



1 Go to now, ye rich men, weep and howl for your miseries that shall come upon you. 2 Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are motheaten. 3 Your gold and silver is cankered; and the rust of them shall be a witness against you, and shall eat your flesh as it were fire. Ye have heaped treasure together for the last days. 4 Behold, the hire of the labourers who have reaped down your fields, which is of you kept back by fraud, crieth: and the cries of them which have reaped are entered into the ears of the Lord of sabaoth. 5 Ye have lived in pleasure on the earth, and been wanton; ye have nourished your hearts, as in a day of slaughter. 6 Ye have condemned and killed the just; and he doth not resist you. 7 Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord. Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and latter rain. (James 5:1-7)

A casual reading of this passage would lead the reader to believe that wealth, in itself, is evil; but that is not the case. Inanimate objects possess no moral conscience. The greed and covetousness with which mankind views wealth determines the wicked intent of the heart of men. *“For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.”* (1 Tim 6:10) Does this verse claim money to be wicked? No, it does not! It states that the *“LOVE of money”* is the root of all evil. Nicodemus was a wealthy man. The wise Men were wealthy men. Joseph of Arimethea was a wealthy man. Lydia was a wealthy woman. But all of these were faithful disciples of the Lord. Money and riches become evil (to us) when we place a greater value thereon than we should. Many place a higher premium on riches than they do on the lives of other human beings and, ultimately, upon the importance of God in their lives. Allow me to recount the story Jesus gives us of the rich young ruler:

18 And a certain ruler asked him, saying, Good Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life? 19 And Jesus said unto him, Why callest thou me good? none is good, save one, that is, God. 20 Thou knowest the commandments, Do not commit adultery, Do not kill, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Honour thy father and thy mother. 21 And he said, All these have I kept from my youth up. 22 Now when Jesus heard these things, he said unto him, Yet lackest thou one thing: sell all that thou hast, and distribute unto the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, follow me. 23 And when he heard this, he was very sorrowful: for he was very rich. (Luke 18:18-23)

In this event, we read of a rich young ruler coming to Christ. You will note that the young man addresses Christ as Good Master (Teacher) and not as Lord. The parallel Gospel in Mark says this young man knelt down before Jesus: *“And when he was gone forth into the way, there came one running, and kneeled to him.”* (Mark 10:17) Jesus could see into the morally sound heart of this young man immediately. The young man was apparently a civically responsible person who shared with the poor. He seems to have (or at least claims here) been honest and charitable with others around him. But his question exposes a lack of understanding about who Jesus is, and upon what salvation depends. He wants to know what he can DO to inherit eternal life. Well, what CAN he do? We can DO nothing to inherit eternal life for it is the gift of the grace of God. *“For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God Not of works, lest any man should boast.”* (Eph 2:8-9) So the young man is seeking the wrong means of salvation. The very means of salvation stood before him in the Person of Christ. There was no good works he could do to be saved.

Jesus asked the young man: *“Why callest thou me good? none is good, save one, that is, God.”* Jesus is showing us that this young man does not recognize Jesus as Lord God. True, there is only one who is righteous and that is God. But Jesus is God the Son who stands before the young man. The young man fails the first test in knowing the Lord Jesus Christ. Perhaps recognizing the good moral character which lies in the heart of the young man, Jesus outlines those Commandments of God that are our duty to our fellow men: *“Thou knowest the commandments, Do not commit adultery, Do not murder, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Honour thy father and thy mother.”* The young man proudly responds: *“All these have I kept from my youth up.”* It may be true that the young man has kept those moral Commandments that apply to his fellow man, but what of the very first Commandment that relates to our duty to God? Jesus knows precisely the lack in the heart of the young man. Jesus knows that the young man has placed his wealth above his duty to God. Though he may have kept the lesser Commandments toward man, he has failed to keep even the First Greater Commandment: *“I am the Lord thy God; thou shalt have no other gods beside me!”* Jesus draws the young man out of his self-righteous shell with His follow up: *“Now when Jesus heard these things, he said unto him, Yet lackest thou one thing: sell all that thou hast, and distribute unto the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, follow me.”* Lacking that ONE thing condemns us to eternal darkness! Jesus is asking the young man to surrender that which is most valuable in his life, and make God most valuable. This, the young man cannot do. *“And when he heard this, he was very sorrowful: for he was very rich.”* Not every wealthy person would have been asked to surrender his wealth for Christ – only those who allow their wealth and greed to eclipse their duty to God. This is the whole point of the argument James provides in this passage.

