

“Rich and Wicked”

September 23, 2012

Text: James 5:1-3

I’ve entitled the passage in James, which we will consider today, “*Rich and Wicked.*”

Neither the book of James, nor Scripture as a whole, suggests that all rich people are wicked, nor that it is wicked to be rich.

Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were all good/godly men who were very rich, because God had made them rich.

Abraham’s servant said of him=> “*The LORD has greatly blessed my master, so that he has become **rich***” (Gen 24:35).

I Kn 10:23 says of Solomon that he “*became greater than all the kings of the earth in **riches** and in wisdom.*”

Job too was rich, as was Joseph of Arimathea, the man who housed X’s body in his own tomb—an expensive tomb fulfilling Isaiah’s prophecy that Messiah would be “*with a **rich** man in His death*” (Isa 53:9).

Prov 10:22=> “*It is the blessing of the LORD that makes **rich**, And He adds no sorrow to it.*”

But although some rich folks are godly people, others are made very wicked by the power of their wealth itself.

Empowered sinners can be extremely evil/hurtful individuals.

They often have the power to impose their will on the poor, take advantage of them, and make their lives miserable.

Many of the OT prophets denounced the ruthlessly rich.

E.g. God said to such people thru Isaiah=> “*The plunder of the poor is in your houses. / What do you mean by crushing My people & grinding the face of the poor? declares the Lord GOD of hosts*” (Isa 3:14-15).

God threatened the ruthless rich-men of Amos' time “*who oppress the poor, who crush the needy*”=> “*Days are coming upon you when they will take you away with meat hooks, & the last of you with fish hooks*” (Am. 4:2).

Wealth tends to create pride in man's heart, which drives him farther/farther away from the Lord.

That's why Jesus warned=> “*It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a **rich** man to enter the kingdom of God*” (Lk 18:25).

That's also why the writer of Prov 30:8 says very wisely=> “*Give me neither poverty nor **riches**; Feed me with the food [an asset of wealth] that is my portion, / Lest I be full and deny Thee and say, 'Who is the LORD?'*” (30:8-9).

Therein is the problem: Man's wealth gives him the feeling that he is so full/secure in himself that he doesn't need the Lord.

We see this very clearly in the parable Jesus told about the rich man in Luke 12, whose land was so productive that he decided to build new/bigger barns to store all his grain—which represented (in that agrarian culture) his wealth, and therefore his security.

The man said to himself=> “*Soul, you have many goods [many foodstuffs and much grain] laid up for many years to come; take your ease, eat, drink and be merry*” (Lk 12:19).

He didn’t think he needed God, because he would have all those new barns—full of grain.

The rich men James will address in our text today are beyond wicked—they are apostates.

Apostates are sinners whose wickedness has progressed so far, and whose hearts have become so hard in rejecting X, that they have become forever sealed in their willful sinfulness, and separated from God.

They fully understand the gospel, and yet they repudiate it, so Heb 6 says=> “*It is **impossible** to renew them again to **repentance***” (Heb 6:6).

Heb 10 says that a person like this has=> “*Trampled under foot the Son of God, and has regarded as unclean the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has insulted the Spirit of grace*” (10:29).

Verse 26 says of such people=> “*For if we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there **no longer remains** a sacrifice for sins, / but a certain terrifying expectation of **judgment**, and **THE FURY OF A FIRE WHICH WILL CONSUME THE ADVERSARIES***” (Heb 10:26-27).

The rich men in Jms 5:1-3 are men of this kind, having chosen to serve the god of wealth, rather than the true God, and their hearts having become hardened through unbelief/greed.

**This makes them different from the church-attenders of
Laodicea, about whom we read about in Rev 3.**

Those people say=> *“I am **rich**, and have become **wealthy**,
and have need of nothing.”*

To which Jesus responds=> *“You do not know that you are
wretched & miserable & poor & blind & naked.”*

Jesus says to them=> *“Because you are **lukewarm**, and
neither hot nor cold, I will **spit** you out of My mouth.”*

But then He graciously adds, for any who might still listen,

*“I advise you to buy from Me gold refined by fire,
that you may become rich, and white garments, that
you may clothe yourself, and that the shame of your
nakedness may not be revealed; and eye salve to
anoint your eyes, that you may see” (Rev 16-18).*

This at least holds out to them the hope of redemption.

