

The Book of James

Weep and Howl!

Lesson #10 for December 6, 2014

Scriptures: James 5:1-6; Psalm 73:3-19; 1 Samuel 25:2-11; Leviticus 19:13; Luke 16:19-31; Matthew 5:39.

1. Have you ever wished that you could win the lottery? Or, perhaps, win a lot of money on a quiz show? Studies have shown that suddenly receiving a lot of money can ruin one's life! Why do we need money? We need enough to comfortably eat, house, and clothe ourselves and our families. We need money for transportation, and all of this must come after paying tithes and offerings to the church as well as taxes. Often, the greatest happiness in life does not come from money. Think of times when you have received loving words, an encouraging smile, a listening ear, unexpected kindnesses, warm acceptance and love, respect, a sympathetic touch or even a hug, and genuine friendship. How much do these things cost?
2. What is the most important thing in your life? What gives you the most happiness? People are willing to sacrifice even life itself sometimes to get fame, fortune (wealth), or health. Some have even been reported as saying: "I'm going to practice health reform, even if it kills me!"
3. The Bible suggests that God can give us faith, hope, wisdom, patience, love, contentment, and many other blessings. How does God give those gifts? Can we see in our own lives how God has given them to us? Do you find that "God's gifts" are the most important things in your life? Why? Or, why not? How many of our daily activities are truly unselfish, acting out of conscious principle, and showing to others that we are truly doing what is right because it is right?
4. Read James 5:1. While we do not like to think about it, James 1:10-11 reminds us that our lives could end at any moment. In the passage for this week (James 5:1-6), James addressed those who live just prior to Christ's return. What do other Bible writers say about those who hoard wealth at that point in earth's history? (See Luke 17:27-29; 2 Timothy 3:1-2; Revelation 18:3,7.) Unfortunately, Revelation 3:17 suggests that this will be a special problem among God's end-time church. It is very interesting to note that the Greek word for *miseries* in James 5:1 comes from the same root that is used to describe end-time Christians in the message to Laodicea as recorded in Revelation 3:17. Is this talking about material possessions? Or, spiritual possessions? What is your attitude toward money?
5. Many of the Bible's most famous people were either rich and/or served in high positions in their governments. Would these messages apply to them? Why? Or, why not? In what sense are the people in our day "wretched"? The Greek term could be translated "worn out from hard labor." Could those words apply to us as we sit watching TV with the remote in hand? Do those words in Revelation apply only to Christians? Or, perhaps, only to our church? Aren't we supposed to be warning the world about what is coming?
6. How do you think James regarded his financial situation? We believe that he was the leader of the church in Jerusalem. So many church leaders in our day are rich and increased with goods! Do you think James was poor? Compare the situation of Peter in Acts 3:1-10. Look at what happened to people's wealth in Germany right after World War II.
7. Why do some people seem to be getting richer and richer while others are getting poorer and poorer? Is it possible for us to do anything about that here and now? Read Psalm 73:3-9. Should we be rejoicing that God will one day deal with those who oppress us?
8. The Old Testament prophet Habakkuk lived during a very difficult time. While there are no clearly datable events or persons mentioned in the book, textual evidence seems to suggest

that he lived and prophesied just before the Babylonians conquered Judea for the first time in 605 B.C. He cried out with questions to God. (See Habakkuk 1:2-4,13-14.) God's answer is surprising. (Habakkuk 2:2-4) But, the most incredible part of the book is the last couple of verses. Try to imagine what it would be like to be a subsistence farmer whose only wealth is what his land and his animals produce and what it would be like if he has no crops and all his animals die! (See Habakkuk 3:17-19.) Could 21st century Adventist Christians ever face such a crisis? What about Revelation 13:16-17? Contrast Revelation 14:9-11.

