

CHAPTER IX

PRETENDED DEBATE WITH A RICH UNBELIEVER

James 4:13-5:6

Introduction:

The title of this chapter is itself interpretive, and might introduce some discussion. There is no doubt but that James is here debating with a rich man; but is the rich man an unbeliever? Also, is this rich man present as James speaks, or present in the audience to which James writes? It would be better to settle these problems before beginning a more detailed study of the text.

The section in 5:1-6 is obviously addressed to the unbeliever. James here makes clear the calamities that are to befall him in the judgment so the persecuted Christian (to whom James is writing) will know that justice will prevail and that vengeance belongs to the Lord. After completing this section, he turns back to the Christian, and says, "Be patient therefore, brethren, until the coming of the Lord."

If 4:13-17 is addressed to the rich Christian, then there is a break of thought and a change of argument between the close of chapter four and the opening of chapter five. Verses 13 and 14 of chapter four are in the same vein of condemnation as is the chapter five section. This is not conclusive, of course, but it does seem to be the most obvious and intended meaning.

One might ask, "why argue with a person who will not hear the argument?" This is done for the benefit of the reader rather than the call to repentance of the rich persecutor. There is no admonition for correction, nor call to repentance, as James made to the Christians in 4:8. Furthermore, the "come now" with which he introduces 4:13 is repeated in 5:1, indicating James is speaking to the same persons in both sections. This entire section does not contain the word "brethren" which James uses or implies in nearly every paragraph of the epistle.

All this seems to indicate James is turning aside and speaking to an imaginary figure who will probably never see his epistle. The rich persons being condemned really do exist, but they are not

numbered among the brethren. So he tells the brethren what is going to happen to the rich man in this very dramatic fashion.

The style of argument is the diatribe of the Stoic philosophers. The debator turns to an imaginary opponent and argues with him as if he were present. It is a style of delivery that the Jewish and Greek speakers used often, and is effectively used by ministers and public speakers today.

The Christian at the time, even as now, was numbered from among the poorer classes of the world. His most avid persecutors were the enemies of Christ, especially religious people who followed some other doctrine than that of Christ. But the world was also filled with rich people who habitually made a practice of preying upon the poor. The rich man made no exception of the poor Christian. In fact, he was easy prey because of his meek demeanor. For this reason the Christian needed encouragement to hold fast to Christ in the midst of this ill treatment. The time would come when God's justice would prevail and the rich persecutor would receive that which he had earned. "So don't give up, brethren," says James, "for the Lord will come and make all things right." (See 5:7-8).

THE PRESUMPTION OF PLANNING WITHOUT GOD

Text 4:13-17

- 4:13. Come now ye that say, to-day or to-morrow we will go into this city, and spend a year there, and trade and get gain:
14. whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. What is your life? For ye are a vapor that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away.
15. For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will we shall both live, and do this or that.
16. But now ye glory in your vauntings; all such glorying is evil.
17. To him therefore that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin.

Queries

351. "Come now" is an interjection used to gain attention. What interjection would you probably use to gain attention today?

352. Comparing v. 13 with 5:1, what might be said about the financial status of the people addressed?
353. Is there any evidence in the section of v. 13 to 17 that shows the people addressed are rich? What?
354. Since James used the expression "today or tomorrow," do you think there was anything indefinite about *when* the rich would trade and get gain?
355. If the rich were making definite plans, then why does James say "today or tomorrow"?
356. What about verse 13 shows that definite plans for the future were made?
357. James is very indefinite in referring to these definite plans. Why?
358. Is James condemning the making of definite plans about the future? What is he condemning?
359. See if you can reword the question in the middle of verse 14 to make it a statement contained in the first sentence of the verse.
360. James says "ye know not what shall be on the morrow." Is this true of all men on earth? (Or does it only apply to these rich being addressed?)
361. What is the point of the question of verse 14?
362. "You are a vapor." What does this mean?
363. In verse 15 is James indicating that these words should be repeated before making plans for the future? If not that, then what does he mean?
364. What is the significance of "if the Lord Will"? (Can you expand the expression and put it into your own words?)
365. What are the "vauntings"? (i.e. what does the word mean?)
366. Over what vauntings are they glorying?
367. This vaunting is evil. Why?
368. What does verse 17 have to do with the argument that went before?
369. Is James giving added information in verse 17, or proving a point?
370. In either case, what is the added information, or what is the point?

