

• *The misuse of wealth*

**1. James' friends are to repent over their attitude to wealth**

• *Most of James' readers were rich*

• *God will reverse their situation*

• *The Bible never criticizes wealth – only its use*

**2. God hates the hoarding of wealth**

• *Hoarded wealth devalues or is stolen*

• *Preparing for the future within reasonable limits*

**3. God hates ill-treatment of the needy**

• *Blind to the situation of others*

James is still asking his readers to stay 'unstained by the world'. He is thinking specially of quarrels and fights<sup>☞1</sup>, slander<sup>☞2</sup>, self-willed arrogance<sup>☞3</sup>, neglect of duty<sup>☞4</sup> and now, as we discover in 5:1–6, misuse of one's wealth.

**1. James' friends are to repent over a wrong attitude to wealth.** He says, '*Come now, you rich people ...*'<sup>☞1</sup>. It is obvious that most of the people who would be receiving James' letter would be rich Christians. They must have been embarrassed at the thought that sooner or later the letter would be read by some poorer Christians! What would these rich people feel after they had been so severely and publicly rebuked by James? '*Come now, you rich people, cry aloud in weeping over the miseries that are coming upon you*'<sup>☞2</sup>. It is another call (like 4:9) to see what they have been doing in treating the poor so badly. It is only a matter of time before God reverses the situation and they will find themselves humiliated and deprived of the wealth they have misused so badly. The Bible never criticizes wealth in itself but it has sharp things to say about how it is used. There will be severe judgement for those who have money but misuse it on pleasures and little else.

**2. God hates the hoarding of wealth.** James says: '*Your wealth has become corrupt, and your clothes have been eaten by moths*'<sup>☞1</sup>. '*Your gold and silver are corroded. Their corrosion will testify against you and eat your flesh like fire. You have hoarded wealth in the last days*'<sup>☞2</sup>. Wealthy people like to hoard up their wealth so that they become yet richer. Yet, James asks, what is the point of doing this? The wealth devalues or is stolen. It turns rotten by being kept, like keeping fruit in a cupboard for too long. Clothes get moth-eaten even hanging in a cupboard. Yet there are people out there who desperately need what we have. James' friends are storing up wealth for the future, but it is the last days! At any moment Jesus might come, in one way or another. Changes in the economy can take place at any moment and all our stores might be lost. We could have used them, but suddenly they are swept away. The last days' is the period in which Jesus might come in one way or another at any moment. Even if the final end of the world does not come, at any moment something might happen which will be the end of the world we have known.

Of course there is nothing wrong with preparing for the future within reasonable limits, but why save money and needless goods for a world which is so insecure and which might end soon? Better to use what we have than for it to pass away unused.

**3. God hates ill-treatment of the needy.** These rich Christians were land-owners and some of their workers were Christian people also. Yet the rich landowners were often careless about the needs of their own Christian workers. '*Look! The wages of their workers, who brought in the harvest from your fields, the wages which you kept back by fraud, is crying out against you. And the cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord All-Powerful*'<sup>☞1</sup>. The Christian who is wealthy can be extraordinarily blind at times. It is hard for a rich person to fully enter into all that is available for him in God's kingdom. His self-satisfaction gets in the way.

☞1 4:1-3  
☞2 4:11-12  
☞3 4:13-16  
☞4 4:17

☞1 5:1a

☞2 5:1

☞1 5:2

☞2 5:3

☞1 5:4

• James is getting involved with very down-to-earth matters

• There is no area in life from which you can exclude God

• God's word has things to say about every area of life

#### 4. God hates flabby self-indulgence

• Even Christians can come under God's fiery judgement

• Better to care for the poor

There is something that might surprise us in all of this – until we give it more thought. James gets involved with such a down-to-earth matter as paying the salary of employees. Surely, we might think, this is a very personal matter. Is James really getting involved even in the way we pay our workers? What right does he have to tell us how to pay a salary to other people? He's a preacher not a businessman! Is he preaching a 'social gospel'? Is he encouraging 'class- conflict'? Is he becoming political?

One answer to these questions is: there is no area in life from which you can exclude God! You cannot tell God to stay out of social issues or to keep away from politics! It is true that the finer details of social endeavour or political agitation is best not done by those who are dedicated to being full-time preachers. A full-time preacher can hardly be a full-time social worker at the same time. But on the other hand you cannot keep the preachers out altogether. They are called to bring in God's word and God's word has things to say about every area of life. 'James the Lord's brother', senior pastor of the church of Jerusalem, knew a lot about the day-to-day life of all of his people, rich and poor. And he was not afraid to speak out when he could see that rich Christians were getting greedy<sup>□1</sup>, socially insensitive<sup>□2</sup> and self-indulgent<sup>□3</sup>. He knew by the Holy Spirit that he had a word for these rich Christians and he had the courage to plunge into the situation with a word from God.

4. **God hates flabby self-indulgence.** 'You have lived on earth in luxury, and have indulged yourselves in pleasures. You have fattened your appetites in a day of slaughter<sup>□1</sup>. There are words of terrible warning here. Even Christians can come under the fiery judgement of God. The cries of the poor reach the heart of God. The Christian who gets bloated with his own self-indulgence is like the animal who is fat. In the day when animals are slaughtered for meat, the butcher will go for the fattest first! Better to give up hoarding, to care for the poor, to forget about ambitions for the luxurious life and spend such wealth as we have in carefully and wisely serving God.

□1 1:1

□1 5:1-3  
□2 5:4  
□3 5:5

□1 5:5



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