

Symptoms of the Love of Money Part 3

Epistle of James

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Amen. Well, it is definitely good to be back home and back with you, which means being home, home with the body of Christ. It was a wonderful trip. Thank you for your prayers. One week in Pretoria, one week in Cape Town. The trip that we took was basically to help Dr. Mack and Carol, Sybrand and Beth at Linwood Baptist Church and particularly ACBC, the Association of Certified Biblical Counselors in Africa, ACBC Africa. They had two conferences, one in Pretoria, one in Cape Town, and our team was responsible for doing registration, caring for the children for both conferences, and it was quite an undertaking and I was very proud of the folks that went. They just did a wonderful job and were a real encouragement to the body of Christ in South Africa, and there were folks from all over Africa that came to those conferences and it was really exciting to see what God is doing. Very encouraging. We had about 130 people at the conference in Pretoria, plus children, up to about 35 or 40 kids our folks were taking care of, and they had them from 11 a.m. to 8:30 at night each day. Well, Thursday, Friday and Wednesday and Saturday were slightly a little different but only until 5 p.m. on Saturday. There was a dinner break that the parents took them back for an hour and a half, but it was a really demanding time for our folks and they did a great job. I had the easy part, I was just a part of the conference so it was much easier what I was doing than what they were doing, but they did it with such, just joy in the Lord and no complaining.

It was really just tremendous and I think the Mack's were very encouraged. I know they wanted me to express their love and appreciation to all of you at Providence. They miss you. Dr. Mack said some really neat things about the church when he was introducing me in one of the services and just how much he loves the people and the body of Christ here, how much he and Carol love you. So you should be encouraged by the way that we've loved on them, it's made an impact on them and it's really exciting to see what God's doing in Africa. It's just amazing. They've been there 12 years now and there's really a sense of just the church seems so healthy. Linwood seemed like home, it seemed like Providence. It really did. I mean, the people, we got to stay with, we were hosted by different families in the church so all of us were staying with different folks in the church and just wonderful.

So rejoice in that. Pray for them even more fervently that God will just keep the work going, but also to see how biblical counseling is really taking root in the Cape Town area

and other parts of Africa. It's just really very exciting so praise God for that. Thank you, again, for sending us and for praying for us as we were there. I appreciate so much Jess preaching for me when I was gone, three Sundays in a row, and then to be able to just trust that the Lord is taking care of the body through our elders and through those that were still here.

Also I want to remind you of something that we're in a season of prayer for the future of the church as far as it relates to the facilities and continue to be praying about that. We sent a couple of prayer guides out and I apologize in the last few weeks I have not gotten those out, but we'll be sending one again tomorrow and then one next Monday as well. I'd ask you to continue to pray for God's wisdom and grace in helping us decide what we should do as a church going forward. Some things are continuing to happen. The county finally did actually give us the paperwork to give us the property exchange we were trying to get that took a year and nine months that we thought would be six months when we started. So I guess that's pretty good, only took 21 months, you know, 3 ½ times what they estimated. But, no, we praise the Lord. He made it happen.

Anyway, just be in prayer for that and this morning I want to invite you to turn with me again to James 5 in your Bibles. James 5. We're picking up where we left off last time I was here on October 7, which was in a series on James 5:1-6, the third message under the title "Symptoms of the Love of Money." So today's title is "Symptoms of the Love of Money, Part 3," and we're looking at the fourth symptom of the love of money here in this passage and what we really see in this passage is that James is addressing very real suffering that his readers were dealing with. He's basically telling them that God is concerned about them. We'll see as we read the text again, and I'll remind you if you were there in the previous messages, you may remember we were talking about the fact that James in James 5:1-6 for the first time seems to turn aside from his audience and begin addressing those outside the church. The whole letter is written to believers as the Scriptures are written to believers to encourage them, and these verses are written to them to encourage them but the direct recipients of the message of James 5:1-6 are those outside the body. He addresses the ungodly rich in the first century who were guilty of loving money and doing harm and injustice to the people of God and so James, if you think about the flow of the letter, each section of the letter, he's addressing needs that the body has; he's addressing directly things that they need to be encouraged about in their walk with Christ. So, you know, chapter 1 he talks about suffering and how to handle suffering; to understand that we need to engraft the word and meditate upon the word. Chapter 2 he talks about faith and works. In chapter 3, the tongue and wisdom from above. Chapter 4 dealing with heart issues that we need to deal with. In chapter 5 after he's been addressing all these different issues, he turns aside and speaks directly to those outside the church. It's really interesting to see that and it's just like what happens in the prophets as you read the prophets in the Old Testament: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, the minor prophets. Their primary message is to the people of God but you will see them from time to time turn aside and speak directly to the ungodly nations and they'll pronounce an oracle of judgment on Babylon, for instance, or upon the Philistines, for instance, or the Edomites.

