

James 5:1-6 'Beware Of Having The Heart Of The Hoarder!'

Last week in James we looked at v13-17 of chapter 4, 'My Times Are In Thy Hands', I called it. We considered the vanity of believing that we have ownership of tomorrow. James used the example of the wealthy businessmen who believed that such was their power and hold over the things of their life that they made their bold plans for the future. V13: "Now listen," or "Listen here," or "Come now." V14: "You do not even know what will happen tomorrow," let alone in years to come. Yes, he continues with that same tone of voice that he used in v12: "But you, who are you to judge your neighbour?" Yes *who do you think you are? You are not God, even though you act as though you were!* The Commentator explained that what James is doing here, (while giving us insight into the madness of self-sufficiency before God) he is also explaining, that as a person thinks, so they are. As Manton says, "That a person's thoughts are the offspring of their soul." And as Jesus put it in Matthew 6:21: "For where a man's treasure is, there will his heart be also." And Blanchard used the example of a poor man suddenly thrust into being in line to the throne of the king. His thoughts even his obsession, perhaps, will be upon those things of wealth and privilege which he has never experienced before.

Yes our thoughts reveal who we truly are in our soul. Because where our focus is, that is who we are! The rich man of Luke chapter 12, well his focus was all about himself. What he would do. How he "will build bigger barns, and with his future all laid out in front of him, he will eat drink and be merry." But "God comes to him and says: "You fool. This very night your life will be demanded from you." Yes his thoughts were all about himself and his life in this world. Not the world to come. He was not "Rich toward God" as Jesus explained!

James 4:14: "What is your life? You are but a mist that appears and is gone." In the scheme of eternity, our whole life is but a single breath. *My times are in thy hand, my times are in thy hand.* V15: "Instead you ought to say, 'If it is the Lord's will. 16 As it is you boast and brag." And yet Psalm 90:12: "Teach us to number our days aright, that we might gain a heart of wisdom."

And finally v17: "Therefore anyone who knows the good he ought to do and does not do it, sins." Those wealthy Jewish merchants were all well aware of God's Laws of mercy and benevolence towards the poor. And yet they were all about themselves! So merely knowing the things of the Kingdom of God, will be as empty as the profession of these men, come the day of the Lord!

Well we come now to chapter 5:1-6. 'Beware Of Having The Heart Of The Hoarder!' V1: "Now listen." He uses the exact same words as in chapter 4: 3: "Come now," or perhaps "Listen here," or "Therefore listen." Having just spoken of those wealthy Jewish merchants who claimed to be Christian, and yet their verbal profession was all they seemed to possess of Christianity. And James rebuke for them being, (though they believed in their vanity that they had ownership of tomorrow, making their plans for years down the track, and yet they did not: "Even know what will happen tomorrow," let alone in years to come. He now speaks to the out and out pagans, as the Commentators explained, because within any Christian society or church, there will be non-believers!

Now were they actually a different group of people to those in chapter 4:13-17? I was a bit unsure until looking further at the passage and in light of the commentators' explanations. And I'll explain my thinking a bit later. Because he could have simply been giving us a bit more of an insight into that

last group of people and the dangers they were facing. But either way the warning is the same and it is here for all of us to see. We must beware of having our security in the transient nature of the things of this world. He is speaking specifically of affluence and wealth. And for the better part of those of us who live in Australia, this includes us all! v1: "Now listen you rich people, weep and wail, because of the misery that is coming up on you." In chapter 4:9, it was: "Grieve, mourn and wail. Change your laughter to mourning, your joy to gloom." Living the way that they were meant that they had nothing to be joyful about. Here it is simply: "Weep and wail." There is not even a call to repentance, which is perhaps why the Commentators suggest that James is indeed addressing a different group of people.

"Weep and wail." Because of the misery of God's judgement which not might be coming, but "is coming upon you." Brothers and sisters, surely one of the main things which leaps out at us every day as clear evidence of the downward spiralling of our society into depravity, is the growing lack of there being any consequences for actions. Many children are raised today by parents who give their children a free reign. Because they want to be their children's friends. Now this is all well and good in theory, (and perhaps even admirable in some ways) but as they do this, these parents are not only doing what is against God's teaching of wise parenting, but they are also robbing their children of having the security of knowing where their boundaries lie!

