

Do You See “Others”? Ուրիշներ կը Տեսնե՞ս

James 5:1-6

There used to be a TV show called *The Good Wife*. I enjoyed the stories but my favorite part was the character of the wife of the governor who remained faithful to her marriage vow even though the husband was not. This continued for a long time during the show. I always said to my wife: “Yes, this is *good*. She is staying firm as the good wife.” Then things changed and she lost it as well. I lost my interest in the show. Sevan used to ask me, “What happened to the good wife?” I used to say, “No more good wife.” I then heard a new show started called *The Good Fight*.

Let me ask you, **What is a “Good Life?”** I assume what the world “sells” to us is that “good life” comes from what kind of car we drive, what clothes we wear, and which vacation destination we pick. The good life is a life of self-indulgence. If we are not traveling first class or business class, something is wrong in our contentment in life.

For many a good life and money go together. We forget that money is a dangerous tool. Someone said: “Money and misery often go hand in hand, especially when money has been gained by exploiting others.”

James describes to us *a good life*. A life that has purpose, a life that glorifies God. A life in which you are not the center, but God is. A life that can see “others” not as object to be used, but as people created in the image of God.

Before I go to chapter 5, let me recap the message of chapter 4 which was given at the start of the New Year (1/13/2019):

1. Planning Without God

Come now, you who say, “Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and make a profit.” (James 4:13 ESV)

2. Determining life without God

yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes. (James 4:14 ESV)

3. Instead...

Instead you ought to say, “If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that.” (James 4:15 ESV)

A. Does your plan glorify God?

B. Is it biblical?

C. Is your plan motivated by God’s Love?

We now arrive to chapter 5.

James wrote this letter to the early church, the early Christians who did not have an easy life. Many were persecuted in the Roman Empire because of their faith in Christ. Some even were excommunicated from their families because they were followers of Christ. In all these situations, there was a misuse of power by the rich and the wealthy. There were wealthy landlords who became richer on the account of the poor.

The commentaries explain: “James speaks in the tones of the Old Testament prophets. The prophets described what would happen when the day of the LORD comes (cf. e.g. Isa. 13:6; 15:3; Amos 8:3). This background makes clear that *the miseries that are coming upon the rich* refer not to earthly, temporal suffering, but to the condemnation and punishment that God will mete out to them on the day of judgment.”¹

Who are these rich people? Are they Christians? Are they part of the church? Most likely they are. Let me clarify one thing, James is not rebuking the wealthy (or the merchants chapter 4), but he is rebuking the ones who exploit those who work for them.

Let us see how James presents this:

-The Crime: Theft and Murder*

Behold, the wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud... (5:4 ESV)

You have condemned and murdered the righteous person. He does not resist you. (5:6 ESV)

It bothers me when a worker is not justly compensated. It bothers me how people mistreat others. Those “landlords” mistreated those people. In other words, the greed of the rich man caused the death, either directly or indirectly, of those whom he has oppressed². They did not resist.

How do we resist oppressor like this? We will discuss next sermon the conduct of the oppressed. God is teaching them not to take revenge. God will take care of it in his time. An early church Father Justin Martyr said: "Jesus' great miracle is that he did not retaliate"

-The Evidence: Hoarded wealth

Your gold and silver have corroded, and their corrosion will be evidence against you and will eat your flesh like fire. You have laid up treasure in the last days. (5:3 ESV)

You have lived on the earth in luxury and in self-indulgence. You have fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter. (5:5 ESV)

How greedy and self-centered were these people. Hoarding is always wrong. (By the way, why do we need to rent space to put things we don't need?) James also mentions "the last days." After Jesus' resurrection, we live in the last days. Jesus will return any time. James is questioning these people about their priorities concerning the last days. What is important in the last days? Don't we have more important things to do? If you know this is your last day, how do you live?

I ask you the question as well: where do you invest if you know you live a temporary life? What is more valuable to you in life?

-The Testimony: Prayers of the Oppressed

the cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord of hosts. (5:4b ESV)

James is warning to the "rich" saying, "You are oppressing those people. The oppressed are praying to the Lord, and their prayers have reached their destination." Watch out, God heard it and God will avenge.

David says:

The righteous will rejoice when he sees the vengeance;
he will bathe his feet in the blood of the wicked.

¹¹Mankind will say, "Surely there is a reward for the righteous;
surely there is a God who judges on earth." (Psalm 58:10-11 ESV)

- Sentence: Guilty, Judgment

Come now, you rich, weep and howl for the miseries that are coming upon you. (5:1 ESV)

Watch out people, the Lord is coming and He will bring judgment and justice.

Jesus described the rich man who was piling up his riches:

¹⁵And he said to them, “Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.” ¹⁶And he told them a parable, saying, “The land of a rich man produced plentifully, ¹⁷and he thought to himself, ‘What shall I do, for I have nowhere to store my crops?’ ¹⁸And he said, ‘I will do this: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods.’ ¹⁹And I will say to my soul, “Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.”” ²⁰But God said to him, ‘Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?’ ²¹So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God.” (Luke 5:15-21 ESV)

Please ask yourself today. “How much I need to live for one day?” If you have a family, multiply that with their number. Then think about the month and the year. Ask yourself about your priorities. Then ask yourself, “Am I faithful in giving to God? Am I hoarding my treasures?” Mind you, financial planning is not wrong.

On the other hand, ask yourself, “How faithful I am in paying my employees fairly?” Are you generous towards the people who serve you?

Coming back to James, James is drawing the picture very clearly. His language is very harsh and direct.

What to do? Application:

What is the proper response for the rich person?

1. Repent, and turn to God

For the day of the LORD is great and very awesome;
who can endure it?

¹² “Yet even now,” declares the LORD,

“return to me with all your heart,

with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning;

¹³ and rend your hearts and not your garments.”

Return to the LORD your God,

for he is gracious and merciful,

slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love;

and he relents over disaster. (Joel 2:11b-13 ESV)

Turning to God in humility on confession is a good place to start.

2. See “others” as God’s beloved creation, and an look for an opportunity to be instrument of God.

Who are the “others” in your life? Do you care to know about the “others”?

The oppressed, the marginalized, the bullied, the unwanted, the depressed, the lonely, the elderly, the ones with whom no one wants to talk, the dirty (not clean), the ugly

People who do jobs that no one wants to do: porter, dish washer,

3. Learn to invest in God’s work.

How about saying this: God likes to see that we invest in His treasury fund.

“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven.” (Matthew 6:19-20 NIV)

The best investment is in ministries that make a difference in people’s lives. Ministries where they learn to live Christ-centered lives, ministries where people will know that God cares for them.

Illustration: An enormously rich man complained to a psychiatrist once that despite his great wealth which enabled him to have whatever he wanted, he still felt miserable. The psychiatrist took the man to the window overlooking the street and asked, “What do you see?” The man replied, “I see men, women, and children.” The psychiatrist then took the man to

stand in front of a mirror and asked, “Now what do you see?” The man said, “I see only myself.” The psychiatrist then said, “In the window there is glass and in the mirror there is glass, and when you look through the glass in the window, you see others, but when you look into the glass of the mirror you see only yourself. The reason for this,” said the psychiatrist, “is that behind the glass in the mirror is a layer of silver. When silver is added, you cease to see others. You only see yourself.”

Let us examine ourselves today, What do you see?

* The titles and ideas are adapted from pastor Andrew Drake PBCC (2008)

1 Tyndale Commentary on James.

2. John Hanneman, The Folly of the Rich Man.

3. ibid