

Message #16**James 5:1-6**

Back around the year 1900, one of the most feared names to businesses was Mary Harris Jones. Mary Jones was a school teacher and dressmaker. In the late 1800's she saw that working people were not being treated well. She recognized that they were being required to work long hours and being paid very low wages and the working conditions were inhumane.

She noticed that owners of some companies were getting very rich and the condition of the employees was getting worse and some of the employees were actually dying. So she went on a one woman crusade to organize labor unions. During her 50 year tenure she was cursed, threatened, mobbed, beaten and even jailed. She truly believed if she didn't stand up for the social and economic injustices, no one else would.

That is where she was wrong. God is for the working man. God is concerned about how the working person is treated. In fact, **God keeps close records as to how employees are being treated and if those employees are Christians, he keeps even a closer record.**

Now the Bible does not condemn financial success and business prosperity. In fact, the sovereignty of God is behind it. However, the Bible clearly sets forth the idea that if God has allowed success and prosperity, there is a great responsibility to use it properly. If there is a corporation that is cheating its employees out of what they should have so that it can make more profit, God takes that very seriously.

Now when James writes this part of the epistle, the specific people he has in mind are the rich, successful businessmen, who were not taking good care of their employees. In **verse 1**, there is an article "the" before the noun rich, so this is a specific group to whom this is addressed.

In fact, in Greek the verse begins "come now the ones rich." James says come on now you rich businessmen and take a serious look at this.

What apparently was happening is these businessmen had made a lot of money, but they were not sharing it with their employees. In fact, it was even getting worse than that. They were actually cheating their employees out of the money they had coming.

The employers had been living an exquisite life. They had nice homes, fine dining and luxurious surroundings. The employees on the other hand were just barely surviving. In fact, some were having a very difficult time surviving.

So James, being led by God's Spirit, decided to address that. What he says is something that should be read by every businessman:

ANY EMPLOYER WHO DOES NOT PROPERLY CARE FOR HIS EMPLOYEES WILL BE SEVERELY JUDGED BY GOD.

Now I have read many articles on the subject of investments. I have read the Wall Street Journal; Business Journals and Money Magazine. I have never read what is said in these verses in any secular article. **You certainly don't start reading an article that says you wealthy people need to "weep and howl" because you are heading to a judgment of God.**

If one is a businessman or woman and God prospers them to the extent that you can hire people to work for you and then you do not properly care for those who are working for you, it is a very serious matter in the mind of God.

What is so tragic is that in many cases labor unions have put pressure on companies to care for their employees, when in all reality treating employees well should be prompted by a reverence for God.

Any believer who works for someone who is cheating them can know that employer is going to face God and there will be a serious settling of accounts.

When we were in Florida, we took an inland channel cruise that pointed out an amazing mansion that you could only see from the boat. It was spectacular. It was a home worth millions. The man who owned it committed suicide because the way he got the home was by stealing the pension funds of the people. He committed suicide thinking that was the way to escape. That was his biggest mistake of all. That put him into the presence of God and when you steal from employees, James says you will suffer serious eternal judgment.

When James wrote this, the scattered Jewish believers were barely surviving. In fact, some weren't surviving and James wanted them to know there would come a day when those for whom they worked would face God.

This basic point comes from **verse 1**. Now James addresses rich businessmen and he begins by saying you are heading to a serious judgment that will cause you to weep and howl. You would be very wise to humble yourself now rather than face God and receive eternal miseries. In other words, you have something coming to you that will cause you to weep and howl.

Now James brings four serious accusations against these business people. Four major accusations:

ACCUSATION #1 – These people hoarded their wealth. **5:2-3**

James brings out three major industries that were doing this:

Industry #1 - There was wealth produced in the farming industry. **5:2a**

Notice how **verse 2** begins, "your riches have rotted." That word "rot" is a Greek word that many believe is a reference to the farming world. The word refers to something that has perished, such as a crop.

The point of this is that these businessmen had hoarded away their grain for so long that it rotted. In our first church we had a big grain farmer and I once asked him how long you can store grain before it rots. He said if you have the right temperature and proper ventilation, you could store it for years.