But no such hope is extended to the rich men in our own text.

They will simply be told to weep/howl because of the
miseries/judgments that are already coming upon
them.

**Someone: What’s the point of a passage like this, if it’s not to
persuade such rich sinners to repent of their sin?**

1st, it’s to persuade anyone who is wealthy and in danger of
falling into such a hopeless state, to repent of it, now,
before it’s too late.

Most of us are rich, because Scripture deals with anyone
who has more than he actually needs, as a rich man.
It’s just a matter of degree.

Some of us are rich, and others are even richer.

We all need to guard our hearts because we're so wealthy.
2nd, this passage assures us, God is aware that some of the rich,
subject poor people to injustice, & He will repay them in
kind.

In chapter 2, James said that the rich had oppressed some of
his readers, dragging them into court.

In next week's text, we'll read that they had also withheld
the rightful wages of the poor who worked for them.

This text assures us that God, being a just God, will deal
with them and their treachery justly.

**James begins by calling upon the wicked-rich to weep/howl
over the miseries that are coming upon them.**

These miseries include

- * Worthless Riches
- * Woeful Judgment
- * Wasted Lives

*** James' Call to Weep**

[James 5:1]=> *"Come now, you **rich**, **weep** and **howl** for your
miseries which are coming upon you."*

**James commands the wicked-rich to "Weep" & to do so now,
not to wait until God's judgment actually falls on them.**

They have been betrayed by their trust in worldly wisdom.

Everything it has taught them to build their lives upon, has
proven false/worthless.

They've built on sand, & now their lives are
collapsing/falling-apart, due to the winds/waves of
adversity, and the weight of their own wickedness.
Their foolishness has destined them for eternal judgment,
& God Himself is poised against them, to
inflict/impose it.

In that realization, the only appropriate response left to them is to
weep and sob aloud, as one weeps over the death of a loved
one, or as Peter wept over his denial/betrayal of X.

Peter wept in repentance, but these men whom James is
calling to weep, can't bring themselves to repent.
And w/o repentance, there can be no forgiveness,
only weeping/regret.

So now they have no way of turning back;

No way of undoing the mistakes they have made.

**James also says to “howl”—a periodic shriek/scream that’s
pierces/punctuates the agonized weeping/sobbing of
these rich men.**

They have come to realize what a terrible mess they've made of
their lives, & the miseries they've brought on themselves.
Tragically, they have wholeheartedly embraced worldly
wisdom.

Now they must deal w/ the irrevocable miseries resulting
from that mistaken decision.

Miseries which they've just started to sense.

Q: Do unrepentant sinners actually weep over their sins like this?

Not usually, although they should.

But II Cor 7:10 shows that they can experience the sorrow of regret over the consequences of their sin.

Instead of leading to repentance, that kind of sorrow/weeping leads to death.

James is doing here what the prophet Isaiah did in chapter 13 where he declared to the city of Babylon=>

“Wail, for the day of the LORD is near! It will come as destruction from the Almighty” (Isa 13:6).

The Babylonians prob. never heard/read it, but the Jews did, & it was a warning to them, not to sin as Babylon had.

Love of money is the root of all sorts of evil (I Tim 6:10).

At one time that was just a concept these men in our own text despised/mockered.

Now they are living out its truth, & its inexorable reality is so grievous, they can't stop crying for themselves.

Money was their god, and they were hoarding it for themselves.

Jms 5:5 says they were living luxuriously on the earth (as we'll see next time) leading a life of wanton pleasure, being fattened up for the day of judgment/slaughter.

They were ruthless in their treatment of others, as they pursued their dream=> the limitless accumulation of wealth.

X said, “*You cannot serve God and mammon*” (Mt 6:24),
mammon being money.

These men chose to serve money, & to reject God.

Their love for money and the world & its things, has cost
them their souls (I Jn 2:15).

They once laughed disdainfully about going to hell in a
bucket, but now their laughter has turned into
uncontrollable weeping/sobbing.

It all brings to mind Jesus’ words in Luke 6=> “*Woe to you who
are **rich**, for you are receiving your comfort in full. / Woe
to you who are well-fed now, for you shall be hungry. Woe
to you who laugh now, for you shall mourn and **weep***”
(Lk 6:24-25).

