

# Faith Without Works is Useless

## An Expository “Journey” Through the **Epistle of James**

### 17- Why the “Rich” Should Weep and Howl

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Church; July 18, 2021

#### **James 5:1-6**

**1 Come now, you rich, weep and howl for your miseries which are coming upon you.**

**2 Your riches have rotted and your garments have become moth-eaten.**

**3 Your gold and your silver have rusted; and their rust will be a witness against you and will consume your flesh like fire. It is in the last days that you have stored up your treasure!**

**4 Behold, the pay of the laborers who mowed your fields, and which has been withheld by you, cries out against you; and the outcry of those who did the harvesting has reached the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth.**

**5 You have lived luxuriously on the earth and led a life of wanton pleasure; you have fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter.**

**6 You have condemned and put to death the righteous man; he does not resist you.**

To the Glory of God

Perhaps no other Issue that the Bible talks about is more perplexing and more confusing to modern American believers- than the Issue of Wealth. And there are multiple reasons why this Issue is hard for us to grasp:

- The natural and normal Inclination of ALL fallen humans to be wealthy
- Shallow, inconsistent, contradictory, and false Teaching about Wealth by those in Leadership in the modern Church
- The fact that modern Americans are the wealthiest people in the history of Mankind
- Our ability to live and provide for our families is *totally* dependent on Money.
- 21<sup>st</sup> Century Americans are the most materialistic people in history.

Now the Truth of the matter is that the visible representation of the Church of Jesus in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century is divided over this Issue. There is NO consensus about

what we are supposed to believe and teach and practice as it relates to Wealth and Money and Riches. On the one hand- you have those who are espousing the “*Prosperity Gospel*” that *joyfully* promotes Wealth and Riches and material Goods- with little or no thought of the many verses of inspired Scripture that warn us about these things.

But on the other hand- you have those who are almost promoting a “*Poverty Gospel*” that decries ALL Wealth and material Goods. So, where should we land in this discussion? Should we merely split the difference and try to “balance things out”?

There are a lot of ways to discuss Money and Wealth- but I want to simply try to understand why James said what he said in this Passage. So, I’m going to restrict my examination to these six verses. And more specifically, I’m going to zero in on why James said this in verse 1:

**Come now, you rich, weep and howl for your miseries which are coming upon you.**

Now this is strong. And it would be hard to find a more damning comment about Wealth and Money and those who have it- anywhere else in the entire Bible.

Now in context- the people James is talking about here in Chapter 5 are NOT simply wealthy people- but *wicked* wealthy people- who are openly *hostile* to the Gospel; and who are persecuting the believers. Now how do I know that? Because of what James said back in

**James 2:6b&7:**

**... Is it not the rich who oppress you and personally drag you into court? Do they not blaspheme the fair name by which you have been called?**

... so, the context here in Chapter 5 has to do with those wicked, lost people, who are wealthy and who have position and power and political connections there in Jerusalem back in the 1<sup>st</sup> Century- who are openly hostile to the Gospel and, for reasons unknown to us- are making it a point to persecute the saints in the Church that James shepherds. And so, James cries out against this terrible Sin and issues the “Divine Indictment” from Almighty God- listed in verses 1-6.

And that is the correct historical context of this Passage. And if all you were interested in was a History Lesson- we would be finished and we could all go home.

But the **Epistle of James** is much more than a History Book about what was going on in Jerusalem- back in the 1st Century. The Words before us are part of a

collection of the most *unique* Words on the face of the earth. The Words in this Epistle and in the Holy Bible are *different* from all other words in every other piece of literature. How so? Because, you see, these Words are Inspired. God the Holy Spirit “breathed them out” (Gr. *theopneustos*). And that means these Words are also Inerrant, Infallible, and Relevant for us today.