Sadly this lunacy has spilled into classrooms to the point where basically, teachers have been robbed of having any real authority. It has become so bad now, that some states are actually raising the age from 10 to 14 of someone being held accountable for their crimes. And these young hoodlums, these criminals, can basically rob, steal and even murder, up until the age of 14, with absolute impunity. An individual is not deemed to know right from wrong until the age of 14! Well what insanity must possess those who pass such legislation and make such laws. Because not only are these young people not being prepared for the real world in which we live, (although perhaps even more terrifying is that they actually are) but worse still, they're not being prepared for their ultimate meeting with God. Well these wealthy people before us, are now being woken up from their affluent induced coma! "Now listen you rich people, weep and wail, because of the misery that is coming up on you.v2 Your wealth has rotted, and moths have eaten your clothes.'

In Matthew 6:19-21 Jesus said: "Do not store up treasures on earth where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." Again James 5:2: "Your wealth has rotted, and moths have eaten your clothes."

Now this speaks of two of the ways of measuring wealth in that ancient agricultural Society. The wealth of produce, meaning barns full to the overflowing like the rich fool in Luke 2, and the fine clothes of all of those wealthy land owners. In some ways it was much the same as it is today. Where high fashion and the latest trends, (no matter how ludicrous they are) seem to be driving society. And in the ancient world, some fabrics were so valuable they were worth more than precious gems. So James is telling these well to do people, that the wealth of their barns is mouldy and rotting, and little moths, have been secretly chewing away at their precious clothes. So their hoarding of things has done them no good!

One of Darlene's favourite shows on TV is called 'Space Invaders'. And it's about a group of people who go into people's houses who have literally become prisoners in their own homes, due to the stuff that they have gathered and squirrelled away over many, many years. Often times it is literally rubbish. There have even been tragic cases where people have been found dead after weeks, months

and even years, after they have passed away, because of the junk that they've acquired, they were barely able to reach the front door. Things were piled from floor to ceiling, room to room, leaving only a narrow corridor to traverse the home. It's a sad tragedy. These people feel the need to have these things around them to feel safe and secure. And what those things end up doing has the opposite effect. Those people become alienated from family and friends, (that's if they do have any) and they often eventually die alone!

Well unbeknownst to these wealthy people, that is exactly what is happening to them in the sight of God. Yes their crops are rotting away in their vast storehouses. And there are tiny bugs chewing their way through all of those high fashion one of a kind designer clothes! Oh dear friends, how useless things are, when they become the objects of our obsession. Those kinds of things which we hoard and surround ourselves with. We feel that if we get enough of them, (whatever those things may be) will keep us content, safe and secure. Yes they'll protect us from that whole world of pain and suffering in which we live. And even if we are not aware of this, that is in effect what we can be doing towards God! We might not be those wealthy land owners with their mouldy rotting products, and their moth eaten clothes hanging in their cupboards, but we have placed our trust and hope in people or things, that are not God!

But again, slowly but surely those things unbeknownst to us, are being eaten away by our mouldy, rotting self-assurance, and moth eaten ragged clothes, that will leave us naked before God come judgement day! Beloved, I say this with all sensitivity, as someone who loves you in the Lord, is this who you are to any degree? If it is, surely then it's time to cast all those things upon the Lord Jesus. Confess them to God, and then take it to the Lord in prayer! In the hymn what a friend we have in Jesus, we sing: *Do thy friends despise forsake thee? Take it to the Lord in prayer. In His arms He'll take and shield thee, thou wilt find a solace there!*

Well after talking of produce and clothes which do perish, James now speaks of things which seem more secure, because they actually do not perish as those other things do. Those precious metals which are so highly valued even today. "Your gold and silver are corroded. Their corrosion will testify against you and eat your flesh like fire." Now brothers and sisters, this is not that bubble-gum fairy floss kind of Christianity, that is preached and promoted by so many today, is it? "Your gold and silver has corroded. Their corrosion will testify against you and eat your flesh like fire. You have hoarded your wealth in the last days." Friends I made the point last time that James does not condemn the building up of a business or the making of profit, no. What he condemns is the hoarding of wealth. Just as those people do with things, in the space invaders show. It's a covetous lusting after the god of mammon. Because those precious things that we have stored away, that we have hoarded, will eventually eat us alive spiritually, and ultimately carry down the path to hell!

