

How timely is the word of God. This striking passage could well be a headline in today's news – quoted on every editorial page in the nation. Covetousness! Greed, in every imaginable form. It has just been exposed at every level of our society in the United States, if not throughout the world. Leaders are incensed. Ordinary people are incensed. Leaders are guilty. Ordinary people are guilty. Fingers of blame are pointed every direction. We as believers need to consider ourselves. Are we victims, or has our conduct contributed to the current economic crisis?

James has already called out “go to!” once. Here he has another arresting call to stop and consider one's ways. To stop and change one's ways. This time the rich are confronted with their selfish practices. Greed had laid hold on them and accumulation of wealth was unrestrained by the brotherly love to be expected among them. The twelve tribes scattered abroad seemingly had started to follow the gospel preached to them. Who would read this letter otherwise? Or was it a last appeal to repentance for the unbelieving of the scattered nation, James' countrymen? But some, whether believers or unbelievers, still aggressively pursued riches. And they did so without scruples about injustices that were strewn in their wake. Nothing new, their predecessors, along with the Gentiles, had done so for centuries. Riches were viewed as God's blessing and the greater the wealth the more one was thought to be in God's favor. People evaluated their status with God this way. Some believers today seem to still think that way. (I've met some.) They either have never heard, or have conveniently forgotten, what Jesus has said about riches and rich men. The New Testament writers, led by the Holy Spirit, put things in a fresh, new perspective, one suited to man on earth **laying up treasures in heaven**. James was among the first to sound an alarm. Loving others, unselfish blessing of others, sacrificing and giving to others needs, was what characterized godly believers. The Lord Jesus was first to say so. Yet some slick charlatans today make themselves rich peddling something called the prosperity gospel. What blasphemy.

Being well-to-do or comfortable in this world is not evil in and of itself. Neither James nor Paul nor Jesus says that. Instead much instruction is given in scripture for acquiring and handling what resources we have been entrusted with. The appropriate attitude of a believer is contentment, kindness, good stewardship, generosity, thanksgiving and the like, not ruthless grasping, not endless searching for something for nothing. Lord help us to discern the line between stingy, grasping greed and industrious generation of income accompanied by thrifty and prudent living. Yet the Lord has to write one of the seven assemblies circled around Him, one prophetically picturing the last days,

Revelation 3:17 Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and

knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked: 18 I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see.

May we today be wise as He urges.

James again “pulls no punches.” No excuses desired, only broken repentance. Christ is still open to that. Come.

Read Matthew 6:24 -34; Luke 16:19,25; 1Timothy 5:6; 6:6; Hebrews 13:5;

Vs. 3b. “Ye have heaped treasure together for the last days.” This literally means the uttermost last day, implying an amount far more than one could possibly ever need. Saving for a postponed need or even for one's livelihood later in life, is pronounced wise by Solomon. But excessive accumulation of wealth, more than enough than needed for simple retirement needs, perhaps as a marker of one's success and acumen in this world, is deplored in scripture. If God has provided for your needs ask Him what He has in mind, at least for what you don't need. Then give it back to Him. Then maybe a little more. First, if one owes someone, the government, some corporation, a neighbor or a brother in the Lord, shouldn't one see that those debts are paid or payment provided for before giving any money to the poor or to the Lord? If, perhaps, a declaration of bankruptcy has been made and you have been able to legally move on leaving some “bad debts” behind, pay them off when you can. (One can even do this for a deceased parent using funds off the top of what remains in the estate after expenses.) In summary, we are each to provide for ourselves, 2Thessalonians 3:10-12; our families, 1Timothy 5:4,8; for the needy, Ephesians 4:28; Galatians 6:9-10; and for the servants of the Lord, 1Corinthians 9:6-11; Philippians 4:15. The latter can be done personally, but better if through the local Assembly, 1Cor. 16:1-3; 2Cor. 8 & 9.

“Ye have killed the just.” In master/slave cultures inhumanity, cruelty and killing are common. Historically, men in the United States have even tried to use the scriptures to justify such conduct. Injustice in any of our dealings blasphemes Christ who died, the Just for the unjust. An example is the no-win plight of illegal immigrants in the United States, hired illegally yet held as virtual slave labor under questionable working conditions under threat of being reported to the authorities. If their wages are kept back they can't complain without being in danger of being arrested. So called “sweat shops” are another example. The believer has no business knowingly having any part in illegal arrangements like this. Businesses can reward owners, provide useful goods and services while treating employees well and equitably. Patronize them.

By Ron Canner, September 24, 2008