

It's Hard for a Rich Man

by Shane Idleman

Shane Idleman explores the dangers of wealth and the importance of aligning our hearts with God's will regarding riches.

Duration: 31:57

Topics: "Wealth And Idolatry", "Humility And Patience"

Description

This sermon delves into the importance of humility and patience in the face of wealth, emphasizing the dangers of allowing riches to become an idol that draws us away from God. James addresses the arrogance of boasting about future plans without considering God's will, highlighting the need to establish our hearts in patience and trust in God's promises. The message warns against the deceptive nature of wealth, revealing how riches can lead to a wasted life and ultimately perish in the day of judgment.

Transcript

James chapter 5, you know what, before I read chapter 5, let's go back what I read last week to put this in context because what is interesting here, James is talking to businessmen, remember, you know, about not planning ahead and don't plan for this and don't plan for that, and then he goes right into talking about rich people in chapter 5. So James 4.13, All such boasting is evil. Therefore, to him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin. So, again, brief recap, it's God's will versus my will.

There's nothing wrong with saying, hey, in a year from now I plan to pay off my vehicle or my home and we plan to live here and move here. This is what we'd like to do. Lord, would you guide us and lead us and direct us as we give you our plans? That's fine.

What he's talking about here is people boasting, saying we're going to do this and we're going to do that and really we're not too concerned what God has to say about it because we're just going to do it. And in that boasting, it's arrogance because you can't even guarantee tomorrow. Life is like a vapor if you look at it through the timeline of history.

It's just here today and gone tomorrow. And to live like that, to teach us to number our days, it's a very wise verse in Proverbs. Lord, help me to number my days.

Teach me to number my days. How much more would we appreciate our days and even live them a little bit more for Christ if we had a huge calendar up there and we could check off and we knew, okay, it's

coming to the end of my life here shortly. If you take the average year, 70 years, and how many days are in a year, and then you have these days that you're just marking off.

Halfway through your life, you see these going by. Teach us how to number our days. So there's nothing wrong with asking God for direction, but forcing your will and saying this is what we're going to do is not a good direction to be going.

So then he goes right into chapter 5. Come now, you rich. And now remember, there's no chapter and verses when he wrote this. So what he was saying, if you back up, instead you ought to say if the Lord wills, he shall live and do this or that.

But now you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil. Therefore, to him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin.

Come now, you rich. Weep and howl for your miseries that are coming upon you. Boy, he's not very popular, is he? He's not going to really please a lot of people in these types of messages, but that was the point.

And I find it interesting that James is talking to believers. In his epistle, James is talking to believers or those professing to be believers, those in the church. And he's wanting to hit those who are rich.

Weep and howl for your miseries that are coming upon you. Your riches are corrupt, and your garments are moth-eaten. Your gold and your silver are corroded, and their corrosion will be a witness against you, and you will eat your flesh like fire.

You have heaped up treasure in the last days. Indeed, the wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you have kept back by fraud, they cry out. And the cries of the reapers have reached the ears of the Lord of Sabbath.

You have lived on the earth in pleasure and luxury. You have fattened your hearts as in a day of slaughter. You have condemned, you have murdered the just, and he does not resist you.

Boy, I don't know how you feel if you're one of the people he was talking about, but that's a very difficult thing to not only write, but a thing to hear. James is writing to those who call themselves believers. And what we know about wealth is something very interesting.

Wealth reveals the heart. How you spend wealth, I guess I should say. What you do with wealth, with money, really reveals a lot about our hearts.

The more we hoard and covet and just keep to ourselves and build and not really give and not help those in need and look at it as idolatry, reveals what's going on in the heart. Because you know, once God has your heart, he has your money. Usually.

But sometimes, many people, especially if they have a lot of wealth, that's what he's talking about here, that it begins to draw them away from God. And it's really not about riches. Because sometimes we hear that, wealth, wealth, wealth, and you have two sides of the church throughout church history.