So you have this happening in the word of God and it's quite instructive that the Lord includes that because, in one sense, if he wanted to say it directly to them, he could have just made a flier and sent it out and not put it in the text of Isaiah or Jeremiah or Ezekiel or here of James. What's going on with that? Well, the Lord lets us see his heart and how he feels about the oppression and the wickedness of the ungodly so that we can be comforted; that God sees, God knows, God understands, God cares and God is acting and, therefore, we can endure patiently. Even though it appears that the oppressor is completely carefree and doing what he wants to do and destroying and trampling down the righteous, the reality is God is on the throne and God is taking note of everything that happens. God sees everything, God knows everything, and God cares about all of these circumstances.

That's what's happening here. God is essentially here turning aside to address directly and express a prophetic oracle of judgment upon the ungodly rich and there's essentially two purposes we've noted that these things are happening. The first is to comfort as I just mentioned. We can be comforted knowing God has got it under control. The second aspect, though, is not just to comfort but is to provide a caution for us that we would not want to be like those ungodly rich in any way. You see, the ungodly rich, they essentially embody the love of money and so this is a warning to us to flee from the love of money. So it's a comfort on one hand that God sees our suffering, sees the oppression of those who oppress us; on the other hand, it's a caution, "Do not be like them." So that's basically why the Lord gives this passage.

We've seen as we've looked at it and we'll see it as we read it again in a moment, that there are basically four charges that the Lord, he basically says, "I'm going to judge you ungodly rich who are oppressing my people. I'm going to judge you." That's essentially the thrust of the message, "Judgment is coming now. Go ahead and start weeping and wailing now. It's coming." Then he explains why it's coming. He gives four charges. There are four things that you're guilty of. The ungodly rich are guilty of hoarding, we'll see this in verses 2 and 3. We've seen it already but you'll see it as we read again. They are guilty of injustice, withholding wages. They're guilty of incredible self-indulgence, that's the third charge. So it's hoarding, injustice, indulgence, and today we come to the fourth charge which is oppression, oppression or cruelty and this is a charge against these ungodly people who are really doing this to the people of God in James's day but it's also then a comfort to us to know that God sees, but it's also a warning, a caution, "Don't be like this."

So let's read verses 1 to 6 of James 5.

1 Come now, you rich, weep and howl for your miseries which are coming upon you. 2 Your riches have rotted and your garments have become moth-eaten. 3 Your gold and your silver have rusted; and their rust will be a witness against you and will consume your flesh like fire. It is in the last days that you have stored up your treasure! 4 Behold, the pay of the laborers who mowed your fields, and which has been withheld by you, cries out against you; and the outcry of those who did the harvesting has

reached the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth. 5 You have lived luxuriously on the earth and led a life of wanton pleasure; you have fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter. 6 You have condemned and put to death the righteous man; he does not resist you.

Let's go to the Lord in prayer.

Our Father, we ask that you would help us now by the power of your Spirit to see and understand your word; that you would apply it to our hearts; that you would help us, O Lord, to take comfort in the ways that we should but also, Lord, to be cautioned and warned, reproved, challenged. And grant us greater repentance and greater trust in our great Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, in whose name we pray. Amen.

So this fourth symptom of the love of money is seen in the fourth charge that is offered in verse 6 when he says, "You have condemned and put to death the righteous man; he does not resist you." We're considering that verse under one charge, the charge is oppression or cruelty. Basically he's saying that, "You guys love money so much and you want money so much that you are not only guilty of hoarding," like he said in verse 3, "you stored up your treasure; you're not just guilty of hoarding, you're not only guilty of injustice," verse 4, "that is that you withheld the right wages of people who work for you, you've held it back and been unfair and unjust. Not only have you been a hoarder and unjust and not only have you been completely self-indulgent," verse 5, three verbs, "you lived luxuriously, you led a life of wanton pleasure, you fattened your hearts, not only have you done all these things but all of these things have culminated in this fourth and most heinous offense. You are condemning and putting to death," and it's actually the past tense, "You have condemned and you have put to death the righteous, the innocent. So great is your love for money that you are willing to trample upon the legitimate rights of innocent people." This is the oppression that James condemns here.

