

THE WOES OF WEALTH WITHOUT GOD

James 5:1-6, Luke 12:16-20

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*Come now, you rich, weep and howl for your miseries that are coming upon you! ² Your riches ^[a]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. 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 ^[b]Sabaoth. ⁵ You have lived on the earth in pleasure and ^[c]luxury; you have ^[d]fattened your hearts ^[e]as in a day of slaughter. ⁶ You have condemned, you have murdered the just; he does not resist you. **James 5:1-6.***

The term wealth is a noun which means an abundance of valuable possessions or money. Or simply put in another form is the plentiful supply of a particular desirable thing. Being wealthy is relative, because what we may think or see as wealth to one man may not to another. In the community of the blind, a one eyed man is the king whereas elsewhere he is not seen that way. Similarly, in a family where everyone is uneducated, a man with a primary 6 or WAEC certificate is well respected and celebrated.

The crave for recognition and accumulation of resources today is making our society to forget the true meaning of wealth and today people celebrate those who can accumulate more without considering the source of such wealth. Just one Tuesday, I was told some young men just by the market were throwing money on the air, and people were picking and those picking such money do not bother to know the source of such money. What a world. It didn't start today. It has been from time immemorial.

Our society is consumed by a passion for wealth and all the things that money can do. Every area of society is so much engulf with this crave for wealth, that today, when a man finds a lot of money and returns it, people starts asking if the man/woman is normal to return such money. We live in a society where our bookstores are crammed with books that have a variety of get-rich-quick schemes and where television entices us with the lifestyles of the rich and famous. This mentality affects all of us because who among us has not daydreamed about what our life would be like if we won Twenty million Naira.

A careful reading of Scripture indicates that wealth is not a sin. For example, Abraham was an extremely wealthy man, and he walked with God. He was used by God to bless the whole world. Scripture teaches that material possessions are entrusted to us, to be used wisely in our lives, in our service to God, and in our service to our fellow man.

In our text, **James 5:1-6**, we are shown the dangerous side of wealth and what money can do to us. James addresses himself to the wealthy, and he has some straightforward things to say about the use and abuse of wealth.

The focus of our discussion this morning is on the woes of wealth without God. A timely lesson for us is found in the parable of the foolish farmer (**Luke 12:16-21**). From this parable we learn the truth that *the rich can be fools and fools can be rich*. A man once asked the Lord, "Teacher, bid my brother divide the inheritance with me." Because of covetousness, he saw in Jesus only a rabbi who could influence his brother. Many people today see in Jesus only a social or economic reformer. But our Lord is not only interested in man's physical needs, He is also interested in man's soul.

Jesus said *a certain man had a field and it brought forth so plentifully that he did not have sufficient space to store his harvest. So he said to himself, "I will pull down my barns, and build greater."* Thus, here is the story of a very successful farmer. He was wealthy and prosperous. He had accumulated his wealth honestly. He hadn't cheated anyone; he hadn't defrauded anyone. But God called him a fool. People are wise in some respects and so foolish in other respects.

Though this man was very successful, the Lord said he was a fool. God's epitaph (the writing or marker people's grave) for his grave marker would have been: "Here lies a fool." I am sure men thought he was exceedingly wise. He probably was held in high esteem by those who knew him. But he made some tragic mistakes. Those who accumulate wealth without God makes this common mistake just like the rich fool.

1. THE MISTAKE OF LIMITED VISION

He made the mistake of a limited vision. He couldn't see beyond himself, and he couldn't see beyond this present world. These two thoughts run throughout the story. How many of us are limited in that we find difficulty in seeing beyond ourselves? Everything we do is for ourselves and this present world. We can't see beyond the here and now.

2. THE MISTAKE OF FAULTY REASONING

Another mistake this man made was that of faulty reasoning. The Bible says, "He reasoned within himself." He didn't reason with God. He really didn't take God into account. He didn't recognize that God had actually given him the success he had enjoyed. **Deuteronomy 8:18** says, "It is he [God] that giveth thee power to get wealth." What about those people who are exceedingly rich but actually have no concern for God? God gave every man the power to get riches. But this man didn't realize that truth. He saw the ground below, but he didn't see God above. In **Matthew 5:45** Jesus said, "He maketh his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sendeth rain on the just and the unjust." In **Job 1:20** Job said, "Jehovah gave, and Jehovah hath taken away; blessed be the name of Jehovah." In **James 1:17** we are told that "every good gift and every perfect gift is from above." So God is the giver of all things. But the man in our story didn't see this truth. He made a terrible mistake.