But that means that even though James was very *narrowly* addressing the unsaved wealthy people in Jerusalem back in the 1<sup>st</sup> Century, who were persecuting the saints- because these Words are inspired- they offer us Divine Truth about how *we* are to understand and relate to Money and Riches and Wealth in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. So, how are we to *apply* what James says here to those of us, who live nearly 7,000 miles away from Jerusalem and 2,000 years apart?

And part of the Answer is that there are other very strong denunciations of both Money and those who are wealthy- scattered throughout the *entirety* of the Scriptures. For example, Jesus Himself said this in **Matthew 6:19-21**:

**Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal; for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.**

... and then again in **Matthew 19:23b&24**:

**... Truly I say to you, it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.**

Now, probably some of you have heard or been taught that over at the wall surrounding Jerusalem, there is a place that is called, the “*eye of the needle*” that is very low and narrow. And when Jesus said this- He was talking about the main gate to the City of Jerusalem. At night, the gate is shut- but a much smaller opening in the Gate allowed night- time visitors. And a camel would have to kneel down and struggle to squeeze through that narrow place in the gate. And supposedly, that smaller gate was called, the “*eye of the needle*”.

And so, the point Jesus was making is that it is *hard*- but NOT *impossible*- for a camel to squeeze through that narrow opening in the gate. Therefore, it isn't *impossible*- just *hard*- for a rich person to be saved and enter into Heaven. Why? Because the success that wealthy people have garnered throughout their life- tends to incline them to trust in what they can do for themselves- rather than humble themselves and repent and trust in God.

Now this is very interesting and makes sense on a certain level. And even though their conclusion is very good- the example they use about a narrow place in the gate isn't true.<sup>1</sup> There is NO narrow opening in the gate around Jerusalem or any other wall called the "*eye of the needle*". And that means that what Jesus was saying here is that it is literally easier for a real live camel to go through the eye of a *sewing* needle than it is for a rich man to be saved- unless God does something miraculous to and for that man.<sup>2</sup> But as we nod our heads and agree with that- we also need to remember that it is just as impossible for a *poor* man to be saved- unless God does something miraculous in his life, too. But why is that?

Because Salvation is a sovereign Act of God. And so, *nobody* is saved; and *nobody* remains lost based on the size of their bank account. So, poor people may be less materialistic- but they are NOT saved; they aren't more- godly; and they aren't even more likely to be saved- simply because they don't have Wealth. The Roman religious system *invented* that Theology.

The Bible teaches that all of us- rich and poor- are inherently proud; self-righteous; and arrogant- and we are, by nature, hostile to the Gospel. And so, ALL who will be saved have to have a "*Poverty of Spirit*"- where we understand:

- We are NOT "Good"
- We sin because we WANT to
- We have offended God and belittled His Glory by our Sins
- Therefore, we *deserve* eternal Damnation
- But we CANNOT fix this problem through anything we do for ourselves- including good, religious Works

... and that "*Poverty of Spirit*" MUST become the basis of our desperate Repentance; and our crying out for Mercy. And our trusting that Who Jesus is and What Jesus alone has done will:

- Forgive ALL our Sins
- Impute the spotless Righteousness of Jesus to us
- Make us "fit for Heaven"
- Give us the Desire and Ability to love, obey, and enjoy Jesus

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<sup>1</sup> This legend began at some point back in the 15<sup>th</sup> Century- but there is NO proof that this "eye of the needle" ever existed.

<sup>2</sup> We need to remember that Jesus spoke in Aramaic and Matthew (Levi) translated Jesus' Words into Greek- which have subsequently been translated into English for our Bibles. It is possible that Jesus was actually talking about trying to thread a large "cable" through a sewing needle- rather than a "camel".

... and we will find the fullness of our own Joy in God being glorified through our submission to Him! And that will happen- NOT because we are Poor- but because we are saved.

Yet that “*Poverty of Spirit*” is NOT a Choice or a Decision or an Act of our Will. It is a gracious Gift from God to those chosen for Salvation.

