

***“The Cry Heard by God”***

September 30, 2012

Text: James 5:4-6

**In the nation of Israel, God intended for poor people (the truly poor) to find relief from their poverty, in their neighbors’ generosity.**

In Deut 15:7, He made such individual generosity mandatory—the national policy of Israel=>

*“If there is a **poor man** with you, one of your brothers, in any of your towns in your land which the LORD your God is giving you, you shall not harden your heart, nor close your hand from your **poor** brother; / but you shall freely open your hand to him, and shall **generously lend** him sufficient for his need in whatever he lacks” (7-8).*

I.e., “I’m giving you this land as a generous gift;

“Now you be generous w/ the poor, following my example.”

In our study of James we have seen 2 types of wisdom=>

- \* Worldly wisdom, which is based on selfishness,  
leaves God out of one’s life, & trusts in self;  
And which is inherently stingy because of its selfishness.
- \* Godly/heavenly wisdom based on selflessness,  
which trusts God, obeys His Word, loves Him wholeheartedly, & shows love to other people, by doing practical deeds of generosity/kindness to them.

Israel was to live according to godly wisdom, & that included making generous loans to the poor.

**The real test of this generosity occurred every 7<sup>th</sup> year when the unpaid balances on all such loans were to cancelled/forgiven, turning them into outright gifts.**

If a poor person asked for a loan in the 6<sup>th</sup> year, the lender knew the whole loan would have to be paid off that year, otherwise he would never get his money back.

Those whose hearts were governed by selfish worldly-wisdom, would never risk loaning anything to anyone in that 6<sup>th</sup> year.

So God said in Deut 15:9=> *“Beware, lest there is a base thought in your heart, saying, ‘The seventh year, the year of remission, is near,’ and your eye is hostile toward your **poor** brother, and you give him nothing; then he may cry to the LORD against you, and it will be a sin in you.”*

Loaning money to the poor under these circumstances was based on trust in God’s blessing, as lenders obeyed His command.

This whole system wasn’t intended/designed to hurt the rich, but rather to bless them w/ God’s blessings.

It was deliberately choosing godly wisdom, rejecting worldly wisdom.

And God promised that those who trusted/obeyed Him in this matter would be richly blessed by Him, w/ His blessings.

Deut 15:10=> *“You shall **generously give** to him, and your heart shall not be grieved when you give to him, because for this thing the LORD your **God will bless you in all your work and in all your undertakings.**”*

Giving/lending like that would be an act of faith, trusting the Lord’s promise, putting your money where your faith was.

**There were a number of other provisions in the Law which were especially designed to assist/protect a poor man.**

- \* If he had to sell his land, it reverted back to him in the Year of Jubilee, which occurred once every 50 years in Israel.
- \* If he had to sell himself into slavery, he was to be freed in the year of Jubilee (Lev 25:25-28; 25:39).
- \* If a lender required some sort of collateral/pledge to secure a loan to a poor man, it had to be returned to the poor man by sunset (e.g. his cloak).
- \* If a poor man was hired for wages, he was to receive his wages in full before sundown (Deut 24:12-15; 24:15)

**OT wisdom literature also made a number of statements that demonstrate God’s special concern for the poor.**

- \* Psa 140:12 (David): *“I know that the LORD will maintain the cause of the afflicted, justice for the **poor.**”*
- \* Prov 14:31=> *“He who oppresses the **poor** reproaches his Maker, But he who is **gracious** to the **needy** honors Him.”*

\* Prov 19:17=> *“He who is gracious to a **poor** man **lends** to the **LORD**, & **He will repay** him for his good deed.”*

\* Prov 22:22=> *“Do not rob the **poor** because he **is** poor, Or crush the afflicted at the gate; / For the **LORD** will plead their case, And **take the life** of those who **rob** them” (22:22-23).*

### **The NT too demonstrates great compassion toward the plight of the poor.**

- \* Jesus must have given charity to the poor on a regular basis, because when He dismissed Judas from the Upper Room (Jn 13:27), the other Apostles all assumed He had told Judas to go out and make a donation to the poor (Jn 13:29).
- \* When the Church was first established in Jerusalem, wealthy Xns sold their real estate to help provide for poor Xns.
- \* Paul traveled all over the Middle East, taking up a collection for the poor in the church at Jerusalem.
- \* In I Tim 6, he wrote to Pastor Timothy=> *“Instruct those who are **rich** in this present world not to be conceited or to fix their hope on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who **richly** supplies us with all things to enjoy. / Instruct them to do good, to be **rich in good works**, to be **generous** and ready to **share** [w/ the poor], / storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is life indeed” (6:17-19).*  
Only “widows-indeed” were to receive ongoing support from the church.

