



[Slide] Are any of you haunted by something? [Leader tip: tell a story about a time something happened that haunts you to this day.] Years ago, I was driving in Maine and a snowstorm hit, the roads iced up, and I was still twenty minutes from home. I thought, I can make it. Well, I kind of did. I came over a hill and started easing my way down it. I thought I was going slow enough. At the bottom of the hill, this other guy lost control of his vehicle and crashed into the side rails. He was a couple hundred feet ahead of me. So, I started braking. Nothing. I'm slamming my foot on the brakes, pumping them, pulling the emergency brake, trying to turn, nothing worked. I just slowly slid down that road in a straight line into his car. It was a slow-motion experience of complete powerlessness.

Now, when it snows, I make people crazy because of how cautious I am when I drive. That feeling of powerlessness still haunts me and comes back every time I'm driving in icy conditions. I don't like it.

Are any of you haunted by a Scripture passage? Is that a strange question? I'll tell you what, there are some doozies in the Bible, but the one has challenged me over the years is James 4:17.

[Slide] *James 4:17 (NLT) Remember, it is sin to know what you ought to do and then not do it.*

If I see dirty dishes and don't wash them, it's a sin. If I see trash on the ground and don't pick it up, sin. If I see some way I can help someone out and don't, SIN. The problem is, there isn't enough time in the day to do all the things we ought to do – it doesn't matter how hard I try, man I sin all the time. That verse still haunts me, coming back in all sorts of situations; could I have done more for that person, should I have said something different, should I have pushed back harder on something wrong, is there something I should be doing for my family?

But this is not quite what James was going for with his warning; the context, which starts in James 4:13, is critical to understand.

[Slide] *James 4:13-16 (NLT) ¹³ Look here,*

These two words carry a tone of correction, of a tone of frustration, a tone of condemnation.¹ James was shifting into a new topic in his letter and he wanted to get the reader's attention.

James 4:13-16 (NLT) ¹³ Look here, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we are going to a certain town and will stay there a year. We will do business there and make a profit." ¹⁴ How do you know what your life will be like tomorrow? Your life is like the morning fog—it's here a little while, then it's gone.

[Slide] *¹⁵ What you ought to say is, "If the Lord wants us to, we will live and do this or that." ¹⁶ Otherwise you are boasting about your own pretentious plans, and all such boasting is evil.*

He's not calling people out because they made money, he called them out because they put all their plans and faith in their money. God was an afterthought. Their plans, their security, all of that was tied up in *their* plans, not God's plans. And then he got to the crescendo, calling out the rich.

[Slide] *James 4:17-5:6 (NLT) ^{4:17} Remember, it is sin to know what you ought to do and then not do it. ^{5:1} Look here, you rich people:*

When James wrote this, it was a letter. Then, centuries later someone else split it into chapters and added verse numbers to make it easier to navigate. The challenge is, sometimes we look at these chapter breaks and think it's a completely new section or thought - and sometimes that is the case - but it's not here. Every scholar I read said the same thing, that James 4:13-5:6 was one section, one thought, which we can tell because of the unified theme and the repeated language of "look here." James was doubling down when he said, "*look here, you rich people.*" 4:13-16 was the introduction to the real point.

^{5:1} Look here, you rich people: Weep and groan with anguish because of all the terrible troubles ahead of you. ² Your wealth is rotting away, and your fine clothes are moth-eaten rags.

[Slide] *³ Your gold and silver are corroded. The very wealth you were counting on will eat away your flesh like fire. This corroded treasure you*

¹ Douglas J. Moo, *The Letter of James* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2021), Kindle location 5993.

have hoarded will testify against you on the day of judgment. ⁴ For listen! Hear the cries of the field workers whom you have cheated of their pay.

[Slide] *The cries of those who harvest your fields have reached the ears of the Lord of Heaven's Armies. ⁵ You have spent your years on earth in luxury, satisfying your every desire. You have fattened yourselves for the day of slaughter. ⁶ You have condemned and killed innocent people, who do not resist you.*

According to Old Testament law, when wealthy took advantage of the poor, it was a crime. In fact, simply failing to help the poor was a crime, a sin of omission one could say.² In other words, when James wrote, “*it is sin to know what you ought to do and then not do it,*” this is exactly what he is referring to. He was saying, “look here, you rich people, you know what to do with your money and you’re not doing it – that’s a sin.”

These rich people were not Christians.³ Anyone else just breathe a sigh of relief? Well, don’t get too comfortable. While the letter was written to Christians, this portion of it was calling out the sin of the rich who were oppressing these early, poor, Christians. James didn’t rail against these unsaved rich because they were rich, he railed against their misuse of their wealth. And he identified three ways they are misusing it. Let’s take a closer look:

[Slide] *James 5:2-3 (NLT) ² Your wealth is rotting away, and your fine clothes are moth-eaten rags. ³ Your gold and silver are corroded. The very wealth you were counting on will eat away your flesh like fire. This corroded treasure you have hoarded will testify against you on the day of judgment.*

[Slide] **They hoarded wealth.** It’s such a massive waste; the clothes are rotting away before they can even be used – it’s like they have clothes they’ve bought, hanging in the closet unused, with the tags still on them. Over and over Scripture reveals God’s heart for those in need, the hungry, the poor, those without a voice, and here the people hoarded what they had, rather than putting it to use for God’s kingdom.

² Peter H. Davids, *The Epistle of James* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2013), Kindle location 1931.

³ Moo, *The Letter of James*, Kindle location 6028.

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