Now one of the reasons American believers struggle so hard about the Issue of Money and Wealth and Riches is because of the amazing Prosperity that we enjoy in this country. And that Prosperity has warped our response to the many Warnings that the Bible gives us.

And there are two things that have made the United States the envy of the world:

1. Liberty
2. Capitalism

Now the Concept of Liberty in this Country is the stuff of legends. And even though Capitalism isn't without its problems- nevertheless- Capitalism provides more Goods and Services; to more people; at a lower price- than any other economic system in the history of the world. And that isn't an opinion- it is a fact of economics.

Now some nations have *some* degree of Liberty; while others have *some* form of Capitalism. But the United States has both Liberty and Capitalism and *that* is why we are the freest and the strongest and the wealthiest Nation in the history of the world. And that is why people are willing to get into rowboats and cross over the open sea- just for a chance to live here.

And by and large, ANYONE who has a dream can turn that dream into a reality in this country. And because of both Liberty and Capitalism- lost sinners, who have no intention of ever being saved; and those deceived by false religions; and atheists; and sexually perverse people can use that Liberty and the capitalistic System to become a billionaire before next Thursday. Truly God has shed His Grace on this Nation.

And we have never known anything different. And that has caused us to think that all of this is normal. It isn't normal. It is an amazing Gift of God. And most people in the world- who love Jesus and who are going to be in heaven forever- will NEVER see a single day of what we see every day.

Yet we have recently seen just how fragile all of this really is- and how easy it would be to lose it all- because we are witnessing people, who are very serious about tearing it all down. And these people are acquiring more and more Power.

But being born and living in this amazingly blessed Nation has given us a warped understanding of things like Money and Wealth and Riches and how all of this relates to our spiritual well-being. And to prove that point- I would suggest

that most of us are able to simply push a button to enjoy cool air when it's warm outside; and we can push another button to become warm when it is cold outside. And even though I could relate many other examples of how the poorest among us are blessed beyond all comprehension- and how we take for granted what most of the people of the world will NEVER have- most of us here today would probably reject the notion that we are "Rich" or "Wealthy". And as I have told you before- I have met very few people in over 50 years of being in the Church, who would freely admit to actually loving Money.

And so, it has been my experience during the time I have journeyed with Jesus- that when these Divine Warnings about Money and Wealth and Riches are read- most people- most saved people- respond by either completely ignoring them or they wave their hand and say, "*That doesn't apply to me!*"

So, all I want to do today is to say two things:

1. These Warnings DO apply to you and me
2. Which is WHY we must NOT ignore them

Or we could go to **Hebrews 13:5** where God the Holy Spirit moved on the writer of **Hebrews** to say,

**Make sure that your character is free from the love of money, being content with what you have; for He Himself has said, "I WILL NEVER DESERT YOU, NOR WILL I EVER FORSAKE YOU,"**

... or we could go to **1Timothy 6:9&10** that says,

**9 But those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful desires which plunge men into ruin and destruction.**

**10 For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.**

... or **Proverbs 23:4** that says,

**Do not worry yourself to gain wealth, Cease from your consideration of it.**

... and then we might go to **1Timothy 3:3** that says that one of the qualifications to be an Elder is that that man must be,

**... free from the love of money.**

... or **Luke 16:13** where Jesus said,

**No servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth."**

So, unlike many within the modern Church- God doesn't seem to promote Money or Wealth or Riches. Instead- the Bible *warns* us about what these things do to our hearts; and our relationship to Jesus; and our walk with God.

And so, to be "biblical"- we also need to take great care that we approach the subject of Money and Wealth and Riches with great Caution. Because even though it is very hard today to find anyone who is even discussing these Issues in any depth and fullness- God has been crystal clear about it in His Word.

So, it is incumbent upon those of us, who genuinely are striving to be Biblical; and who are pursuing Holiness on purpose- to develop a Theology; a Doctrine; a "World-View"; and a "Way of Life" about Money and Wealth and Riches that is *in accord* with Scripture rather than *in accord* with what the pagan lost world teaches.

