. He's the one who made all of these things to be enjoyed. Satan's desire is to get you and me to want these things too much beyond the realm that we should, inordinate desires for them, or to want them in ways which God has forbidden.

It's really profound to think about this, that the most ungodly pagan who is pursuing sin in the most reprobate way and we know that they're losing pleasure as they go and this is one of the reasons they're so angry. But whatever pleasure they get in the sin they're pursuing, is actually a gift of a gracious God. We read earlier in Acts 13 that he has satisfied your hearts with good things. Remember that? Acts 14. This is his testimony, his goodness. He gives you seasons and rain and he's satisfied your hearts with good things. God has invented all these things. He's the one who invented all the different flavors of the world; all the different spices came from him and we've just been discovering them. Do you ever think about how do people think to put things, you know, how did you think to take that bean and then mash it up and grind it up, let it sit a while and then turn it into chocolate? I mean, that was a good move whoever did that, right? But it didn't originate with them. God did it and he revealed it. He's unveiling his goodness in all these different things. Then to put chocolate with a little bit of sea salt, that is even better. But it's all from God.

I want to show you something so we understand asceticism is not biblical, turn to 1 Timothy 4. We must watch out for this and we're going to have to fight against our flesh and self-control is a fruit of the Spirit and we want to subdue our desires and keep them under control of the Spirit, not live according to the desires of the flesh, right, but walk in the Spirit, but the pleasures are from God. Look at this, 1 Timothy 4:1-5. Paul is describing to Timothy a type of apostasy that is happening in the church. False teaching has arisen that is basically asceticism. Look what he says, chapter 4, verse 1, 1 Timothy, "But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons, by means of the hypocrisy of liars seared in their own conscience as with a branding iron," look what he says, "men who forbid marriage and advocate abstaining from foods," they're advocating, "Hey, don't

eat any of these pleasurable foods. Don't get married. Don't have sexual relations. You're not supposed to do that. That's dirty. The body is dirty. The pleasures of life are dirty, they're bad." Do you see that? Look what he says, though, "abstaining from foods which God has created to be gratefully shared in by those who believe and know the truth. For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with gratitude; for it is sanctified by means of the word of God and prayer." Everything that God has made is good and the key issue is receiving it from him and sanctifying it with prayer and a surrendered heart to him. This is why Paul says in 1 Corinthians 10:31, "Whether you eat or drink, whatever you do, do all for," what? "For the glory of God."

So these things are good so when James says, "You're living luxuriously," he's not meaning that you shouldn't have pleasure, you shouldn't enjoy a good meal, you should never enjoy. No, he's not saying that at all. He's saying that these ungodly rich, though, have so focused their life, their only reason for living is consuming, enjoying personal enjoyment, personal satisfaction, personal affluence, personal peace and affluence. That's all they're living for and he says that is ungodly.

He says, "You're living for it in a day of slaughter," so that the charge is, "You're living completely self-focused lives. This is why you're withholding. This is why you're not sensitive to other people. This is why you're hoarding. This is why you're doing injustice, because you're just living for yourself. And the timing of it, in a day of slaughter. You're doing this and it's like the sword is coming down on your head even as you speak."

It reminded me as I was thinking about this of that graphic picture in historical reality but of Daniel 5 when Belshazzar, remember, the grandson of Nebuchadnezzar is having that feast, decadent feast in which he is just delighting and having this great party for all of his nobles, they're drinking wine, they're eating to excess, and they're doing and what's interesting, Daniel doesn't tell us this right at the first but we know from what happens at the end, Babylon is surrounded by the Medo-Persian armies who have come to try to overtake it. Darius the Mede, Cyrus the Persian have surrounded the city, but the Babylonians are so confident that Babylon is impregnable that they rather than be concerned about it or taking precautions, they throw this great feast. "We don't have to worry about it." Great walls. The only way into the city when they were walled up was to come through the river and they had it well-guarded.

So there were no worries and remember he sees a hand writing on the wall and he becomes white as a sheet, his knees are knocking together, and the hand writes something, "Mene, mene, tekel, upharsin. You've been weighed in the balance and found wanting and your time is up." And that very night Belshazzar died at the hand of the Medes and the Persians. Babylon was conquered. What did they do? They dammed up the Euphrates River that ran through the city. They dammed it up, diverted it, and walked through on the riverbed and the city was not prepared and they took it almost without a shot fired, figuratively speaking. They killed the king and they took over Babylon.

He says that's what the ungodly rich are doing, they're living like that and judgment is coming so they should be terrified, and if that describes you, you should be terrified. But

the fact that you're hearing it today is an invitation from God to repent and to trust in Jesus. The passage that Ted read earlier from Isaiah 57 spoke of someone at one point who was enjoying luxury to the point of sin, and yet the idea was God will heal. God will forgive. It's always the message. When God even pronounces judgment, what should you do? Run to him and plead the blood of Christ. Don't run away from him, run to him because he is good.

Now, is it a symptom in our life? Do we love luxury and ease? Do we love self-gratification and self-indulgence? Do we love to pamper ourselves? I mean, these are things that certainly all of us have desires for these things. The goal is not asceticism, well, what is it? How do you balance this? I mean, James 1:17, just to show you again that it's not asceticism, James 1:17, "Every good and perfect gift is from above coming down from the Father of lights in whom there is no shadow of turning." God is perfectly good and he gives good gifts. Everything that's good comes from him and is a reflection of him and what we should do is what the psalmist says in Psalm 34:8, "taste and see that the LORD is good."