The two verbs there, "you have condemned and you have put to death," this pictures a legal action, condemned, it's the language of the courtroom, and it seems that he's saying, "You've gotten a legal judgment against these people to justify your murderous intention and then you've murdered them. You've actually killed them." I don't think he's talking about the death penalty, that wasn't standard for some kind of a financial obligation problem or something like that, but he's saying that, "You have, in effect, literally put them to death by your action. By condemning them, you have led to their death."

It's helpful to look at this in context. We're looking at James 5:6 but if we turn back over, turn the page back to James 2, we'll see that James has already addressed the issue of how the rich oppress the poor; how the ungodly rich have been oppressing the godly poor, the Christians who don't have any financial power. In verse 6 when he's talking about favoritism he says, "Look," he's basically saying, "Why have you been showing preference to the rich who have come into the worship center over the poor?" He says in verse 6, "you have dishonored the poor man. Is it not the rich who oppress you and personally drag you into court?" The rich oppress you and the rich personally drag you into court. He says, "Is it not...don't you..." It's happening so much that James can say,

"Why would you give the best seat to someone who comes in in nice clothing and nice jewelry and stuff, the rich person, why would you naturally give them the preferential seat and tell the poor person, 'Hey, sit down at the stool over here. You can sit on the floor.'" Which is what he basically describes in that passage, if you recall. "Why would you do this because it's the rich who on average are dragging you personally into court? It's the rich who are oppressing you. They're getting judgments against you and they're taking everything that you have." So you see this picture of what has been a reality throughout human history. I mean, human history is the story in many ways of rich people oppressing poor people throughout history. It's not always just the rich, it's powerful people oppressing powerless people because of the nature of sin.

Now remember, we said something very important I want to remind you: wealth is not sinful. To be wealthy is not to be sinning. Proverbs 10:22 says it's the Lord who makes wealthy and God blesses his servants in the Old Testament with wealth so much and that's one of the ways he shows his kindness and his love. Job is a great example but Abraham, Isaac, Jacob. He blesses with wealth. It's not wealth that is sinful and one of the things we pointed out before and it's something that's really important for us to remember is that one of the most often misquoted verses in Scripture is 1 Timothy 6:10. It's often quoted, misquoted this way, "Money is the root of all evil." That's a misquote. That's not what the text says. 1 Timothy 6:10 says, "The love of money is a root of all sorts of evil." Okay? It's not money itself, it's not wealth itself, it's the love of money that is condemned in Scripture. It is our attitude toward wealth that is where the danger lies, not wealth itself. Wealth is not evil. It's neutral. It's our hearts that either misuse it or use it appropriately.

I want to remind you of the J. C. Ryle quote I mentioned about a month ago, a great quote. He said, "You can love money," now listen to this, "You can love money and not have it and you can have money and not love it." That's important. That's the biblical view, people very wealthy in the Scriptures who don't love money. Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were very wealthy by any standard in their day and yet what we read in Hebrews 11 is they did not love their wealth. They were looking for the city whose builder and maker is God. They were longing for heaven and that's really what wealth should do, is help us to really long for the wealth that is in Christ.

So having said that again, we understand, though, that one of the things that we see throughout history is because of the sinful nature of the human heart is that it's natural for sinners to oppress one another; to use whatever power they have for oppression, greed, lust, and we see this again and again throughout history. We see exploitation. I mean, think about the history of humanity is the history of things like slavery. What is slavery but using people for your benefit and not giving them what is their appropriate due. So it, in itself, is an evidence of that kind of human mistreatment. Of course, it could be worse and better in certain circumstances, people can be horribly unkind and wicked in the way that they exercise their power and some are relatively kind and loving, but think about the feudal system in Europe where it wasn't slavery but you were essentially all but a slave if you were a serf in Medieval Europe. You had no political power. You were completely subject to your lord, your overseer of the land. Read a Dickens book or watch one of the

movies where it's been made. Child labor laws came out of the kind of incredible oppression that happened even in the 1800s in England was happening to children being mistreated and used for exploitative purposes.