Now I don't have time in one Sermon to do that- but from these verses- I have developed a *Summary* about the Warnings that the Scriptures give us about Money and Wealth and being Rich:

- Being rich *wars against* being saved
- Loving Money is a *root* of all sorts of Evil
- Those seeking after Wealth fall into Temptation and a Snare and many foolish and harmful Desires that lead to Destruction
- Longing for Wealth encourages wandering away from the Christian Faith
- Stop considering how to become wealthy
- Make sure that our character is free from the love of Money

... because we CANNOT serve God and Wealth.

And so, whatever else we believe and teach about Money and Wealth- we MUST *include* these Warnings and hold each other *accountable* to them.

But as we ponder these infallible Truths- we should also realize that, like many other Issues we deal with every day- Money and Wealth and Riches have infinitely MORE to do with our hearts than with our bank accounts. We sin in relation to Money because there is an area of our hearts that is still dark and earthly and that genuinely *loves* that Darkness. So, like other Issues- the cure to avoid sinning in relation to Money and Wealth is NOT for us to become Poor. It is to allow the Light of the Gospel to shine into our hearts; expose that dark area; and, by God's Grace and through the Power of the Holy Spirit- begin to hate that Darkness and overcome it.

Because Poverty isn't any more spiritual than being wealthy. Some of the most arrogant, self-righteous, and prideful people on earth are those who live in adjacent Poverty. In fact, because of the Fall, people can actually take great Pride in being Poor. For example, the Warning that the Apostle Paul gave Timothy about the Danger of Money- was NOT addressed to those who were already rich- but to those who WANTED to be rich:

**... those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful desires which plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.**

So, what we have to understand is that we choose to do what we *love*; what we *want*; and what we *desire*. And so, when we choose to sin- that means that we genuinely *love* that Sin; or we *love* what that Sin promises to give to us. And that is why God judges Sin so severely. Sin offends God- because it belittles His Glory. Because when we sin- we are “setting our Love” on something that makes God look inferior and weak. And so, when we sin- we are looking at God as He stands before us in all His glorious Magnificence- offering us Himself. And we say to God,

“No thank You, I'd rather have that other thing. You see, God- You don't satisfy me. You don't delight my heart. And I just can't find the fullness of my Joy in You. But that other thing provides all that for me. And I see that other thing as being infinitely more delightful; and better; and more glorious- than You. And that other thing is more beneficial to me than You are. Now I don't want to go to Hell and so, I will be happy to go to Church; and go through the motions; and sing Your praises; and raise my hands; and even give money. But by engaging in what that Sin offers me- I am looking You right in the Eye and saying to You- ‘*You're just NOT Good enough!*’”

... and you simply CAN'T insult God any more than that.

Now we also need to know that the Love that we have for whatever Darkness we are involved with- like Money- is real. It is a *genuine* Love. It is a *true* Affection of our hearts. But even though it is a real, genuine Love- it is an *inferior* Love. We could also call it an “earthly” Love; a “sinful” Love; or even a “demonic” Love- because it is a genuine Affection on something that God hates; and something that attacks God's Glory.

But those *inferior* Loves; those *earthly* Loves; those *sinful* Loves; and those *demonic* Loves CANNOT be defeated by simply *ignoring* them or *avoiding* them.



Why? Because they are *real* Loves. We truly *love* them. We engage in Acts and Attitudes that we already know- intellectually speaking- insult God and belittle His Glory. So, why do we do it? Because we *love* them!

So, how do we overcome these Loves? How can we live in this life and on this earth and NOT love Money- even though we NEED Money? All of our *inferior* Loves must be replaced with *superior* Loves. So, how do we overcome the Love for Money that has ruined so many lives before us? By throwing all of our possessions into the front yard and by emptying our bank accounts and giving all that we own to the Poor? No! We stop loving Money by loving Jesus MORE. We overcome the Desire to be rich- by replacing that *inferior* Desire with a *superior* Desire to be rich in God- by making Him look glorious by what we do in His Name!

