

# The Sentencing of Snobs

Hang in There Part 1  
James 5:1-6 8-16-2015

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Summary: Chapter 5 begins the closing section urging us to be patient in suffering. It begins by assuring us that those who are causing our suffering will be punished. We must not fret about them or envy them or imitate them.

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**James 5:1** Now listen, you rich people, weep and wail because of the misery that is coming upon you. **2** Your wealth has rotted, and moths have eaten your clothes. **3** 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. **4** Look! The wages you failed to pay the workmen who mowed your fields are crying out against you. The cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord Almighty. **5** You have lived on earth in luxury and self-indulgence. You have fattened yourselves in the day of slaughter. **6** You have condemned and murdered innocent men, who were not opposing you. **7** Be patient, therefore, brothers, until the Lord's coming.

# Introduction

## Don't Fret

Think back to the last time you were in a situation where you or someone you love had to suffer an injustice – something really unfair and wrong, and there wasn't anything you could do about it. How did that make you feel? If you haven't ever gone through that, it's hard to explain the feelings it causes. It is a special kind of anxiety. It's a mix of anger, distress, fear, indignation, outrage, self-pity, urgency, and a host of other painful emotions mixed together in such a way that dominates your thinking. It is one of the most distracting emotions you will ever feel. In a case of real extreme injustice, it will jump into the front of your thinking every few seconds all day long. You can try to push those thoughts away, but they come right back. There is a word for that feeling. That mix of anger, distress, fear, urgency, and all the rest – there's a word that the Bible uses to describe that whole complex of emotions. It is the word **fretting**, and Scripture tells us not to do that.

**Psalm 37:1 Do not fret because of evil men or be envious of those who do wrong; 2 for like the grass they will soon wither, like green plants they will soon die away.**

That whole psalm is all about how to solve the problem of fretting. So if you have a problem with that, you are definitely going to want to spend some time in Psalm 37. But you might also spend time in James 5, because that is exactly what James is talking about here. Instead of fretting, James is going to teach us how to be patient until the Lord's return. And one of the keys to overcoming fretting, is understanding the judgment that is going to come on the wicked. That is why James has all this harsh language about judgment. He is going to talk to us about how to persevere in suffering, and so he begins by telling us that God is going to deal with those people who are causing our suffering. That is an important principle when it comes to handling suffering that he didn't really touch on in chapter 1.

The book of James is a suffering sandwich. Chapters 1 and 5 are both about persevering through suffering. Those are the pieces of bread, and in between is the meat of the book, which is all about true religion – being a doer of the word by showing love to one another, controlling the tongue, and avoiding worldliness. Love in chapter 2, the tongue in chapter 3, and worldliness in chapter 4.

## Four Purposes of 5:1-6

So that is the structure of the book. We are just beginning the second piece of bread about hanging in there during suffering. Now, at this point some of you might be thinking, "Are you looking at the same passage that I'm looking at? Did you just hear the Scripture reading? Because what I heard didn't sound like encouragement at all. It sounded like a harsh rebuke. He is saying things like, "**Weep and wail because of the misery that is coming upon you**, judgment is coming and it is going to **eat your flesh like fire** – all these indictments and judgments." That's true. I can't deny the fact that those people in verses one through six are being threatened with severe judgment. In fact, it sounds to me like those people are going to hell. And there is not even a call to repentance. He doesn't tell them to weep in repentance like he did in chapter 4. This is crying and wailing in the agony of punishment. The word **wail** has to do with volume. It refers to the shrieking and screaming that comes when someone is in intense agony. James is saying, "If you knew the punishment you are about to face – if you knew what Jesus Christ is going to do to you on Judgment Day, you would be screaming right now." So how is that encouraging?

Well, what we need to do is figure out why James is saying all this. What is his purpose? If you want to know his purpose, it's not hard – all you have to do is find the word **therefore**, so you can see the conclusion that he draws at the end. And that comes in verse seven.

**7 Therefore, my brothers, be patient until the Lord's coming.**

"How does that make sense? Weep and wail because you're going to hell, therefore be patient?"