You can go back to early church fathers, and it was as poor as you could be, that the poorer you were, the more spiritual you were. So if you're, you know, just as poor as it gets here in the United States, then you are very spiritual. Now, of course, we know that's not necessarily true because there's a lot of poor people

who do not love the Lord.

And sometimes, big disclaimer here, sometimes, I'm not going to be one of those people who say all the time, but sometimes poverty is a curse. Sometimes poverty, God will remove things from our life and bring us to a pover state. Look at most addicts.

Where do they end up, very wealthy or very poor and broken and lose everything? So sometimes, poverty can be a judgment of God. Not all the time. There's wonderful people who just, it's hard to get by.

So we have to look at our heart and see what's happening. But then the other side, which has been lately, is the prosperity gospel. What's this say? Wealthy, wealthy, wealthy, God's going to give you a thousand cattle on a thousand hills.

Whatever that verse is, right? You're going to be the head, not the tail. The poor are going to lend to you. Rich are going to lend to you.

You're going to be this. God's going to give you so much wealth. And that's a very wrong focus because you're serving God for the wealth.

But the more wealth you had, oh, he must be blessed. He must be blessed. But Jesus said it's hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven.

It'd be easier for a camel to go through an eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter heaven. And they said, how is that possible? We thought, even in Jesus' time, they thought the riches equaled a person being in right standing with God. But he clarified that no, riches pull you away from God.

It's actually not riches themselves. It's the love of money. People often misquote that.

They think, well, money is the root of all evil. No, it's not. No, it's not at all.

It's just money is a piece of paper. You can throw it in the trash or you can spend it. It's the love of money.

That's the root of all kinds of evil. So it's not about riches because you can look at Abraham and David and Job. And throughout, there's rich people, rich believers in the New Testament.

I personally believe that God will give people certain things to be a blessing to others. He'll elevate certain people so they can give more to missionaries. They can support local businesses that are wanting to do things for God.

So people, God gives wealth so that they take their wealth and they bring it out and they make a difference. You look at a lot of, there's investors. We had one for the church in Lancaster, a very wealthy company.

And they're actually putting a business here in Palmdale shortly. And they would have bought us a church, two, three million dollar church, and just give us a building if we can find a building at a substantial discount. So God has blessed those kind of people to be able to be a blessing to others.

So it's not riches in and of themselves, but look at what it has done. They don't see that their life is, their silver and their gold are corroding. They obviously haven't taught or took care of their employees very well.

They've paid their labors a lot less than they should have. They've taken advantage of people. And that's what wealth does.

If you're chasing that idol, it's an idol that can never be satisfied. You remember, I've heard it many times before. I don't remember who said it, but they asked a very wealthy man, when's it enough? And he said, just one more dollar.

Just one more dollar. And they pursue these things, and it doesn't pay off. Riches can lead to a wasted life.

Riches can lead to a wasted life. Anybody can waste their life, but it's particularly disheartening for the wealthy. Because life is an illusion.

Wealth, they have this wealth, they have this money, they think, look how successful I am. And when it's all said and done, are we really that successful if we've amassed a fortune? Jesus said that actually it's better for you to not lose your body and soul in hell, than to chase wealth. I have the exact scripture here.

Let me read it from Mark. What does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses his soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul? So what he was saying here is weep. Miseries are coming.

Always James is trying to get the reader back. Look, these things that you're chasing, this idolatry, this silver and this gold that's corrupted, you need to weep. Misery is coming.

You will be regretting these decisions. And misery would lead often to repentance. People saying, oh my gosh, I've made this mistake.

God, I've focused in the wrong direction. That misery and that weeping is often attributed to repentance if they bring it in the right direction. If they don't, then James is saying that day is coming when God will judge them.

Riches are also deceptive because we don't see our need for God. I covered this earlier. It's easier for the camel to go through the eye of a needle than the rich man to get into heaven.

So they're deceptive. They lead to a wasted life. The sad part about that is most people think they're wasting their life.