Because you can't simply stop loving something. So, you *replace* that *inferior* Love; that *earthly* Want; that *sinful* and *demonic* Desire with *superior* Loves, Wants, and Desires. Okay, but from where do we get those "superior" Loves? We DON'T "get" them. We have to be "given" those superior Loves, Wants, and Desires.

You see, superior Loves are, like everything else that is worthwhile- they are a Gift from God. We don't already possess them. They don't already reside inside of us. These infinitely superior Loves are Gifts from God; and so, they MUST be GIVEN to us.

So, what do we do about things that we need but don't already have? We ask. We cry out to God. We pray. And as we ask for God to give us these superior Loves- we MUST remember what James told us about that from **James 4:1-3**, that says,

**1 What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members?**

**2 You lust and do not have; so you commit murder. You are envious and cannot obtain; so you fight and quarrel. You do not have because you do not ask.**

**3 You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures.**

... but asking God to give us a *superior* Love for Jesus so we may overcome our *sinful* Love for Money IS the Right Motive. So, as we pray and beg God to give us *superior* Loves, Wants, and Desires- we also must ask to have our eyes "opened" and "unveiled"- so that we may see the Object of our Loves, Wants, and Desires- which is the Lord Jesus Christ.

Okay, but how does that work? We are given these superior Loves when the veil that is over our eyes is sovereignly removed; and we behold Jesus in His Glory. So, NOT merely believing that He exists- but actually seeing Jesus as He really is- as the Scriptures declare Him to be- will change us- forever!

And this is what the Apostle Paul was talking about as God the Holy Spirit moved on him to write **2Corinthians 3:18** that says,

**But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit.**

The Promise here is that as our eyes are unveiled and as we behold the Glory of God- we are changed into what we see. And we will be changed- *progressively*- from one realm of Glory to the next. And as we are changed- we will be given *superior* Loves- which will serve to *overcome* the inferior, earthly, sinful, and demonic Loves- like the Love of Money, Wealth, and Riches. And then, *whatever* amount of Wealth or material Goods God wills for us to have- won't be a snare for us.

So, where do we see the Glory of God *best*? In a sunset? In a waterfall? In a child's eyes? No. In Jesus- through the Scriptures. Look at what God said about this in **1Samuel 3:21**:

**And the Lord appeared again at Shiloh, because the Lord revealed Himself to Samuel at Shiloh by the word of the Lord.**

Now the Apostle Paul describes this Glory in two different ways:

**2Corinthians 4:4b**

**... the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.**

... or **2Corinthians 4:6b**

**... the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.**

... but it's the SAME Glory. And this is the Glory that satan fights so hard to keep us from seeing:

**2Corinthians 4:4**

**in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.**

... and the writer of **Hebrews** knew this. And that's why he said this to those 1<sup>st</sup> Century believers in **Hebrews 12:1&2**:

**Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.**

Here, the writer says that we can accomplish three things:

1. **lay aside every encumbrance** (like the Love of money)
2. [lay aside] **the sin which so easily entangles us** (like the desire to become rich)
3. **run with endurance the race that is set before us** (like “set our Affections on Jesus as our real Treasure)

... How? By “**fixing our eyes on Jesus**”!

And then the writer went about to tell us about the Attributes and Characteristics of the Jesus- he told us to fix our eyes on! So, I would suggest that “fixing our eyes on Jesus”- as we understand His Attributes and Characteristics (from Scripture) is what “beholding Jesus in His Glory” looks like.

We need to remember that seeing Jesus as He was transfigured before them in the Mountain- *radically* and *eternally* transformed Peter, James, and John. They were never the same after that. And when we see Jesus in His Beauty; when we behold Jesus in His Magnificence; when we look at the Christ in the fullness of His Glory- we will NEVER be the same.