Beloved, each metaphor paints the picture of the dwindling of these people's great wealth while also pointing us to their dwindling lives. Because just like those things that they have tried to cling to, life itself is slipping through their fingers! "You have hoarded wealth in these last days." Now if you did a Bible search for these words: "In the last days," you would find them in many places within the scriptures. Indeed we have been living: "In the last days" since Jesus rose from the grave. But are these those "last days" of which James is speaking? They may well be, but I'm not so sure. He may be saying, you have done this thing "in these last days" of the King's imminent return. So, far from making preparations for the return of the King and the new Kingdom that awaits us, they have been hiding their worldly wares and riches in the shadows, far from everyone's gaze!

But to me, it seems to be speaking of: "The last days," of these people's lives. These were Jews who were more than well aware of God's requirements of benevolence and how we should live in regard

to the poor. So there is a righteous “misery,” that is going to be meted out upon them by Jesus for their gross inconsistency. And yet even as their lives were slowly but surely coming to an end, they have tried to hang on to those fading things, in which they had placed their hope! In v4, we get yet another look at the character of these people: “Look. The wages you failed to pay the workmen who mowed your fields are crying out against you.” But firstly I want us to consider the implications of the words in v3: “Your gold and silver are corroded. Their corrosion will testify against you and eat your flesh like fire.” It brings to mind those descriptions of judgement and hell we find in the scriptures.

In Isaiah 66:15-24 we read: “See the Lord is coming with fire, and his Chariots are like a whirlwind; he will bring down his anger with fury, and his rebuke with flames of fire. For with fire and with his sword the Lord will execute judgement upon all men, and many will be those slain by the Lord. Those who consecrate and purify themselves to go into the gardens, following the one in the midst of those who eat the flesh of pigs and rats and other abominable things, they will meet their end together,” declares the Lord, “And I, because of their actions and their imaginations, am about to come and gather all nations and tongues, and they will come and see my glory. I will set a sign among them, and I will send some of those who survive to the nations, to Tarshish, to the Libyans and Lydians (famous as archers) to Tubal and Greece, and to the distant lands that have not heard of my fame or seen my glory. They will proclaim my glory among the nations. And they will bring all your brothers, from all the nations to my holy mountain in Jerusalem as an offering to the Lord, on horses, in Chariots and wagons, and on mules and camels”, says the Lord. “They will bring them, as the Israelites bring their grain offerings, to the temple of the Lord in ceremonially clean vessels. And I will select some of them also to be priests and Levites”, says the Lord. “As the new heavens and the new earth that I will make will end your before me”, says the Lord, “So will your name and descendants endure. From one new moon to another and from one Sabbath to another, all mankind will come and bow down before me,” says the Lord. “And they will go out and look upon the dead bodies of those who rebelled against me; their worm will not die, nor will their fire be quenched, and they will be loathsome to all mankind.”

Yes, “See, the Lord is coming with fire.” This is the coming misery of which James speaks. The Wrath and Judgement of God! His “Chariots are like a whirlwind; and he will bring down his anger with fury and his rebuke with flames of fire. For with fire and with his sword the Lord will execute judgement upon all men, and many will be those slain by the Lord.” “Chariots” were those ancient vehicles of destruction such as tanks etc are today. Through Isaiah, God creates the picture of His final victory over rebellion and sin. And it will come with speed, it will come with suddenness, it will “come with anger, with fury and with fire,” and with “His Sword” which the scriptures tell us is the Word of His Mouth. No this is not *‘1,2,3 Jesus loves me’!*

