No More Mr. Nice Guy
March 7, 2007

James 5:1-12
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, then, brothers, until the Lord's coming. See how the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop and how patient he is for the autumn and spring rains. [8]You too, be patient and stand firm, because the Lord's coming is near. [9]Don't grumble against each other, brothers, or you will be judged. The Judge is standing at the door!
[10]Brothers, as an example of patience in the face of suffering, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. [11]As you know, we consider blessed those who have persevered. You have heard of Job's perseverance and have seen what the Lord finally brought about. The Lord is full of compassion and mercy.
[12]Above all, my brothers, do not swear—not by heaven or by earth or by anything else. Let your "Yes" be yes, and your "No," no, or you will be condemned.

James would never win a Mr. Nice Guy competition—I don't think he'd even enter. As if his style hasn't been direct enough, he seems to shift gears a bit as he closes out his letter, and gets a little cranky.

This chapter isolates two groups of people—the ones that have *done well* and the ones that have *done without*—who couldn't be more different, and gives both a similar warning—*God's impending judgment*—because of their attitudes and their behavior toward a common topic.

James is like a junk yard dog with a bone…he doesn't let go easily when he's got something that's important to him. This particular theme moves right through the entire 5 chapters—your and my claim of faith in Christ means absolutely nothing until you and I back it up with consistent Christ-honoring behavior. And a great barometer of our willingness to do that has to do with how we feel about money: the desire for it, what we're willing to do to get it, what we do with it once we have it, and even how it affects us if we don't have as much money as we want… It's pretty tough stuff actually…

I. If you've done well, beware of the <u>misery</u> that may await (vv 1-6).

1. It's a miserable day when you realize that whatever basket you've put all your eggs into is just a <u>basket of rotten eggs</u>…

2. What are you going to do when you wake up one of these days only to discover that you've finally got what thought would make life worth living…and it <u>doesn't</u>?

   QUOTE
   The greatest deceit in life is having plenty to live <u>on</u>, and nothing to live <u>for</u>…

QUOTE
Happiness is not a goal to be attained…it is the by-product of a life well lived.

QUOTE
Never confuse success with significance; Madonna is one, Mother Teresa is the other.

a. Verse 2 reminds us of the misery that awaits all of us who think we can buy happiness…

    i. If I have _____ then I'll be happy.
    ii. If I have enough _____ then I'll be happy.
    iii. If I have a newer _____ then I'll be happy.

    - To be perfectly honest sometimes I can buy happiness…it just doesn't last, and my next fix is always more expensive, fades more quickly, and leaves me wanting even more of what I thought I'd already found but didn't find…
    - So I guess I really can't buy happiness…
    - All I can buy is something that's a very expensive and deeply disappointing look-alike.
    - I need this kind of reminder all of the time…

b. Verses 3-5 warn us of the misery that's headed our way if we think our way to happiness lies not in what we can buy with our money but in our craving to acquire more and more and more…and our willingness to do whatever we have to in order to get it.

    i. You have HOARDED wealth—the sin is in the manner of securing wealth.
        1. Some wealth is the result of treating others unfairly (v. 4).
            a. Cheating employees out of what they deserve…
            b. Cheating employers out of what they deserve…
            c. Cheating anyone out of anything they deserve…

        2. Some wealth is the result of extreme self-indulgence (v. 5).

            QUOTE
            Get all you can, can all you get, & sit on the can.

        3. Some wealth is the result of out-right lawlessness toward other people (v. 6).

    ii. You HAVE hoarded wealth—the sin is refusing to honor God through sound, biblical stewardship principles—which are as follows..

        1. Earn your money ethically.
            a. No backdoor deals or get rich quick schemes.
            b. Earn a lot of it if you want—just make sure you earn it ethically.

        2. Spend it wisely.

        3. Avoid destructive debt.

4. Save money consistently for your future.

5. Give money to the poor generously.

6. And, as a part of overall money management practices, God established the tithe—which means *a tenth.*
    a. The idea is that God's people would give at least 10% of their income as financial support for the temple or church.
    b. The tithe was a responsive gift—in recognition of God's goodness to us we give a minimum of 10% back to him.

GIVING ISN'T FUNDAMENTALLY ABOUT MONEY…
IT'S ABOUT THE CONDITION OF YOUR HEART TOWARD GOD.

DISCUSSION

The Bible never disparages wealth, nor does it discourage those with sufficient industry and drive to use their abilities to earn a good living or enjoy the benefits of their work. 1 Timothy 6:10 says, "the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil" which causes some people to stray from their faith and results in tremendous grief. Following that warning we are told in verse 11 to resist crossing that line and to pursue righteousness and godliness.

1. How would you describe that "line" to a friend that asked your opinion?

2. When does a man's pursuit of wealth or financial success cross the line from good pay for hard work and become *a root of evil*?

3. What is it that prevents good men from being obedient to the teachings of the Scripture when the subject is money?

II. If you've done without, beware of the judgment that may await (vv. 7-11).

- I can sin by wanting something that I can't afford as easily as I can sin by having something I shouldn't buy.
- You don't have to be rich to be greedy.
- A particular sin of those who don't have much money is their prickly attitude toward those who do.
- It's possible for a person of meager means to be as guilty of financial sin as it is a person that's wealthy simply through that person's attitude toward money.
- All are unacceptable attitudes and behaviors for the mature Christ-follower for which people will be judged/punished.

1. The first attitude is supposed to be patience (v. 7).

ILLUSTRATION

The picture is vivid to me having lived a lifetime in western Oklahoma in a span of five years. All they talked about was the weather… If it wasn't interesting where we lived, then they talked about the weather somewhere else. Arguable James knew little about Elk City, Oklahoma, but there are many points in common—without rain trouble was certain.

The farmer in James' day planted his crop…and hoped for the best. They didn't have irrigation systems. A bad year could result in a family losing everything. It wasn't uncommon in James' day for families to go hungry in the last weeks leading up to harvest, and in some cases to die of starvation.

The point of the illustration, however, is that whatever happened in regard to the rain, it was outside his ability to control it. All he could do was wait, and be patient.

2. Your second attitude is supposed to be expectation (vv. 8-10).

QUOTE
"Our conduct is influenced, not by our experiences, but by our expectations." (George Bernard Shaw)

a. It is a state of blessedness to persevere when we encounter loss or deprivation (v. 11).

b. To fail to treat life's challenges in this realm with a good attitude invites God's judgment (v. 9).

c. To succeed in meeting this challenge with a good attitude secures God's compassion and mercy (vv 10-11).

ILLUSTRATION
James reminds us of God's numerous prophets who, said the right things and did the right things, and who also "suffered" in ways most of us can't imagine. Jeremiah's first sermon was about repentance, and his own family tried to kill him. *Welcome to the ministry son…*
On another occasion he warned people about their worthless worship habits, because their worship was not connected to their lifestyles, for which he got locked up in jail—but at least his family didn't try to kill him this time. All the other preachers tried, but at least his family didn't.
But he finished his work… I'm sure he felt discouraged and hurt, not to mention confused and disappointed, but he finished because of his expectation that one day he would be in the presence of God…and that's where all things will be ultimately accounted for.

So, when things aren't turning out the way we want them to, we're supposed to be patient and expectant… Patient because things may change. Expectant because they may not, but even so, Jesus will one day come again, and all will be well.

DISCUSSION

1. Does it sound odd to you that God will hold people as accountable for their attitude toward money as he would their use, abuse, or misuse of it?

2. James ends this discussion with advice that *above all* we should let our *"Yes" be yes and our "No" be no*—what application might this have to the discussion about the *doing well* and *doing without*?