One glimpse and we will never “love” the Darkness again. Now, because we are still living on this earth and in these fleshly bodies- we will periodically still “DO” Darkness. But the Power of seeing the risen Christ; and loving what we see- will so change us- that we will NEVER “love” the Darkness again.

So, we will possess a *superior* Love for Jesus when we behold Him in His Glory. And that *superior* Love for Jesus- will replace the *inferior* love for Money.

Now as we heed all the Warnings about Money and Wealth and Riches that the scriptures provide- we also need to read and believe and trust in the Good and Godly areas of these Issues. So, for example, we have **Deuteronomy 8:18a** that says,

**... you shall remember the Lord your God, for it is He who is giving you power to make wealth ...**

... which seems to say that God has sovereignly chosen to move in some people to allow them to “make wealth” or to “become wealthy”.

... and then there is **1Thessalonians 4:9-11** that says,

**9 Now as to the love of the brethren, you have no need for anyone to write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another;**

**10 for indeed you do practice it toward all the brethren who are in all Macedonia. But we urge you, brethren, to excel still more,**

**11 and to make it your ambition to lead a quiet life and attend to your own business and work with your hands, just as we commanded you,**

**12 so that you will behave properly toward outsiders and not be in any need.**

... yet the only way that anyone would not be “in any need” is if we had “worked with our hands” and had some degree of Wealth that would allow for that.

And then there is the Parable that Jesus taught in **Luke 19:11-27** about the proper *usage* of Money that says,

**11 While they were listening to these things, Jesus went on to tell a parable, because He was near Jerusalem, and they supposed that the kingdom of God was going to appear immediately.**

**12 So He said, "A nobleman went to a distant country to receive a kingdom for himself, and then return.**

**13 And he called ten of his slaves, and gave them ten minas and said to them, 'Do business with this until I come back.'**

**14 But his citizens hated him and sent a delegation after him, saying, 'We do not want this man to reign over us.'**

**15 When he returned, after receiving the kingdom, he ordered that these slaves, to whom he had given the money, be called to him so that he might know what business they had done.**

**16 The first appeared, saying, 'Master, your mina has made ten minas more.'**

**17 And he said to him, 'Well done, good slave, because you have been faithful in a very little thing, you are to be in authority over ten cities.'**  
**18 The second came, saying, 'Your mina, master, has made five minas.'**  
**19 And he said to him also, 'And you are to be over five cities.'**  
**20 Another came, saying, 'Master, here is your mina, which I kept put away in a handkerchief;**  
**21 for I was afraid of you, because you are an exacting man; you take up what you did not lay down and reap what you did not sow.'**  
**22 He said to him, 'By your own words I will judge you, you worthless slave. Did you know that I am an exacting man, taking up what I did not lay down and reaping what I did not sow?**  
**23 Then why did you not put my money in the bank, and having come, I would have collected it with interest?'**  
**24 Then he said to the bystanders, 'Take the mina away from him and give it to the one who has the ten minas.'**  
**25 And they said to him, 'Master, he has ten minas already.'**  
**26 I tell you that to everyone who has, more shall be given, but from the one who does not have, even what he does have shall be taken away.**  
**27 But these enemies of mine, who did not want me to reign over them, bring them here and slay them in my presence."**

Now we need to take notice that nowhere in this Parable does Jesus command the slaves to rid themselves of all their Money and Wealth. Instead, Jesus focuses on these people *using* their Money and Wealth “properly”- or in a “God-honoring Way” as opposed to using their Money and Wealth- in a sinful way by NOT being productive with it.

So, it seems that what is Sin- is NOT that we have Money or Wealth- per se- but three other things:

1. *Loving* Money and Wealth
2. *Seeking* to gain Money and Wealth- *in a sinful way*
3. *NOT using* Money and Wealth- in a God-honoring way- *after* we have it

So, I pray that we can honestly examine what James is saying here, because as I told you from the very beginning of our “journey” through **James**- this Epistle is a series of Tests that prove where we are- in our relationship with Jesus.