Paraphrases

- A. 4:13. Come, come, now, you who plan your future trips and transactions even to the time that you shall do thus and so and even to the profit you shall make:
14. You don't know a thing that shall happen to-morrow, not even whether or not you shall be alive. You are like a breath of smoke that is seen for a moment and then disappears.
 15. You make your plans this way instead of saying, "If God sees fit to allow me, I shall live, and I shall do thus and so."
 16. Your plannings without God are really boasting in your arrogances: it is sin to boast against God.
 17. If you refuse to do that which you know to be right, it is sin.
- B.*4:13. Look here, you people who say "Today or tomorrow we are going to such and such a town, stay there a year and open up a profitable business."
14. How do you know what is going to happen tomorrow? For the length of your lives is uncertain as the morning fog; now you see it, soon it is gone.
 15. What you ought to say is "If the Lord wants us to, we shall live and do this or that."
 16. Otherwise, you will be bragging about your own plans, and such self-confidence never pleases God.
 17. Remember, too, that knowing what is right to do and then not doing it is sin.

Summary

Listen, you who lay out your life without God. It is sinful and arrogant when you refuse to take God into your plans.

Comment

"Come, come, now" says James. In effect, you know better than this! Had he been speaking with our modern vernacular he might have said, "Listen here, now!" This kind of an expression was used to gain the attention of the hearer; and in this case, to get them to notice, he had begun a diatribe with the unbelieving rich. Today the expression is still quite common in the English language to

separate two opposing views when given by the same speaker in a public discourse, especially when the first view is incorrect and the second is correct. Here James seems to be using it to separate his real audience from his pretended audience.

Although the admonition given to the absent rich certainly applied to them, it likewise applies equally well to any Christian. If the shoe fits, wear it. But try it on for yourself! This practice of making plans for tomorrow without considering God's will and the fact that God may have other plans is not only arrogant and presumptuous of the rich, but a sin for the Christian (verses 16-17).

James is not concerned with any particular plan, but wishes to admonish all such planning. His "today or tomorrow" includes any definite plans, whether in the near future or the far future. To make such plans without taking into account the fact that God may have other plans is wrong.

The error is not confined to the unbeliever who is not present, but is a mistake often made by the Christian worker. Young men and women who plan to go to this or that mission field after so many years training should be warned not to make their plans too definite nor too inflexible. God, who holds the future, might have other plans for them. He then might open avenues of service and training that go unnoticed by the would-be missionary. The young Christian, having definite future plans of his own, counts all closed doors as obstacles which the Lord must remove before the saint can work in the field of his choice. His inflexible planning may blind him for years to the will of God and opportunities of service and he would thus bypass much work that could have been done for the cause of Christ.

The Christian who thinks he must work in this or that particular job may be committing the same sin. The church member who thinks he must spend the rest of his life in one particular locality may have planned this choice out of selfish motives rather than considering that God may reveal other plans as time passes.

God does not remove our will, but He leaves it up to our own will and intellect to seize opportunities of service which He places before us. Selfish desire and wilful planning can blind us to the will of God as effectively as any other sin. If we as Christians desire to work in another locality this desire may be so strong as to blind us to the opportunity in our own home or home town. Likewise, if we have a selfish desire to remain where we are at all costs, we may

ignore all opportunities of serving the Lord that are open to us elsewhere. God grant that our wills would be so submitted to Him that we would be willing to submit ourself to His plans whatever they might be.

This unwillingness to conform to God's will can cause the Christian untold worry. The self-willed saint suspecting that God may alter his own selfish plans, will often be overly concerned with worry over losing that which is of no spiritual significance nor lasting consequence. His prayer requests will reflect his planning to be arrogant rather than being the will of God. His work will be designed to achieve these inconsequential goals rather than to fit into an overall plan of God which he may not know in advance. For this reason he become an unhappy and thwarted worrier because he makes his plans without considering that God's will may be otherwise.

James' indefinite references show he is referring to any specific plans; thus his references are "today or tomorrow" (or "today and tomorrow"), and "spend a year there, and trade, and get gain."

"The fact of the matter," says James, "is that you do not know what is to happen tomorrow." The question that follows: "What sort (is) your life?" may also be a portion of the same sentence. James could be saying: "You do not know of the thing of tomorrow: what sort of life you will have." This is really a smoother reading and a likely meaning.

The question is not necessary to a proper translation. If the phrase "What sort is your life?" were made a separate sentence but not a question, then James might be saying, "The fact of the matter is that you do not know what is to happen tomorrow. How miserable is your life!" This would still be in keeping with the shortlived vapor that is described in the sentence that follows.

Whichever way the sentence is read, the meaning is consistent with the Scripture. There is no certainty of life, and we are not aware of all of God's plans for our tomorrows. These uncertainties are big *ifs* in our plans. God does not object to our making plans; but we should always consider the will of God, both in making our plans and in the possibility of changing our plans. The uncertainty is very vivid the way James puts it. "You *are* a vapor. . . .", using a metaphor (instead of a simile, "You are like a vapor . . .").