If they are, you know, somebody's addicted or, boy, I really wasted my life. But the rich person thinks they're very successful and they haven't wasted their life. But when they stand before God, they realize their entire life was wasted.

Can you imagine thinking you're going to heaven, thinking you're on God's side, building and amassing and tons of things and you realize all of that was wasted? All of life was wasted. All that energy, all those resources, all that money was just wasted. And it says here, The cries of the reapers have reached the ears of the Lord of Sabbath.

Now, it's not the Lord of the Sabbath. Some people think that word is host, the Lord of hosts. God is, He is God of the armies of the earth and of the heavens.

That term there is the Lord of hosts that God will come with His armies. He will judge. So the cries of the reapers, these people working for these rich people that are working hard and being taken advantage of

and not getting paid, their cries actually reach up to heaven and God, the God of the angel armies, will judge the earthly armies.

He will judge those who are doing this and taking advantage of people. And often we forget, even in Sodom and Gomorrah, we think of homosexuality or we think of all these other sins sometimes throughout the Old Testament. But often God would rebuke His people because of how they mistreated the poor.

Throughout all of Scripture. How they mistreated the poor and the impoverished. They took advantage of them.

They didn't help them. And there are strong warnings in that throughout all of Scripture. So on this topic of riches, I wanted to go through Proverbs 11 briefly that would really help.

Proverbs 11.11 Dishonest scales are an abomination to the Lord, but a just weight is His delight. You know what dishonest scales are? They used to weigh things on scales. And they would put things on the scale or on their things that they used, these weights, where they would cheat the people.

Really it doesn't weigh a pound. It really only weighs six ounces. So they would put it in such a way that they would be profiting from the people.

And they're making something appear better or worse for gain. Now doesn't this happen to everybody from a mechanic to a contractor to a politician to a doctor? We can make things look better than what they are or worse in order to make a profit. Have you ever heard the statement, make sure you get a second opinion? Before that doctor wants to do surgery and make \$25,000, you might want to get a second opinion.

You don't always need surgery. Now am I saying all doctors are bad? Of course not. You'd be amazed at what people, how they take little clips out of here.

Oh, Shane says we shouldn't go to doctors, they're all bad. No, just anybody, a mechanic. Boy, look at this car, especially when you go to oil change.

I just did that today. And I didn't know, boy, that rear differential fluid, it's about 150. Look at this air filter, it's getting pretty dirty.

By the time I would have been out there, it would have been \$450. But it's called suggestive selling. Now probably do I need those things? I don't need differential fluid that soon.

And wherever we go, a contractor might really look at how bad this looks and really increase it. That's the same thing, it's no different. We have dishonest scales often and God looks at our heart, how we treat people.

Do we have dishonest scales and we make things look worse than they are in order to make more? And that's why riches are deceptive. Proverbs 11, 4, riches do not profit in the day of wrath, but righteousness delivers from death. So our riches, our wealth, whatever we have, will not stand next to us when we're standing at the judgment seat of Christ, when our works are being judged, but also when we're judged in front of God.

The great white throne judgment, two different judgments. Our wealth is not going to matter. It doesn't pay off in the day of judgment, but righteousness, having a right standing before God, that's why we come

here, we worship Jesus and what He did.

11, 5, the righteousness of the blameless will direct His way, but the wicked will fall by His own wickedness. The righteousness of the upright will deliver them, but the unfaithful will be caught by their own lusts. Isn't that interesting? They'll be caught by their own lusts.

The rich and the wicked are often parallel in Scripture. Proverbs 11, 7, when a wicked man dies, his expectation will perish, and the hope of the unjust perishes as well. Verse 8, the righteous is delivered from trouble, and it comes to the wicked instead.

When it goes well with the righteous, the city rejoices, and when the wicked perish, there is jubilation. In other words, the city rejoices when the wicked person dies. And often the wealthy and the wicked are joined together, especially if you look at all the kings in the Old Testament.