When you experience pleasure, worship God. When you eat a wonderful meal, praise and thank God, not just ahead of time like praying a blessing hoping that maybe the meat's not tainted or whatever. That's okay too. I'm not saying it's a bad idea to pray but it's talking about sanctifying in prayer, it's just saying that you're trying to protect yourself. No, sanctified, everything we receive is sanctified with the word and prayer is your heart is surrendered to God. Your heart is sanctified to him through the word and prayer so that even as you enjoy these things, you're setting yourself apart unto him so that you're doing it with thanksgiving. I mean, it's so good and it makes it so wonderful to enjoy the blessings of God by saying, "Lord, thank you for making this taste so good. How amazing you are." To enjoy the gift not just separate from the Giver but as a part and extension of the Giver because what we want to do is learn to see the gift and in receiving the gift, not love the gift and treasure the gift and turn away from God with the gift, but we want to receive the gift, look to God and let that gift make us long more for him. "This is so good and it comes from you. I want you more."

That's what we're called to do, thank God and enjoy God in his gifts, what he gives us, and anticipate heaven. If this is this good in this sin-sick world, if something can be that wonderful, what must heaven be like? If this is just a taste of your goodness, what must it be like to be in your presence?

Jonathan Edwards says it so well. He says God is the highest good, listen to this, God is the highest good of the reasonable creature. The enjoyment of him is our proper end and the enjoyment of God is the only happiness with which our souls can be truly satisfied. To go to heaven fully to enjoy God is infinitely better than the most pleasant accommodations here, better than fathers and mothers, husbands, wives or children, or the company of any or all earthly friends. These are but shadows but the enjoyment of God is the substance. These are but scattered beams but God is the sun. These are but streams but God is the fountain. These are but drops but God is the ocean. That's the reality.

So if we receive these things from God and we don't let them become an obstacle so what we have to do, what does that look like? It means that when we're eating we learn to pray. So I'll tell you, it's amazing how fast I can eat. You know, I always want to blame that on, I think my mom used to explain that away for me too in a kind way, at school you only have 15 minutes to eat lunch. Remember that in the old days when you went to public school? Like herd them in and, man, you did have to eat in a hurry, right? Well, but I can eat really fast and you're eating a really good meal and suddenly you realize it's gone and you're like, "What happened?" Well then, what we do a lot of times is we just go and get more. One of the things I've tried to do in recent years and you can pray for me in this when you think about it yourself, you can pray for me and I'll try to pray for you as well, is slow down and worship God and thank him and enjoy him and even talk with him about how much I'm eating. Now that's risky because he's going to tell you to stop eating before you want to but it will be better. Slow down, savor the food and praise him and it will be much better than enjoying a wonderful meal, you'll be enjoying a taste of the goodness of God. You will be in that process setting your affection and your hearts on heaven.

Even the pleasures come from God so if we use them with hearts that are filled with gratitude and surrendered to him, they cannot be but anything but a blessing. This is why Christians are the happiest of all people. We know. We know that he's made everything good. We know that sexual relations between one man and one woman for life is the very best way. We know that. We have enjoyed that and we're helping one another remember that. Yes, it's a process. It's hard. It's a fallen world. It's a fight. But we know that what God has given is best and by faith we're pursuing our joy in him in accordance with his word. So we of all people should be the happiest. Yeah, but life's hard. We saw that. James is saying, "You guys, you're suffering. You're being oppressed. You're being mistreated and you don't have enough," but even in that know that God will deal with that. Even when we're oppressed. Even when we don't have, we have him. And when we don't have, those are opportunities to know what we really want too.

That's why I think Paul said, "I know the secret of contentment, having too much, having too little. I can do all things through Christ. Whether I have little or whether I have much, I have learned how to make Christ my all-in-all." That's where that verse comes from, "I can do all things through Christ," it's about contentment. It's not about just becoming a professional athlete or anything like that. It's about being content. That's the miracle. Whether you have nothing, whether you have not enough. This is what's going on in Psalm 73. Remember Psalm 73, the guy's looking at the world around him and he sees injustice everywhere, he sees the wicked prospering, his own life, he's afflicted every day, he's having misery, he's not having what he needs, but he sees the wicked who don't love God and they're enjoying everything. Everything changes when he prays, when he goes to the Lord, when he goes into the sanctuary of God, then he sees their end. He sees that God's going to deal with them. He sees exactly what James is talking about. "They may be oppressing me now but God will deal with them."

But what's more wonderful than that is what he sees at the end of that chapter. He says after realizing that he was so unhappy with what was going on in his life, he said, "Whom have I in heaven but thee and besides thee I desire nothing on earth." You see, not having for a while, getting into the presence of God, made him realize that what he really longs for is God. "Whom have I in heaven but thee and besides thee I desire nothing on earth. My flesh and my heart may fail but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever." Christians are happy, can be happy when we have nothing. We can be happy when we're oppressed because we have him. God wants us to live lives like that, free from the love of money because we know that Jesus is a greater treasure and helping one another to pursue him above all things. That's what we're called to do.

Let's pray together.

*Father, we thank you for the treasure that you have given us in the knowledge of Jesus Christ. Lord all good things find their source in you, every bit of beauty, every bit of delight, every bit of goodness, just shadows of the substance that is the goodness, the beauty, the overwhelming delightfulness of you, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. We marvel that you have been so kind to us. We know that we don't deserve your goodness that's extended to all people every day. None of us deserves it. We are sinners. We're wicked. We're rebellious. And yet you show kindness day after day. Then we come who have been bought with the blood of Jesus Christ and now are not only people created in your image but we are now sons and daughters of the living God and we marvel at the riches of your grace, the infinitude of your lovingkindness. God, help everything else to lose its hold on us and help us only long for Jesus and help us, then, use the things that you give us gratefully, enjoying them in your presence, sanctifying them with a word in prayer, and sharing them generously with those around us that we might be children of our heavenly Father, that we might be perfect as he is perfect. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.*