

Fact Sheet for **“Sherlock Holmes”**
James 5:1-12

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One of my favorite fictional characters is Sherlock Holmes. Well, I'm asking you to be sort of like Sherlock Holes this morning. In James 5:1-12 James addressed a specific situation that existed with his readers. There were those who were rich who were taking advantage of some of them. James has some pointed words for these employers. But James also had some instruction for those who were being taken advantage of. And that advice is quite different than what we might hear today. See if you can be sort of like a Sherlock Holmes and surface a truth that lies behind this passage.

James five is really a continuation of chapter 4. Read James 4:1, 4a, 11a, and 13 as a reminder from that chapter. Now James begins chapter five with some harsh words for the rich who were gaining their wealth in part by taking advantage of their workers. He may have been addressing both those who were Christians among them (compare 1:9-10) as well as those who were not (compare 2:6b).

¹ Come now, you rich, weep and howl for the miseries that are coming upon you.

James begins this verse with the same “Come now” as in 4:13. The reason for the weeping and howling is because some of their actions in gaining that wealth will be evidence against them in the life hereafter.

² Your riches have rotted and your garments are moth-eaten. ^{3a} Your gold and silver have corroded, and their corrosion will be evidence against you and will eat your flesh like fire.

I've always had a reaction about something in this verse. Pure gold doesn't corrode (oxidize)! If it's not pure it can tarnish, but the point of the verses is that all the gold people amass now will be of absolutely no value to them in eternity.

^{3b} You have laid up treasure in the last days.

Jesus used similar words in the Sermon on the Plain (Matthew 6:19-21). But these words in James have an almost opposite meaning.

“**You have laid up treasure**” is a translation of one word that can also be translated “You have stored up treasure” or “You have hoarded treasure”. The rest of this sentence (“**in the last days**”) point to the hereafter when their ill-gotten wealth will be evidence against them. By greedily amassing wealth now at the expense of their workers they were amassing evidence against them when they would stand before the judge of every person.

⁴ Behold, the wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, are crying out against you, and the cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord of hosts. ⁵ You have lived on the earth in luxury and in self-indulgence. You have fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter. ⁶ You have condemned and murdered the righteous person. He does not resist you.

In our society this is seen to almost excuse any number of sinful actions on the part of those who feel they are oppressed, or who feel they have been taken advantage of. But here are James' words for his readers who were in that position.

^{7a} Be patient, therefore, brothers, until the coming of the Lord.

This didn't mean that they shouldn't seek to rectify the situation through good means. It did mean that they should keep their attitudes in check. They should exhibit patience (literally being "long to anger"). They should look towards the coming of the Lord.

^{7b} See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient about it, until it receives the early and the late rains. ⁸ You also, be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand.

Every generation of Christians were and are to expect that the Lord's coming is near.

⁹ Do not grumble against one another, brothers, so that you may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing at the door.

Remember James 4:11? Some were grumbling against fellow Christians.

¹⁰ As an example of suffering and patience, brothers, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. ¹¹ Behold, we consider those blessed who remained steadfast. You have heard of the steadfastness of Job, and you have seen the purpose of the Lord, how the Lord is compassionate and merciful.

Job... wow! We should be steadfast that long!

¹² But above all, my brothers, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or by any other oath, but let your "yes" be yes and your "no" be no, so that you may not fall under condemnation.

This swearing was not profanity. It was emphasizing what you were about to do by taking an oath. Do you remember Jesus' words from the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:33-37)? This is almost a stand-alone verse, except for the broader context. Verses 7-20 of this chapter are a concluding series of exhortations for his readers that James wrote to help them in their Christian walk. As the context of this whole book is so entwined with riches I would strongly suspect that the oath taking that James wrote about was somehow connected with their reactions to those who were rich and/or the rich taking oaths about what they were planning..

Now to Sherlock Holmes. Did you see a truth behind all of James' words here that can be of a great help to all of us today? Here it is... train yourself to fix your eyes on eternity! If the rich that James wrote about had done this they wouldn't have greedily hoarded their wealth at the expense of their workers. They wouldn't have stored-up this evidence against them in eternity. If the others had done this they would have been patient over what they could not change. If we do this it will bring so much context to everything we will face in life. It will help us have the right attitudes day by day. Fix your eyes on eternity!

If you have never asked Christ to be your Savior from sin then think about your eternal destiny. What are you headed to? You need to fix your eyes on eternity!