3. THE MISTAKE OF SELF-CENTREDNESS

This man also made the tragic mistake of being selfish. He was self-centred. A man cantered on himself is far from being well-balanced. This man was not very well-balanced. Six times he used the word I. Five times he used the possessive pronoun my. A child was asked, "What part of speech are my and mine?" The child said, "They are aggressive pronouns." The child was right. They are not only possessive pronouns but also

aggressive pronouns. This man was aggressive; he was aggressive in the wrong sense. Before a man can be a success, he must be somewhat aggressive. But this man possessed the wrong kind of aggressiveness. So he said, "*What shall I do, because I have not where to bestow my fruits? . . . This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater.*" What a terrible mistake he made in being selfish.

The soul is not where man lives, but it is where man loves. The Lord said, ". . . *for where thy treasure is, there will thy heart be also*" (**Matthew 6:19-21**). "*For the mind of the flesh is death; but the mind of the Spirit is life and peace*" (**Romans 8:6**). We are told not to mind earthly things in the sense of bowing down to them. We are not to make these material goods our god.

This man was wise in many respects. He was wise enough to be a success. Yet, he was selfish enough to be a fool. Many people think they are worth a lot of money because they have it. Many people who have a lot of money aren't really worth it. This man had a lot of money, but he wasn't worth very much.

4. THE MISTAKE OF ERRONEOUS CONCEPTS

This man also made the mistake of having false concepts. He mistook himself for God. He mistook his body for his soul. He mistook time for eternity. While thinking of his goods, he forgot the God who had given them. While thinking of himself, he forgot his neighbour. While thinking of his body, he forgot his soul. While thinking of this life, he forgot the next life. How many people have made the same mistake?

A capitalist says, "*Property belongs to the individual.*" A socialist says, "*Property belongs to society.*" But the Christian says, "*Property belongs to God.*" What is your concept of property? Is your concept a false concept? Is your concept really a mistaken idea?

Apparently, Barnabas believed property really belonged to God. "*To have is to owe.*" That was the idea Paul presented when he said, "*Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labor, working with his hands the thing that is good, that he may have whereof to give to him that hath need.*" So, the Christian concept is this: "*To have is to owe.*" In **1 Corinthians 3:21-23** Paul said, "*For all things are yours; . . . and ye are Christ's; and Christ is God's.*" On one occasion an older man said to a young man, "*What are your plans for your life?*" Thinking only of this life, the young man said, "*I plan to go and learn a trade.*" The older man said, "*And then what?*" He said, "*Then I'll set up my business.*" The older man said, "*And then what?*" "Well, *he said, 'I'll make my fortune.'*" "*And then what?*" was the question again. "*Then I'll retire,*" he replied. "*And then what?*" he asked again. "*Then I'll live on the money I've made,*" he said. "*And then what?*" he repeated. "*Well,*" he said, "*someday I'll die.*" "*And then what?*" was still his question. There was no reply. Many people think only of self and this present world.

5. THE MISTAKE OF FALSE SECURITY

This farmer made the mistake of having false security. He thought he could find security in goods. He didn't realize that real security can be found only in God. He said, "*I have many goods laid up for many years.*" The goods would last a while but would he? He had no lease on life. He didn't have the promise of another second. What are your plans for tomorrow? Do you plan to go to the office? Do you plan to take care of some responsibility? We have all made plans for tomorrow, but have we taken into account that we might not be here tomorrow? No man is sure of life. A man can be sure of eternal life,

but no man is sure of this life. ". . . *for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth,*" said Solomon in **Proverbs 27:1**. Your life is a vapour, and you don't know how long that vapour will hang over the valley. It may be gone before you know it. So, James *said we ought to say if the Lord permits we will do thus and so*. Peace is not found in goods but in God. The man was really talking to his soul. It was as if he were saying, "*All of these goods I have laid up for thee.*" A person might say that to the body, but he cannot say that to the soul. The soul can't live on things stacked in barns. The soul can't live on things put in a bank. The soul lives only upon spiritual food. He said to his soul, "Take thine ease," simply because he had worldly provisions. Jesus said in **Matthew 11:29**, "*Ye shall find rest unto your souls.*" There is no peace for the soul other than the peace which is found in God. Some have found rest for their bodies, but have they really found rest for their souls?

Rather than saying to your soul, "*Take thine ease,*" why not try to find rest for your soul in Jesus. That rest can be ours if we will but accept His invitation to come unto Him. The foolish farmer said to his soul, "*You have many goods laid up for many years.*" But the Lord said, "*This night your soul is required of you.*" A good man commits his soul to God, but the foolish man's soul is required of him.