So it's just something that's a reality and today we have the horror of human trafficking. What a wicked and ungodly thing that is happening in our day and what this text is saying is God sees, God hears the cries of those who are oppressed, and God is going to deal with them. He's already dealing with it. His judgment is so real and so imminent that it's talked about as being present tense kind of thing. When you look at James 5, he says, "Come now, you rich, and howl for your miseries which are coming upon you. Your miseries are already happening. The judgment is already falling and part of the evidence is your gold is rusting, your goods are rotting. God's judgment, his hand is falling upon you."

Now this means that when we are exploited, if we find ourselves in positions where we are exploited, we are to have comfort from this, that God really does care, he sees. Now in our culture, we're so wealthy in America that it's hard for us to relate to what was going on here and how it could really lead to death, but in the first century, the gap between rich and poor in Palestine and the area surrounding it was great and fewer and fewer people actually owned land. There were fewer and fewer wealthy landowners and everyone was basically a tenant farmer working for them and they were completely subject to the power of the wealthy landowners and James realizes he's seen in shepherding the people as often the case throughout history, those who come to the Lord on average tend to be those who are oppressed, not those who are in power. Now there are those, there are always rich people in heaven, too, of course, but that more or less it's the weak, the disenfranchised that God uses our suffering to help us know that we need to live for heaven.

He says, "In this circumstance, understand that the Lord, he sees the oppression." So I said it's hard for us to relate to that because in America even our poverty line is, relatively speaking, especially in the history of the world, living at a standard of living that is enviable by most people that have lived in all of history. So we may not see this as easily but you can be mistreated economically, you can be mistreated at work and if you are, you can know that God sees. But beyond that, I think this helps prepare us for what might happen in our lives. If we go through political persecution, if we experience persecution for our faith, if it becomes criminal to proclaim one way to heaven through Jesus Christ, and we find ourselves disenfranchised like many in the first century did, in fact, Jews like James is writing to, I mean, think about what it was like for them. When they believed in Jesus Christ, he's writing, I've suggested he's writing to a Jewish believing audience, these are folks who have received Jesus as the fulfillment of all the Jewish hopes of the Old Testament and yet they are in the minority among their physical brethren. They are being disowned by their families. They are being hated, despised by their former friends and so they are experiencing that kind of oppression and James is telling them God understands, God sees, God knows, God cares. And that's something some of you may have experienced yourselves. You came to Christ from a family that was not Christian

and you've experienced sort of oppression, rejection. Well, God sees. God cares. Even if you don't see his hand, he is intimately aware of your suffering.

I love the picture that we get in Exodus 3. You know, the nation of Israel, remember they're in slavery and they've been in slavery for quite a while. After Joseph's day, sometime after that, we're told that a Pharaoh didn't know Joseph and puts them in slavery and decade after decade, generation after generation of slavery. They're suffering at the hand of the Egyptian taskmasters and God, remember God meets Moses in the burning bush and he says to him, "I have seen the affliction of my people. I have taken heed of the cry by reason of their taskmasters." He says, "I see. I have seen. I have heard. I know their suffering and not only do I see, I hear, I know," he says, "I see, I hear, I know and I have come down." That is the God of the Bible. He sees. He hears. He knows. And he acts. And his action for you in whatever circumstance you find yourself, you may not see the judgment fall but you will have God standing with you, a God who sees, who hears, who understands, who cares. Jesus is ready to support you and to support me in our suffering.

So we can take comfort in that and he's going to deal with, no matter how wicked and awful the oppression is, no matter how unjust it is, he is not missing one element. If every idle word is going to be given an account for, every deed, every unjust and wicked deed will be accounted for. That's why we can say, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord. We can leave it to God. So that's the comfort that we're to have. It's comfort even as we're oppressed, we can be comforted.