In vs 2 James begins to explain why these men are weeping=>

*** Their Riches Are Worthless** (to them now)

**Everything they have devoted their lives to is just a sham, and
now they see it, even though they can’t change.**

[Verse 2]=> “Your riches have **rotted and your **garments** have
become **moth-eaten**. ”**

*** “*Rotted*” alludes to the perishable food they once feasted on.**

In the time/place this was written, foodstuffs were considered an
important part of one’s wealth.

That’s why the man in Luke 12 who built new barns for his
abundant harvests felt so well off, and so secure.

He/his-family wouldn’t have to worry about staving
off hunger for a very long time to come.

We believers are to trust in God, praying, “*Give us this day our daily bread,*” but he trusted in his barns, and ultimately in himself.

The men in our text once had plenty of stored food as well, but now it has all gone rotten, and they feel impoverished/empty.

They had placed value on the things of this world that were perishable, rather than the eternal riches of God.

*** In addition, their garments had become moth-eaten, another mistake of the same kind.**

Garments were also a form of personal wealth, especially those that were beautifully embroidered.

They were handed down to one’s heirs as part of their inheritance, and sometimes they were given as gifts or even as a form of remuneration.

E.g. when Samson challenged the Philistines w/ his riddle, he offered them 30 linen wraps and 30 changes of clothes, if they could solve it.

When Paul was demonstrating the purity of his motives for his ministry at Ephesus, he said=> “*I have coveted no one’s silver or gold or **clothes***” (Acts 20:33).

Clothes made the man, even more in those days than now, because most clothing was rather plain/drab.

A nice set of clothes marked a man out as being wealthy, and the rich men in our text had prob. been

distinguished by many beautiful cloaks & other garments that were ornately embroidered.

But now the moths had gotten to them, and they, like the foodstuffs, were all worthless.

They had foolishly overvalued the things of this world which pass away, leaving a person empty/naked.

Believers have eternal riches to enjoy=>

* We have the truth of God's Word, & can say w/ Psa 119,

"I have rejoiced in the way of Thy testimonies, as much as in all riches" (119:14).

* From the Bible we gain the riches of godly wisdom, and can agree w/ Prov 3=> *"How blessed is the man who finds wisdom, and the man who gains understanding. / For its profit is better than the profit of **silver**, and its gain than fine **gold**" (Prov 3:13-14).*

* We have received the riches of God's kindness/patience which have led us to repentance (Rom 2:4), and to saving faith in X.

* We have redemption in X's blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses according to *"the **riches** of His grace"* (Eph 1:7).

* James 2:5 has reminded us that God has chosen the poor of this world to be *"**rich** in faith & **heirs** of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him."*

* We are promised that in eternity, God will show us=> *"the surpassing **riches** of His **grace** in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus" (Eph 2:7).*

The rich men in our text forfeited all of these blessings for some grain that had rotted away, and some clothes that were now full of holes and moth-eaten.

It's no wonder they were weeping/howling so bitterly.

These were symbols of their materialistic values.

But whatever else they had treasured, was just as valueless/crass and just as prone to fall apart.

Sadly, we often see this same kind of foolishness all around us.

- * Wealthy people like the rich young ruler who go away sad after hearing the gospel, unable to repent from their love of money.

- * People preoccupied w/ the deceitfulness of riches, which chokes out the Word from coming to life, in their hearts, to save their souls.

Only by the grace of God have the hearts of believers been prepared to receive the Word, & believe it, unto eternal life.

- * **Their Judgment Is Woeful** (and Sure)

[Verse 3a]=> *“Your **gold** and your **silver** have **rusted**; and their rust will be a witness against you and will consume your flesh like fire.”*

James undoubtedly knew that gold/silver don't rust, but here he's using “rust” figuratively to teach a spiritual truth.

He even intensifies the verb, so it means to rust clear thru.

James is saying to the rich-men he's addressing, “You pick up the beautiful objects of gold/silver you once loved so much, &

now they have become ugly to you—as if rusted clear through.”

“Realizing how worthless they really are, you now weep.”

But James takes the illustration even further, saying that this ugly rust will actually witness against them at God’s Judgment Throne.

It will testify to their guilt/foolishness in treasuring the corruptible things of this world, over all the spiritual treasures/riches God offers believers through His Son, Jesus X.