How does that make any sense? It makes perfect sense when you understand that James is talking to two different groups of people. He is not talking to you in verses 1-6. He is talking to the people who are hurting you.<sup>1</sup> Then in verse 7 he starts talking to you.

Turn back to chapter 2 for a moment, so we can remind ourselves of what was happening with these people. James is writing to Christians who were being oppressed by the wealthy class.

**James 2:6 ...Is it not the rich who are exploiting you? Are they not the ones who are dragging you into court? 7 Are they not the ones who are slandering the noble name of him to whom you belong?**

In that culture, the wealthy class could bring a lawsuit against a poor person, but a poor person was not allowed to initiate a lawsuit against someone in a higher class. If you are poor, and you get treated unfairly, you are just out of luck. There was no recourse whatsoever.

And so in chapter 5 James is saying, “Hey guys, hang in there a little longer. Pretty soon Jesus is going to return and He will answer your cries for help and punish those people.” Look at verse 4.

**4 Look! The wages you failed to pay the workmen who mowed your fields are crying out against you. The cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord Almighty.**

Those harvesters are the Christians who are reading the book of James. They were being taken advantage of and treated unfairly by their employers, and they have been crying out to God for justice.

So once we understand all that, this passage explodes with meaning. In fact, I would suggest that this passage has no less than four purposes. The primary purpose is to encourage the people who are being oppressed or mistreated.<sup>2</sup>

A second purpose is to warn the ones doing the oppressing. God’s people can take this message to the world and warn them about the threats of judgment on the wicked – that is part of preaching the gospel.

And I believe a third, implied purpose is to warn the Christians who are being oppressed not to act like the very people who are oppressing them. Remember, that was the problem back in chapter 2. The Christians were showing favoritism to the rich and mistreating the poor, and James says, “Isn’t that the very thing the rich people are doing to you?” So as we read the warning for these wicked, condemned rich people, we need to take the warnings to heart so that we don’t end up committing the very same sins.

And then finally, passages that point to the coming misery of the ungodly rich also have the purpose of teaching us not to envy them. From a temporal standpoint, it seems like they’ve got it made, but when you look at what God has in store for them, and what He has in store for you – you realize they are in a pitiable condition, not an enviable one. You are the one in an enviable position.<sup>3</sup> There is a whole Psalm about that principle – Psalm 73.

So that is the four-part message of this passage. When somebody is mistreating you, remember these four things:

1. God will make things right. He will punish them and reward you.
2. Therefore, don’t get discouraged or upset. Don’t fret.

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<sup>1</sup> Some people have struggled with this passage because it is doubtful that these rich people who were oppressing the Christians would have been in the church to hear the reading of this letter. So why would James address people who work there? Actually, that’s fairly common in Scripture.

**Ezekiel 32:28 You too, O Pharaoh, will be broken and will lie among the uncircumcised, with those killed by the sword.** He speaks directly to Pharaoh. Was Ezekiel expecting Pharaoh to read his prophecy? No, the purpose of that is to encourage God’s people who were being oppressed by Pharaoh. James is doing the same thing.

<sup>2</sup> One reason why I believe the warning part is secondary is that there is no call to repentance. It is simply an announcement of judgment.

<sup>3</sup> **Psalm 73:2 ...my feet had almost slipped; I had nearly lost my foothold. 3 For I envied the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. 4 They have no struggles ... 12 This is what the wicked are like— always carefree, they increase in wealth. 13 Surely in vain have I kept my heart pure ...14 All day long I have been plagued... 16 When I tried to understand all this, it was oppressive to me 17 till I entered the sanctuary of God; then I understood their final destiny. 18 Surely you place them on slippery ground; you cast them down to ruin...23 Yet I am always with you; you hold me by my right hand. 24 You guide me with your counsel, and afterward you will take me into glory.**

3. And don't envy them, because they are doomed and you are on your way to glory.
4. And finally, whatever you do, don't imitate them.