V24 explains that the chosen of the Lord will “Go out and look upon the dead bodies of those who have rebelled against me; their worm will not die, nor will their fire be quenched.” This speaks of unimaginable and never ending torment. Of the decomposing lives of people who ultimately will be cast into hell. And with the flames of those funeral fires never going out! Brethren I have pointed out before, that these punishments are personal: “Their worm will not die, nor their fire be quenched.” In another place it adds to the imagery saying: “Where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” Friends in hell, there will be eternal lament, but also eternal anger by some! O Beloved, in the same way that we cannot imagine God, (and we shouldn't try) we cannot even begin to imagine His perfect Judgement and Wrath. We can but get an insight, a mere glimpse into those things. And what we see is indeed terrifying!

The sense to what James is saying here, is that those hoardings of wealth are stored up in heaven as a testimony against us. And although “silver and gold” do not corrode, the imagery speaks of the

worthlessness of worldly wealth before the judgement seat of Christ. Yes those hoardings will in effect eat the callous souls of the well to do Scrooge alive, for all eternity!

And more of these people's character is revealed in v4: "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 Almighty." We see this kind of imagery in Cain's slaying of his brother Abel in Genesis 4:10: "The Lord said to Cain, "What have you done? Listen. Your brother's blood cries out to me from the ground." Friends don't we sometimes think to ourselves: Lord don't You see? Don't You even care?

O Beloved, nothing is hidden from God. Every wrong, every injustice, every corrupt dealing by politician, policeman, priest, judge or public servant, all ordinary men and women. Will be laid bare before the Judgement seat of Jesus. Those deceptions of wages and accounts that have not been paid cry out to God like Abel's blood from the ground, and He has heard them all. And all of those outstanding accounts will be paid in full! Ecclesiastes 12:14: "For God will bring every deed into judgement, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil." Yes the cries of the defrauded labourers throughout the millennia have been heard. "Every deed. God will bring into judgement." These things have reached the ears of the Almighty! v5: "You have lived on earth in luxury and self-indulgence. You have fattened yourselves in the day of slaughter." Like the collaborator in times of war, they attached themselves to the oppressors for profit. Growing rich upon the very blood of their own people. Even family and friends! Or like the person who goes from revelry to revelry.

Beloved, we need to beware of being the hoarder. Not just with our finances. Now granted this is speaking of unsaved wealthy people, with their eyes upon the here and now, while being prepared to grow in greed and finances on the backs of less able people, but we all need to be on guard against this sort of thing! We can "hoard" our finances, even be tight fisted towards the work of the Lord. We can "hoard" our abilities, those gifts and talents that God has given us, keeping them to ourselves. We can "hoard" our gratitude and encouragements by simply holding our tongue. And may I suggest that we can even "hoard" ourselves, so to speak. By holding ourselves back from the body of believers, being willing to contribute to nothing. We can be spiritual sponges, soaking up everyone else's efforts, while never being prepared to contribute anything!

James' final indictment upon these people, v6: "You have condemned and murdered innocent men, who were not opposing you." Beloved, if we think of this statement in a broad sense, we can find it ringing true since the murder of Abel by his brother Cain, to the rise of so many people to power throughout history! Even in the most recent of times: That murderous despot in China, Putin in Russia, Mugabe in Zimbabwe, the list is as long as time itself. And I dare say nothing will change this side of heaven. And though these charges will be read out against those people come the day of judgement, we must ensure that we ourselves who call on the Name of Jesus, are not in any way like them! Micah 6:8: "He has showed you O man what is good. And what does the Lord require from you? But to act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God."

So as I close this morning, we simply learn that as with all things, finances and wealth are simply blessings and tools to be used by us, from God. We ought to be wise and not frivolous with our finances by all means. But a mean spirited, tight fisted, calloused hearted "hoarder," is not of Christ, of this we can be sure. "Freely you have received freely give." Now granted this is speaking specifically of the gospel message. But I feel it has further application in our response to the riches of mercy and grace, that we have received through Jesus! Friends all of these things today have simply been a warning for us who claim Christ. "How hard it is for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of

heaven. I tell you the truth. It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of heaven.” Jesus said. “But with God all things are possible.”

Let's pray!