

05.08.11 / James 5:1-6

Passage Insight

In the way of context, we see that in the preceding chapter, James has encouraged his readers to choose humility and the requisite weeping that comes when we see our need for the Lord over the arrogance that leads us to boasting and rejection of God's sovereign will. He speaks specifically to those who would boast and seek riches in the process, pursuing money rather than the Lord, and doing so selfishly for their own gain and on their own terms. When this happens, the end result is shown in today's passage: weeping in agony over the loss of all that we held dear, which was ultimately without any real value of its own. Such a convicting passage for us all. Particularly as we contrast this fading hope with the never ending hope found in Christ. Let's take a look.

16 of the 38 parables found in the New Testament deal with money. Jesus speaks about it over and over and over again. Clearly, He knew and knows the power it often wields over us when we put our hope in it to provide for us, and He frees us from this by His mercy and His power alone, as we'll soon see. Money is not evil. The Bible speaks of money as a tool, a resource if you will that can be used to bring God glory, to bless others, to provide for one's family, and to worship God. In the Law of Moses, specific rules are even laid out for getting and securing wealth, and there is nothing in Scripture that prohibits the pursuit of profit. The Scriptures do, however, address the heart, and they remind us that God alone is to be the source of our worship and the longing of our hearts. No valueless tool, such as money, should be awarded such affection. To do so is to worship an idol and to deny God. The Bible, in this passage and elsewhere, speaks against the pursuit of profit by dishonest means or means that demonstrate disregard for others. As Christians, we are to consider others more important than ourselves (Philippians 2:3), which leaves no room whatsoever for the objectification or abuse of others in order to fulfill our own desires.

While money in and of itself is not evil, the love of money is, as we see in 1 Timothy 6:10, which reads, "For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs." Loving money is like eating cardboard. It may fill up your craving for fullness briefly, but there's no nourishment, and the fullness is a lie. This lack of nourishment, this lie, this filling up with something that will corrode and rot, will ultimately lead to death. Cardboard doesn't keep you alive, and neither does money. It has no value. When we serve money and its pursuit, we are not serving God. As Jesus says in Matthew 6:24, "No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money."

When we serve money, we are actually serving ourselves. If we trust money to save us, thinking, "If I have more money, I'll be OK..." then we take our salvation into our hands. Here are some signs that we may be doing just this: we think about money all the time; our decisions are driven by thoughts of money; we are happier when we have more money; we are sadder when we have less money. As we serve money, we are compelled by the feeling that we have to meet our own needs, which reveals a deeper self-reliance, for in this we are trusting OURSELVES to provide our needs, and this naturally means distrusting God. In summary, when we serve money, we are trusting the provision, rather than the Provider, to save us, and we are trusting ourselves to get the provision on our own apart from God. Finally, in this we reveal our belief that we know our needs better than the Lord. In believing this lie, we rob ourselves of the blessing of trust in the Lord, and we rob the Lord of His due glory in being the Perfect Provider.

Scripture says in Matthew 6:21 that "...where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." In other words, our treasure will reveal what we put our hope in. What happens to a hope that is found in money, an inert tool that has

no value in and of itself? What happens when our hope is found in our ability to and desire to gain more and more money and put our hope for salvation in this lifeless entity? This hope, and our very lives if we apart from Christ, will rot, corrode, and die. Most likely not the outcome we are searching for as we fight and scrap for every penny. So, how can we see a different outcome, one where life, not death, is the order of the day? Simply put, we must have a hope that leads to life, a hope that will never fade, a hope that will never die, a hope that we see in 1 Peter 1:3-5, which reads:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

In this passage, what do we see about our God? What God secures cannot be touched, tampered with, or destroyed, He gives LIFE where there was once death, He saves us by HIS power and HIS mercy, and once we are in Him, we can never be separated from Him. Because of who HE is (not who WE are), the hope we have in HIM is a perfect, unfading hope. Praise God.

Application Questions / Prayer

Whom Do You Serve?

- 1) What are your actions like when you are serving money instead of serving the Lord?
- 2) How can you recognize that this is what you're doing (your happiness is proportional to the amount of money you have, you think about money all the time, your decisions are driven by money, etc.)?
- 3) What are your actions when you are serving God instead?
- 4) How will your money be spent differently if you are serving Him?
- 5) Where does this challenge you personally?

Hope

- 1) What do you long for?
- 2) Is this hope a living hope like the one in 1 Peter, or a dying hope like the one in today's passage?
- 3) If your hope is in something that will only fade away, how are you replacing the truth about God with a lie – where are you worshiping something that is CREATED rather than the CREATOR?
- 4) Where do you believe your sufficiency to be greater than Jesus' sufficiency?
- 5) What is the truth about God that will replace this lie?
- 6) Who in your group can help you see this more clearly?

Sources

- Prayer
- Bible Exposition Commentary