A mist, or breath of air, vaporizes immediately and vanishes; so also is our life's span in relation to eternity. Those who are spiritually discerning realize this and plan for eternity accordingly.

They plan their days as best they can, but always to His plans. Those who are "earthy" make their plans as if they were in complete control of tomorrows and God had nothing to do with them.

James says these plans made which ignore God are really boasting. The man who counts himself to be something when he is nothing is vaunting; and when he makes his definite plans discounting God, he is glorying in these vauntings. The fact that he is vaunting may imply that he does know better. He sins doubly. He sins in vaunting in the first place, and he sins because he knows he should honor God and he does not do so when he makes his plans. His sin is both a sin of commission and a sin of omission. Thus verse sixteen ties to verse seventeen.

THE END OF THE UNGODLY RICH

Text 5:1-6

- 5:1. Come now ye rich and howl for your miseries that are coming upon you.
2. Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are moth eaten.
 3. Your gold and your silver are rusted; and their rust shall be for a testimony against you and shall eat your flesh as fire. Ye have laid up your treasure in the last days.
 4. Behold the hire of the laborers who mowed your fields, which is of you kept back by fraud, crieth out: and the cries of them that reaped have entered into the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth.
 5. Ye have lived delicately on earth, and taken your pleasure; ye have nourished your hearts in a day of slaughter.
 6. Ye have condemned, ye have killed the righteous one; he doth not resist you.

Queries

371. Where was the term "come now" last used? Why do you think it was repeated here?
372. What is the difference between "weep" and "howl"?
373. Is this "weep" any different from the weeping in 4:9? If so, what?
374. What are the miseries that have come upon the rich man? (see the close of Chapter 4).

375. What does it mean for something to be "corrupted"? (If you do not know, look it up in a dictionary).
376. What is the difference between the term "corrupted" of verse 2 and "rusted" of verse 3?
377. Can gold and silver really rust? Then why is the term used?
378. How could a rusty coin be a testimony against the rich?
379. Could this idea of "rusty coins" be a testimony against Christians today? How?
380. Evidently the rust from the coins will not really eat the flesh . . . but what does the expression mean? (Be careful, for remember the faithful Christian's body also rots in the grave!)
381. What does the expression 'as fire' tell us about the flesh being eaten?
382. How do the great material blessings of America make this a particular warning to the churches in America to-day?
383. What are the "treasures" of verse 3?
384. The last days in verse three can have several possible meanings. See if you can think of about three applications.
385. Why would James say "behold" when he already had the reader's attention?
386. In what way did the rich man practice fraud with his laborers?
387. What is the subject of "crieth out" in verse 4?
388. How could this possibly cry out? What does it mean?
389. Sabaoth does not refer to the Sabbath. Look it up in a Bible Dictionary to determine the true meaning.
390. How will this army react to the cries it hears in 4b?
391. How can a rich man "live delicately"?
392. Although you may not count yourself as being rich, would it be possible for you to live delicately today? (Don't look for the answer just by comparing yourself with some rich who you think have more delicate lives than you . . . but measure your own possibility of delicate living in terms of what the expression must mean.)
393. Is he condemning delicate living even though the money for it was not obtained by fraud?
394. "You have taken your pleasure" is evidently used in a bad sense. What kind of pleasure is here condemned?
395. Is it right to have any kind of pleasure? What?
396. In the days of "slaughter," what is to be (or being) slaughtered, and who does the slaughtering?

397. Do you think "a day of slaughter" refers to the rich man's death, or the final judgment? Why?
398. What class of people have the rich really condemned and killed?
399. In what way could it also be said they have condemned and killed Jesus?
400. "He doth not resist you" could mean he doesn't fight back. "Doth not" is present tense, suggesting it is still going on. How does this (or should this) fit the Christian's attitude toward his persecutors today?

Paraphrases

- A. 5:1. Come, come, now, you class of rich people, weep because of the future wrath of God, and shriek in the misery of what's coming to you.
2. Your wealth is rotten, and your expensive clothing is already moth-eaten.
 3. Your gold and silver coins are tarnished, and the rust of your money will be used as a testimony against you; and your well-fed bodies shall be eaten by this rust because you have treasured for yourselves the fire which shall be in the last days.
 4. Consider this now, how you have held back on the wages of your tenant farmers who worked so hard in your fields. The Lord of hosts has heard the cries for justice of them that harvested your fields.
 5. With these wages kept back you have lived luxurious and self-indulgent lives; you have fattened yourselves right down to the day of the slaughter of the Lord.
 6. You have continually condemned and killed the righteous class, and to this day your victims cannot stop you.
- B.*5:1. Look here, you rich men, now is the time to cry and groan with violent grief in view of all the terrible troubles ahead of you.
2. For your wealth is rotting away, and your fine clothes are becoming moth-eaten rags.
 3. The value of your gold and silver is dropping fast, yet it will stand as evidence against you, and eat your flesh like

fire. That is what you have stored up for yourselves in that coming day of judgment.