But wealthy Xns were encouraged to individually share w/ any who had special needs, as the Lord made them

aware of those needs, and supplied them w/ all things to enjoy.

**Q: Why wouldn't God, who is good/sovereign, eliminate poverty altogether among His people?**

He miraculously caused the widow of Zarephath's bowl of flower, and jar of oil to remain full, constantly replenishing them, and He could do the same for any of us, if He chose to do so.

In 2 Kings 4, another widow owed a debt she couldn't repay, and a creditor was about to take her 2 sons as slaves, to pay it off.

She had nothing in her houses w/ which to pay the debt except a jar of oil.

Elisha told her to borrow empty vessels from all her neighbors, and pour the oil into them.

After pouring the oil from her own jar into the first vessel, she discovered her own jar was still full.

She did this again/again until she had enough oil to pay off her debt.

Psa 50 says God owns the cattle on 1000 hills (50:10).

So why does He allow some believers to remain poor?

1<sup>st</sup>, so that others will thank Him for His generosity to them.

I once had occasion to go to India & visit a pastor there, who was extremely thankful to God for his library.

I asked him if I could see it.

He took me into his office and showed me a book shelf that  
had 3 little pamphlets on it—that was his library!  
I suddenly felt all the more thankful for the 100's of  
wonderful books in my own library.

2<sup>nd</sup>, God's choosing of the poor to be among His people  
demonstrates His sovereignty.

We would have expected Him to choose the rich/famous.  
But His choice of men/women defies worldly-wisdom=>

*“Not many wise according to the flesh, not many  
mighty, not many noble; / but God has chosen the  
foolish things of the world to shame the wise”  
(I Cor 1:26-27).*

X died for some people whom the world values least=>  
poor people.

When God told Moses to take a census of the Israelites, He  
said that each one of them was to give a ransom for  
himself to the Lord by paying a ½ shekel, an amount  
which every man could afford.

Then He added=> *“The rich shall not pay more, and  
the poor shall not pay less than the half shekel,  
when you give the contribution to the LORD to  
make atonement for yourselves” (Ex 30:15).*

In God's eyes the poor are worth no more/less than the rich.  
He sovereignly chose whomever He chose, and many  
of them are poor.

3<sup>rd</sup>, God chooses the poor because they often glorify Him best.

My friend Paul Wright was a missionary to Romania back  
in the days of the Communist empire in Europe.

He would sneak into Romania, meet secretly with a handful  
of pastors, & give them a week of seminary training.  
It was the only training at that level which was available to  
them, and they valued it very highly.

But they were so poor, that they would go w/o eating for  
the week before that, in order to make sure Paul had  
plenty to eat, & they fed him like a king.

What glory their sacrifice brought to the name of X!

4<sup>th</sup>, God uses His poorest people to triumph over Satan.

That's what He did w/ Job, about whom Satan told God=>

*"Thou hast blessed the work of his hands, & his  
possessions have increased in the land. / But put  
forth Thy hand now and touch all that he has;  
he will surely curse Thee to Thy face" (1:9-11).*

God allowed Satan to make a poor man of Job, and Job  
glorified God all the more by responding=>

*"Though He slay me, I will hope in Him" (13:15).*

Poor but faithful believers prove Satan wrong, and bring  
great glory to the Lord.

5<sup>th</sup>, poor people give other believers an opportunity to show their  
love to the Lord.

When we show mercy/kindness to fellow Xns, we do so to  
X, Himself.

God has poured out His love into our hearts, and has given  
us the poor to become recipients of that love.

Acts of love to the least among X's brethren, become acts of  
love to Him.

When we feed the hungry, or clothe those who can't afford  
clothing, our Lord accepts such acts of kindness as if  
they were done to Him, personally.

**These are the things God expects of His people.**

But in today's text we'll read about some poor people who were  
badly mistreated by the same rich folks James told to weep  
& howl in last week's text, because of the miseries God  
was bringing on them, for hoarding their wealth.

The poor in our text today will appeal to God, & He will hear  
their cry.

If the rich people in this text were real Xns, they could not, &  
would not, have taken advantage of the poor, as these did.

I Jn 3 asks=> *"Whoever has the world's goods, and beholds  
his brother in need and closes his heart against him,  
how does the love of God abide in him?"* (verse 17).

The answer is obvious=> It doesn't.