1 “Go to now, ye rich men, weep and howl for your miseries that shall come upon you.” James opens with an attention-getter. “Go to now” – listen to me for my counsel is important for your souls. He is not speaking to EVERY rich man for all do not abuse their wealth as those in this passage are described. He speaks to those who hoard their resources and have no charity toward others – men who not only highly treasure their own wealth, but covet the belongings of others. Such men are naked and poor in the eyes of God for they have no covering for their sins. In fact, James says: “2 Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are moth-eaten.” Wealth employed for greedy purposes are corrupted and not useful for God or His people.

3 “Your gold and silver is cankered; and the rust of them shall be a witness against you, and shall eat your flesh as it were fire. Ye have heaped treasure together

for the last days.” Hoarded wealth is not in circulation and benefits no one. It is like the table silver of a big house in which the silver is always used daily. The silver service retains its brightness because of use, but that silver placed in a drawer for long storage loses its luster and becomes tarnished. No matter the quality of the medal, it loses its immunity to rust if not used in a manner pleasing to God. It becomes a canker of the heart that destroys every soft tissue of feeling and love. James says that the wealthy have stored up their riches for the last days. Pray tell, of what value is gold or silver that cannot be carried beyond the boundaries of mortal life on the last day?

We have just completed observance of Advent and Christmas in the Church calendar. How grateful and filled with joy we are that Christ came to us as an innocent Babe at Bethlehem to save us. But that same Jesus will not always behave as a loving Babe toward sinners who persist in their rebellion against Heaven and its Sovereign. **4 *“Behold, the hire of the labourers who have reaped down your fields, which is of you kept back by fraud, crieth: and the cries of them which have reaped are entered into the ears of the Lord of sabaoth.”*** The wealthy are often no better than common thieves who have reaped profits on the backs of honest men whose wages they have usurped and misappropriated. Now there is a special and particular Name by which the Lord is called who hears of these wicked practices – **Lord of Sabaoth!** Is this not an important title? It has direct bearing on one of the offices of the Lord Jesus Christ – it means, Lord of the Armies of Israel. I would not wish to be in the shoes of the wicked rich who have incurred the anger of the Captain of the Hosts of Heaven. When Christ returns, He will come both as Liberator of His people and as a consuming fire to those who have waged war against Heaven. It is much like MacArthur’s return to the Philippine Islands. He liberated the Island from the oppressors, booted the oppressors, and put them to the sword.

5 *“Ye have lived in pleasure on the earth, and been wanton; ye have nourished your hearts, as in a day of slaughter. 6 Ye have condemned and killed the just; and he doth not resist you.”* These rich of which James speaks have placed personal pleasure above compassion and love of God. As ruthless conquerors who take no quarter on the battlefield, they have fed their greed on the blood of the poor. These rich have ignored justice and slain the just man without provocation. It is the old, old profession of politics as usual which doubtless is a close relative to the FIRST notorious profession. (Let the reader understand)

James has unconditionally condemned the greed of the wealthy, but he saves a word of encouragement for the righteous of the Lord. **7 *“Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord. Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and latter rain.”*** The uncharacteristic impatience of Napoleon in ordering the premature charge of the Imperial Guards at Waterloo lost the field that day and resulted in his final defeat. Patience in battle is an invaluable asset. We are in heated battle with the forces of the Devil and his minions. We must deploy our resources wisely and without impatience.

The Armies of Heaven are held in reserve for the consolidation of the battlefield. Once during the Battle of Atlanta, a small Union supply post was attacked by a superior force under Confederate General Hood. The depot was overrun and the fragmentary Union forces were forced into a small fort atop a hill overlooking Altoona Pass. The situation was hopeless, and surrender seemed the only feasible option. But just prior to surrendering, a semaphore flag signal was seen flashing across the valley “Hold the Fort. I am coming. W.T. Sherman.” The Union troops rallied and ‘held the fort’ until rescued by the infamous Sherman. The event inspired Phillip Bliss to write the words

and music to an old hymn entitled, "Hold the Fort:"

*Ho, my comrades! see the signal waving in the sky!
Reinforcements now appearing, victory is nigh.*

Refrain - "Hold the fort, for I am coming," Jesus signals still;
Wave the answer back to Heaven, "By Thy grace we will."

*See the mighty host advancing, Satan leading on;
Mighty ones around us falling, courage almost gone!*

Refrain

*See the glorious banner waving! Hear the trumpet blow
!In our Leader's Name we triumph over ev'ry foe.*

Refrain

*Fierce and long the battle rages, but our help is near;
Onward comes our great Commander, cheer, my comrades, cheer!*

Refrain

We are to do the same in wait for the grand and glorious day of Christ's return at the head of the Armies of the Hosts of Heaven.