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| Topic | Materialism |
| Reference | James 5: 1-6 |
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| Speaker | Ps Mark Tan |

In the setting nowadays there is usually an extreme either we think too much in our heads about our materials or we think too much about our hands about materials. Materialism in the philosophical school is the idea that they say there is no such thing as spirituality or God, so everything that we have here we can touch and see, smell and feel and this is called materialism. It does not apply to all of us directly because we believe in God, we believe that there is a power that is above us, and we believe there are mysteries that we cannot answer. The hands part is when we start to talk about the wealth that we have and then we beat ourselves in, “O God thank you for giving me enough, teach me O Lord to give unto others as well” and then because we have that mindset we feel so guilty of the amount of money that we might have in our bank account or the dreams and aspiration that we have in our head that makes us feel that, “May be this is not a God, am I committing sin” and we feel this sense of guilt that we work so hard and even worse we will feel so shameful when we work so hard but then end up not acquiring our goals and our dreams. There is a balance here and actually the head and hands they do connect but the issue is that middle point at the heart, the longest journey from the head to the heart and from the heart to our hands and James is speaking to our hearts today and James is actually saying, that is actually very-very subtle this materialism. This passage that James is saying is actually more deepens and stabs personally our hearts. The belongings that we have, we feel a lot of responsibility for them. So it is quite subtle, it is almost like a child with his pet python.

There was a story a while back about a child owning a pet python. The pet python is about 11 feet long, eats one chicken every three days and the python then lets the boy sleep on top of it, hangs out with him all the time and so on and so forth, but there was one day that the python stopped eating for days and so the child got very worried because he loved his pet python. So he went to the veterinarian and then he asked, “Doctor, look at my python it has been days since he ate and I am worried because I do not want him to starve” then the veterinary doctor asked him this question. “Have you noticed if he had started squeezing you bit by bit for a while, like he would just wrap around you and hold you tight for a while but then let go a few seconds later” and the kid said, “Yes, that’s right”. Doctor continued, “Have you noticed that when you lie down straight before he coils around you and lies next to you, he stretches himself out right next to you the same length from head to toe”. The kid replied, “Yes that is right, how do you know that?” Then the vet says, “You may have to kill your python because it actually is planning to eat you. The python is straightening itself out because he wants to see how he can fit you in his body and he is squeezing you tightly so that he can deceive you for that final day that he will give you that squeeze that he will not let go until you stop shaking”.

This is same thing when it comes to wealth, we feel responsible because “O God you have given me this gift, all these joys, teach me God to be responsible” and we do try to be responsible but then acquire a bit after a bit after a bit and we lose sleep and we just aspire to make sure that we get enough in our bank account, enough in our assets making sure that we have enough for missions but also for nice vacation. There are two things here:

1. It is very subtle, it starts with acquiring a little bit here, little bit there and then all of a sudden you get extraordinary cash and you show it and say it is for investment purposes.
2. Second thing I want to say is this, whether you feel you have a lot or you feel you do not have much at all, I am not talking about what you have in your hands or what you have in your head, I am talking about what you have in your heart.

When I go to Sabah and I go to the villages where annually one household earns about 3500 ringgit a year, how do they live but even they therefore will have this dream and nightmare and haunting at the back of their heads of getting more earning. So whether we are rich or poor in our own eyes, whether we have felt that we have controlled our finances well or we have separated from our work of God James is actually speaking to us that is very subtle and so we begin immaterialism.

James does not talk about it philosophically nor does he talk about his hands, he is actually going through the text and he is giving very practical advice in this passage but also he is saying lifetime struggle that we will continue to have as believers in Jesus Christ. Two layers of it, so this will be a two part passage. The first one is that it is a question of faith and the second part is a call to repentance.

**The first part: A Question of Faith**

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

The question that usually comes out amongst scholars today is who is James referring this to. A lot of people say, James must be metaphorically speaking outside the church as there are plenty of rich people outside there and James is rebuking these guys who are not inside the church but actually he is talking to believers.

James 4

**13** Come you who say, tomorrow we will go to a place and make money.

The way that he is challenging people:

1. He knows them pretty well.
2. He knows that it is to a people who they have close relationship with as a church.

He is warning us over something that is vitally-vitally important and it may change our lives between life and death.

What miseries that James is talking about here?

