

James 5:1-6 – Envy Hurts

Calvin, Vincent, TSK, Geneva, GreekLexicon, Henry, PNT, Family, JFB, Robertson, Trapp, Poole, Clarke, Eelectic, JND, Doriani, Rienecker, Gaebelein
Brothers and sisters in the Lord: Many Christians in Apostle James' day suffered from pride. **Pride gave birth to envy.** Envy brought in his **bad friends.** **One of those friends was pain.**

You will see today details of the pain that came from envy.

Our headings are:

Envy Hurts the Envious

Envy Hurts the Envied

Our goals are: That you will remember the Lord provides everything you need for body and soul and you are therefore to learn contentment so you won't envy and cause hurt to the cause of Christ.

Envy Hurts the Envious

1 Come now, you rich, **weep and howl** for your **miseries** that are **coming upon you!**

1. Miseries were coming on the envious - those who crushed the godly poor and then became friends with the wicked rich.

What were these miseries? Jesus said those who pursued wealth **would get was "woe."**

Luke 6:24 "But **woe to you who are rich,** for you have received your consolation.

The Lord wasn't condemning riches. Not at all! He was simply **pointing to those** who trusted in their riches, as opposed to those who trusted in God who gave them their riches.

It is likely some of these envious people were not believers at all, but they saw the church as an opportunity to enhance their business. So they joined. And because of their envy, they would soon see the **horrors and miseries of the Roman invasion and destruction of Jerusalem – the money tree.**

(Jerusalem was a thriving metropolis at that time and a business center.)

2. Their miseries would be so bad the envious would weep and howl.

Weeping was bad as weeping meant there was true sadness, but **howling** was done when there was a **high degree of pain.** Josephus and other historians of that time

confirmed the weeping and howling that took place when Jerusalem was destroyed in AD70.

Blood covered the streets.

Women ate their own children.

Jerusalem was **burned**.

Thousands were sold into **slavery**.

Thousands had their **throats slit** and thrown into the Sea of Galilee, turning it red.

Over **1,000,000** Jews died.

Many were **paraded** in Rome.

Many **strangled** for entertainment in the arenas.

(This was not referring to the end of the world.)

2 Your **riches are corrupted**, and your **garments are moth-eaten**. 3 Your **gold and silver are corroded**, and their corrosion will be a **witness against you and will eat your flesh like fire**. You have heaped up **treasure in the last days**.

3. The envious would know that it was their envy that caused them to weep and howl.

a. Their riches would be corrupted. They gained riches by illicit means and trusted in their riches to give them security. So taking away their riches was the **worst type of punishment a rich person could get**. Eating, drinking, and making merry (signs of wealth) were their gods! They would lose their gods.

b. Their clothes, which were often stored up (hoarded) as a wealth commodity, would be eaten by moths. Rich men would have invested much money in their clothes. Their rich clothes pointed to their position in society. They didn't wear sackcloth made of camel's hair. But their nice clothes would rot.

c. Their gold would be corroded. But it wouldn't be corroded as in rust, but their gold would be tarnished. This meant they were hoarding their wealth! **“Corrosion” is the same word for poison** – the poison of deadly snakes.

Their gold, because it was hoarded, would speak against them – give a clear witness against them.

Their gold, because it was hoarded, would eat their flesh like fire.

Fire is often used as a punishment for covetousness. **It would consume their flesh as gangrene.**

That was how Jerusalem, a city of wealth, was destroyed when **Nebuchadnezzar** came. Thousands died by fire. 586BC.

That was how Jerusalem, the business capital, was destroyed when the **Romans** came. Thousands died by fire. AD70

That was how **Sodom and Gomorrah**, where Lot went for wealth, were destroyed.

That is how the wicked will be destroyed at the **end of the world**, cast into a lake of eternal fire.

So it wasn't strange to use this **strong figurative language**: "God will burn your flesh!" Envy will hurt them!

Isn't it true that it is the rich that hurt the most when there is trouble? The poor have less to lose.

4. I have no doubt the "treasure" mentioned in Verse 2 was used in an ironic way.

The "treasure" would be judgment. God was saying: "You want treasures, so I will give you "treasures" you are saving up.

5. Confirming this was referring to Jerusalem's destruction in AD70, Apostle James said they had saved "in the last days."

Those was the last days before Jerusalem was destroyed. The Jews there were going to see their businesses destroyed.

6. Lessons:

a. Wealth is not wrong. Don't hate wealth. Wealth is a gift of God.

b. Don't play with envy...it will bring in his buddies and hurt you – big-time.
Malls are not your cathedrals.

c. Pay a fair wage to your workers. Don't allow money to blind you. Pay them what they are worth. Don't let them do dangerous work without training. **Those who don't pay a fair wage and rob the poor are taking a deadly poison!** God isn't concerned about what is legal, but what is moral! If you are blinded by envy and lust, you will fall into a ravine and die. It may take a while for you to fall into the deep ravine, but you will fall.

d. Wealth is to aid you in your work. Wealth is for essentials like food, it is to be enjoyed, and it is to be shared. Wealth must not be the goal of your work. If wealth becomes your god, remember wealth is an insatiable god.

e Lay up your treasures in heaven.

Matthew 6:19 "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; 20 "but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal.

(The Vanderbilt's built a "cottage" in Rhode Island with a marble kitchen over 2,000sq. and 40 full-time workers. Even that will fall.)