Now that was the first point actually. Look how I do this. The first point was comfort for the afflicted. That was everything that was just said already. I'm a little rusty. The second point is caution for the comfortable. First, comfort for the afflicted, the second point, caution for the comfortable. If we're not presently being afflicted, then it's when you're being afflicted it's helpful, it keeps you from loving money, from loving the things of this world. That's one of the blessings of affliction and suffering. That's one of the things we should always be thankful about when we are suffering. I mean, when you find yourself in misery, you know, sometimes it's just you can be sick, so sick. Have you been this way? You've been so sick that even though you weren't in danger of death and you knew you weren't, you sort of wished you were going to die almost? Like, "I feel so miserable." Maybe you're nauseated so bad. "I don't want to live." Have you had that thought? In those moments, those are reminders this is not it. "Lord, you're reminding me this world is not my home." How good it is to have reminders and it lessens our hold on the things of this world. "God, let me set my affection on the things above, not on things below. Thank you for this reminder."

So that's what we need to do in moments of affliction but when we're not afflicted, when things are going well, there is the danger when we're comfortable, we need to be cautioned and this word gives us a caution. So the caution for the comfortable. This fourth charge of oppression and cruelty can help us to be aware of how we need to watch our own souls as it relates to the potential for the love of money because in our flesh all of these things can become realized and we need the grace of God and the word of God

and the Spirit of God to help us overcome these things. There are two subpoints under the caution for the comfortable, two words of warning that we can receive from this particular charge that the ungodly rich were being oppressive. Two words of warning here. Two words of caution. The first subpoint under caution for the comfortable is we need to be warned by the progressive nature of sin. To be warned by the progressive nature of sin. It's interesting as you look at the passage, to see how there does seem to be a progression working from the first charge to the fourth. Look at the flow here. The first charge he makes for these ungodly rich who were loving money and hurting his people is the first thing they're doing is they're hoarding. They're storing up. There is this lust for more and more things. They are finding their security in things and it starts there. But the second charge, that's clear in verses 2 and 3, the second charge is injustice. Verse 4, remember they withheld the pay of their workers, their laborers who needed their money on a daily basis to be paid to them so that they could eat and feed their families. They are withholding it and cheating them out is the implication. They're defrauding their laborers. So it's this love of things, this love of money that creeps in and the desire to hoard is growing into, "I want things so much I'm willing to cheat people out of legitimate pay and appropriate honor. I'm willing to skirt the issue."

So that's the second thing, this progression but it keeps on going in verse 5. He speaks of this kind of we called it indulgence, hoarding, injustice, indulgence is the third step. It's a completely self-focused indulgence. We talked about the fact that James is not advocating asceticism. He's not saying that we are to spurn every kind of pleasure and never enjoy anything and just eat, you know, basically eat stone soup and bread and water. That's not what James is saying. That's not what the Bible teaches. It's 1 Timothy 4 which points out that that kind of mentality is false teaching. Asceticism is ungodly and unbiblical. It's a way of earning your way to heaven. That's not, no, God is not about that. That's not the Gospel. These things as 1 Timothy 4 says, all are given for us to be enjoyed, we are to enjoy these things, every good gift as James says in chapter 1, verse 17, is from God. But it's not asceticism but there is a danger of a self-focused just overindulgence in pleasure.

This is what he describes in verse 5 and he uses those three verbs in verse 5 to describe this one charge against the wicked rich, "You have lived luxuriously on the earth," living luxuriously, secondly, "led a life of wanton pleasure," and thirdly, "fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter." Three verbs to say one thing. He's basically saying, remember he says it three times basically biblically. There is a sense in which, "Holy, holy, holy," it takes it to the superlative degree. When God says something three times, he's emphasizing it to the highest level. So he's saying about these ungodly rich that their self-indulgence was to the extreme. It wasn't that they were enjoying a pleasure like a good cup of coffee and thanking God for that. "Man, isn't coffee wonderful?"

You know, I have a new appreciation for that. Actually in Africa, by the way, I thought we'd have great coffee because Africa is where coffee was born, as I recall, Arab coffee or whatever, right? And we did have some good coffee but it's really we need to pray for our brothers and sisters in South Africa, it's amazing how many of them drink instant coffee. We need to really go into some serious prayer time for them. No, but through

God's grace I was able to make it through. Why aren't you amazed? Instant coffee in the morning. We did it. No, seriously. I lost my train of thought completely with that.

God has given us these things to enjoy and when you drink a good cup of coffee, when you have a good meal and you think the Lord is the one who created it, it was his idea, it was his idea to make the various spices that we taste in a wonderful dish of food. God, we didn't invent that. We had to discover it by his grace and his help but he's the one who came up with the idea of all that. So when you enjoy that and you give him praise and you give him thanks, you eat or you drink and you worship, that is bringing it to its full God-intended purpose. Every good thing is to be enjoyed from him and through him and to him, to praise him, to thank him.