**In today's text, James exposes three sins of the rich which  
caused the poor people of his time, to cry out to God...**

- \* Robbery of the poor
- \* Indifference to the poor
- \* Murder of the poor



## **\* Robbery of the Poor**

**[James 5:4]=>** *“Behold, the pay of the laborers who mowed your fields, and which has been withheld by you, cries out against you; and the outcry of those who did the harvesting has reached the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth.”*

**James says “Behold!” because this is all so shocking, in light of God’s expectations of us (His people) regarding the poor (which we have just seen).**

In Mt 20:8, Jesus told a parable about such day laborers, saying that a landowner hired a few of them early one morning. He promised to pay them 1 denarius/day for their work. They agreed, because that was a fair wage, and so he sent them off to work in his vineyard.

An hour/so later, he hired more laborers, then continued to hire still others 3 hours, 6 hours, and 8 hours later.

At day’s end, he paid each of the workers 1 denarius.

I.e., he paid the last ones hired, for a full day’s work, far more than they deserved.

Jesus had begun this parable by saying that the kingdom of heaven is like this.

It turns all this world’s values upside down, and operates on the principle of grace, rather than bare merit/fairness.

A godly landowner/employer overpays his laborers according to heavenly wisdom, wanting to bless them w/ more than they deserve, not to cheat them out of what they do deserve.

His business ethics are not laced with selfishness that seeks to get rich by overworking/underpaying other people. Instead, he trusts God to take care of him, as he fulfills his responsibility to care for them.

It is an expression of love for others, not a self-centered spirit, that takes advantage of them.

**Day-laborers like this usually lived from hand to mouth.**

They waited in the marketplace each morning, hoping to get hired.

They counted on receiving a fair daily wage, for a fair day's work.

They needed that, in order to feed themselves/their-families.

But the rich landowners in this case withheld their wages at day's end, when they could do nothing about it.

It would have been wrong for them to merely delay payment, because, as we saw earlier, the Law required such owners to pay their workers before the sun went down.

But shockingly, these landowners had totally refused to pay (or at least, to pay in full) the wages they owed, & the perf. tense of the verb indicates they were withholding them permanently.

Unscrupulous people like that know such workers are too poor to hire a lawyer to take their case to court, so from a human

p.o.v. there's nothing they can do, but accept the unfair situation.

**But James says that such laborers do have a champion whom their bosses haven't taken into account=> the Lord.**

He says the unpaid wages of the laborers, cry/shout/scream-out for justice, and reach the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth (the omnipotent Commander of all heaven's angelic hosts).

Obviously, inanimate money doesn't actually speak/shout, any more than the blood of Abel literally/actually cried out to God in Gen 4.

But after Cane killed his brother Abel, the Lord told him=>

*“The **voice** of your brother's **blood** is **crying** to Me from the ground” (Gen 4:10).*

What God was saying, is that He is aware of every injustice, and so passionately longs for justice, that it's as if the evidence itself (the wages/blood) were crying to Him for retribution.

The poor/helpless can know, that they have the Lord on their side.

**We saw this principle earlier today in Exodus 3:9, where God told the Israelite slaves in Egypt=> “The cry of the sons of Israel has come to Me; furthermore, I have seen the oppression with which the Egyptians are oppressing them.”**

Like the workers in our own text, the Israelite slaves also felt helpless/powerless.

They sighed under the mistreatment of their Egyptian taskmasters, and then their sighs turned into cries/groans.

Some of us have gone through something like that at times, ourselves.

At first people noticed we just seemed to sigh heavily/sadly and absent-mindedly; but ultimately the sorrow in our hearts welled-up, until we groaned, or even cried.

Our mere sighs didn't reach the Lord's ears—not that He doesn't actually hear everything we say/think.

But when our sighs deepened into cries/groans, they came up before the Lord, not merely as prayers, but as fervent supplications.

It was as if He heard our cries, the cries of the Israelite slaves & those of the laborers in our text, like that, then stopped to listen attentively, responding, out of His own just nature.

The laborers had been robbed by rich bullies, it was wrong, and it was intolerable to God.

**The second sin of the rich which caused the laborers in our text to cry out to God was the landowners'...**

**\* Indifference to the Poor**

[Verse 5]=> *“You have lived luxuriously on the earth and led a life of wanton pleasure; you have fattened your hearts **in** [in connection with, or “for”] a day of slaughter.”*

**In their self-indulgence, they had “lived luxuriously.”**

Is that wrong? In their case yes, for several reasons=>

1<sup>st</sup>, it was wrong because the wealth in which these rich men were indulging, had been stolen from their poor laborers.

