

## **9-10-23 Consecration Sunday**

Sermon: Handle Your Wealth

Scripture: James 5:1-6 CTW Reading 530

Hymns: 525, 527, 529

Theme: We all have a choice: We can spend our life longing for worldly wealth or we can recognize the greatest treasure any person can possess is a relationship with Jesus Christ. If God has given you earthly treasure, use your earthly treasure for the exaltation of Christ.

### **I. "If I Were a Rich Man"**

**A. In reality, all of us at one time or another can admit to making that statement!**

Have any of you seen the play or movie "**Fiddler on the Roof**" about Tevye, a Jewish man who was married and had 5 daughters. He worked in a small town as a milkman, and often dreamed about what it would be like if he were rich.

And he sings a song, "**If I were a rich man**," in which he sings, or laments about what wealth would buy him. It would buy him a bigger house with its luxuries and he wouldn't have to work so hard.

Also, he laments that He could spend more time in the synagogue praying and studying the Torah if he didn't have to work so many hours.

I would guess that everyone of us have had days when we've dreamed Tevye's dream. "If I only were rich, If I only had more money... If only I didn't have to work..." If only... We dream that we would be so much happier if only we had more wealth. The problem with that of course is that when you get more - you still want more.

**B. We've all dreamed Tevye's dream, but in most cases, if you ask people what they really want they will say, "Just a little bit more."** And when we get "just a little bit more" do you know what we want then? "Just a little bit more, please"

Enough is never enough. This is a hard place to live. Life on earth is difficult. No matter how hard you work - a person never really has **"enough."**

No matter how hard you work, "Man there has got to be to life to than this." Not just the area of finances -- but life overall.

There is a very important truth that we face:

## **II. Our Life on Earth Will Always Contain some Sense of Discomfort and Dissatisfaction.**

**A. God does not want you to be dissatisfied with life on earth as we have it.** We are not to live for the pleasures we can enjoy in "the now" We live for the rewards of eternity.

**Paul, in 2 Cor. 5:1-5 reminds us:** "For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands. Meanwhile we groan, longing to be clothed instead with our heavenly dwelling, because when we are clothed, we will not be found naked. For while we are in this tent, we groan and are burdened, because we do not wish to be unclothed but to be clothed instead with our heavenly dwelling, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. Now the one who has fashioned us for this very purpose is God, who has given us the Spirit as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come."

**Does that sound like a person who is satisfied with what he is experiencing on the earth?** He says, "While I'm on earth what I'm experiencing is driving me crazy. There is this constant groaning and there is this sense that something is missing.

Paul says, that's exactly what life on earth feels like. It feels like something is missing. I want to be clothed with my heavenly dwelling -- I want to be home. This is home to me -- this is something I just have to go through before I get to go home. I groan through this -- I'm burdened through this.

And God designed a Christian's life to be that way. God doesn't want us to be satisfied with earth stuff. He wants us to find our satisfaction in Jesus Christ. Because He's eternal -- not the stuff on earth.

**B. Now I know that it might not sound like it, but these are actually words of encouragement.**

**James says,** "Now listen, you rich people, there is still time to do something."

Now I know that at first reading, this passage seems to be very, very harsh, right? But let me suggest that in reality it was meant to be a word of encouragement to the people who heard it.

**Who did James write to?** If you go back to the beginning of the book and look, you'll be reminded that it was written to the 12 tribes scattered around the world.

What's that mean? The Jewish believers were located in Jerusalem but persecution comes -- they are scattered to the four corners of the earth. When persecution comes -- they have no choice to leave everything and flee.

**So James is writing this letter to them.** He's writing to people who have been persecuted by the rich. Talk about discomfort and dissatisfaction with life! These are the people who have been cheated and taken advantage of. They've lost their jobs, their homes, some of lost their family members. Nothing marvelous about their life on earth. He wants to give them a word of encouragement -- bring them back to a biblical perspective.

### **C. James says Be Encouraged as You Wait For the Lord's Return.**

What's he saying? Chill out -- get a grip on reality. This is not all there is. There's a better day coming. One day Jesus is coming back to take you home. When Paul wrote to the Thessalonians and talked to them about the return of Christ, he said "Therefore encourage one another with these words." **(1 Thess. 4:18)**.

One day Jesus is going to make things right. He's talking to the victims of unjust oppression -- he's talking to people who have suffered in one way or another -- and he's saying to them:

**"Keep in mind one day Jesus is going to return and on that day he's going to put things back to the way they should be. All these people who have ripped you off and taken advantage of you and caused you pain You be patient -- Why? Because the Lord's coming is near."**

And the idea here is not just the idea of imminence -- but **what will happen after** the imminent return of Christ.

