

A WARNING REGARDING MATERIALISM

INTRO: We live in the last days. Are we guilty of heaping up treasure in these last days, the days of the coming of the “Son of Man”, when we should be gathering up treasure in heaven? There is a warning here for us as there was for believers in James’ day. One of the great threats for the church today is the materialism that marks the world that we live in: eating and drinking as in the days of Noah.

I. JAMES ADDRESSES THE RICH IN THE CHURCH.

- A. Those who are rich in material things.
 1. There is no sin in riches itself.
 2. There are children of God who are rich. James is not speaking to the world, but addresses members of the church.
 3. But lest we look around to address this sermon only to a few, notice that in N. America, we are all rich.
 4. Jesus warns that it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than a rich man to enter kingdom of God.
 5. With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.
 6. But in the church world, poverty is the expected norm for God’s people, suffering at the hands of the rich (Luke 16).
- B. James pointedly addresses these rich as wicked!
 1. In vs. 3, we are told that their gold will witness against them.
 2. Verse 4 indicates that they accumulated their riches in a n evil manner, they stole.
 3. In verse 5, we read that they used their possessions in an evil way.
- C. Here again we see how worldliness and an evil heart affect us all.
 1. As the Devil holds out forbidden fruit to Adam and Eve for advancement, so the world is always striving for more.
 2. Whence come wars? Is not from envy, jealousy, and lack of contentment?.
 3. The materialism of the world is a temptation for all of us; those who have much, and those who have less.
 4. You deserve more, you will be happy if you have more, get what you can in any way possible.
 5. Materialism is a god as real as Baal or Molech, a false god!

II. THE WICKEDNESS SET FORTH.

- A. These wicked have accumulated great wealth (vs. 3).
 1. Described in our text: “riches”. This includes all material things such as cash (gold, silver), investments (homes, etc.).
 2. They even build up a nest egg for retirement. “Ye have heaped treasure together for the last days (vs. 3).”
 3. Jesus warned in a parable of the rich fool (Luke 12).
 4. It is good to plan and save for the future. But we must not trust in these uncertain riches!
 5. How sinful to acquire beautiful things if in acquiring these we do not pay for the needs of the church, educ. of children!
 6. Jesus warns us to “seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness...”
- B. These wicked cheated their employees and thus gained wealth wrongfully (vs. 4).
 1. They had good crops, but did not pay the laborers good wages.
 2. Verse 6 says, “ You have condemned and murdered innocent men..” The world says that this is good business.
 3. Some might try to use our text to support the cause of organized labor.
 4. But these poor workers did not rebel against their employers; they cried to God (vs. 4,6)!
 5. God condemns exploitation by employer (Deut. 24:14,15; Lev. 19:17; Mal. 3:5).
 6. God demands the employee to submit to the employer (I Pet. 2:18-20).
- C. These wicked filled their lives with pleasure.
 1. Verse 5 indicates that they reveled in the sins of gluttony, drunkenness and exorbitant spending.
 2. While they oppress the poor, they spend freely enough upon themselves so as to satisfy their own lustful desires.
 3. We must remember that of all that we have, we are merely stewards, who must give an account
 4. These wicked have squandered and wasted their God-given gifts, not using them to his glory but only their pleasures.

III. THE PREDICTED JUDGMENT.

- A. “The miseries that shall come upon you (vs. 1).”
 1. They face a judgment of God, for God is righteous.
 2. There is a judgment of God upon the wicked rich throughout their whole life.
 3. But God will also visit all their sins hereafter with utter desolation when the fullness of God’s wrath is poured out.
- B. The present judgment:
 1. The wicked lose their possessions. The idea is that in this life these things are ‘gods’, but in the end they all perish.
 2. Concrete pictures: food becomes rotten, garments become moth eaten, gold and silver rusty.
 3. This speaks of the disillusion the wicked have of earthly things. They pass away and deteriorate.
 4. Esp. gold rusting: idea is that there is no real gold. Imagine it pure which in reality it is not.
- C. The future judgment when Christ returns.
 1. The wicked’s wrong use of things will occasion their being judged as guilty, being worthy of hell fire.
 2. The cries of those defrauded will cry out like ‘Abel’s blood, testifying against them.
 3. All our works enter into judgment, also the use of our money and material things. Apart from Christ, this is dreadful!
- D. The reaction of the wicked rich to judgment
 1. A loud voice of misery, “weep and howl”. This is conscious suffering presently and especially in hell.
 2. Written for the saints, that we may consider how we acquire and how we use our money lest we be found guilty.
 3. How we can rejoice that in Christ, there is forgiveness of our sins re. material things. Mourning changed into laughter!
 4. How we desire to be instructed by Christ re. the proper attitude towards and use of what gives us.
 5. God’s glory, his kingdom, our and others benefit.