2<sup>nd</sup>, it's also wrong to let self-indulgence like that reorient one's whole mind/life toward the things of this world, & away from God.

II Tim 3:4 calls men like these landowners "*lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God.*"

Solomon gave himself over to such self-indulgence & then

later he said=> "*All that my eyes desired I did not refuse them. I did not withhold my heart from any pleasure, for my heart was pleased because of all my labor and this was my reward for all my labor*"  
(Eccl 2:7-10).

But Solomon ultimately drew this conclusion from it all=>

*"I considered all my activities which my hands had done and the labor which I had exerted, and behold [surprised discovery] all was vanity and striving after wind and there was no profit under the sun"*  
(Eccl 2:11).

Life that is fixated on this world (not eternity) is profitless.

I Tim 5:6 calls such people "dead, even while they live."

3<sup>rd</sup>, the landowners' luxurious self-indulgence was ultimately wrong because it expressed their indifference to the suffering of their own workers.

They were guilty of the same indifference practiced by the rich man in Lk 16:19 who "*habitually dressed in purple and fine linen, gaily living in splendor every day.*"

Meanwhile, his self-indulgent attitude enabled him to  
blithely ignore poor Lazarus, who was placed at his  
gate each day.

He was covered with sores, being licked by dogs.

He longed for the crumbs that fell from the rich man's  
table, because that's all he'd get from the rich man.

People like this rich man close their eyes to others' needs,  
even as they gratify their own selfish lusts/pleasures.

**Charles Spurgeon said something about this, that I like=>**

“Some of you should, now and then, go and search out poverty.... If you would have your hearts enlarged, visit the poor! Follow them into their dens.... See the straw in the corner of the room where they sleep; yes, see worse than that—see a chair whereon a man has been for the last five years, not able to sit without being propped, obliged to be fed by others and yet living on four or five shillings a week.... Go and see such cases, and if you do not put your hands in your pockets and help the aged pilgrims, I am afraid there is not much Christianity in you.”

**Finally, James added that the rich landowners in our text had**

*“fattened [their] hearts in [or for] a day of slaughter.”*

The “*day of slaughter*” here is most likely the Day of Judgment.

But like ignorant oxen being fattened up by their owners so their  
meat will fetch a good price at the slaughter house, the  
wicked landowners continued to increase the weighty of  
their own guilt, cheating their workers, and indulging  
themselves.

Their hearts craved luxuries, & that's what they fed them,  
until they were fat/ready for slaughter, blinding

themselves to heaven, and ignoring biblical warnings of the Judgment to come.

\* **Murder of the Poor**—was the 3<sup>rd</sup> sin of the rich that caused the poor laborers in our text, to cry out to God.

[Verse 6]=> *“You have condemned and put to death the righteous man; he does not resist you.”*

**Back in Jms 2:6, we read=>** *“Is it not the rich who oppress you and personally drag you into court?”*

Now we discover just how egregious/horrible that situation actually was=>

The rich landowners weren't just dragging poor people into the inconvenience of being taken to court;

They were using the legal system to kill them.

They apparently used their wealth to influence the judges' decisions, if not to bribe them outright.

The word “*and*” is not in the original text, so it actually reads

*“You condemned/murdered the righteous”* as if this were all one action—a slam-dunk mistrial, that had nothing to do with justice, but everything to do w/ the power of money to pervert justice.

In seeking wealth, the rich had sunk to murdering the poor.

It was all nice/legal, but it was murder nonetheless.

Jewish courts, including the Sanhedrin, couldn't execute anyone.

So these rich murderers seem to have subverted the Roman judicial system, in order to achieve their greedy/deadly ends.

**The victims in this whole outrage were “*the righteous*”— poor people of good character, who had done nothing wrong but ask their rich employers for the daily wages, that were owed them.**

Their deaths would leave the executed laborers’ families helpless and defenseless, unable to provide for themselves, & even less capable of defending themselves, against the greed of these same rich predators, than the laborers themselves had been.

It was inhumanity like this that Isaiah had denounced

so vehemently/passionately, saying=> “*Woe to those who enact evil statutes, And to those who constantly record unjust decisions, / So as to deprive the needy of justice, And rob the **poor** of My people of their rights, In order that **widows** may be their spoil, And that they may plunder the orphans*” (Isa 10:1-2).

**The poor didn’t resist their enemies, because they couldn’t.**

They were like the Israelites when Moses first attempted to lead them in rebellion against Pharaoh, to gain their freedom.

