

## Regarding the Study of James Chapter 5...

Even by the standards of the rest of the book, James 5 is an exceptionally challenging chapter. Pete Burton, in his Emmaus Online message and preaching at the Yvonne Arnaud decided – probably very sensibly – not to take all 20 verses as his text, but to focus just on verses 1-6. Also, rather than attempting a detailed exegesis, he used this brief passage as a way of speaking more generally about how we, as followers of Christ, should approach the tricky issue of money, which Karl Marx once named with great perspicuity, ‘the jealous god’. Jesus had, of course, got there nearly 1900 years earlier when he said, "You cannot serve God and money at the same time."<sup>1</sup>

Preaching yesterday morning, Pete suggested that perhaps, in our Collectives, we might like to look more broadly at the whole of the chapter. And so, I am providing two alternative studies for this week’s collectives.

1. A study based on Pete Burton’s talk on Money (James 5:1-6), which I have called, **Money, Money, Money**<sup>2</sup>
2. A study, from a slightly different perspective (an ‘alternative reading’, if you will) looking at the whole of the chapter (James 5:1-20), entitled, **What will you do in the end?**

You might like to look at them both and decide which is more suitable for your collective.

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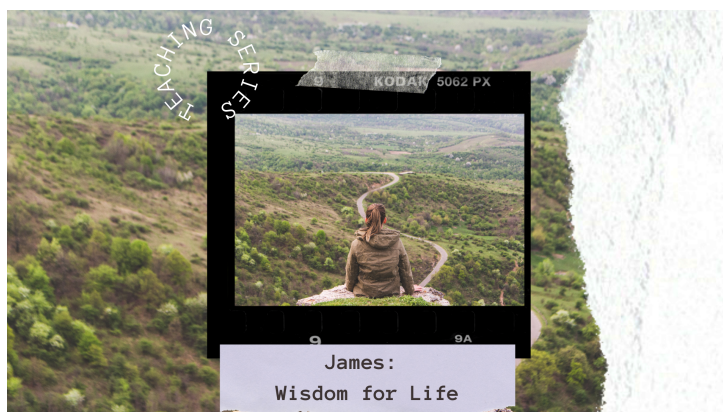
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<sup>1</sup>Matthew 6:24 (ICB)

<sup>2</sup> This is my Abba inspired title, but not the Abba to whom Jesus referred. Pete Burton was not responsible for this.

## #5 – JAMES 5: MONEY, MONEY, MONEY! (Pete Burton)

- Where have you seen God at work in your life this week? (Share any brief examples and encouragements).
- Was there anything from Sunday's message which you found particularly inspiring or challenging?
- Was there anything else you particularly noticed?



### James 5:1-6

*Now listen, you rich people, weep and wail because of the misery that is coming on you. Your wealth has rotted, and moths have eaten your clothes. Your gold and silver are corroded. Their corrosion will testify against you and eat your flesh like fire. You have hoarded wealth in the last days. Look! The wages you failed to pay the workers who mowed your fields are crying out against you. The cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord Almighty. You have lived on earth in luxury and self-indulgence. You have fattened yourselves in the day of slaughter. You have condemned and murdered the innocent one, who was not opposing you.*

Verses 1-3 pronounce prophetic judgement on the wealthy, while verses 4-6 accuse the rich of crimes against those protected the law of Moses – widows, orphans, foreigners, and day labourers. Three things Pete said about wealth:

