

WARNINGS TO THE WEALTHY

James 5:1-6

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INTRODUCTION

- A. According to the Self Storage Association, a trade group charged with monitoring such things, the country now possesses about 1.9 billion square feet of personal storage space outside of the home. All this space is contained in nearly 40,000 facilities owned and operated by more than 2,000 entrepreneurs, including a handful of publicly traded giants like Public Storage, Storage USA, and Shurgard.

According to a recent survey, the owners of 1 out of every 11 homes also own a self-storage space. This represents an increase of 75 percent since 1995. Most operators of self-storage facilities report 90 percent occupancy, with average stints among renters of 15 months. Last year alone saw a 24 percent spike in the number of self-storage units on the market.

But, amazingly, as the amount of storage space required by homeowners has grown, so has the average size of the American house. In fact, the National Association of Homebuilders reports that the average American house grew from 1,660 square feet in 1973 to 2,400 square feet in 2004.

So let's get this straight—houses got bigger, average family sizes got smaller, and yet we still need to tack on almost two billion square feet of extra space to store our stuff?

- B. James addresses a certain kind of Christian near the end of his letter.
1. Last time, in our study of 4:13-17, we saw that James addressed people who used their “time” without any consideration of God and his will (i.e. 4:13-14).
 2. Now in 5:1-6, he addresses the same kind of person, who now uses his “treasure” without considering God’s will.
 3. In this passage James levels four warnings to these kinds of people.
 4. Remember, by the world’s standards of income, we are considered wealthy, so his warnings may be directed toward us.

I. THE FIRST WARNING IS ABOUT HOARDING WEALTH.

- A. Its found in 5:1-3.
- B. There were no banks in the first century. Wealth was measured in three ways.
1. Food.
 2. Clothing.
 3. Precious metals and coins.
- C. James’ point is that all three are easy to lose.
1. Food rots because of no refrigeration.
 2. Clothes were susceptible to moths.
 3. Precious metals didn’t actually corrode as James warns. This is his way of saying they can be devalued like our stock market today.
- D. James’ warning is against hoarding wealth-3b.
1. Hoarding, according to James, is wrong because its selfish-4:17.
 2. One way Christians hoard their wealth today is by refusing to tithe.

II. THE SECOND WARNING IS AGAINST STEALING WEALTH.

- A. This is in 5:4.
1. Common laborers in the first century lived day to day.
 2. These wealthy people were cheating them out of their wages. The phrase, “failed to pay” literally refers to stealing what is owed to someone else.
- B. John Steinbeck’s classic, “The Grapes of Wrath” is about the class struggle between the 1930’s, California was inundated with too many laborers (“Okies”), originally a derogatory word. In Texas it still is! The land owners used this over abundance of workers to virtually starve these pickers by paying them obscenely low wages. This is what was happening in James’ day.

- C. Do you remember the New York City hotel owner Leona Helmsley? She was known as “The Queen of Mean” because of the way she mistreated her employees. She was eventually convicted and sentenced to prison for income tax evasion. It seems she not only refused to pay her employees, but she refused to pay her taxes too. This is the kind of person James warns about stealing wages from others.
- D. James’ warning is that you may be able to hide selfish actions from others and get away with it, but you can’t hide it from God-v.3b.

III. THE THIRD WARNING IS AGAINST SELF-INDULGENCE.

- A. This is in 5:5.
- B. Jesus’ parable of the Rich Man in Luke 12:13-25 is one example of self- indulgence.
- C. James’ warning is that this kind of attitude leads to destruction (“slaughter”).

IV. THE FOURTH WARNING IS AGAINST OPPRESSION.

- A. This is in 5:6. The rich were taking the poor to court and further abusing them.
- B. The old saying is, unfortunately still true, “Power corrupts. Absolute power corrupts absolutely.”

CONCLUSION

- A. Solomon offers his own warning to those who abuse others with their money-Proverbs 11:4.
- B. We would do well to take note of James’ warning today...
 - 1. Beware of the danger of hoarding wealth.
 - 2. Beware of treating others fairly.
 - 3. Beware of the danger of self-indulgence.
 - 4. Beware of taking advantage of others with our position or money.