Often times the first thing that comes to our head is judgment, one day we will go before God and then God will reveal our lives and see and then only we will experience the alter of misery in hell, but that is not the case. We see the grammar here and we see that **for the miseries that are coming upon you**, it is a present and continuous tense and so that means he knows for a fact that some rich people even though they are either have acquired a lot of money in their wallets or they are in the midst of trying to do well in their career, he is actually looking at this passage and says yes, you are actually having some misery now.

During the time of recession back in the 80s and 90s people were jumping off buildings because of the misery they have in their heads saying I have worked so hard and now I have lost everything. People die because they have lost something that are on this earth and surely wealth causes a lot of misery. We thrive to seek a career just for the sake of self-sustenance and just to thrive, does it cause us misery. The feeling of not doing good in business always haunt us. There are people in this world that commit suicide after losing their wealth. It is folly to put so much emotion and so much of your life on these things.

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

3 Your gold and silver have corroded, and their corrosion will be evidence against you and will eat your flesh like fire.

James is saying a couple of things:

1. He is actually rekindling the words of Jesus. This part is actually almost verbatim. James is quoting Jesus,

Matthew 6:19-21, ESV

**19** “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal,**20** but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. **21** For where your treasure is, **there your heart will be also**.

James is talking about the folliness of saving and saving and saving and not using it for the kingdom of God. James is not against wealth, he is against people who want to acquire wealth and out of lack of faith in the Lord they just keep and keep and keep for themselves. James is reflecting the faith that we should have just as much as Jesus himself had said it. He is not saying store up on this earth. The best way to ensure that our clothes will not be eaten by moths or our gold or our money will not corrode and disappear is to use it.

Everything that we put our hopes in, in hope that will help to give us a very comfortable and cozy retirements in the years to come, some closer than others, is withering away. Jesus said store your treasures up in heaven where there will be no moth to eat it and the gold and silver will never corrode. He is asking us to put our faith and trust in Him who provides. From where you treasure is there your heart will be also. So the first issue of faith is we believers if we truly say that we believe in Jesus Christ where is our faith when we handle the wealth or the money or the blessings that which God has given us, what have we done with it.

**3** You have laid up treasure in the last days.

James is recollecting the promise that Jesus is yet to fulfill. Jesus came down to this earth and mentioned three things,

1. I have come to bear witness to the truth, to teach us the way that He is the way, the truth and the life. So he died for our sins and he did say that on the third day I will rise again from the dead and then after I arise I will go to my father but one day I will come back to you.
2. He will die.
3. He will rise.
4. He will come back again.

He is talking about the faith that we are supposed to have to know for a fact that Jesus is coming back.

Acts 1:10-11, ESV

**10** And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes,

**11** and said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.”

So when we store our treasures on the earth thinking that we have got a long way to live here, how often do we think of the idea that Jesus is coming back. If Jesus comes back today, if we have our faith in him we will say “Jesus we were waiting for you”, but how many of us can authentically say this.

We have brothers and sisters who are losing their lives as sudden as the next day or the next hour. Now let’s assume jihadists have taken over our hometown and we have 48 hours to choose from four options:

* 1. Convert Immediately to Islam and stay alive.
  2. Pay an exorbitant tax and stay alive (until no more money).
  3. Leave immediately take nothing with you just start walking.
  4. Die by beheading, hanging, burned alive or thrown off a building (more choices to come).

Some of us will think that this will never happen in Malaysia. But the reports say that they are moving close to Malaysia. Choices two, three and four requires a certain amount of faith. Number one showing no faith; it is just dumb God so that we may stay secure. It is valuing your life and those who value their life will take the first option.

If God calls you to leave for the sake of the gospel, leave your comfortable lives now for the sake of the gospel, the question is would we do this?

Are we willing to belief till our last breath?

Some of us might have this question day by day, where we can get such faith to stand persecution that kept the 12 Christians first caught by ISIS and made popular by CNN to hold their tongue and confess their life to Jesus till they very last breath and had that mass killing. Where was the faith of our brothers and sisters in China during those dark times of the church, so that they can keep it and keep it and keep it until now the fastest growing church is now in China. What was the faith of our ancestors, our fathers and our mothers that kept us going beyond hunger, poverty and sickness to continue to confess that Jesus Christ is lord until we can actually have this luxury of being here today. The faith that we can actually find is in Christ Jesus and John says

**10** And I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, “Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God.

**11**And they have conquered him by **the blood of the Lamb** and **by the word of their testimony**, **for they loved not their lives even unto death.**

**12**Therefore, rejoice, O heavens and you who dwell in them! But woe to you, O earth and sea, for the devil has come down to you in great wrath, because he knows that his time is short!”