When you have been mistreated by people who are stronger than you, there is always a temptation to turn around and mistreat the people who are weaker than you - just like they were doing back in chapter 2. Or if you ever get the upper hand over those who were mistreating you, you give them a taste of their own medicine. But if their sin is so horrible and wicked, and it invites the wrath of God, we don't want to commit that same sin.

So those are the points. When people mistreat you, don't fret about them, don't envy them, and don't imitate them. You need to know all that up front, because that makes this a very tricky sermon to preach, and a very tricky sermon to listen to. My job is to comfort you and warn you at the same time. And your job is to be comforted and be warned. As you listen to the sermon, you will need to think about the people who are more powerful than you who are mistreating you. And you think, "Don't fret about that, don't get upset, and don't envy them." But when you get to the part about, "Don't imitate them," then you need to shift your thinking to a different group of people who are less powerful than you - people you might be tempted to mistreat. So this sermon will require a lot of mental energy. But we need to put forth that energy, because if you walk out of here without being both comforted and warned, then either you haven't done your job, or I haven't done my job. So here is what I would suggest: with your left ear listen for all the warnings, and repent where you see the sins in your life where you have imitated these people. And with your right ear, listen for the comfort and encouragement, so that you won't be dismayed or discouraged about people who are mistreating you.

## The Announcement of Judgment

### The Proud Rich

#### 1 Now listen...

These are the exact same two words that start the closing paragraph of chapter 4. And we saw that those words indicate a rebuke. So there is a connection between these two passages.

### Review

At the end of chapter 4 he rebuked people who want to live as though this life is their party. They live for their own will instead of God's will. That is the way this world lives - with no regard at all for God's will. When I was studying for last week's sermon I was shocked to discover what the number one song is at funerals - "I Did It My Way."

*I've lived a life that's full, I've traveled each and every highway*

*But more, much more than this, I did it my way*

More important than all I accomplished is the fact that I did it my way. I lived for myself, and there isn't room in my song for a single word about God's will. Alistair Begg told the story of how he was in a grocery store one day, and the lady in front of him was a friend of the checker, and as she started to walk away she said, "I'll see you next year." The other lady responded, "See you next year." And Alistair Begg said, "if the Lord wills." And that first lady turned around and looked at him and said very firmly, "No, I will see her next year." And then she said again, "I will see her next year!" Then she turned to the checker and said, "That's the power of positive thinking." The pride of the unregenerate heart hates the idea that it is not ultimately in charge of its own destiny. An unbeliever can make 10 million mistakes and foolish decisions and still go to the grave reveling in the fact that, "I did it my way."

And the connection between these two paragraphs is this: when that "It's my party - I did it my way" attitude is taken to its logical conclusion, you end up with the kind of people described at the beginning of chapter 5.

## Who Is Included In This Indictment?

### 1 Now listen, you rich people

Does that include all rich people? Are rich people automatically evil just because they're rich? No. We know James isn't saying that, because look who he gives as a positive example in verse 11 – Job.

**James 5:11 ... have heard of Job's perseverance and have seen what the Lord finally brought about.**

What did God finally bring about at the end of the book of Job? He gave Job double the wealth he started with (and Job was a very rich man to start with). Obviously James is not condemning all wealth. So which kind of wealthy people is James talking about? They are the rich people who didn't do what James said in chapter 1 (vv.9-11).

**James 1:9 The brother in humble circumstances ought to take pride in his high position. 10 But the one who is rich should take pride in his low position, because he will pass away like a wild flower.**

The point there was that your only hope is humility, and rich people still have an outside shot at learning humility if they will understand that all their money and good looks and power and all the rest is going to fade away like a wild flower. The rich people in chapter 5 are the ones who didn't pay attention in chapter 1. They never did learn humility and so look at what they are doing now. They were oppressing the poor, withholding wages, and living in luxury and self-indulgence. That is the kind of rich person James is talking about. It's not a bad thing to be rich. But it is a very bad thing to be rich and put your hope in those riches so that you devote your life to luxury and comfort, and you oppress people instead of being generous.