Don't get so wrapped up in defending yourself that you forget we are not living for the now. Don't feel that you have to fight for your rights -- Jesus is coming and he'll take care of those who have wronged you.

### **III. The Return of Christ is Going to Be Wonderful Comfort For Some But Terrible Misery For Others.**

**A. But James is also addressing the wealthy in this passage.** Now listen, you rich people, weep and wail because of the misery that is coming on you. To be honest -- what I think is that both groups were part of the setting.

Scholars all have their own opinions on who **James** was writing to -- but I think they were both there. That makes sense, doesn't it? Why write a letter to people who would not hear it?

So, when he says, "listen you rich people," I think he's looking right at them. Maybe on one side of the room he has all the wealthy people sitting together.

And on all the other side of the room all the poor people sitting together. On one side of the room are the oppressors -- on the other side those who are being oppressed. One group really needs a word of encouragement -- the other group really needs to be chastised.

**B. He delivers comfort to one group by reminding them that one day Jesus is going to come for them.** He reminds the other group about horrible impending judgment by saying one day Jesus is going to come for them. And what is going to be wonderful comfort for some is going to be terrible misery for others.

He says some fairly harsh things to them. **James wasn't a pastor that spent much time tickling a person's ears, was he?** He tells them to weep and wail, howl, cry and moan. Why?

**Because the judge is standing at the door.** The King is coming. And again, the idea here is not just the idea of imminence -- but what will happen after the imminent return.

The King is going to balance out the scales. James plunges headfirst into a topic we tend to want to handle with kid-gloves in the modern church. He puts his finger right on the topic that gets this huge recoil response out of people. He talks about their money.

**Everybody says, "Oh No!" "You aren't going to talk about money are you?** But the bible has a great deal to say about money and Jesus certainly had a lot to say to about how a believer is to handle money.

**C. James says How A Person Feels About And Handles Wealth Is A Test.**

How you feel about money and possessions and material things is a test which reveals the spiritual state of your heart. Now if these people are in the church, they are there because of a profession of faith in Jesus. But even though they are professing Christ to others, their life is totally controlled and governed by the love of money.

**Matt. 6:19-21 is pretty clear on this:**

"Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."

Isn't there an amazing similarity to what James says? You want to show me where your heart is, then show me where your treasure is. Where are you stockpiling your treasure? Where are you placing your wealth?

**D. Jesus Said Money Is A Leadership Test.**

Jesus said one of the tests of whether or not a person is fit to lead others in the church is the way they handle their personal finances.

**Luke 16:10-12** states: "Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much, and whoever is dishonest with very little will also be dishonest with much. So if you have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will trust you with true riches? And if you have not been trustworthy with someone else's property, who will give you property of your own?"

Money is not the only test for leadership -- but it is a test -- an important test. If you can't be faithful with the money that you manage as a stewardship from God then why would God give you something of greater value -- his own children bought with the precious blood of His Son for you to shepherd or teach?

Money? What's money? Money is fleeting -- it the small stuff -- it's not nearly as important as exercising spiritual influence over people's lives. The Lord uses how you manage finances as an assessment to test a person's readiness for leadership.

Now there is probably one more question that needs to be addressed here: How do we define wealth? **James says**, "Listen here you rich people." So what's the thought that's kicking around in your head at that point? "He's talking to rich people and that's definitely not me."

**You might say to yourself: I'm not rich." Who is rich?**

If you pay the necessary bills and still have any discretionary money, you're in the category of the rich.

The wealthy are those people who have more than they need to live. So the overriding message in this passage is **"Think about your attitude toward your wealth."**

**In that regard then in comparison to many of the people in the world, we are all wealthy.**

**IV. Conclusion: Remember that the Love of Money Will Lead You Into Compromising Your Integrity.**

**A. (1 Timothy 6:10) states that the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil.** Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.

When the love of money controls you it can lead into all kinds of evil. Ultimately it leads into judgment by God.

**James shows us that the Love of Money Fans The Flame of Self-Indulgence.**

We have lived on earth in luxury and self-indulgence. Life seems to be all about a bigger castle and more luxurious chariot -- longer vacations in faraway places.

God doesn't necessarily want you to sit on a soap box and sleep on a straw mat.

But neither or we to view the goal of life as getting as much as we can.

**So, where do you stand in all this?** We all have a choice: We can spend our life longing for worldly wealth, or We can recognize the greatest treasure any person can possess is a relationship with Jesus Christ.

Therefore, if God has given you earthly treasure, use your earthly treasure for the exaltation of Christ, by sharing in the work of God wherever you might be, and you will find the more you do that, the more you will be blessed!

Amen? Let us pray...