So the picture here is that these businessmen hoarded away their grain for so long that it began to rot. Instead of them selling it and using it to help his employees and enrich their lives, he let the crop rot. God says I take that very seriously.

Industry #2 - There was wealth produced in the garment industry. **5:2b**

Clothing has always been a major industry. People need clothes. Now in any culture if you sell high quality, top dollar clothing, you are one that has money. Lydia, for example (Acts 16:14), was a very successful clothing merchant. But the problem with some of these business people is that they had hoarded their wealth and stored their clothing to the extent that moths had eaten the material.

According to II Kings 5:5, clothing was a major trade item in Biblical times. So what happened is that these rich clothing merchants had stashed away their goods for so long that moths had eaten them.

Now we used to have a clothier in one of our churches and I asked her how long can you store clothing before moths eat it. She said it is not uncommon to store something for 20-25 years. That is a long time.

So this businessman hoarded the clothing for a long time, instead of selling it or using it to take good care of his employees.

Industry #3 - There was wealth produced in the monetary industry. **5:3**

Gold and silver are still big money investment items. These guys obviously had made a lot of money. From the world's perspective these men had made it. They had stored up huge sums of grain, clothes and money. But from God's perspective they were dirt poor.

It would take years to cause silver or gold to rust. In fact, many have argued it is not possible. Rusting, in the sense of oxidization, was not fully known in the first century so what this means is that this money had been stored for years and years and their employees were barely surviving and some weren't.

James says when you get before God, your rotted grain, your moth-eaten clothes and your rusted stored up money will testify against you. They could have used it to help others.

ACCUSATION #2 – These people hoarded their employees’ wages. **5:4**

This passage is clear what had happened. The employers had not given the employees their due pay. According to the O.T. law, a laborer was to be paid on the day he issued his services (Lev. 19:13; Deut. 24:14-15). If one did not pay his help at the end of the day, it was a very serious sin. God equates this sin on the same level with sorcery and adultery (Malachi 3:5).

What was happening is that these employees had come in and harvested the fields and instead of the businessmen paying them properly and sharing profits, they were hoarding the money for their own greater profit.

These believers were praying to God and crying out to God and James says you need to know those prayers have reached the ears of the “Lord of Sabaoth” that is the Lord who is in charge of all the hosts.

Every businessman who has employees needs to look very seriously at these verses. A workman is worthy of his reward and if a businessman does not agree to that, he will face Almighty God.

ACCUSATION #3 – These people invested their life in pleasure. **5:5**

These people lived a life of luxury and wealth. They spent their time investing in themselves. They lived the good life and did not deny themselves anything.

It is interesting that the Greek word “wanton” is a Greek verb (σπαταλαω) spa ta lao. It is a word that means “self-pleasure,” “self-indulgence.” What really caught my eye are the first three Greek letters “SPA.”

If we bump the text of James up a couple thousand years, we could say these rich people were the spa people. They have their spa memberships, they have their country clubs and their restaurants. They are enjoying the good life. They have the pleasure life and their employees are wondering if they have enough for groceries and bills. God says I watch that. I keep track of that.

ACCUSATION #4 – These people murdered God’s people. **5:6**

There are three interpretations of what this means and I think it is possible in some ways that all three are true:

- 1) They refused to give the money that was due to these believers for their life support and God considers that on the same scale as murder.
- 2) Some believers were so destitute that they actually died and God viewed their death as a murder against those who could have given them the wages and prevented it.

3) Refusing to pay wages and stealing from God's people is viewed the same way by God as a murder context like that of His son.

Years ago there used to be a popular show on TV called "Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous." The show would visit the homes of those who had really made it by the world's standards. The places were impressive.

But the Bible says there ought to be a different perspective that should be proclaimed and that is the "Destiny of the Rich and Famous."

Unless the rich and famous are willing to come to terms with Jesus Christ, and unless they are willing to submit themselves and their money to the Sovereignty of God, they will be eternal losers.

Instead of enjoying the spa, they will be weeping and howling in hell.