The people who do that have reason to scream and shriek over the judgment that is going to come upon them. Nobody is going to be in hell saying, "Well, at least I did it my way." There will be screams of regret over the fact that they did it their way. But they still won't be repentant. Their hatred of God will only increase, as their torment goes on forever.

## The Demise of their False God

And there are signs of that judgment even here in this life. They have made a god out of money, and the true, living God has already pronounced a judgment on that false god. He has made it subject to decay.

**2 Your wealth has rotted, and moths have eaten your clothes. 3 Your gold and silver are corroded.**

Money and clothing and possessions can be a great, wonderful blessing from God if they are used properly. But if instead of using them you start to look to them as your security, and your joy and happiness, and your source of fulfillment in life – you will never have security, joy, or fulfillment because even when you have those things, you are always at risk of losing them. It can rot, it can rust, it can fall apart, moths can eat it, thieves can steal it, the government can take it – all kinds of things can happen to it.

The fact that money and possessions are temporary and subject to decay and loss - that doesn't hurt people who rely on God for their joy, and use money and possessions to serve God. But it does hurt those people who rely on money and possessions for their joy. No matter how hard they try, they can never have security. Their hope always rests on a hopelessly shaky foundation. The problem of loss and decay will be a constant, nagging threat that eats at your very soul. And what James is doing is transporting us into the future were all their money and possessions have failed.

The true, living God is pretty hard on rival false gods. When the Philistines put the Ark of the Covenant in with their idol Dagon, they came in the next day and Dagon was flat on the floor with his hands busted off. That is the kind of thing the true, living God does to false gods. And that is what He will do to our money and possessions if we turn them into a god. But not only will He punish that false god;

he will punish those who worship a false god. That's why James has such harsh words for them in this passage. The kind of pride and complacency that can come from wealth can make the heart so dull that the only thing that can get through to it is a strong, harsh pronouncement of judgment.

**Hosea 12:8 Ephraim boasts, "I am very rich; I have become wealthy. With all my wealth they will not find in me any iniquity or sin."**

People can find so much false security in their wealth, that they become deaf to calls to repentance. And sometimes God just has to get in their face and wake them up to reality.

So James pronounces the judgment. And from there, he goes on to describe the reason for that judgment. He lists for sins that these people committed. Let's look at them one at a time.

## **The Reason for the Judgment**

### **Sin #1: Hording**

The first one is in verse 2. It is the sin of hoarding.

**2 Your wealth has rotted, and moths have eaten your clothes. 3 Your gold and silver are corroded.**

"I thought that was a description of their judgment and punishment?"

It is, but it is also a description of their sin. Sometimes God uses our sins as the very instrument of our punishment. Their misery will arise from the very things in which they placed their hope. We know that is an indictment of sin because of the rest of verse 3.

**3 ...Their corrosion will testify against you and eat your flesh like fire.**

The fact that they allowed their earthly goods to become corroded and rotted and moth-eaten is evidence against them. It is exhibit A in the courtroom, proving their guilt. God is the prosecutor in the courtroom, and He says, "I would like to call to the witness stand the corrosion of your wealth." And the fact that you let your wealth go to waste rather than using it will be the very evidence used to convict you of sin, because wealth is to be used, not hoarded.

Remember in the parable of the talents – three servants were put in charge of various sums of money as stewards, or managers? The two who put that money to use were commended. But the guy who buried his in the ground was rebuked for being a wicked, lazy servant. God does not give us resources so that we can just sit on them. He wants us to put them to use. And so if they start to get rusty, or collect dust, or rot, or get moth-eaten – we are in trouble.<sup>4</sup>

So let's look at this point from both angles. First, when you see other people hoarding.

### **When Others Have the Money**

If you are working hard but you still can't seem to get your head above water, then you turn on your TV and see some guy who has more money than he could possibly spend in his lifetime, and he's not even using it, don't fret about that. Or you look at your boss, and he is so much money, and yet he's so stingy with you. He could easily afford to pay you what you are worth, but instead you are grossly underpaid. Don't get upset. God will make it right.