Their wealth drew them away from God. It's one thing, I've already released that article I wrote about interviewing the Catholic priests. It's on our website, but Facebook and different things, and we'll send it out.

But if you study and you see how much of the papacy in Rome and how much money they've amassed, it's amazing. We're talking billions of dollars in this system. And this just fits.

The wickedness and riches often go together because the devil will bless you too. He will open certain doors and allow that wealth to continue to take us away. Verse 25, The generous soul will be made rich, and he who waters will also be watered himself.

The generous soul will be made rich. And what he means by that is not necessarily physical wealth. The generous soul will be rich.

Often God would talk about blessings and honor and riches coming upon a person. It wasn't just so they would be elevated and have a million dollars in the bank and retire by the time they're 50. An abundant life, a life that's carefree, that God's got your back, that things are covered, that you're not stressed out, that God opens tremendous doors.

He takes care of you. So when the generous soul is a person who gives of their time, they go to the hospital homes like we talked about. They visit those in need.

They have a generous soul. They help those. They buy clothes for people.

They have a generous soul. God in return will build them up. He will make them rich and have an abundant life.

Because we also know that he who sows also reaps. You reap what you sow. As you sow into generosity, God will reward you in that area.

So if you're struggling, I often tell people this. If you're struggling financially, there's a couple things that you can look at. Now, first, let's just throw it out there that not everybody struggling financially is this is going to pertain to.

But often you have to look at budgeting. How do you spend your money? It's often not what you make. It's what you spend.

So you look at a person's money. And if they're going through a lot and you look at their bills, often you'll see that they are living above their means. They're spending on things they don't need to be spending on.

You also look at are they generous? Well, Shane, I can't be generous because I have to hold on to everything. No, the reason you're having to hold on to everything is because you're not generous. You have to test God.

God says test me in this area. So it's funny. And people who are sometimes struggling in this area, they're not generous.

They don't give. They don't budget. It's amazing how many people we'll talk to that need help in certain areas.

And call me stupid, say that on Wednesday nights, but you don't need to spend \$150 at Starbucks. You don't need \$150 worth of cigarettes. And you can look through, and they're not spending their money on things.

They're not being good stewards, is the word I'm looking for, of their money. There's not a budget. It's just a free-for-all.

They're not generous. They hold on to everything, and they wonder why they're struggling. But God's Word says a generous soul will be made rich.

Verse 28, He who trusts in riches will fall, but the righteous will flourish like foliage. Now, they can understand this imagery. What is foliage? That stuff just grows, right? You see it out here a lot in this valley.

When it starts to rain in the springtime, and it just grows. That's what God does. He pours out His blessings, and not just financially, relationally, filled with the Spirit.

That's the one thing when God says He will bless you and water you, and you will just grow and flourish like foliage. There's health there. There's vitality.

You're growing spiritually. And a person I've seen, and I've known that a lot of people, if they're not generous, and this time of year, Scrooge, they don't grow spiritually. They very rarely grow spiritually because that riches has still had a hold on them.

Who trusts in His riches will fall, but the righteous will flourish like foliage. He who troubles his own house, verse 29, he who troubles his own house will inherit the wind, and the fool will be a servant to the wise heart. And they're tying this in with wisdom and wealth as well.

When God gives us wealth, He wants us to be wise about it, to use wisdom to be a person that knows how to invest, and knows how to rule his house well. It's interesting in Timothy, one of the qualifications of an elder, a person who is a group of men who lead the church, one of the qualifications is that they have to rule their home well. They have to be not greedy for money, and greedy for gain.

They have to be able to control wealth instead of allowing wealth to control you. The best way you can control wealth, and I'll say it again, I've said it before, is you have to give some of that away or it becomes idolatry. There's teachings on, what do you think about tithe? What do you think tithe is in the New Testament, the Old Testament? Abraham, tithe is before Abraham.