And so, Wealth and Riches and Money are to be seen as a Test in several areas- including these four:

1. Who or What we truly love

2. Who or What we truly trust in and hope for
3. Who or What brings us the most Joy and Satisfaction
4. Who or What brings us the most Worry and Concern

## **1. Who or What we truly love**

One of the greatest ways to see how much we love Money is NOT when you are blessed and when you enjoy all the things that Money can buy- but when we don't have any Money; or when what you do have- is taken away. For example, one of the greatest examples of what genuine Salvation looks like is found in **Hebrews 10:32-34** that says,

**32 But remember the former days, when, after being enlightened, you endured a great conflict of sufferings,  
33 partly by being made a public spectacle through reproaches and tribulations, and partly by becoming sharers with those who were so treated.  
34 For you showed sympathy to the prisoners and accepted joyfully the seizure of your property, knowing that you have for yourselves a better possession and a lasting one.**

Now here the writer of **Hebrews** is reminding the people of this small Church in what is now Asia Minor during the last third of the 1<sup>st</sup> Century about how things were when they were under great and intense Persecution. But look closely at verse 34 again.

**You... accepted joyfully the seizure of your property, knowing that you have for yourselves a better possession and a lasting one.**

So, evidently, some group, like unbelieving Jews, or maybe some Government that was hostile toward Christianity, had unjustly confiscated the Property of the saints of this Church. And yet please notice that this writer did NOT say that these people simply *endured* this Persecution. And they didn't file a claim with their Insurance carrier either. No, these people "accepted joyfully" the seizure of their property.

Now how do you get to be a people like that- where you can JOYFULLY accept having what you own taken from you? What has to happen to your heart and mind that allows people to be like that? Well, the writer tells us,

**... knowing that you have for yourselves a better possession and a lasting one.**

It was the Knowledge that they had in the “better and lasting” Possession that allowed them to “JOYFULLY” accept the confiscation of their Property. So, the unfair and unjust loss of their Possessions allowed these people to PROVE that they didn’t love Money. And this Test displayed for all to see- even 2,000 years later that human beings can actually escape the tyranny of Money and Wealth and Riches and we can actually be joyful- in accepting the loss of our Property! I truly want that kind of Knowledge in the “better and lasting” Possession of Jesus Christ in my own life.

## **2. Who or What we truly trust in and hope for**

Saving and being disciplined enough to build up a Retirement that is as close to being guaranteed as possible- is both wise and admirable. Most people simply do NOT have that kind of discipline to sacrifice during their entire working years so that they won’t be destitute when they are too old to work.

And so, we are to praise and brag on the people who do have that kind of discipline. Yet it is that area of “Guarantees” that we need to take heed. Because if we are not careful- we will trust in and hope for the guaranteed check every month- rather than in God- Who is supreme over all things.

We sing a song called, the “Doxology”. And part of that songs says,  
*Praise God from Whom all Blessings flow*

... yet if we are trusting in what the Government or the Corporation or our own retirement Account provides for us- we need to be honest and sing a different song:

*Praise Government from whom all Blessings flow*

Now I’m NOT against Social Security or Retirement Accounts or 401ks or vast Real Estate Holdings or anything else that “guarantees” income for us in our old age. And neither is God. But what God IS against and what we SHOULD be against is ANYTHING that takes God’s Place as the SOURCE- the ONLY Source of our Blessings.

So, I honestly believe that part of *why* this nation faces periodic economic downturns; or Recessions; or even Depressions- is so that God’s people will have an opportunity to *re-focus* on just WHO is the Source of ALL our Blessings- the Government; our Company; our own Labor or Ingenuity- or God?