In Luke 16 Jesus told about the beggar named Lazarus who was covered with sores and he sat out by the gate of the rich man, and he wished that he could have some of the crumbs that fell off the rich man's table as he feasted every day. It wasn't even the feast he had his eye on – just the crumbs. It wouldn't cost

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<sup>4</sup> You know that has happened in your life when your stuff becomes more important than the people around you. In fact, sometimes our commitment to money and possessions can clog up our life so much that there is no room left for relationships. **Isaiah 5:8 Woe to you who add house to house and join field to field till no space is left and you live alone in the land.**

him a dime to let Lazarus eat those crumbs. But the rich man never gave him anything. After they both died, Lazarus went to Paradise and the rich man went to a place of fiery torment.

**Luke 16:24** "... have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire." **25** But Abraham replied, "Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in agony."

God made it right. And I'm sure those years that Lazarus spent lying outside the gate hungry, with the dogs licking his sores - no doubt that seemed like a long time while it was happening. But Lazarus has been enjoying paradise with the Lord Jesus Christ now for 2000 years already. And when he looks back on that time when he suffered on earth, if he can remember it at all, I'm sure it seems like the blink of an eye. That suffering was just a flash, and then it was over. And it says that Lazarus is currently up in heaven being comforted by God. On top of all the rest of the wonderful things that go along with being in paradise with Christ, Lazarus is getting some extra comfort. Because of all his suffering, and because of the injustices he suffered on earth, Jesus is making up for that now. And Lazarus is really, really glad that he suffered what he did during that blink of an eye on earth, because of what it gained for him for eternity.

The rich guy, on the other hand, has been in torment now for 2000 years already. All those great meals he had back when he was on earth, are a distant memory. All he knows now, and all he will ever know, is punishment.

So if you are having trouble, and some rich person is unwilling to help you, don't fret. And don't look at his huge stockpile and envy him. When you realize where he is headed, and where you are headed - he is in a pitiable position and you are in the enviable position.

## **When You Have the Money**

You probably don't think you're rich, but if you make \$25,000/yr you are in the wealthiest 2% of the world. You are someone's Bill Gates. There are a lot of people in this world would have their mind blown if they saw how you live.

"But I don't feel very wealthy."

Hardly anybody feels wealthy, because they have got their eye on the next level up. Even the really rich people don't feel rich, because they have their eye on that next level of wealth. We think we would be happy if we could just get up to that next level, so we start stockpiling and hoarding. Instead of using wealth for kingdom purposes, we hoard for our own purposes. We stop giving to God because we cannot afford to honor Him with 10%. We are not generous with other people because we think people should really be helping us. We hold on to our money and our possessions tighter and tighter because that's our joy source. That is our security. That is our future. But in this passage James is telling us, "No, if you go down that road, your future is rust, decay, loss, and punishment from God. That's the road the wicked are on - you don't want to imitate them."

There is wisdom in setting aside a modest amount so that you can get by from the time you are too old to work until the time you die without being a burden on your kids. But there is a big difference between that and trying to amass the biggest fortune you possibly can. My retirement account is not my security. God is my security. And my money and my clothes and my possessions are things to be used for God's purposes, not things to be stockpiled.

### ***Use Your Resources***

So how do you know if you have crossed the line from wise saving over into sinful hoarding? One indicator is what he is talking about right here - decay. If you have things that are going to waste because you have them sitting around not being used, that is hoarding. If your stuff wears out because of use, that's fine. But if it rusts out because of disuse, that is a bad sign. Have you ever noticed that moths don't

eat clothes you are wearing? You have never once gotten dressed and then showed up naked somewhere because the moths ate all your clothes.