Envy Hurts the Envied

4 **Indeed** the wages of the **laborers** who mowed your fields, which you **kept back by fraud, cry out;** and the **cries of the reapers have reached the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth.**

1. The "wages" cry out to go to the one to whom they belonged: The day laborers.

Both the poor and the rich needed the work done, but the rich, using their power, abused the poor. Envy controlled them.

Leviticus 19:13 'You shall not cheat your neighbor, nor rob him. The wages of him who is hired shall not remain with you all night until morning.

Deuteronomy 24:14 "You shall not oppress a hired servant who is poor and needy, whether one of your brethren or one of the aliens who is in your land within your gates.

Jeremiah 22:13 "Woe to him who builds his house by unrighteousness And his chambers by injustice, Who uses his neighbor's service without wages And gives him nothing for his work,

Malachi 3:5 And I will come near you for judgment; I will be a swift witness Against sorcerers, Against adulterers, Against perjurers, Against those who exploit wage earners and widows and orphans, And against those who turn away an alien — Because they do not fear Me," Says the LORD of hosts.

Habakkuk 2:9 "Woe to him who covets evil gain for his house, That he may set his nest on high, That he may be delivered from the power of disaster!

Apostle James called attention to this by using the word "indeed," which is otherwise translated "behold," or "see."

2. The reapers – the day laborers- also cried out.

Matthew Henry called this a “crying sin.” This sin reached up quickly to God’s ears, asking him to watch the poor being abused by their own fellow men.

3. They cried to the Lord Sabaoth – the Lord of Hosts – the judgment name for God.

Choosing to use this name for God was a warning to the Jews in particular. They would have known what this word meant and it would have attracted their attention. God used this name when he was about to declare judgment on Judah.

One example:

Isaiah 5:9 In my hearing the LORD of hosts said, "Truly, many houses shall be desolate, Great and beautiful ones, without inhabitant.

5 You have **lived on the earth in pleasure and luxury**; you have **fattened your hearts as in a day of slaughter**.

4. It is true God was not against enjoying riches (God gave riches), but God was against the rich indulging themselves (filling their stomach to their heart’s desire—overfeeding themselves) and not paying the day-laborers their wage or not paying them fairly.

Isn’t it true that men who are rich often don’t know how to limit their gratifications? One of the most outrageous things every done in the history of the world was done by a Muslim leader who built the Taj Mahal as a tomb for his wife. Hundreds of millions of dollars and thousands of lives were used up to build it...even in a nation torn by war and hunger.

Similarly, these men were foolish in their selfish actions. They were ignoring the obvious. Cows don’t know they are going to be slaughtered as they walk to the slaughter house. There is no tension in them. **But man knew! And he still walked forward!**

They were like someone who didn’t care to live right even though he knew he was going to die soon.

And Apostle James alluded to this when he mentioned how it was **common to fatten the calf or lamb before it was slaughtered**. These wicked men were fattening themselves to die.

Deuteronomy 32:15 "But **Jeshurun grew fat** and kicked; You grew fat, you grew thick, you are obese! Then he **forsook God** who made him, and **scornfully esteemed the Rock** of his salvation.

6 You have **condemned**, you have **murdered the just**; he **does not resist you**.

5. The envied were condemned (like in a court, a legal term is used here) and murdered (or destroyed).

Psalms 10:9 He lies in wait secretly, as a lion in his den; He lies in wait to catch the poor; He catches the poor when he draws him into his net.

The verb suggests this condemning of the poor and robbing them was **continuous action**. This destroyed them.

(By the way, the writer was James the Just, so you can see his strong concern for justice.)

6. The envied were weak and unable to resist the cruelty of the envious who had all their lawyer friends behind them.

Ever notice how a crow might pull wool off a sheep's back but never try that with a lion?

But God had instituted protection for the poor, like **using the Year of Jubilee** to control unlimited spread of wealth.

Gleaning is another protection for the poor. The rich had to leave the edges of their fields for the poor.

7. Lessons:

a. It is easier to forget God than to obey him and treat his people well, but don't be cruel to God's people. That's what Israel had done earlier.

Hosea 13:6 When they had pasture, **they were filled**; They were filled and their heart was exalted; **Therefore they forgot Me**.

b. There is a saying: "Fat has no feeling." It is true. When the rich get richer, they lose feeling of others.

c. Cruelty, a child of envy, may be excused on the grounds that the other person "agreed" to the wages. But God doesn't work on man's standards. God doesn't work on democracy. God works on what is right. And God cares for the poor. He is their protector. They were made in his image...as the rich were.

Psalms 41:1 **Blessed is he who considers the poor;** The LORD will deliver him in time of trouble.

d. It is often said there is more justice in hell than in business, for in hell, no one is wrongfully condemned.

Conclusion:

People who lived for the pleasures of this world, hurt themselves by their envy. God would duly recompense them for their sins. But the envious didn't just hurt themselves. They hurt those who were on the receiving end of their envy. They robbed them and treated them with disdain. So God threatened the envious with severe judgment.

Brothers and Sisters in Jesus Christ:

1. Know the kind of riches that really matter in the long run. Know that Jesus is your all in all. It doesn't matter if others are stinking rich. You have more! You have a loving Savior.

2. Crave a close relationship with Jesus. Learn more of him and his work for you so you will crave him more.

3. Testify to other believers how Jesus satisfies your greatest needs so *they* are guarded from envy. Let your life be a testimony to the world so they see the uselessness of craving this world's wealth and yearn for the Savior.

Finally: Whatever you have in this world will burn up or rot. Only what you can take out of this world will last. Do you want that only thing you can take out of this world – the salvation of Jesus Christ? Then ask. God will give it for free. God loves the world.