They had become slaves in mind a/w/a body—so ground down, & so used to oppression, that they’d lost all spirit, no longer even having any hope at all of freedom.

That’s how the poor people in our text must have felt as well.



On the other hand, some of these poor laborers may have submitted to their oppressors out of faith-in/obedience-to their Lord.

X had said=> *“Do not resist him who is evil; but whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn to him the other also. / And if anyone wants to sue you, & take your shirt, let him have your coat also. / And whoever shall force you to go one mile, go with him two”*  
(Mt 5:39-41).

X Himself, when reviled, did not revile in return, & uttered no threats, submitting to His enemies, & *“entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously”* (I Pt 2:23).

The poor people James described may have been emulating Jesus’ response to their oppressors, out of their faith in Him.

**Worldly wisdom teaches man to take advantage of the poor, in order to serve one’s own selfish ego/interests.**

The love of money can turn people into inhuman savages, who will even stoop to killing/destroying others to gain more wealth.

Godly wisdom takes the opposite approach both to money & to the poor.

It says, “Everything I own has been given/entrusted to me by God.

“He loves/cares-about the poor, and He has placed me here to help care for them, on His behalf.”

In Gal 2:10, Paul recalls the instructions he had received from the Jerusalem Council, saying=> *“They only asked us to*

*remember the poor—the very thing I also was eager to do.”*

God has called us to remember the poor, as well.

It’s very easy for us to forget the poor, so God told Paul, &

He tells us, to go out of our way to remember them.

We talk about the equality of all men, but in reality we find

that it’s far easier for us to remember the rich, than

the poor—the waitress, the gas-station clerk, or the

older person hired to chase down shopping carts in

the grocery store parking lot.

They are souls, bound for heaven/hell, just like the rich—

souls we should remember, speak to kindly and

courteously, share the gospel with, pray for, and seek

to help, if they need it.

Someone: “I’d help them, but they’d just spend the money I’d give them on cigarettes.”

That may be true, & their foolish values may be to blame

(at least, in part) for their poverty in the first place.

But ultimately, that’s not the point.

The poor are souls God cares about, & whom He has

placed in our path, to love/help, as He gives us

opportunity, and as they will permit us to do so.

## ***“The Cry Heard by God”***

September 30, 2012

Text: James 5:4-6

1. In the nation of Israel, God intended for poor people to find relief from their poverty in their [22 neighbors'] generosity.

Deut 15:7-8, 9, 10

2. There were a number of provisions in the Law which were especially designed to assist and protect a [10 poor] man.

Lev 25:25-28; 25:39; Deut 24:12-15; 24:15; Psa 140:12; Prov 14:31; 19:17; 22:22; I Tim 6:17-19

### **Why wouldn't God, who is both good and sovereign, eliminate poverty altogether among His people?**

Psa 50:10

- \*3. So that others will thank Him for His generosity to [10 them].

- \*4. God's choosing of the poor to be among His people demonstrates His [24 sovereignty].

I Cor 1:26-27; Ex 30:15

- \*5. God chooses the poor because they often [16 glorify] Him best.

- \*6. God uses His poorest people to [16 triumph] over Satan.

Job 1:9-11; 13:15

- \*7. Poor people give other believers an opportunity to show their [10 love] to the Lord.

I Jn 3:17

### **In today's text, James exposes three sins of the rich which caused the poor people of his time to cry out to God...**

#### **\* Robbery of the Poor**

**[James 5:4]**

8. James says, "*Behold!*" because this is all so shocking in light of [12 God's] expectations of us regarding the poor.

Mt 20:8

9. A godly landowner overpays his laborers according to heavenly wisdom wanting to bless them with [10 more] than they deserve.

Gen 4:10; Ex 3:9

10. The laborers had been robbed by rich bullies, it was wrong, and it was [24 intolerable] to God.

\* **Indifference to the Poor**

[Verse 5]

II Tim 3:4; Eccl 2:7-10, 11; I Tim 5:6

11. The landowners' luxurious self-indulgence was ultimately wrong because it expressed their indifference to the [20 suffering] of their own workers.

Lk 16:19

\* **Murder of the Poor**

[Verse 6]

12. The rich landowners weren't just dragging poor people into court; they were using the legal system to [10 kill] them.

Isa 10:1-2

13. The poor didn't resist their enemies because they [18 couldn't].

Mt 5:39-41; I Pet 2:23; Gal 2:10

14. The poor are souls God cares about, and whom He has placed in our path, to love and [10 help] as He gives us opportunity, and as they will permit us to do so.