So we're not saying asceticism by any stretch of the imagination but there is the danger of learning to love the pleasure and losing God in it, forgetting God. This is what he's describing in verse 5, these ungodly rich are living for luxury and pleasure and fattening their hearts, they're just letting their lust run wild. So they were hoarding and then they began being unjust and now their indulgence is growing at such a level that all they can think about is themselves, themselves, themselves, themselves, themselves, and when you're thinking about yourself like this and all you want is yourself and you're not thinking about, who? Other people, and that leads to a heart that then would oppress and even condemn and put to death others, actually physical death but even beyond that, just the spiritual attitude that we see Jesus says, "You're a murderer not just if you physically murder somebody," Jesus says, "the standard of God is that if you call someone a fool, if you regard them as worthless like that, you're guilty of murder."

So he's saying you can become so self-focused that you're willing to trample on people, that you have no regard for other people. This is the progressive nature of sin that he's describing. Do you see how there's a growing like a cancer that's spreading. If you allow those lusts of hoarding to go unchecked, then it grows into a willingness to cheat others and the willingness to cheat others begins to become more and more and more self-focused. I'm not looking at the other person at all. I've already started cheating and now I'm looking at myself so much that I'm willing to step on people and to even regard them as worthless and murder them in the sight of God for my own pleasure. That's a horrible progression.

This is why Paul tells us in 1 Timothy 6, in fact, turn over there for a moment. I mentioned the passage earlier. The love of money, let's look at that verse. You see this basically, this danger that James is addressing dealt with so clearly by Paul also in 1 Timothy 6, basically tells us we need to seek contentment with whatever God gives us but verse 9 he says and look at the progression here, "those who want to get rich," 1 Timothy 6:9, "But those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful desires which plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs." This is exactly what James is saying. If you allow the love of money in your life to go unchecked, it will grow like a cancer that will take more and more of your heart and your soul until finally you are a murderer.

It shows kind of a callousness of heart. You become so self-focused that you can't even feel what the other person might be feeling. You lose empathy. This is how you become this kind of oppressor, cruelty. You become indifferent to the pain and suffering you cause other people.

The reality is sin never stands still. You should write that down: sin never stands still. If you give sin an inch, it will over time take a mile and another mile and another mile and Satan wants to tempt us to think that you can allow, just take this little bit, but that's a lie. That's why back to our text in 1 Timothy 6, after he says, "For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs. But flee from these things, you man of God." Run from them. Run from the love of money. Run from it, he says, "and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, perseverance and gentleness." Flee from it. Run from it.

I think what he's telling us one of the ways we need to learn to do it, I mentioned earlier that when we enjoy pleasures we need to learn to worship God. Discipline ourselves to worship God as we enjoy it. Try to constantly be reminding ourselves, "When I'm enjoying something, worship God, whatever it is because whether you eat or drink, whatever you do, do all to the glory of God." Bring everything under the authority and the Lordship of Jesus Christ and what we're remembering is that we're not our own. 1 Corinthians 6:19, "do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body." So I belong to God. I'm completely his, therefore, everything that I'm doing is a stewardship and so I'm to do it for his glory so that I can eat this food and enjoy it and worship him. Yes, I'm giving him glory and praise.

This redeems everything. It makes it more wonderful. It's must more wonderful to enjoy, it's like if you imagine getting a gift as a little child at Christmas, you know? You get a gift and when you're a child, you don't really think about this as much but as you get older you understand that the gift came from a parent who loved you enough to give you what you wanted and what's more wonderful than the gift, no matter how good the gift is, is the love that gave the gift, right? Someone loves me and wanted to give this to me. So how foolish is it, then, to receive a gift as you understand that and separate it from the giver so that you just get the gift and you turn away and you just enjoy the gift. How much better to get the gift and enjoy the gift in the presence of the love that gave the gift. This is what our lives should be. Every time we enjoy something good from God, we enjoy it in his presence rejoicing in the goodness of a God who would do this. "How wonderful you are to give me, a sinner, wicked, but by your grace made right with you through Christ to give me any good thing and to give me this good thing." And it makes it, it completes the enjoyment of it. We then enjoy it with him.