Melchizedek, all these things. People like to argue over all these little things. Don't use the word tithing.

Don't use the word. Make sure it's an offering. But we just know that God loves a cheerful giver.

And David said, I won't give to the Lord anything that doesn't cost me. So that's why I say a tithe or a 10% is a good number because it hurts. You're giving.

It's like, Lord, I want to give 10%. Not legalistically or 12% or whatever it is. Lord, I want this.

I want to rearrange my life in such a way that my house is going to be a little smaller. My vehicle's gonna be a little older. We're not gonna go on 14 vacations this year.

We're going to budget and we're going to put you first and we're gonna have a generous, we're gonna be a generous giving family. And God will bless that. And that's one way you get rid of that.

You get rid of that. How does that work, Shane? Well, because the person who's making \$3,000 and giving \$300, soon as they make \$4,000 a month, they're giving \$400. They make \$5,000 a month, then they're giving \$500.

They make \$10,000 a month and they're giving \$1,000 a month. They give away as this grows. And that's the best way to make sure this area doesn't encapsulate your life and take you down.

Now, what's the number one excuse, though? I can't afford that. But that goes, and this didn't mean to turn into a giving message. There's no boxes out today.

We're not concerned. I'm just concerned. It's funny about tithing, too.

If it's one of the best kept secrets and it's really not a secret, why wouldn't we want to talk about it more? As a living witness, God has totally blessed us in many different ways because of this area of giving. And giving, we don't always have it. God has come through a hundred times over.

And it's a biblical truth. Test me in this area. Give.

Paul said God loves the cheerful giver. And you know that God is a rewarder of those who give. So you can test God in this area.

He will never let a soul that gives perish. Now, there will be difficulties. Your faith might be challenged.

I remember when we went through some difficult valleys, we still gave. Even though we lowered a little bit, we still gave and trust God. So my whole reason for saying that is that's one of the ways, the best ways to make sure that riches don't have a hold on you.

And it'll usually happen slowly. Many times, if a person's not doing well financially, and years go by and then they start to do well financially, it starts to get a grip on them. And then a larger grip and a larger grip.

And then they want to save and retirement turns into a cabin in Vail and a cabin in Big Bear and a cabin over here and a house in Ventura. And we start to amass all these things. I'm not thinking of anybody in here at all.

I don't know if you have those things. But the point is, that's what happens is we begin to start to allow wealth. And it's a form of idolatry that's always going to be there unless you crush it.

It's always knocking on the door, isn't it? Isn't compromise knocking on the door? Oh, please. Wednesday night needs to be a little bit more honest. It's going to happen between January and April when your tax preparer says things like, how much mileage did you have this year? We can write that off and that off and that off and that off.

And we're... God, you guys are not getting it tonight, huh? But that's what... We're challenged in this area in wealth because we want to hold on to as much as we can. Now, there's nothing wrong with using wisdom and being a good steward. See, you can be a good steward and still have a generous soul, generous heart.

There's nothing wrong with that. Actually, a wise steward does have a genuine heart and vice versa. Generous, when a person wants to give of their time and their money and their resources.

So, at this point, you might say, how do I fix this, Shane? Well, the same way James was prescribing. The cure is humility. The cure is always humility.

Humble yourself under the mighty hand of God. Humble yourself and admit this is an area. And he goes on to say in verse 7, Therefore, be patient, brethren.

He just rebuked them. He goes from, You have lived on earth in pleasure and luxury. You have fattened your hearts as in a day of slaughter.

You have condemned. You have murdered the just. And He does not resist you.

Therefore, be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, waiting patiently for it until it receives the early and latter rain. You also be patient.

Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand. And he was tying in, I believe, patience with often wealth. We want to be in fast forward motion, don't we? We want to be going 100 miles an hour.

It's got to get it. It's got to get it now. Patience.

God says patiently wait upon me. Maybe if you're not struggling with wealth, I bet you're struggling with patience. Or both.