### ***Help the Poor***

Another sign that you are hoarding is if you lack generosity. Are you remembering the poor? In Galatians 2 Paul asked the other Apostles it would be okay if he focused on Gentiles, and this was the response:

**Galatians 2:9 ... They agreed that we should go to the Gentiles, and they to the Jews. 10 All they asked was that we should continue to remember the poor, the very thing I was eager to do.**

Do you remember the poor? Do you have clothes and shoes in your house that you don't use? Why not give them to the Salvation Army? That's a Christian organization that uses their income to honor Christ and to help the poor and needy.

If you are like me, you worry about just giving handouts to the poor, because that can do more harm than good. If you study poverty around the world you will find that no culture ever makes it out of poverty just by someone coming along and giving them money. The only way a culture will come out of poverty is when businesses start up in that culture. If someone can get a business going, as the business grows they hire employees, those employees take their paycheck and go spend it at other businesses, so those businesses become more profitable and they need to hire more employees and buy more goods, which puts more money in the circulation, and so on and the whole culture becomes more wealthy. So if you really want to help the poor long-term, one of the best things you can do is help people in a poor culture get started in business. This is a little bit of a digression from the sermon, but I want to mention that because it is a practical way that we can really help the poor. There is an organization called Kiva where you can give any amount of money you want, and they take that money and loan it to people in poor countries who are trying to get a business going. This is a way you can help the poor and it doesn't even cost you anything. Instead of that money just sitting in your bank account gaining \$.02 a month in interest, that money could really be helping someone. You could go on the Kiva website, pick out a business that sounds like something you want to support, then you send \$25 or whatever, that money gets loaned to that person interest free, and pretty soon it's all paid back. Then you can take that same \$25 and loan it to someone else, and then to someone else, etc.<sup>5</sup> That way, instead of stockpiling our money so that it does nothing but gather dust, we can actually use it to help the poor.

## **Sin #2: Exploitation**

**4 Look! The wages you failed to pay the workmen who mowed your fields are crying out against you. The cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord Almighty.**

They weren't paying their employees on time. Why not? Maybe they had a bookkeeping problem. Maybe they were punishing the worker. Maybe they had a cash flow issue. Maybe they were out of town for a few weeks on business. Maybe they just forgot. Bottom line – the reason they didn't pay them on time was that they didn't have to. They had all the power.

When you have all the power, and you take advantage of that, that is a very big deal to God.

**Leviticus 19:13 Do not defraud your neighbor or rob him. Do not hold back the wages of a hired man overnight.**

God said, "Don't even be one day late in paying your employees."

**Deuteronomy 24:15 Pay him his wages each day before sunset, because he is poor and is counting on it. Otherwise he may cry to the LORD against you, and you will be guilty of sin.**

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<sup>5</sup> There is a 98.6% repayment rate, so you might only get \$24.75 back on a \$25 loan, but that's a pretty small sacrifice to make to help the poor.



And this is a principal that applies not just with wages, but anytime one person has more power than another person. Every one of us has been in a situation where someone else had the upper hand. It might not have even involved money. It might have just been influence. That person had a platform, and they were telling lies about you, and there wasn't anything you could do about it. It could be a man beating his wife or a big brother picking on his little brother. Every bully commits this sin. Whoever has the power will tend to exploit the people without power. In this country, the business owners had the power, and so they oppressed and mistreated the employees. So finally the employees got together and formed labor unions. And guess what happened when the labor unions got the upper hand and they had the power? They became just as oppressive as the business owners were. The government sees all that so they step in to solve the problem, and they become oppressive. But whether it's the government, your boss, your spouse, someone who tricked you into signing some contract, or any other kind of bully, it is a very painful ordeal to be oppressed by someone more powerful than you and to have no recourse.

## **Don't Fret and Don't Envy Them**

But if that happens, don't fret. God will deal with that person.

### **4 Look! The wages you failed to pay the workmen who mowed your fields are crying out against you.**

That reminds me of Cain and Abel. Cain thought he got away with murder, but then what happened? The blood of Abel cried out to God from the ground. And at that point Cain was in big trouble.

