

## James 5:1-6

### “Funnels or sponges”

- I. Intro
- II. Vs. 1-3 How they gained their wealth
- III. Vs. 4-6 How they used their wealth

#### I. Intro

Throughout his letter to messianic Jews who were living outside of Israel, **James has written entirely on the need for spiritual growth and the things God uses to stimulate it as well as things to avoid that will stagnate maturity.** I mention this as it is important as he takes up another aspect that can stunt your love for Christ and this has to do with **how you perceive wealth and privilege.** These 6 verses has caused difficulty in the interpretation as **James Isn't clear in whom he is referencing?** Some believe that James is speaking to the **wealthy in the church,** while others see this as a reference to those **nonbelievers who some in the church were idolizing and placing on a pedestal.** Because of this many commentaries have chosen to just sum up these 6 verses instead of examining them. What is clear in James words is his disdain for two specific actions with regards to the wealthy:

A. Vs. 1-3 **How they gained their wealth**

B. Vs. 4-6 **How they used their wealth**

James has already mentioned the wealthy in two other places in this short letter:

1. Vs. 1:9-11 Where clearly the wealthy are believers.
2. Vs. 2:2-6 Where the wealthy are nonbelievers and the issue is how believers gave them favoritism.
3. Vs. 5:1-6 Finally we have this section and James is using a style of writing known

as rhetorical “apostrophe” which was stylistically a turning away from his intended readers to address another group. When James in 2:2-6 wrote about the favoritism that some had given the wealthy and was doing so to the very people who had oppressed them and others. Now in this section James brings it back up and has had enough as these are some of the most biting words in the Bible.

## II. Vs. 1-3 How they gained their wealth

Vs. 1 Many of the secular Jewish merchants were cheating and abusing believers who worked for them by withholding their wages, while others in the fellowship were treating them as if they were gods. As I mentioned this passage is not a general indictment against the wealthy and financially secure. The Bible has clear teaching to us that God is not against people with money, But He does speak out against those who trust in their wealth, gain it through dishonesty and fail to realize that what they have is not their but His and as such they are mere stewards given the task of rightly handling His resources for His glory. The problem isn't money it's “**THE LOVE OF MONEY**”! That is the root of evil. Trust in money instead of faith in the Living God quenches our Love for and security in God. It also causes us to love things more than people as we often will place money above people. Here were wealthy business owners who gained their wealth by cheating their workers out of their paycheck and the worker had no recourse to get what had owed them. Then the money they had they spent on themselves and a lavish lifestyle.

This is the 2<sup>nd</sup> time James has used the phrase “***come now***” which is best rendered “**pay attention to what I'm about to say**”. James says that the proper response of these merchants is to “weep and howl” not because of repentance but because of judgment was about to come upon them. **The believers were given a dose of reality about how God saw**

**these wicked merchants in comparison to how they had placed them upon a pedestal.**

The closest example that I can see today is the worship of wealthy celebrities whose wealth has been gained because they “entertain us”. They have not fixed the social evils of the world; they haven’t fed the hungry, clothed the naked not healed the sick. Yet many, even in the church, worship and not so secretly wish they could be near them. To make matters worse many of them that live these lavish lifestyles speak down in moral superiority over people that drink out of plastic bottles, drive cars instead of using public transportation, and are adamantly opposed to the Bible and Jesus. I watched one of the politicians running for president defend his stand on environmentalism when questioned about his traveling all over the world in his own private jet he said it was justified because he was so very important to the cause!

Vs. 2-3 James uses three illustrations to the temporary nature of wealth that these believers who idolized the wealthy had failed to realize. In each case the Greek wording anticipates their future demise as already happening with the use of the word “**ARE**” as in “*your garments **ARE** moth-eaten*”.

1. **Your riches ARE corrupted**: When we think of wealth today we think of real estate, stocks and bonds and precious metals but wealth has always been a cultural reality as in an agrarian society it would be measured in a different kind of stock, ones with four legs. Here it appears that James has in view produce as he says they are susceptible to decay. His point is that the hoarding away of produce without the ability to resist decay isn’t something to be admired because the storage makes it worthless and keeps others from being able to use it. The wastefulness of the wealthy is what James is speaking on

that their extravagant lifestyle wastes resources others could use as they don't have enough because the wealthy have taken it and wasted it.

2. **Your garments ARE moth-eaten**: Another evidence of wealth was the wardrobe of the rich. They bought extravagant garments to flaunt their wealth. With all the expense of their clothing living in the middle east made such garments vulnerable to moth and insects that would make them nothing more than high priced rags. While in the Dominican Republic I had the opportunity to visit a museum that just so happened to be displaying the Dominican fashion designer Oscar De La Renta, these gowns were worn by the most famous people and went for millions and now were behind glass adorning mannequins.
3. **Your gold and silver ARE corroded**: It is clear that James is using this expression figuratively saying that such precious metals that are being stored up for the future without an understanding of WHO hold the future might as well be iron.

Each of these three examples express the futility of keeping in storage things that should be put to use for the glory of God. The believers are to not idolize such folks who so live in the world's ways as to admire them. **True wealth is never to be measure by what a person HAS but rather by what a person DOES with what they have!** The truth of the matter was that in less than 30 years when the Roman general invaded Jerusalem he destroyed it and all the riches that the wealth had gathered became the Roman's spoil. **God is always better honored when His people are funnels and not sponges to the resources God has given us!**

James says that another thing that they ought not admire about the rich is that they have a wrong view of eternity as they have “*heaped up treasure in the last days.*” They had gathered up wealth as if they were never going to die as where their treasure was so was their heart. They weren’t going to live forever, there is *no Hurst pulling a U-hall.* They didn’t realize that the last days were already upon them and cared more for what they had now than where they would spend eternity.

### **III. Vs. 4-6 How they used their wealth**

Vs. 4-6 James continues his reality check for the believers who idolized the worldly wealthy by saying that they ought to realize the dishonest way that the wealthy had acquired their riches. The wealthy landowner had workers in the field that had earned the wage, but the wealthy had taken advantage of them and not payed them what was promised to gather more profits for themselves. There were no unions or workers’ rights no legal recourse, so the laborer had to just tolerate this practice. Such wealthy abuse shouldn’t be admired by believers as many of them had been victimized by the wealthy. James reminds these folks that the lord hears the cries of these workers and He will judge those who have withheld the wages of the workers in order to gain their wealth!

Furthermore, James takes issue of what these wicked merchants had done with their wealth as they “lived on earth in pleasure and luxury” but have failed to realize that they have only truly succeeded in fattening their hearts for the day of slaughter. Those merchants were addicted to their wealth and like a drug addict who thinks that the only hope they have is in getting more of the same thing that has ruined their life and enslaved them.

The final point James makes with regards to not admiring the worldly wealthy is that their hoarding has taken the lives of folks who otherwise would have lived and James is so bold as to call it murder which suggests that these wealthy business owners knew that what they were doing was taking the life of others. The worldly wealthy were being misrepresented and admired as champions instead of brutal bullies victimizing the innocent. Former secretary of state Henry Kissinger once said; ***“To Americans, usually tragedy is wanting something very badly and not getting it. Many people have had to learn in their private lives, and nations have had to learn in their historical experience, that perhaps the worst form of tragedy is wanting something badly, getting it, and finding it empty.”*** The truth is in my life I have experienced far more generosity from the poor than I have ever from the wealthy. To my way of thinking it is the poor who so live that ought to be admired and if we are fortunate to have been blessed with wealth than we must always remember that with such a blessing comes an even greater responsibility to be a blessing to others!