That's a double whammy. Patience. Waiting patiently.

Isn't it interesting about patience? It's the one thing you pray for, but you don't want God to test you in this area to build it. Lord, give me patience. The only way you're going to get and acquire patience is being tested by things that try your patience.

People try your patience. Kids try your patience. That's true.

Kids, people, places, work. Lord, you're not moving quick enough in this area. And finances, while we're on that subject, finances try us too in our patience.

Lord, why isn't this happening? I can't understand it. We want to hurry up. Many times we want to pull ourselves out of the fire.

We want to pull ourselves out of the difficult situation, don't we? If possible, we want to live in this nice bubble that doesn't hurt. There's no pain. Lord, pull me out of this bad relationship.

Lord, pull me out of this challenging home environment. Lord, pull me out of this hard work environment. Lord, pull me out of this trying time where I'm hurting financially.

And pull me all out of this so I can just sit at home and watch Joanne Gaines and Chip remodel homes. And just sit there in total comfort. But James says you need patience.

Establish your hearts for the coming of the Lord is at hand. And establish your heart there. He's ending on this, so I'll end on this.

And then we'll go into the next area later. Establish your heart. Out of the heart, it's a wellspring of life.

Out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks. Everything comes out of our heart. So James says to establish your heart.

It's imagery there in the Greek language of putting it on a foundation. You know what a foundation is, right? They dig down into the dirt. They pour the concrete.

Out of the concrete, there are these metal bolts that come out. And they tie the walls to it. And how they do it, they put holes in the wood and the frames.

They put those over those big nuts and they screw down the nuts. And that holds the wall. It's established.

So you have to establish your heart in patience. Lord, why isn't this happening right now? Lord, do you want us to do this? Do you want us to go here or do that? Lord, you're not answering. I can't take this much longer.

Have you ever said that? Please, somebody say yes. Don't leave me up here by myself. I have often.

Lord, please establish your heart. And what you're establishing here, you're establishing patience, but you're establishing your trust in God. For the coming of the Lord is at hand.

So when I establish my heart, I say, Lord, your word says this. You've promised this. I know you to be this.

I'm establishing my heart. I'm building my heart on your promises and on what you've said. And that's how I'm going to live my life.

And that's what he does to establish the heart. But for riches and those who are struggling in this area, humble yourself. Humble yourself.

And you don't even have to give here. You could give to Grace Resource this time of year. You could give to Care Net Pregnancy Resource Council.

There's wonderful organizations. I've got to give some of this away. It's got to hold on me.

And I don't like it. It's got to hold. And I want to give some of its power away.

Because riches lose their power when they're given away. They maintain their power, and that power grows as we hold it closer. Like kryptonite with Superman.

He's got to get as far away from that as possible. Shane, that's a fictitious story. I know, but the principle is true.

You've got to get as far away as you can from that that is going to pull you away from God. And the only way to get rid of it is if God's giving it to you, save some. I mean, you know the old saying, give 10%, save 10%, spend 10%.

Use wisdom, bless others, and allow God to direct you through giving in a generous heart. And I guess maybe I'm just, I don't know if it even applies to most people here, but I've been in churches in the past where I knew guys that were in the stock market and very wealthy, very wealthy, but they were the most indigest person you ever knew. They would nickel and dime a receipt from a waitress.

This is off 25 cents. I don't think this cup costs that. And just, you know, and they wouldn't give to those in need.

They wouldn't help those in need. And they were Christians. They held on to this.

They're so happy about their retirement and that gold went from \$300 an ounce to \$1,800 an ounce. They could tell you all, I just made \$35,000 in the last two years. But they're Scrooge.

And they're Christians. So it happens. And I've seen a hurt that hurts their marriage.

It hurts their walk with the Lord. It hurts their relationship with their kids. Why Shane? Because that becomes their God.

That becomes their God. And that's who they worship. That's who they bow down to.

That's who they live their life around. And the only way to crush that idol is to give it away.

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