That's the first thing but the second thing I think we need to do related to the progressive nature of sin, to fight against it, is we need to practice self-denial. We need to, by God's grace, practice biblical self-denial. I mean, self-denial is a part of what it means to be a Christian. I mean, when you come to faith, repentance is essentially denying yourself,

taking up your cross and following Jesus. That's part of what salvation is, is the awareness that you're losing yourself and you're turning to Christ and you're casting everything upon him. You're going to him personally and in doing that, you're forsaking, you're letting go of everything else. So in the Christian life, then, we should be willing to, "Lord, whatever you give me I'm going to enjoy in your presence but at the same time, whatever you want, I don't want to take anything that you don't want me to have and so I'm willing to learn how to deny myself these pleasures for your glory." And we can't do that in our own strength and we don't do it to earn his favor, we do it because of what he's done for us.

How do you do that? I mean, how do you keep from letting the pleasures of this world dominate you is you're asking the Lord even as you're going to enjoy it in his presence, you stop and you say, "Lord, do you want me to enjoy this right now or is this a time for me to share with somebody else? Is this last scoop of gelato in the container, my favorite gelato, is this for me alone or should I be sharing it?" It really is that basic and, you know, I'm not trying to say we walk through life constantly trying to hear. I'm not saying that but we ask the Lord, we prayerfully consider it, and we'll be convicted by the word of God, God will give us Scripture. You know, you may have that verse come to mind, "Look not out for your own interests but also the interests of others," and that means you can share the gelato. But you're willing to deny yourself for the glory of God and to realize even in those moments of self-denial that this is part of, it's God's grace. Now you can't do it by yourself. This is why self-denial that is truly biblical, the only way you can do it is run to Jesus. Constantly go to Jesus. "Lord, here I am and I love this thing too much and I see that and I need a Savior. You never loved anything too much. You never had inordinate affections. I'm coming to you, Lord Jesus. I surrender to you who I am. Give me your balanced perspective on this. I'm united to you and who I am in you. Help me now." And then through that seeking of Christ, that's how, it's the cross that helps us to be truly practicing biblical self-denial. "I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live, yet not I but Christ lives in me. Lord Jesus, you can live in me, the ability to lay this down right now. I'm not looking to my own strength, I'm going to obey by your power and your grace." So we need to practice self-denial.

The progressive nature of sin means that we should seek to overcome that by reigning it in, by worshiping God in everything that we enjoy and by practicing self-denial. That's that first subpoint A, the progressive nature of sin, caution for the comfortable. The second subpoint, the second word of caution is the destructive power of sin, related to the first point but it not only grows but it becomes more damaging at each level. What happens here is you see this self-focus, this self-gratification of the love of money is emblematic of causes there to be a dullness and insensitivity of the heart. Your heart becomes numb and you don't know what you're doing to other people. This is something, one of the real damaging things about pornography, for instance. When a person gives themselves to pornography, it dulls, it damages, it deadens the sensitivity so that very often you'll see this in someone who's done that for a period of time can't even see the devastation that they're doing to their spouse. Completely because you can't live in that kind of ungodliness and grow in self-gratification and be concerned about other people. You're turned in upon yourself.

That's the destructive power of sin, it not only progressively grows, it destroys, it destroys you. This is why 1 Peter 2 says, "Abstain from fleshly lusts which war against your soul." To give in to fleshly lusts wars against the soul. It kills the soul. This is why John Owen said, "Kill sin or sin will be killing you." Sin kills and this kind of self-focus and self-gratification and it doesn't just happen to be money-wise, it can be, this kind of thing happens I think often were people are concerned about their reputation, the love of honor, and they get so concerned about their reputation, their love of honor and they're always thinking about themselves and the circumstance, that only things that make them look good and how are people looking at them. They become, then, dull and insensitive to the needs of other people. They don't understand they're hurting others.

A powerful picture of this in ancient Greek mythology is the story of Narcissus. Narcissus was the son of a god, one of the Roman gods and a nymph who was a very beautiful man. Everyone acknowledged him to be incredibly handsome and the story is told that he walked by a pool of water and the pool was so calm that he could see his reflection with clarity he hadn't seen anywhere else and he fell in love with his reflection. He could not leave the pool. He sat there and stared at himself and out of agony that he could not ever have the love of his heart, he couldn't have himself, he died. Self-love to the point it kills.

