

James 5:1-6
The Rich Should Treat the Poor With Justice

Introduction: This addresses a specific group within the synagogue, like 4:7-10. However, as William Varner points out, the difference between these two passages, however, is that a hope of forgiveness is offered to those addressed in 4:7–10, while in 5:1–6 the crying and weeping of the oppressing rich is because of their certain judgment to come (5:1). As J. Ron Blue remarks, there is no plea for reform, only a grim warning.

1) He wants the rich to pay attention—5:1a

- a) ¹ *Come now, you rich* [plou,sioj], (cf. 4:13)
- b) These may be wealthy landowners of the community associated with the synagogue but who are not genuine followers of Christ. He never identifies them as “brothers.”
 - i) These are the same people that they were tempted to treat with special care when they arrive at the synagogue meetings. (cf. 2:1-7)
- c) It is not sinful to be rich. (cf. 1 Tim. 6:17-19)

2) How does he want the rich to respond?—5:1bc

- a) **weep** [aor. act. imp. klai,w] **and howl** [pres. act. ptc. ovlolu,zw] *for the miseries* [talaiwri,a] *that are coming* [pres. ptc. evpe,rcomai] *upon you.*
- b) Echoes of Jesus’ words in Luke 6:24-25.
- c) This may refer to the destruction in AD 70.

3) They have hoarded their wealth for themselves—5:2-3

- a) **Perfect** aspect—5:2-3a (everything they have put their faith and hope in)
 - i) ² *Your riches have rotted* [pf. act. ind. sh,tw]
 - (1) This may include grain, oil, or some other produce.
 - ii) *and your garments are* [pf. act. ind. gi,nomai] *moth-eaten.*
 - (1) This doesn’t happen to clothes that get used regularly. (W. MacDonald)
 - iii) ³ *Your gold and silver have corroded* [pf. pass. ind. katio,w],
 - (1) Would most likely happen when the metals were not in use.
- b) **Future** aspect—5:3bc (everything they had not anticipated)
 - i) They stand convicted: *and their corrosion will be* [fur. mid. ind.] *evidence* [martu,rion] *against you*
 - ii) Their judgment is certain: *and will eat* [fut. mid. ind.] *your flesh like fire.*
 - iii) Remember 1:11.
- c) **Aorist** aspect—5:3d (you mistakenly thought you would live forever)
 - i) Time is short: *You have laid up treasure* [aor. act. ind. qhsauri,zw] *in* [evn] (not “for”) *the last days.*
 - (1) In violation of Jesus’ words in Matt. 6:19-20.

- ii) Some see these “last days” as referring to the time leading up to AD 70. However, “the last days” most likely refers to the entire church age leading up to the return of Christ. Cf. 2 Tim. 3:1; 2 Pet. 3:3

4) They have defrauded their workers—5:4-6

- a) God knows the injustices they have done—5:4 ⁴ *Behold*,
 - i) Withholding appropriate payment: *the wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud* [pf. pass. ptc. avpostere,w], *are crying out* [pres. act. ind. kra,zw] *against you*,
 - (1) God clearly revealed workers should be paid promptly every day. Cf. Lev. 19:13; Deut. 24:14-15.
 - ii) God pays attention to how we treat others: *and the cries* [boh,] *of the harvesters have reached* [pf. act. ind.] *the ears of the Lord of hosts*.
 - (1) God alone possesses the infinite knowledge and wisdom and power to accomplish appropriate justice.
- b) God knows the accusations found in the cry of the oppressed—5:5-6
 - i) Self-indulgence: ⁵ *You have lived on the earth in luxury* [trufa,w] *and in self-indulgence* [spatala,w].
 - ii) Self-preparation: *You have fattened* [tre,fw] *your hearts in a day of slaughter*.
 - (1) A sarcastic illustration for those who had seen many fattened sheep and oxen meet their fates in sacrifice or for luxurious meals. (R. Blue)
 - (2) Instead of seeking deliverance from their just condemnation, they have made themselves more likely objects of God’s judgment. (NET)
 - iii) Harm: ⁶ *You have condemned* [katadika,zw] *and murdered* [foneu,w] *the righteous person*.
 - (1) Perhaps by overworking them to the point of exhaustion and illness.
 - (2) Perhaps by withholding wages resulting in starvation, etc.
 - (3) Perhaps by using the legal system to one’s advantage, resulting in a death sentence against the falsely accused.
- c) *He does not resist* [pres. mid. ind. avntita,ssw] *you*.
 - i) Perhaps as a statement: referring to the nonresistant poor.
 - ii) Perhaps instead a question (“Does He not oppose you?”) referring to God.
 - (1) This would be in line with the use of avntita,ssw in 4:6.

5) Things I need to remember:

- a) Remember King Ahab in 1 Kings 21, murdering and stealing to get some more land.
- b) Worldly wealth is an area of high risk in the battle to walk humbly with God. It is hard to be rich and lowly at the same time. The use of money and the life of self-pleasing are never far apart. (A. Motyer)
- c) Remember Jesus’ words in Matt. 19:23.