### **4 ...The cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord Almighty.**

The NIV translates this phrase **Lord Almighty**. Literally it's **Lord of Hosts**. The word *hosts* means *armies*. So it is the **Lord of armies**. This is one of my favorite titles for God in all the Bible. *Lord sabaoth* - the great commander of the heavenly host. He is the commander-in-chief of all the angels of heaven. He also commands all of mankind – He moves the hearts of kings like a watercourse wherever He wishes. He sends lightning bolts on their way, and they report to Him. He commands the thunder and lightning and storms and showers and lions and bears and birds and sicknesses and calamities and blessings and prosperity. In the book of Jonah He commanded the sea, and a great fish, and a plant, and a little worm. Galaxies and microbes are at His beck and call. One angel destroyed a hundred and eighty-five thousand soldiers in one night (2 Kings 19:35), and God commands all the angels. When you are being mistreated, cry out to the Lord of hosts, and when the time is right, He will thunder from heaven in response to those cries.

If you get ripped off, don't ever think that the person who ripped you off got away with it. What they took from you is going to be trouble in their life. Overall, they are going to be much worse off. So don't fret about it, and don't envy those people – they are in big trouble. When you see ISIS beheading Christians, don't fret. Don't think they are getting away with anything. The wrath that is going to come down on their heads will be so violent and agonizing that it would make you squeamish if you saw it.

## **When You Have the Power**

So don't fret, and don't envy them, and whatever you do, don't imitate them. If someone comes and does some work on your house, pay that person on time. If someone is teaching your kids how to play the piano, whatever day that payment is due, don't be late. If some company is providing you with Internet service, pay the bill when it's due. When you are the one who owes the money, you are the one with the power. And withholding that money is abuse of that little bit of power. That money that rightfully belongs to someone else will cry out against you. It will sit there in your bank account and light the landscape of your life on fire. You don't want someone you oppressed crying out to the Lord of hosts.

## **Sin #3: Luxury**

**5 You have lived on earth in luxury and self-indulgence. You have fattened yourselves in the day of slaughter.**

They used their wealth to live a life of **luxury and self-indulgence**.

### **When Others Live in Luxury**

When you see rich people living a soft, cushy life, don't fret about that, and don't envy them. They are like cows enjoying some extra hay that is just getting them ready for the slaughter. They are like the widows in 1 Timothy 5:6.

**1 Timothy 5:6 The widow who lives for pleasure is dead even while she lives.**

The pleasure they seek eludes them. Rich people get depressed and commit suicide. It is nothing to envy.

### **When You Live in Luxury**

And this is the one we are probably most at risk of imitating. We love our luxuries and comforts. And this is a difficult issue, because God gives us comforts in life for our enjoyment (1 Timothy 6:17).

**1 Timothy 6:17 Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment.**

## **Enjoying God's Gifts? Or Luxury and Self-Indulgence?**

So where do you cross the line between enjoying God's gifts and living in luxury and self-indulgence?

### ***Higher Priority than God's Will***

One sign is when your luxuries become a higher priority than God's will. Whenever God guides you in a direction away from softness and comfort and ease, you suddenly become unable to discern His calling. Whenever He calls me to get up off of my soft, comfy pillow, I have selective hearing, "Huh? What? I didn't quite catch it."

### ***Over-Indulgence***

Another sign is over-indulgence. You indulge yourself to the point where it is not even pleasurable anymore. You eat until you feel sick. You sit around in leisure so much that you become lazy. You start living for the weekend. You gain more and more weight. You drink to the point of being drunk. You spend yourself into debt. You amuse yourself to the point of boredom. Your appetites become the god of your life.

### ***Preferring Lesser Pleasures over Greater Ones***

Another sign that you cross the line is when you prefer lesser pleasures over greater ones. Seeking comfort and pleasures is the most natural thing in the world. But the more we mature, the more we learn to forgo certain pleasures and comforts in favor of greater ones. We say *no* to some candy to save our appetite for thanksgiving dinner. We say *no* to an extra hour of sleep so we can get up and go skiing or boating or hiking or whatever you like to do. We might even punish our body in the gym so we can be in better shape. The more mature you become, the more you can do that sort of thing. Spiritual maturity is

when you can say *no* to physical, fleshly pleasures so that you can go after spiritual, eternal pleasures. But when we fail to do that, we know we have crossed the line into living in luxury and self-indulgence. It is fine to enjoy God's gifts as long as the enjoyment of them doesn't get in the way of eternal things.