The devil has come to accuse us so that we may be found guilty of our sin and we are guilty but how do we overcome it, where is the foundation of our faith? We shall overcome it by the blood of the lamb. As death passed over the houses of Jewish people on their last night in Egypt, death does not pass over on the ground or the intensity or the practice of our faith but death passes over us by our faith on the blood of the lamb. That is what silences the accuser that is what makes us go from death into life. That is the real point of it.

We are not here to judge how intense our faith is, we just have to make sure that our faith is in the right thing and that is in Christ Jesus. After that we give our testimony about that faith that we have and also not afraid to die. When we leave this place we go into a beautiful area where God’s dwelling is. We have to take the promise of Jesus in our life in our whole life, and our whole life should be based on this faith. There will be challenges but we will have peace in the hope that we have in Christ Jesus.

Do we have enough faith to overcome the miseries? Do we have enough faith that we know that we actually don’t face the miseries because our confidence is no longer in cash but our confidence is now in Christ. Are we leaving the gifts of God into degradation or are we using it for the furtherance of his kingdom and finally are we living our lives now as if Jesus is coming back soon.

**Second part: Called to Repentance:**

Now we have this faith in Christ Jesus I think repenting is easy because we want to get rid of all the burdens and all the miseries that we put upon ourselves because of our lack of faith but as we put our faith in Christ Jesus. He then calls us to repent. What then should we do?

**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.

(James 5:4, ESV)

The first thing we need to repent is how we treat our neighbors. Are we owing people a debt that is causing our neighbors misery because they are living on the two cents they have left because they did not get the pay which was promised by any of us. God is calling us that if we do this by faith then if you are managers or directors please ensure that your staff are taken care of well. Accountability is necessary in our businesses and our businesses should reflect our faith in Jesus Christ. It is like to what Jesus has said before.

**23** So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you,

**24**leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.

Matthew 5:23-24 (ESV)

Have we made ourselves with our neighbors? In this modern age it is very seldom for us to know the names of our neighbors. There are often times that out of blissful ignorance we mistreat our neighbors by just ignoring them, ignoring their pain, ignoring their struggles.

Have we practice our faith in front of our neighbors?

Our lifestyle

Because we withhold that money from others James also said

**5**You have lived on the earth in luxury and in self-indulgence. You have fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter.

James 5:5, ESV

The point here is that when we acquire that kind of wealth we then pad our hearts, where our treasures there are heart will be also. We will feel very comfortable but actually it might kill us one day. Jesus actually told a very interesting story. Jesus said this in the parable saying

**16**And he told them a parable, saying, “The land of a rich man produced plentifully,**17** and he thought to himself, ‘What shall I do, for I have nowhere to store my crops?’**18**And he said, ‘I will do this: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. **19**And I will say to my soul, “Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.”’ **20**But God said to him, ‘Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?’ **21**So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God.”

**Luke 12:16-21**

Have we put our ambitions before us to the point that we will risk at nothing to make sure that our ambitions are fulfilled including the lives and the lifestyles of others. Have you taken from your neighbor so that you can pad your own lifestyle with the hope that you can actually get the lifestyle that you wants today. There is a need for repentance for us in our lifestyles.

**6**You have condemned and murdered the righteous person. He does not resist you.

In the old NIV it says

**6** You have condemned and murdered innocent man who are not opposing you.

As you steal from your neighbors and let them starve as you pad your own lifestyle you are actually condemning and persecuting and murdering innocent man and they have nothing against you.

The new NIV says

**6** You have condemned and murdered the innocent one who was not opposing you.

We have to ask ourselves who is righteous enough to be called the righteous one, who was innocent enough to be called the innocent one, who knew no sin. When Jesus had a cheating woman put before his feet and the Pharisees said according to the Law of Moses she should be stoned and Jesus said that he who has no sin cast the first stone. Jesus was not being ironic, there was one without sin and he did not cast the stone. In the lifestyle that we have put up for ourselves, with the treasures that we put around our hearts we have actually changed our Lord.

Jesus did not resist his forgiveness of us, he did not resist the grace which we don’t deserve but then by virtue we have because he had given it to us. When we put ourselves as God in trying to live a wonderful life we will have the ambition to actually condemn our Lord and the cross. The scripture calls us to focus and turn our eyes on the cross where Christ died for us and in all that we do let us glorify Him in our neighborhood, community and country.