9. Are there any gross injustices in your environment or even in the wider world that upset you and make you angry? Is it fair that people in some parts of the world are being killed just because their beliefs are different from those of others? Is there any possibility that all injustice will be corrected before Jesus comes again? If not, is working to hasten the second coming (See 2 Peter 3:10-12.) the best way of dealing with injustice in this world?
10. Read James 5:2-3. How were the wealthy people described in these verses gaining that wealth? Did it seem to be doing them any good? Can you name some people in the Bible who clearly misused the wealth that God gave them? Consider Nabal (1 Samuel 25:2-11) and Hezekiah. (2 Kings 20:12-19)
11. Nabal and Hezekiah created disasters from their wealth. Peter, depending completely on the Lord, apparently was not concerned even though he had no money at all! Which of these two situations best describes us today? In our situation, is our money proving to be a blessing? Or, a curse? Will it someday be a witness against us? (James 5:3)
12. What will ultimately happen to all the wealth that has been amassed by everyone living on this earth? (Luke 12:33,39) Should we have more faith in these words from the Bible or in our bank accounts? When the offering plate comes around, do we think about Mark 12:41-44?
13. Ask yourself this question: What is my true attitude toward money? How much of our time and effort is directed toward getting more of it? Do we really need more of it?
14. What kinds of wealthy people were being addressed by James? James described wealthy merchants (James 1:11); business owners who were willing to sue in order to protect their investments (James 2:6); and even employers who were withholding wages from their laborers (James 5:4). The Bible is very clear about what God thinks about people who withhold wages from laborers. Read Leviticus 19:13; Deuteronomy 24:14-15; Jeremiah 22:13; and James 5:4.
15. How many of the early Christians do you think actually worked for wages which they needed to buy food? Subsistence farmers in our day who live in places like Africa and India usually grow their own food but depend on their wages to buy other necessities. James made it very clear that to withhold wages from a worker who needs it to meet his family's necessities is not only a crime against that person and his family but against God Himself!

Riches bring with them great responsibilities. To obtain wealth by unjust dealing, by overreaching in trade, by oppressing the widow and the fatherless, or by hoarding up riches and neglecting the wants of the needy, will eventually bring the just retribution described by the inspired apostle: "Go to now, ye rich men, weep and howl for your miseries that shall come upon you." [James 5:1]—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 2, p. 682. [Content in brackets is added.]

16. Ask yourself this question: In my monetary dealings with other people, what am I saying to them and to the rest of the world about my Christianity? Are you reflecting the character and actions of Jesus Christ?

17. In our business transactions, do we as Seventh-day Adventist Christians always deal fairly with others?

In trading with the merchants at _____, Brother and Sister _____ do not take a course which is pleasing to God. They will dicker to get things as cheap as they possibly can, and linger over a difference of a few pennies, and talk in regard to it as though money was their all—their god. If they could only be brought back, unobserved, to hear the remarks that are made after they leave, they would get a clearer idea of the influence of penuriousness. Our faith is brought into disrepute, and [239] God is blasphemed by some on account of this close, penny dealing. Angels turn away in disgust. Everything in heaven is noble and elevated. All seek the interest and happiness of others. No one devotes himself to looking out and caring for self. **It is the chief joy of all holy beings to witness the joy and happiness of those around them.**—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 2, p. 238.2. [Bold type is added.]

18. Read James 5:5, Ezekiel 16:49-50; and Amos 4:1-3. These verses clearly link fatness and drunkenness to preparation for slaughter. Our world has become expert at fattening up animals for slaughter. Is that what is happening to the rich in our day? When will the slaughter come?

19. Read Luke 16:19-31, the parable of the rich man and Lazarus.

Contrary to popular opinion, the real focus of the parable is this life, not the afterlife. In fact, the original Greek makes no mention of “heaven” and “hell” at all. Both the rich man and Lazarus are depicted in the same place (vs. 23)—the grave (*hadēs*). The chasm separating them symbolizes the fact that after a person dies, his or her eternal destiny is fixed. Therefore, how we treat people in this life (as described in “Moses and the prophets,” vss. 29, 31, NKJV) is extremely important. There is no future life in which we can make up for what we failed to do in this one: “He who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen?” (1 John 4:20, NKJV). *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide*, page 84.