How wise this man was to be so foolish. He was wise enough to make a profit, but he was foolish enough to sell his soul for nothing. It is better to beg bread on earth as Lazarus did than to beg water in hell as the rich man did (**Luke 16:19-31**). This man played with life; he played dangerously with life. He gambled with his soul and lost! Somebody has said, "*During a depression, many people lose their houses. During prosperity, many people lose their homes.*" It is much worse to lose a home than it is to lose a house. "*For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?*" (**Matthew 16:26**, KJV). He was wise enough to get a title to the lands below and foolish enough to live and die without a title to the land beyond. How few people really have a title to that land beyond!

6. THE MISTAKE OF MATERIALISTIC IDOLATRY

When we study this great parable, a lesson in it ought to strike home in this materialistic age. Here is a man who was owned by his money. It is really not the possession of wealth that hurts, it is the disposition toward that wealth. Paul didn't say, "*Money is the root of all evil.*" Money is only a standard of exchange. Without it we couldn't exist. There must be some medium, some standard. But Paul said, "*For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil*" (**1 Timothy 6:10**). Remember, you don't have to be rich to have a love for money. I have known some of the poorest people who were covetous and greedy. No, it isn't in the possession; it is the disposition. Covetousness is idolatry (**Colossians 3:5**). One is idolatrous when he actually makes a god out of his money. You don't have to have money to make a god out of it. You can make a god out of a car. You can make a god out of furniture. You can make a god out of land holdings. You can make a god out of your business. Sometimes people make a god out of a library. You can make a god out of your husband or even your wife. You can make a god out of anything. Who is your god really? To whom are you bowing down, or to what are you bowing down?

As the question was asked in **1 Samuel 30:13**, "*To whom belongest thou?*" This man thought he owned these goods when, in reality, these goods owned him. He thought he owned his barn, but the barn owned him. He had become a slave rather than a master. Money can be a great tool or a terrible tyrant. So many have let it become a master.

7. THE MISTAKE OF COLD INDIFFERENCE

This man said, "*I have nowhere to bestow my goods.*" If he had looked beyond himself, he would have found many places to bestow those goods. He didn't have to stack the goods in a barn. He didn't have to put the goods in the bank. Were there no poor people around? Was there nobody who was needing help? If he had been interested in his fellowman, he would have found many places to bestow those goods. He would have been helpful. A closed hand can neither give nor receive a blessing. The Lord said, "*It is more blessed to give than to receive*" (**Acts 20:35**). This man's hand was closed. He couldn't see beyond himself.

A young man was asked, "*How far can you see?*" He said, "*Oh, I don't know. I can see several miles away if nothing obstructs my vision.*" Then he said to the older man, "*How far can you see?*" He said, "I can see all the way to the sun. Can you see any farther than that?" Many people can't see that far. Many people see only that which is just beyond their noses. They really can't see the needs of others. May we be like Joseph of Arimathaea, Abraham, and others who were rich but used those possessions wisely. "*To whomsoever much is given,*" the Lord said, "*of him shall much be required*" (**Luke 12:48**).

If we don't use wisely what little we have, then, apparently, we wouldn't use wisely a whole lot more if we had it. If you are not faithful in little, the Lord said you wouldn't be faithful in much. If you are wasting the little you have, you would, apparently, waste a lot if you had it. To be faithful in little is to be faithful in much. To be unfaithful in little is to be unfaithful in much.

Conclusion

Would the Lord be constrained to place the epitaph on your grave marker: "*Here lies a fool*"? Suppose your soul were required of you this night? Where would that soul spend eternity? What a man goes after here will determine where the man goes hereafter. So what are you doing on earth for heaven's sake? Will you make a personal, practical application of this lesson? If your soul were required this night without any further change, without any further amending or altering, where would you spend eternity? Are you sure all would be well? We ought to live each moment as if it were our last one. Our breath is in His hands (**Daniel 5:23**). "*He himself giveth to all life, and breath, and all things*" (**Acts 17:25**). "*For in him we live, and move, and have our being*" (**Acts 17:28**). All things really are from God, and let us never forget from whence our successes come. God advanced Moses and Aaron (**1 Samuel 12:6**).

God put wisdom in the heart of Solomon (**2 Chronicles 9:23**). God gave Paul his ability to become a great minister (**2 Corinthians 3:6**). Peter tells us God gives us whatever ability we have (**1 Peter 4:10**). You don't have anything which God didn't give you (**1 Corinthians 4:7**). So may we give the credit to God and live in view of eternity.