It will be presented as evidence of their hardness of heart, against God’s grace.

X said, *“Do not lay up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where **moth** & **rust** destroy, & where thieves break in & steal. / But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, & where thieves do not break in or steal; / for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also”* (Mt 6:19-21).

The things these wealthy gentlemen treasured up on earth have all turned out to be worthless trash, for which they have forfeited all the real treasures offered by God.

Now, that rust will consume their flesh like fire, but this “fire” will be the judgment of God.

Repeatedly in Scripture, fire alludes to God’s judgment.

* E.g. Isa 30:27=> *“Behold, the name of the LORD comes from a remote place; **Burning** is His anger, & dense is His **smoke**; His lips are filled with indignation, And His tongue is like a **consuming fire**. ”*

* Amos 5:6=> *“Seek the LORD that you may live, lest He break forth like a **fire**, O house of Joseph, and it **consume** with none to **quench** it. ”*

* Even in the parable of Lazarus and the rich man, the rich man’s tongue is burning with the fire of hell, so he cries=> *“Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool off my tongue; for I am in agony in this **flame**” (Lk 16:24).*

The men in our text haven’t been judged yet, but it won’t be long.

Heb 9:27=> *“It is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment. ”*

The testimony of the rust has made their judgment sure, and then it will woefully consume their flesh.

The judgment right after a person’s death seems only to be a preliminary judgment, yet enough of one, so that the rich man in Lk 16 (having undergone that judgment) begged Abraham to send Lazarus to cool off the flaming agony in his tongue.

But every unsaved sinner will also face the Great White Throne Judgment at the end of the Millennium.

* **Their Time Has Been Wasted** (a/w/a their lives)

[Verse 3b]=> *“It is in the last days that you have stored up your treasure!”* (your worthless/useless “treasure”!).

What a waste of the rich men's time, and their lives!

It was the "*last days*," the time between X's 1st & 2nd Comings, and it was those wonderful days of the early Church.

These were great days of grace, when the Messiah had come, and the Church was basking in His afterglow.

Rich people like Barnabas were selling their lands, bringing the money to the church, for distribution among the poor.

The canon of Scripture would soon be completed, adding its enormous spiritual wealth to the lives of believers.

But the rich men in our text had missed out on all these wonderful events.

They had been too busy hoarding their "treasures."

This was, and still is, a great time to be rich, & to be Xn, because of all the good that can be done for the Body of X.

But "*The last days*" are also days of urgency, when everything is about to culminate, in Jesus' rapture of the Church, the Tribulation, X's 2nd Coming, & the Millennial Kingdom.

In light of these impending historical events, rich people should be asking themselves how God would have them use the wealth, He has entrusted to them, to accomplish His purposes while there is still time=>

*What fellow Xns have legitimate financial needs they can help meet?

*What ongoing ministries can they help support, to assure their continuation?

*How can they use their wealth to worship God in some special way, as David did, in I Chron 29:3, saying=>

“In my delight in the house of my God, the treasure I have of gold & silver, I give to the house of my God, over and above all that I have already provided for the holy temple.”

The Temple was built on David’s wonderful delight in his God.

The rich men in our text had never asked themselves any of these kinds of questions, because they were committed to living for themselves, to living luxuriously on the earth, leading lives of wanton pleasure, and hoarding their wealth to make themselves feel comfortable/secure.

They had wasted their time, & they had wasted their lives.

They had amassed enormous riches on earth;

But in terms of eternal riches, they were bankrupt.

Fortunately, it’s probable that few of us are rich apostates, like the men in our text.

To whatever extent we have become enamored with the wealth of this world, & its wicked values, Jesus calls to us in Rev 3:18 saying=>

*“I advise you to buy from Me **gold** refined by fire, that you may become **rich**, and white **garments**, that you may clothe yourself, and that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and eye salve to anoint your eyes, that you may see. / Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline; be zealous therefore, and **repent**” (Rev 3:18-19).*

Notice that Jesus says “**buy** from Me,” not “take freely from Me.”

He doesn’t advise us to come as beggars who are so needy we’ll take whatever is available—which is strange, because spiritually speaking, that’s what we are, having nothing good w/ which to barter for our salvation.

But X calls us to “*buy*” w/ a purchaser’s thoughtfulness, looking for the best possible commodity.

