"Woe to the Rich Oppressors!"
James 5:1-6
Hae-Rin Kwon



Background

James has some strong words of judgment against the rich oppressors of his time, those who hoarded their wealth and deprived the poor. The cries of the righteous ones rise up to the Lord of Hosts, who hears them and is ready to fight on their behalf. Where do we see the rich exploit the poor in our own time? And what comfort and hope can we have in the God of justice and righteousness? Join us this Sunday as we continue our exploration of "Living Our Faith" in the book of James!

Sermon Text *James 5:1-6*

Now listen, you rich people, weep and wail because of the misery that is coming on you. [2] Your wealth has rotted, and moths have eaten your clothes. [3] Your gold and silver are corroded. Their corrosion will testify against you and eat your flesh like fire. You have hoarded wealth in the last days. [4] Look! The wages you failed to

pay the workers who mowed your fields are crying out against you. The cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord Almighty. [5] You have lived on earth in luxury and self-indulgence. You have fattened yourselves in the day of slaughter. [6] You have condemned and murdered the innocent one, who was not opposing you.

Discussion Questions

1. Preparation

- What is one thing you hoped to talk about today/tonight?
- What question(s) did you come away with from the sermon?
- What is the best thing you heard on Sunday?

2. Sunday Questions:

1. **Sanitizing Scripture & Cultural Filters**

Pastor Hae-Rin opens with the history of the 1807 "Slave Bible," which intentionally excised passages about liberation and justice to preserve social order. In what subtle ways do modern Western Christians or churches risk "sanitizing" Scripture today—filtering out uncomfortable texts about wealth, systemic injustice, or sacrifice to maintain personal comfort?

2. **The Rhetorical Function of Judgment and Comfort**

The sermon notes that James directs his harsh rebuke at rich oppressors who likely were not even present in the church assembly, serving as a rhetorical act to bring healing, validation, and comfort to victims of oppression. How does knowing that the "Lord Almighty" (Lord Sabaoth) actively hears the cries of the exploited change how we view prayer and advocacy for the marginalized?

3. **Unlimited vs. Limited Wealth Mindsets**

Citing *Misreading Scripture with Western Eyes*, the sermon contrasts the Western view of wealth (as an unlimited resource earned by virtue and hard work) with the biblical/ancient view (where wealth is limited, meaning excess hoarding directly deprives others). How does this perspective challenge standard Western ideas about financial success, retirement, and luxury living?

4. **Complicity in Modern Exploitation**

In James 5:4, the unpaid wages of day-laborers "cry out" against landowners who exploited the legal and social systems of their day. In our globalized economy, where labor practices, supply chains, and legal protections are often hidden from consumers, what practical steps can Christians take to ensure their financial investments and purchasing habits do not participate in economic injustice?

5. **The Tension of Christian History & Following the Righteous Sufferer**

The sermon highlights that Christian history contains a double witness: believers standing with the poor (building hospitals, ending slavery) and believers standing with the rich (choosing profit, control, and empire). Considering Jesus' own identity as the ultimate innocent, righteous sufferer who identified with the poor, what specific choices must your community make today to resist the lure of "Mammon" and choose the way of justice?