20. Read James 5:6. How often in our day do perpetrators of crimes blame their victims? Murderers claim self-defense. Sexual abusers blame the behavior of their victims as enticing them. Husbands and wives blame each other for failed marriages. Even those who killed Christian martyrs blamed the martyrs for heresy. (John 16:2). Will the day come when those who kill Seventh-day Adventists believe they are doing God’s will? Do we sometimes do things that we believe are right only to discover later that they were wrong?
21. Read Matthew 5:39. In our day, what does it mean to “turn the other cheek”? We are not literally being hit on the cheek. How do these words apply to us in the 21st century?
22. It is important to notice that when we talk about wealth, the problem with the rich is their *attitudes and actions*—not their wealth per se. Read Matthew 5:3 and James 2:5. It is those who recognize their spiritual poverty who are rich in faith and will be heirs of the kingdom. It is not those who are “rich, and increased with goods” (Revelation 3:17) who will be in the kingdom. But, we must not forget that it is God who gives people the power to get wealth. (Deuteronomy 8:11-18)

Money has great value, because it can do great good. In the hands of God’s children it is food for the hungry, drink for the thirsty, and clothing for the naked. It is a defense for the oppressed, and a means of help to the sick. But money is of no more value than sand, only as it is put to use in providing for the

necessities of life, in blessing others, and advancing the cause of Christ.

Hoarded wealth is not merely useless, it is a curse. In this life it is a snare to the soul, drawing the affections away from the heavenly treasure. In the great day of God its witness to unused talents and neglected opportunities will condemn its possessor. The Scripture says, [James 5:1-4 quoted].

But Christ sanctions no lavish or careless use of means. His lesson in economy, "Gather up the fragments that remain, that nothing be lost," is for all His followers. (John 6:12.) He who realizes that his money is a talent from God will use it economically, and will feel it a duty to save that he may give.—Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons*, pp. 351.3-352.2. [Content in brackets is added.]

23. Having said all that we have said about wealth and those who possess it, it is also true that "Many poor families are poor because they spend their money as soon as they receive it....When one becomes involved in debt, he is in one of Satan's nets, which he sets for souls."—Ellen G. White, *The Adventist Home*, p. 392.4-5.
24. Can the church in some way preach a gospel to the poor (Luke 4:18) by helping them to get out of debt? Is that what it means to "set the oppressed free"?
25. How can we tell if we are serving money or if it is serving us? Is it easy to tell who is our real master? (Matthew 6:24; Luke 16:13)
26. If you are a Christian and relatively wealthy, how are you supposed to help the poor? Are we supposed to be handing out money? How often do we even think of the rich as weeping or lamenting? Don't we usually think the rich are the ones who do not need to do that? What did James have in mind when he talked about weeping and howling? Aren't those very audible and public displays of grief? We know that economic disparity in this world will never go away. So, what can we do about it? Wouldn't it have been more helpful for James to say as Zacchaeus did that the rich should repay fourfold whatever they have taken by fraud as opposed to telling them to "weep and howl"?
27. What do you think James would have said to the Laodiceans mentioned in Revelation 3? John suggested a very clear answer to the problem. But, are the white raiment, the eyesalve, and the gold of faith and love all that we need? What if all of us went to church as Peter and John did without even a single cent in our pockets? If that was true, how could a church building project be successful?
28. Clearly, this lesson is focusing on attitudes and behaviors. Read James 5:2-6 once again. There are two lists in these verses. In verses 2 & 3, doom is pronounced on the wealth itself showing how it has become accursed. The second list in verses 4-6, tells us how that wealth was accumulated. James and John both suggested that the times they were talking about are the final days in this earth's history. Don't we think that is when we are living? Hopefully, no Seventh-day Adventist is involved in extortion, injustice, or murder. But, do we sometimes indulge self, gratify self, and feel very comfortable with the abundance we have? We know that wealth will never buy a place in the kingdom of God. (Matthew 16:26)
29. If the wealth which we hold not only materially but also spiritually has been given to us by God, what are we doing to share that wealth? Are we sharing our spiritual wealth as well as our material wealth? Shouldn't we be doing that? How can we do that better?

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