

We've seen throughout our time in James how he brings home the practical aspects of living as a Christian. Belief, attitudes and actions coming together.

I don't know about you, but I've found a number of these different looks into the mirror challenging and needing more than just a second look.

It's a great comfort to know that we have God's word to guide and shape us but even more, we have his Holy Spirit to convict and mould us. Keep praying with me that God will continue to work in us by his word and Spirit that we would become more and more like Jesus.

We come today to a particularly challenging passage. Challenging in two ways.

The first is in James' tone and it raises the question who is he addressing? Some have said he's actually turned his attention to non-Christians, like an old testament prophet, declaring the coming judgement of God. And there is indeed an element of that in these verses. But it seems odd to me for James, who is addressing the whole letter to his brothers and sisters, to suddenly be talking to a different group all together when in verse 7, he comes back to addressing the beloved. So, I take it James is addressing a specific group of Christians – the rich.

The second challenge is what is James actually calling these rich people to do? And this is where I think the chapter divisions have been unhelpful because this focus of James on rich Christians flows on from the previous attention where he says, "come now you who say today or tomorrow we will do such and such." Now James says – come now 'you rich people'. And he calls them to weep and wail. That is, he calls them to repentance.

So, as we come to this passage today, we need to come with an attitude to hear what God would be saying to us and be willing to hear where he is rebuking or correcting us in attitude or behaviour.

And while I know everybody is in a different situation, I would say that the majority of us here at The Grace Network would be in the rich category. We have lovely homes, beautiful possessions, we rarely if at all ever lack for anything let alone go hungry or without. We are clothed and warm and secure. But do we have the ears to hear what God is saying to us?

Nat reminded us last week of Jesus saying that we cannot serve two masters, you can't love both God and money. And here, I think James flips the coin and says look at what money or wealth will bring you verses what God will bring you. Verse 1 (bible) *Come now, you rich people, weep and wail for the miseries that are coming to you.*

It's a call for a right perspective. To see into the future. If your trust is in you wealth, trust in the power that your wealth gives you or confidence that everything is going to be fine

because you can buy your way out of trouble, or the idea that I must be doing the right thing because I have been rewarded with wealth, James says, watch out.

James is not saying that wealth is the issue. But what we do with it or expect of it that is the issue. What James goes on to talk about gives us this understanding. James highlights three particular sinful traits. Hoarding, extravagance and Injustice.

Hoarding wealth. Look at verses 2 and 3

Your riches have rotted, and your clothes are moth-eaten. Your gold and silver have rusted, and their rust will be evidence against you, and it will eat your flesh like fire. You have laid up treasure for the last days.

The sin of hoarding is stockpiling it all for you. All for later, all when I need it. There is an attitude that I need more, I need security, I need control. Yet James paints a picture of massive waste. Instead of the wealth being productive it decays, rusts, devalues, and is lost. And if you think that wealth opens doors for you – it does not open the door of heaven and of grace! John Calvin the great reformer wrote: God has not appointed gold for rust, nor garments for moths; but on the contrary, he has designed them as aids and helps to human life. The challenge is if God has given you abundantly, how are you using it for abundant good? And abundant good for others, for the gospel, as service to God? James goes as far as to say that to amass wealth just for its own sake is ungodly. It testifies against us. We saw last week that we do not know the future, we need to trust God and his guidance and ways. This is in the planning, the living and the resources needed. Are you a hoarder of wealth?

The second sinful trait is injustice. Look at verse 4

Listen! The wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, cry out, and the cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord of hosts.

Wealth or riches gives power. And the wealthy seem to always get what they need or want and yet the poor are mistreated and neglected. To short-change someone by a couple of dollars might mean nothing to us – small change...but if that's your only income. It could be the difference between going to bed full or hungry.

We may not be like the example here where we underpay our employees – but there are a number of employers in our network. James' challenge might be a very real one for you.

But before you say, that's not me, I'm off the hook, I think we need to be aware of our position and actions as consumers. We all love a bargain, we all love a special, and our spending dollar has power but do we stop to think about the others who were the labourers, maybe working in a third world location, in a mass production factory, churning out top end label fashion for less than \$2 a day so that some multi-national can make a fortune and our supper grow to make us secure for the future?

How are my business practices and my spending practices displaying my faith in Jesus? Is this something I need to know more about? Somewhere I need to change habit?

The next sinful trait is extravagance. Look at verse 5.

You have lived on the earth in luxury and in pleasure; you have fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter.

James is not saying we can't enjoy the good things that God gives us, indeed when God created the world good, he declares that it is for our pleasure as well as need. We see that in Genesis where we are told "that out of the ground the Lord God made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food." A generous graciousness of God.

Here James is talking about an ungodly attitude that sees us as the centre for everything. That everything is there for my benefit. The goal is to pamper myself, having the most lavish lifestyle I can afford. Fattening myself. But that leads to destruction James says. The day of slaughter is coming.

Rather, the godly use of wealth is the benefit of others, I am blessed with health and ability and resources and the means so that I can serve others. Are you a generous server of others or a self 'pamperer'?

James brings his point home in a very shocking way – he accuses this sinful behaviour of wrong attitude to wealth as murder. Look at verse 6.

You have condemned and murdered the righteous one, who does not resist you.

The misuse of power, the hurt caused by greed, the hardness of a heart that is fortified by wealth, causing others harm. I'm very sure you, like me, do not want this. I am sure we hear James' warning and say, yes, you tell those people. But am I, are you, the one who needs to hear? Listen to this ancient bible wisdom from the book of Proverbs. I can hear echoes of it in what James is saying.

From Proverbs 30 verses 8 and 9

*Remove far from me falsehood and lying;
give me neither poverty nor riches;
feed me with the food that I need,
or I shall be full, and deny you,
and say, "Who is the Lord?"
or I shall be poor, and steal,
and profane the name of my God.*

Finding our contentment in God. Finding our desire in God. Finding our fulness in service. James calls to us all to be authentic Christians. Even with our wealth.

Father, give us grace to hear you word and your Spirit to live it out. Amen.