1. At the time of Jesus and James most people were genuinely poor, with just a few wealthier nobles, landowners, and merchants. But, living in the UK today, **We Are the Wealthy**. It is not easy for all of us to feel wealthy in Surrey (obviously it is for some) – especially as a student or on minimum wage – but, from a global perspective, we are. Just by owning a mobile phone or buying clothes imported from developing nations we are part of a system which exploits the global poor... and we probably have too many clothes!
  - *There is a saying about money, often attributed to John Wesley (although there is no evidence that he ever said it): “Get all you can; save all you can; give all you can.” Do you think that is good advice?*
  - *Would you rather be rich or poor? How about ‘stinking rich’ (like the ‘have yachts’) or ‘stinking poor’? (See **Proverbs 30:8** ‘... give me neither poverty nor riches, but give me only my daily bread’).*
2. **Wealth Creates a Dilemma for a Follower of Jesus**. God cares about how we interact with money. Jesus talked about it more than anything apart from the Kingdom. One third of his parables were about money. (see also **Matthew 6:19-24; 19:24**). Wealth is not inherently bad. It can be used to feed the hungry, pioneer life-saving medicine etc. But it remains ‘an area of high risk in the battle to walk humbly with God’ (cf. **James 1:9-10**). Wealth also ‘creates complexity and the need for more wealth’ (see also **Ecclesiastes 5:10-12** ‘Whoever loves money never has enough; whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with their income. This too is meaningless...’) There are 3 areas of concern: (i) How wealth is acquired; (ii) The spirit wealth engenders in the heart – it elevates you socially and can make you proud and careless towards the poor; (iii) The way it is used.
  - *How does wealth make life more complicated?*
  - *Is there anything you could change this week?*
3. **What Can We Do?** Quote: ‘If your financial affairs are a secret, you’ve got a problem’ Although that doesn’t mean you have to tell everybody!
  - *How can we be more accountable about our use of money?*
  - *How can we practice contentment? (Or, do we always need just a bit more?)*
  - *Do we need to change in the way in which we spend money? What should we be thinking about?*
  - *What about ‘Black Friday’ and ‘Cyber Monday’?... And Christmas? How could we reduce some of the more pointless seasonal purchases? Anything that has worked in your family?*

## #5 – JAMES 5: WHAT WILL YOU DO IN THE END? (The Alternative Version)

- Where have you seen God at work in your life this week? (Share any brief examples and encouragements).
- Was there anything from Sunday's message which you found particularly inspiring or challenging?
- Was there anything else you particularly noticed?



### James 5:1,7,13 (Please read the whole chapter)

Now listen, you **rich** people, weep and wail... Be **patient**, then, brothers and sisters, until the Lord's coming... Is anyone among you in trouble? Let them **pray**.

1. **Warning to the Wealthy (James 5:1-6).** 'You stored up treasure in the last days', says James in v.3. 'The last days', 'the harvest', 'the coming of the Lord' all speak of 'the end'. There are frequent references in the Old Testament to 'the Day of the Lord', which is the time when things will be seen for what they really are – the day of unveiling or revelation (Gk. *apokalupsis*). In vv.1-6 James wants to demonstrate the impotence of wealth as protection in 'the last days' – whether that means 'the end of the world', 'the end of the world as we know it', or 'the end of my world'. Wealth is no shield in the face of death as 'ultimate reality'. (cf Luke 12:18-21). Use wealth wisely by looking after the poor, because in this way does it become 'treasure in heaven'. One might say that it is not that wealth in itself is bad, but that it must not be trusted (which is a failure of faith), hoarded (which is a failure of hope), or used to exploit (a failure to love).
  - *In what ways does money dominate our culture and affect the way we view other people?*
  - *How can money and wealth be a good thing?*
  - *When does money also become a problem?*
  - *In what ways do we put our trust in wealth?*
  - *Would you rather be rich or poor?*
  - *How much is enough?*
  - *What could we do differently?*
2. **Patience in Suffering (James 5:7-12).** The patience of a farmer waiting for a harvest, rather than present prosperity, is the way to prepare for the coming of the Lord (the *Parousia* / Appearing of Christ) which will unveil what is real and what is illusory. Through endurance in the face of trouble we can be ready for anything.
  - *Would you rather be rich or contented?*
  - *Would you rather be prosperous or patient?*
3. **The Prayer of Faith (James 5:13-19).** In addition to the passive virtue of patience, James urges his readers to faith-filled prayer by which we may prepare for the coming harvest, the *telos*, the goal towards which we are travelling as pilgrims in a frequently troubled world. Healing, forgiveness, an openness to others about failure expressed in confession of sins to one another, and finally, the power to transform a person's life. 'Remember this:', James writes, 'whoever turns a sinner from the error of their way will save them from death and cover over a multitude of sins.'
  - *What do you think James means by, 'the prayer of faith'?*
  - *Confess your sins to one another? Really? Isn't that a bit risky?*
  - *What makes prayer 'powerful and effective'?*
  - *How do we 'bring back sinners from wandering'?*