4. For listen! Hear the cries of the field workers whom you have cheated of their pay. Their cries have reached the ears of the Lord of Hosts.
5. You have spent your years here on earth having fun, satisfying every whim, and now your fat hearts are ready for the slaughter.
6. You have condemned and killed good men who had no power to defend themselves against you.

Summary

You rich people who have slaughtered the weak and innocent only fattened yourselves for the day of your own slaughter in God's judgment.

Comment

In these six verses James continues his discussion with the non-present and non-Christian rich. His opening remark, "come now", is the same remark with which he started the discussion in 4:13. He is still discussing the same type of rich he mentioned in chapter two, who oppress the Christians and drag them before the courts. Here James is not concerned with their ungodly actions, but with their ungodly destiny.

Since the rich are not present, James must be speaking for the benefit of the Christian who will read his letter. Filled with frustration over an unceasing fraud at the hands of rich people, the saint might begin to wonder wherein is the justice of God. James makes it clear that vengeance belongs to Jehovah, and that Jehovah will exact payment for the oppressive and fraudulent treatment of others, Christian or not. The church of Jesus Christ must have the right perspective concerning the rich. Much of the epistle of James seems to be written for this purpose.

There is another perspective the Christian should vision correctly, also. This concerns the terrifying danger of riches. Money brings with it the ability to "make money". What we really mean when we say that money makes money, is that he who has money

can so manipulate his fellow man, and the law, so that he can make more money.

The rich can find legal loopholes about which the poor cannot even dream. The rich have plenty of time to scheme how they shall take money away from others. The poor man is so busy trying to earn his bread he has little time for such scheming. Money buys more than material possessions; it buys temptations, it buys smugness and self-satisfaction; it buys fraud and unChristian action. It also buys a great company of evil men who strive continually to encroach upon those same riches.

The weeping the rich man does is not a weeping of Godly sorrow, but a weeping over the terrible denunciation and future destruction predicted. It is not a sorrow over sin, but a sorrow over the results of sin. If the rich could really see their destiny and realize the justice that will be brought upon them, their weeping would reach the proportions of howling, or shrieking in terror. The miseries that shall come upon them are of such proportions that the very thought of it would make them howl like a dog that has just lost his tail.

Some commentators feel that the suffering herein described refers to the destruction of Jerusalem; or of the suffering the rich shalt have in the disappointments of this life. The language is so vivid, however, that both the magnitude and the certainty of the suffering would seem to indicate the justice of the judgment day when the Lord shall come again.

The corruption of their riches, the decay of the garments, of gold, and even the flesh of the rich man seem to indicate either a literal decay that shall be brought about by time; or a decay in the realm of spiritual values. In the latter sense, the good the riches could have done was not done, that the reward that could have come from proper usage is corrupted. The garments were used to nurture a body of sin and shameful oppression of the poor. The gold and silver were used to condemn, oppress, and persecute those that had little or nothing; and so their rust (misuse, if this view is correct) shall be a testimony against the rich man on the judgment day. Non use (i.e., non use for the purpose it should have been used) has caused the rust which is inclined to be a testimony to (or against) the rich.

In verse three, it is possible that the treasure laid up is the fire. If this is the intended reading, then the rust shall eat "your flesh

because you have treasured up fire". Thus the fire could be the fire of Gehenna—the torture of the lost. Whether the rust shall eat your flesh like (as) fire, or the rust shall eat your flesh because you have treasured up fire, the meaning is not materially changed. In a very striking and vivid description the Holy Spirit here informs the Christian that the rich persecutor's lot is not one to be envied, but rather one to be pitied.