That's what James is describing here, self-love to the point that it kills you and you kill others. So like I said, it can be not just money, it can be anything. It can be wanting something so much that you must have it and your focus is on it and so you destroy other people because you want it so much. Any idol can be that way. Good things can be that way. You want your child to become a believer so much that you labor over it, you think about it all the time and you actually make it an idol and then you damage everyone around you because of that idol.

Well, how do you overcome that? It's not just practicing self-denial, I think that we should practice biblically other-centeredness. Turn to Philippians 2. It's not just denying self through the power of the cross, and that is so important, that's a key part of it, but the way that we're going to overcome this kind of self-focus that turns us in upon ourselves and makes us then damage other people around us, the way that you overcome that is by learning to deny self but not only deny self but learning to serve others.

Philippians 2:3, "Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others." He says stop looking at yourself and how it's affecting you and start looking at how it's affecting others and put their needs above your own and discipline yourself to do that.

Now I said earlier how can you do biblical self-denial, right? How do you do it? You run to Jesus. How do you do biblical other-centeredness? The text shows you run to Jesus. He tells you what to do in verses 3 and 4 and then he tells you the power that it's going to come from. He says, "Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of

mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others." Here's the key, "Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross." Jesus did not look out for his own reputation, his own honor. If anyone ever deserved to look out for his own reputation, his own honor, it was Jesus Christ, the one who is worthy of all honor and all praise and yet he laid it aside and he made himself a slave. He says what we need to learn to do to not love money, to be controlled by the love of money or love of anything in this world is we need to take upon ourselves the form of a servant. We're here to serve others. I belong to Jesus. I'm going to practice self-denial. I'm going to practice other-centeredness. "Lord, how can I serve the people around me right now?"

I feel like I want to cling to my reputation, my honor, but what's happening to the person over there? It's amazing how that is such a huge, I mean, it's a small thing and yet it's the hugest thing in the world. How often we find ourselves offended, you know, with somebody else. I mean, we have the opportunity all the time in our relationships in our homes to do this. You know, your spouse says something and you're like, "That's just totally wrong. You should not be saying that. That's just not right." I mean, sometimes you're right on stuff and Patti's right on stuff a lot more. Wives tend to be more right than guys, I think, on stuff like relational stuff. I'm checked out and she'll say, "You know," something. But anyway but there have been times where I've thought to myself, "No, this is not right and I want to defend myself." And I'm thinking in my mind, my argument, "No," I'm actually calculating how I can win this argument, and then when the Lord's grace works to say, "Wait a minute, what's going on in her heart right now? Why would she may be overreacting this way that apparently isn't right? Something's going on. It's not like her to do that, it's more like me. It's not like her. What's going on?" And if I can turn that around by asking the Lord, "Help me serve her. Help me care about her." And I ask a question instead, "Hey, honey, what's going on? How are you feeling? How are things going right now?" And I really mean it, that little change, it happens by grace, that little change can make a chasm of a difference but that comes by dying to self and by putting that other person first and the only way you can do that is run to Jesus. You and I don't have the power but he does.

So that's what we're called to do, practice other-centeredness by looking at Christ. How can I serve this person? "Lord, I see all that's happening to me that's wrong in this situation, how can I turn it around and see how can I serve those around me? You'll take care of me in your time, let me serve those around you. Let me be like Jesus who didn't worry about his own reputation but served." When that happens, you're killing sin in you by God's grace through the cross. You are winning gigantic victories for the kingdom of God and that is something that the world can't understand. The world doesn't know how to be other-centered but through Jesus Christ we can be.

Let's go to the Lord in prayer.

Father, we thank you for the wonder of the Gospel, the wonder of what you have done for us in Christ. We just confess how greatly we need you every moment of every day. Lord, how selfish we are, how easy it is to think about ourselves and our perspective and our needs and our hurts and our concerns. How unnatural it is for us to put others first and yet now in Christ you have given us new hearts and you've given us new power, you've given us new freedom. We're no longer shackled by the flesh. We can lay aside that old man on a daily basis, moments in the day we can lay that aside, lay aside our own concerns and we can put on the interest of others because we can put on Christ. Thank you, Lord Jesus, for being such a great glorious Savior. Thank you for not only saving us from our sins, the penalty of our sins, but by giving us new life you save us from the power of sin on a daily basis when we look to you. Be glorified in your people we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.