

Warnings to the Rich

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BY [She Reads Truth](#)

Scripture Reading: James 5:1-6, Matthew 5:38-42, Hebrews 10:35-39, Revelation 20:11-15

My husband and I were on our way to a dinner party, when we cut through a neighborhood on the nice side of town. As we drove the luxurious streets, we stared out our windows at the soaring homes with custom architecture and perfectly manicured lawns. Each house looked like the perfect place to live, its own little heaven on earth. We drove in silence, until my husband turned to me and laughingly apologized, "I'm sorry I'm a pastor."

This is a running joke between us, though I can't help but detect a hint of truth in his voice. We have every single thing we need, and more, but that doesn't stop comparison from knocking on our door. On more days than I care to admit, I peek over the fence into my neighbor's greener pasture, and I yearn for it.

Deep down, my husband and I both know that "more" will never scratch the itch of envy. More money, more house, more things will not relieve the pain—and the lie—of comparison. It's a bottomless pit of need, with endless demands which are never satisfied. We know this, but we also need reminding.

This is the gift of James 5, which reminds us what is true about all our pretty possessions. Preached with the same fire-bellied conviction as the Old Testament prophets, James has harsh words for wealthy people who misuse their riches. According to New Testament scholar Douglas Moo, James is not targeting *all* wealthy people, but those who put their wealth to unrighteous ends. Or, those who are simply stingy with it. For those believers, James reserves his harshest judgments.

However, James has a more universal message too. Whether we have wealth or we don't, whether we misuse our money or we don't, our possessions amount to very little. Drawing on earlier biblical imagery of moth and rust (Matthew 6:19), James reminds us that even our finest earthly possessions will one day be gone. Their Kingdom weight is slight. Their investment yields even less. Money and possessions cannot, and will not, give us what we want.

So, how do we escape the wretched emptiness this passage describes?

First, **feed on God, not things**. Our pursuit of possessions is a lot like trying to satisfy deep hunger by eating a single lettuce leaf. It will not fill us. Our appetites can only be satisfied by the “bread of life,” Jesus Christ, who promises, “No one who comes to me will ever be hungry, and no one who believes in me will ever be thirsty again” (John 6:35).

Second, **be generous**. Too often, we resolve not to love our possessions too much, a mindset that is well-intentioned but without accountability or discernibility. The world will only know we hold our possessions loosely if we actually hold them loosely. This is why Jesus exhorts us to radical acts of generosity (Matthew 5:40-42). Jesus commands this, not simply because it’s a “nice thing to do,” but because it sets our hearts—and, therefore, our feet—on a different path, away from the destruction James describes.

These are truths we must speak over ourselves again and again. The sparkle and shine of worldly goods are a powerful illusion, but the more we return to these biblical truths, the more they will start to sink in.

Now, whenever my husband apologizes for what we cannot afford, I turn to him and smile to say, “You know what, they don’t have anything we don’t already have in Christ.”

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