## **Sin #4: Oppression**

### **6 You have condemned and murdered the innocent, who was not opposing you.**

In a culture where the poor are really poor, it probably didn't take much for oppression to result in death. Throw the family's breadwinner in jail for a month, and the family starves. Some of these Christians had suffered things like that. They were not even opposing those rich people. But they were killed anyway. Can you imagine? It is one thing to lose friends because they left the church, but can you imagine someone killing your friends? Your father? Your son? And you have no legal recourse, because you are too poor to access the court system. Could you imagine the discouragement and frustration?

## **Murder – Abortion**

Does this happen in our culture - powerful people killing innocent people who are not even opposing them, just to protect their bank account? It happens every single day. Every day, thousands of parents in the United States kill their children – just to save money, or to avoid inconvenience or relationship problems. I know people get all crazy with arguments about “What about if the life of the mother is at stake?” or “What about if it's a rape?” But the vast majority of the one million abortions last year in the US had nothing to do with rape, no one's life was at risk – it was simply because of not wanting the baby. “Having this baby will make my life hard, so it's ok for me to kill it.”

Don't fret. Those children suffering violent, painful deaths - their silent cries have reached the ears of the Lord of Hosts. Judgment is coming.

## **When You Have the Power**

And don't imitate those people. When you have power, use it to protect the weak, not to exploit them.

## **Conclusion: Toxic Air**

Have you seen a movie about a town where everyone is getting sick or getting cancer, and some newspaper reporter finds out that it's because a factory is dumping toxic waste, and it's getting into the drinking water or the soil? It doesn't matter which one of those movies because they all have exactly the same storyline. But I mention that because that is really our situation. We are living in a town contaminated by something very toxic. It is in the water we drink and the air we breathe. Studies say that even though we figured out how to bypass commercials with Netflix and DVR's and all the rest, we still get hit with about 360 per day. That is about half what it used to be, but it's still a lot. Three hundred sixty times a day the world screams at us: “You need this. This thing you don't have would make you happy. You got to have this.” The world is relentless with this one sermon that they never stop repeating – Store up for yourselves treasures on earth! This new phone will make you happy. This new computer will change your life. You deserve a really nice car. Don't walk around looking like a nerd - wear these clothes. Meanwhile Jesus is saying “**Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.**” (Luke 12:15) Beware of the deceitfulness of wealth which can choke out your very faith (Mt.13:22).

**1 Timothy 6:9 People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction.**

Watch out! Watch out! Watch out! Danger! Red alert! Money is like fire. Under control it can be very useful, but it is incredibly dangerous. Out of control it will burn everything to the ground. When does money go out of control? - when your heart falls in love with it.

**1 Timothy 6:10 The love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.**

Wealth can be very useful, but the second your heart falls in love with it, the battle is over – you are done. So beware of the love of money. Don't envy those who have more than you, and don't fret over the people who are treating you unfairly. God will deal with them. Trust Him to make things right. And when the time is right, He will make your righteousness shine like the day.

**Benediction: Psalm 37:1 Do not fret because of evil men or be envious of those who do wrong; 2 for like the grass they will soon wither, like green plants they will soon die away. 3 Trust in the LORD and do good; dwell in the land and enjoy safe pasture. 4 Delight yourself in the LORD and he will give you the desires of your heart.**

### **Application Questions (James 1:25)**

- 1) Who do you know whose life seems to be free from the love of money? Describe that person.
- 2) What kind of injustices are you most tempted to fret about?
- 3) What kind of evil people are you most tempted to envy?
- 4) Which of the four sins are you most tempted to imitate? (hoarding, exploitation, luxury, oppression)