

• *Final words to rich Christians*

• *He questions their usefulness to God or to anyone else*

• *Lazy and self-indulgent*

James is presenting his last words to his rich Christian friends. In James 5:7 he will turn to say something to the poorer people. He is distressed that his friends, whom he persistently calls his dear brothers and sisters, can be so far away from Christian godliness. He is not questioning their salvation, but he has questioned their usefulness to God or to anyone else. And he fears what will happen to them in the day of judgement, which might be at any moment. They are proud before God. They slander each other. They care nothing for the poor. They hold on eagerly to their money and plan to do business to get more. They are lazy and self-indulgent. Worst of all they have forgotten that Jesus identifies with the poor! James says, *'You have condemned and you have killed the righteous one; he does not resist you'*¹. You would think that James is referring to the poor person, and so he is. And yet he is also using language which reminds us of Jesus. 'The righteous one' might refer to the poor person, but of course it is also a title for Jesus the Messiah. It was specially used in Jerusalem² where James the Lord's brother was the senior pastor. The point is that if they ill-treat the poor they are really doing again what happened at the time of the crucifixion of Jesus.

¹ 5:6

² see Acts 3:14; 7:52; 22:14

1. They are in danger of making the same mistake all over again that was made when Jesus was crucified

• *A stumbling stone*

• *Jesus was so poor and so were his parents*

1. They are in danger of making the same mistake all over again that was made when Jesus was crucified. What led the Jewish people to crucify Jesus? The New Testament tells us they stumbled over the stumbling stone. Jesus was a man who had no prestige in society. The first century Jews had the idea that the Messiah would be wealthy and would be an eminent person in the land. But then Jesus came, and He was so poor! If ever there was a despised outsider, rejected by the ruling classes, it was Jesus. This Lord Jesus Christ began to act as the Messiah, but they said, 'Who do you think you are? Can anything good come out of Galilee?' But now the same thing was happening among James' friends. These friends of James are stumbling again over the poor people around them. It is the same mistake that was made when their fellow Jews rejected Jesus. Jesus was one of the common people. He was destitute during much of His life. His parents brought a pigeon in sacrificial thanksgiving for His birth. They could not bring a lamb or a goat or an ox or a bull; they were too poor. They could afford nothing else! If we stumble over a person because he is poor we are making the same mistake that was made when Jesus was crucified.

2. To ill-treat a poor Christian is the same sin as crucifying Jesus

• *Matthew 25 – Jesus' brothers are poor people who have preached the gospel*

2. To ill-treat a poor Christian is the same as the sin of crucifying Jesus. If you ill-treat a poor person then you are doing the same thing as was done to Jesus. Remember Matthew 25. The way in which we have treated poor 'brothers of Jesus' affects us in a day of judgement. Jesus 'brothers' are poor people who have preached the gospel. Jesus will say 'As you did it to the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.' If you 'murder' – by gossip, by slander, by withholding help, by despising someone because he or she is poor – you are crucifying Jesus, because Jesus is present in His people.

When Saul of Tarsus was persecuting the poor Christians of Jerusalem, Jesus appeared to him and said 'Why are you persecuting me?'

3. The poor Christian is like Jesus in refusing to fight back

• At no point did Jesus resist by fighting back

• No retaliation

• Poor Christians likewise do not fight back

• God will step in and put things right

• Jesus was highly exalted

• Vindication will come!

3. **The poor Christian is like Jesus in refusing to fight back.** At no point in the story of the cross did Jesus ever resist what His enemies were doing to Him. Jesus knew that the cross was the Father's will for Him. Terrible things began to happen to Him, but at no point did He resist when they treated Him so badly. He did not resist the soldiers^{☞1}. Peter tried to fight, but Jesus did not let him do it. He did not resist the Father's will. Even as He is taken to the cross He knows He will soon be dead and buried. At the last supper He refers to His body and blood. He knows about His burial^{☞2}. He does not resist Judas^{☞3}. Jesus knew what was happening. He even warned Judas, but He made no attempt to resist him. He did not retaliate. He did not resist any of the trials and testings He endured. There was such injustice. They took Him to court at night. Then they met again in the morning, and sent Him to Pilate. Then He went to Herod and then was taken back again to Pilate. It was crooked from beginning to end. They lashed Him and beat Him. They found Him to be innocent, but then sentenced Him to death. They undressed Him, taking His clothes away to gamble over them. They wanted Him to suffer every kind of shame. He never resisted them. He actually helped them, by carrying His own cross.

The poor Christians that James knows are being like Jesus. They are not fighting back against their richer brothers and sisters. Men in power are likely to treat the poor in the same way people treated Jesus. We are likely to stumble over the poor. There is also a danger of the poor trying to fight back. If those who are being ill-treated will live like Jesus in not fighting richer Christians, the day will come when God will step in and put things right. This too happened in the case of Jesus. Jesus handed His cause over to God, and soon God raised Him and highly exalted Him. When Jesus looked only to God, God gave Him the highest position in the universe. The poor Christians are in a similar situation. They are not resisting, but their cry has come to God. When any downtrodden Christian does not vindicate himself but looks to God alone, the day will come when God will step in and vindicate him, just as he did with Jesus.

☞1 Matthew 26:47

☞2 Matthew 26:12

☞3 Matthew 26:14



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