He says, “Come and examine the goods, & estimate how much the eternal riches and the white garments of true righteousness, are really worth to you.”

What would you give to deliver your soul from hell?

What would you pay to keep from becoming an apostate?

Jesus wants us to realize just how much we need, what He has to give.

A person with any sense at all would answer, “I’ll pay whatever it costs, because what You’re offering me is what I need most, and it is priceless.”

At that point, Jesus adds, “Buy without price, but you must buy it from Me, because no one else has it.

“Buy it ‘*without money and without cost*’ (Isa 55:1),
by simply placing your faith/trust in Me.”

What does Jesus have to sell to us that’s so precious/priceless and yet free of cost?

Gold refined by fire—the priceless gold of His grace.

God won’t accept any other currency, including our good deeds, our knowledge, our moral strength/character, or our religious rituals.

But buying His grace will make us spiritually rich, so that we can buy whatever our souls need/desire.

What else does Jesus have to sell us, free of cost?

White garments such as the rich men in our own text had never seen—coverings that will clothe a person so that the naked shame of his sin will never be revealed/seen.

For those who place their trust/hope/faith in Jesus X alone to forgive/cleanse them of sin, He takes away their guilt and covers them with His own righteousness, like a snow-white cloak.

This is the kind of clothing that fits a person to appear before the Judgment Seat of X, w/o fear of humiliation/rejection/condemnation.

Its radiant whiteness testifies to the righteousness of X w/i us, just as the rusted gold in our own text testified to the corrupt values within the rich men’s hearts.

Someone: You don't realize just how wicked/undeserving I am.

No, but if you desire to be forgiven of your sins, and are willing to trust Jesus X to forgive you, the very fact that you realize how wicked you have been, means you're exactly the kind of buyer He's looking for.

So swallow your pride, recognize what a priceless treasure He offers you, & receive it from Him free of charge, and w/o cost.

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Text: James 5:1-3

1. Although some rich folks are godly people, others are made very wicked by the power of their [14 wealth] itself.

Gen 24:35; I Kn 10:23; Isa 53:9; Prov 10:22; Isa 3:14-15; Amos 4:2; Lk 18:25; Prov 30:8-9; Lk 12:19

2. The rich men James will address in our text today are beyond wicked—they are [20 apostates].

Heb 6:6; 10:26-27; Rev 3:16-18

3. What’s the point of a passage like this? It’s to persuade anyone who is wealthy and in danger of falling into such a hopeless state to [14 repent] of it now.

4. **James begins by calling upon the wicked rich to weep and howl over the miseries that are coming upon them: worthless riches, inevitable judgment, and [14 wasted] lives...**

*** James’ Call to Weep**

[James 5:1]

Isa 13:6

5. Love of money is the root of all evil—a concept these men despised; now they are living out its truth, and they can’t stop [14 crying] for themselves.

Mt 6:24; I Jn 2:15; Lk 6:24-25

In verse 2 James begins to explain why these men are weeping...

*** Their Riches Are Worthless**

6. Everything they have devoted their lives to is just a [10 sham].

[Verse 2]

Acts 20:33

7. Believers have [16 eternal] riches to enjoy.

Psa 119:14; Prov 3:13-14; Rom 2:4; Eph 1:7; Jms 2:5; Eph 2:7

*** Their Judgment Is Woeful**

[Verse 3a]

8. James is saying to the rich men, “You pick up the beautiful objects of gold and silver you once loved so much, and they have become [10 ugly] to you.”

Mt 6:19-21; Isa 30:27; Amos 5:6; Lk 16:24

9. The men in our text haven't been judged yet, but it [12 won't] be long.

Heb 9:27

*** Their Time Has Been Wasted**

[Verse 3b]

10. "*The last days*" are days of urgency when rich people should be asking themselves how God would have them use the [14 wealth] He has entrusted to them.

I Chron 29:3

11. To whatever extent we have become enamored with the wealth of this world and its wicked values, [12 Jesus] calls to us in Rev 3:18.

Rev 3:18-19

12. What does Jesus have to sell to us that's free of cost? Gold refined by fire—the priceless gold of His [12 grace].

13. If you desire to be forgiven of your sins and are willing to trust Jesus Christ to forgive you, the fact that you realize how wicked you have been means you're exactly the kind of [12 buyer] He is looking for.