And, periodically, God will allow a strong Wind to blow; and we are given the Gift of not only singing, “*How Great Thou Art*”- but we are reminded how all the stuff we own and all the accomplishments we have made in this life can be

taken from us in a moment of time. And when that Test comes our way- we can then join in with Paul, who said,

### **Philippians 3:7b&8**

**7 ...whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ.**

**8 More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ,**

Now keep in mind that Paul was NOT talking about his Sin here. Paul was talking about what was “**gain to me**”- the Good things he had done; all the Successes he had; and all the wonderful and noble Accomplishments that he had made- BEFORE he was saved. Those are the things he called, “**rubbish**”. And this word comes from a Greek word (*skubalon*; Strong’s # 4657) that has to do with human waste (dung) and a rotten menstuous cloth. And it was the “*skubalon*” of our lives- our earthly “*trophies*”- that George Bennard had in mind, when in 1912, he wrote,

So, I'll cherish the old rugged Cross  
Till my Trophies, at last, I lay down  
I will cling to the old rugged Cross  
And exchange it some day for a crown

### **3. Who or What brings us the most Safety, Satisfaction, and Joy**

It is foolish to assume that anything that has been made is permanent. God rolled everything out like a scroll at Creation; and one day, in the future- everything will be rolled back up. So, the Foundation of all things- is NOT the earth or the Solar System or the Sun or the Universe. The Foundation of ALL things is God. Because even though they have been here a long time- the clock is ticking and the created Universe will come to an end.

But God will endure- unchanging. And this immortal and unchanging God has promised that we will also live forever- somewhere. So, what SHOULD bring us the most Safety- is God and what God said. And nobody knows that more than God.

And so, our Trials and Tests are given to help us remember what is truly Important and what is Absolute and Eternal. But we live in a world that constantly influences us to look to Wealth and Money and Riches and what we can accomplish with the strength of our own hands. And so, because He loves us- He



will remind us that the greatest Wealth; the greatest Treasure in knowing and loving and enjoying Jesus.

But as we burn- we need to remember that, as Blood-bought believers- we are in the *safest* Place in all the world- the Hands of God. And NOTHING can touch us- unless it is God's Will. But if it is God's Will to allow satan or evil men to touch our flesh- the Promise from a God, Who CANNOT lie- is that He is sovereignly working that "bad thing" together with all the other things He has either sovereignly *allowed* or sovereignly *caused* to come into our lives. And He is working all those things together for two purposes that CANNOT fail:

1. The ultimate "Good" of the Glory of God
2. The fulfillment of our Joy

So, when Tests and Trials come our way- we need to remember that God is NOT merely Sovereign and has the Power to put us into the Fire. But God is also GOOD. And the reason the Fire is so hot and so consuming- is that by burning off all the hay, wood and stubble- we may share in God's very Own personal Holiness!

And so, when we see our brother or sister begin to fall under the weight of the Test and God's Discipline in their lives- we need to reach out to them in Mercy and Compassion and remind them what the inspired, infallible, and inerrant Word of the living God declares in **Hebrews 12:11-13**:

**11 All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness.**

**12 Therefore, strengthen the hands that are weak and the knees that are feeble,**

**13 And make straight paths for your feet, so that the limb which is lame may not be put out of joint, but rather be healed.**

#### **4. Who or What brings us the most Worry and Concern?**

Finally, we need to examine our own hearts to determine just What (or Who) causes us the most Worry and Concern. Because we should fear the least Sin in our lives rather than fear that we might lose all that we own. Jesus said our Concern should be that the way we live our lives *proves* beyond any doubt that Jesus- NOT Money- is the Treasure of our hearts. And that is what will make people believe us when we tell them,

Jesus is the sweetest name I know

... or ...

He will never ever leave me  
nor yet forsake me here,  
While I live by faith and do His blessed Will;  
A Wall of Fire about me,  
I've nothing now to fear,  
From His Manna He my hungry soul shall fill.  
Then sweeping up to Glory  
to see His blessed Face,  
Where rivers of Delight shall ever roll  
He's the Lily of the Valley,  
the Bright and Morning Star,  
He's the fairest of ten thousand to my soul.

Amen. Let's pray.

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Glory of God alone.