It might seem that James here lays a charge directly against all rich people, but his context makes it quite clear that his charge is against the misuse of their riches. It is possible for a rich man to enter heaven, even though it will take special care and intervention of God Himself (see Matt. 19:23-26). It is also an established fact that the road to riches is so often a road of oppression of the poor and cheating and law circumvention. To become wealthy through covetousness or greed is idolatry. (Col. 3:5)

Rusted riches may also be laid to the charge of many wealthy people who die and leave their wealth to the State in taxes, or to relatives who are not Christian or who have no possibility of using it to glorify the cause of Christ Jesus. Many blessings also bring with them a charge of much responsibility. Worry over the possible misuse of fortunes has caused many rich folk (even Christians) to neglect and overlook the right usage of their fortunes. They finally die with their wealth giving no glory to God but all glory to the contentious and greedy spirit of the devil. No wonder God sees fit to keep so many of his own precious saints in a state that most of the world calls poverty. These saints are the truly rich, for God in His infinite wisdom has kept their lives beyond these temptations that they might not resist.

The rust of these condemned rich people is spelled out in verses four to six in very clear terms. They took advantage of their hired servants. These workmen needed their wages for their daily bread, yet they were robbed to add to the fat and delicate lives of their rich masters. The injustice done to the tenant farmer, or the hired man, will one day be made just. The cries of the persecuted poor will one day be the testimony that will cause the shrieks of their tormentors. The Lord of the Sabaoth will see to this justice. (Sabaoth means "armies" or "hosts").

The rich man who takes his pleasure now from the poor is simply fattening himself for the day of his own slaughter. He has fed him-

self on the wages of the poor, and prepared his heart like sheep prepared for the kill; and he is already in the chute heading for the great slaughter-house of the judgment day.

As a final tribute to the magnitude of the testimony against him, the Holy Spirit says "you have condemned, you have killed the righteous one". "The righteous one" could be a reference to the death of Christ through the death of His saints ("Inasmuch as ye did it unto one of these my brethren, even these least, ye did it unto me" Matt. 25:40). Or, it could be referring to the suffering, even to death, of the righteous man that has been persecuted by the rich. Since this has been the subject of James, the latter seems to be the preferred meaning.

TEN THREE-POINT SERMON STARTERS

THE PRESUMPTION OF MAKING PLANS WITHOUT GOD

4:13-17

1. What we will do. (Go to this city, spend a year, trade, etc)
Do we really know what tomorrow will bring? v. 14a.
2. When we will do it. (Today; or tomorrow).
Do we really know when we will die? v. 14b
3. Why we will do it. (To get gain).
We should live to glorify Him. All other glorying is vain.
v. 15-17.

WHAT IS YOUR LIFE? 4:14

1. It is yours, to plan and do with as you will.
2. Plans and preparations in this life are a shadow of what will come.
3. This life is a vapor, soon gone to be replaced by eternity.

WHAT WE KNOW OF TOMORROW 4:13-17

1. We think we know what we shall do. v. 13
2. We should know it is in God's hands, not ours. v. 14-15.
3. We can know the Lord's will for us in eternity. v. 17.

THE LORD'S WILL 4:15-17

1. We ought to be surrendered to it, whatever it is. v. 15.
2. Our own will and vaunting that is contrary to God's is sin. v. 16.

3. The Lord's will is good for me; to do good now and receive good in eternity. v. 17.

THE SIN OF OMISSION 4:17

1. What we know of God's will. (*To Him that knoweth.*)
 - A. The saint, having God's revelation, knows all things, or all He shall reveal. I John 2:20.
 - B. The sinner, having the testimony of creation, knows the power and divinity of God, even if he has not heard the Word. Rom. 1:20.
2. We do not that which we know to do. (*and doeth it not*)
 - A. The more we know of His revelation, the more we realize our transgression.
 - B. The uninformed sinner has not glorified God nor given Him thanks. Rom. 1:21.
3. We all sin.

(But we have an Advocate and a propitiation. I John 2:1-2).

THERE SHALL BE WEEPING AND HOWLING 5:1

1. Weeping for the spiritual torment and howling for physical torment.
2. The miseries of eternal condemnation.
3. They are surely coming upon the unjust and ungodly.

ROTTEN WEALTH 5:2-3

1. Riches are corrupted. (*When they are ill-gotten*).
2. Garments are moth-eaten. (*When they foster selfishness and pride*).
3. Gold and silver are rusted. (*When they are not used to bless God*).

TREASURES LAID UP 5:1-3

1. The bank that really counts is in heaven.
2. The treasures of joy laid up in Christ Jesus.
3. The treasures of fire and torment laid up for the devil.

THE LORD OF SABAOOTH 5:4

1. The "hosts" and "armies" of God.
2. The leader of His armies.
3. The enemy of His armies.

4:13-5:6

JAMES

DELICATE LIVING 5:5 (At the expense of others).

1. It is the taking of ones' own selfish pleasure.
2. It is preparing our hearts for a day of slaughter.
3. It is condemning and killing the righteous.