

Unrighteous Mammon (lesson #10)

James 5:1-6

Do you envy the very rich (be honest)? **Do** you fantasize about what it would be like to have the lifestyle of a person who could do anything his heart desired?

The old saying, “Money doesn’t buy everything” doesn’t give us a lot of comfort, especially in a time like ours when we are continually being drained of cash.

But it is true, money cannot buy the truly lasting relationships & virtues of life that make living on this earth so rewarding.

Money cannot develop a spirit of love & friendship.

Money cannot buy peace of mind or free us from anxiety & concern.

Money certainly does NOT put us in good standing with God.

In fact, the yearning for money & what it can buy is a hindrance—the constant desire for money can actually replace our love for God by interfering with our duty to carry out His will.

In Scripture, the rich are often the object of God’s scorn & condemnation (Lk 6:24-25; 18:24-30).

The point of our study today is not to teach that there is sin in being rich & holiness in being poor, but our objective is to show that we must not “be haughty, nor...trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy” (1 Tim 6:17; Prov 11:28; Matt 6:19-21).

James does not criticize the rich simply because they are rich. **It** is presupposed in the text they these rich people had made their money deceitfully & consumed it according to their own lust.

Riches can be a blessing or a curse, depending on how they are acquired & how they are spent.

Perhaps there are four classes of people in the matter of possessions:

- 1) Rich in the world, but Poor toward God
- 2) Poor in the world, but Rich toward God
- 3) Poor in the world, & Poor toward God
- 4) Rich in the world, & Rich toward God (holding their possessions with a loose hand)

In our text, James, by inspiration of God, teaches us two lessons:

- 1) The worthlessness of riches
- 2) How corrupt one may become who puts his trust in riches rather than God

1. Describe the *wealth* of the “rich” from this text?

There were three general categories of riches (not wealth) in that time: foodstuff, costly clothing items & precious metals.

In this case, the following are mentioned: *gold, silver, garments, heaped up treasure (saving & investments), hired workers & a lifestyle of pleasure & luxury.*

Anything his heart desired was within his reach.

2. Were these “rich” people Christians?

In verse 7 James says, “Therefore...brethren” as though he had been speaking of a class of persons, in verses 1-6, who were not of them (see also [2:2, 6](#)).

3. What would ultimately befall these “rich” people (5:1)?

“Miseries” – talaiporia (tal-ahee-po-ree'-ah); wretchedness, i.e. calamity:

- 1) “Your riches are corrupted”
- 2) “Your garments are moth-eaten”
- 3) “Your gold & silver are corroded (rusted)”
- 4) Their possessions would “witness against” them
- 5) Their possessions would “eat your [their] flesh like fire”
- 6) The wages they paid their workers were fraudulent; and both the wages & the workers would “cry out [to] the Lord of Sabaoth (hosts or armies)”.
- 7) “You have fattened your hearts as in a day of slaughter”

They seems to be comfortable & secure, but that condition would not last.

a. Why would this happen to them (5:4)?

They had defrauded their laborers; they had “kept back” some of what should have been given to those who had been hired.

This was a treacherous crime under the Law (Lev 19:13; Deut 24:14-15; Jer 22:13-16; Mal 3:5; Luke 10:7).

Discuss verse 5 – They made “pleasure” & “luxury” their aim in life. All the while they were merely sealing their horrible fate.

Discuss the phrase – “you have fattened your hearts” indicates that they had taken advantage of the weakness, dependence & vulnerabilities of others for their own sordid gain (as a cow will go after the feed for himself alone, never realizing that the more he eats, the more fit he is for slaughter).

Who may be identified as “the just” (kjv, nkjv) or “the righteous *one* (asv)” or “the righteous *man* (nasu)” or “innocent *men*” (niv).

1. **The** word “just” is dikaios (dik'-ah-yos); equitable (in character or act); by implication, innocent, holy (absolutely or relatively):
 - a. Probably the innocent workers in this context
 - b. But is used to describe Jesus (Acts 3:13-15; 22:12-14)
 - c. Not showing a benevolent spirit toward poor brethren was the same as ignoring the needs of Christ (Matt 25:44-46).

4. How may “mammon” be *righteous* not *unrighteous* (Matt 6:24; Lk 16:1-13)?

“**Mammon**” – mammonas: a common *Aramaic word for “riches,”* akin to a *Hebrew word signifying “to be firm, steadfast”* (whence “Amen”), hence, *“that which is to be trusted”*; Gesenius regards it as derived from a *Heb. word signifying “treasure”* Gen 43:23 (Vine's).

“**Mammon**” cannot be righteous. “You cannot serve God & mammon”. Jesus called it “unrighteous” by comparison to the “true riches” given to those who “serve God”.

However, our use of “[unrighteous] mammon” can be righteous, just so long as we do not attempt to serve it solely for selfish purposes.

a. Did the rich, young ruler possess “unrighteous mammon” (Lk 18:18-23)?

Yes! And due to his love for it, he became unrighteous himself.

This incident demonstrates the absolute impossibility of a covetous person inheriting eternal life.

We become so concerned over the moral decline of our nation that we speak out regularly against drug use, sexual misconduct, thievery etc.

BUT HAVE WE GROWN TO ACCEPT COVETOUSNESS OR THE LOVE OF MONEY & GAIN AS A WAY OF LIFE!

Are we willing to sacrifice our duties to the Lord for the next step in the process of acquiring more funds & goods for ourselves?

The materialistic person has forfeited all hope of Heaven in their feverish pursuit of this worlds good.

God is very severe in His dealings with the sin of covetousness ([Acts 5:1-11](#); [1 Cor 5:11](#); [Eph 5:5-7](#)).

5. Are riches a token of God's approval (give proof)?

Sometimes, but not always (Israel, Patriarchs, Job, Church at Laodicea: **Deut 8:18; Ecc 5:19; 6:2; Gen 24:35; Job 42:12ff; Rev 3:17** – Nabal & Solomon: **1 Sam 25; 1 Kgs 11:11**)

6. Is poverty a token of God's disapproval (give proof)?

Sometimes, but not always (Israel: **Deut 28:63** – The churches in Macedonia, poor but rich in faith, Paul: **2 Cor 8:2; Jas 2:5; Phil 4:14; 2 Cor 6:4, 12:10**)

7. At what point does one commit sin in his use of money & wealth?

There can be many points!

- 1) To purchase things that are ungodly
- 2) To use it selfishly
- 3) To buy friendship & loyalty
- 4) To refuse to designate it to the Lord's work
- 5) To acquire more for the sake of status
- 6) To consume one's thoughts & time
- 7) To bring glory to oneself rather than to the Lord