

Sunday 20 July 2014

Otumoetai Baptist

What is your life?

**James 4:13-17**

Once upon a time in the not so far away land of Auckland  
there lived a busy, important man.

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He often logged twelve to fourteen hour days at his job,  
and sometimes even weekends.

He joined numerous professional organisations  
and boards of directors  
to expand his contacts and get his name out there.

He listened to business books  
on keeping up with the sharks,  
as well as leadership lessons from Genghis Khan  
on a special CD player in his car  
that sped up the reader's voice  
so he could get through it in half the normal time.

Even when he was not working,  
his mind drifted toward his work  
so that it was not only his occupation  
but also his preoccupation.

He found the forty-hour week such a good idea

that he would often do it twice in a week.

He had a wife.

A beautiful, selfless human being,  
who tried to slow him down,  
get him to smell the roses once in a while,  
and remind him that he had a family.

He knew that his wife and him  
were not as close as they once had been.

That hadn't been his intention.

It's just that, well,  
she always seemed to want *time* from him,  
and that is what he did not have to give.

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He was vaguely aware that his kids were growing up  
and he was missing it.

And from time to time they would complain to him  
about the books that he wasn't reading to them,  
the games that he wasn't playing with them,  
the dinners that he wasn't eating with them.

Well, after a while they stopped complaining,  
because they stopped expecting  
that things would be any different.

*I'll be more available to them in six months or so,  
he would say to himself,  
once things settle down  
and I can really give my time to them.*

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For a reasonably bright guy,  
he was blinded to the fact  
that things never settled down.  
And anyway, when he felt guilty  
he would often tell himself  
that he was doing it all for them.  
So that they can have a good comfortable life  
with all the latest and greatest stuff.

Of course that was a lie.  
He would have lived this way  
even if he didn't have a family.  
He was after success  
and having money and a wealthy lifestyle  
was the indicator of success to him.

He knew that he wasn't taking the best care of his body.  
Too many late nights,  
eating too much takeout,  
scoffing down protein bars  
and energy drinks during the day.

His doctor told him  
he had some pretty serious warning signs –  
high blood pressure, high cholesterol, excess weight –  
and told him he needed to cut down  
on the fatty food and get into some exercise.

So he stopped going to the doctor.  
Told himself that *there will be plenty of time for that,  
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He wasn't completely selfish.  
I mean he gave some money to charity.  
Well, he told his wife to give some to them  
whenever they came and knocked on his door.  
And he did think that one day  
he might get out into the community  
and help those less fortunate than him.

But for now he'd concentrate on the business at hand,  
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There'd be plenty of time for helping others,  
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He was a prideful man,  
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and he believed that in the real world  
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One day he hit the jackpot.  
The big kahuna.  
The one he was waiting for!

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The chief operations officer of his company  
came to see him.  
“You won't believe this,  
but things are booming,  
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It's a miracle.

This is our chance to catch the mother lode.  
If we catch this wave we'll be set for life.  
But it will require major changes.  
To keep up with the demand  
we'll need to work longer hours  
and overhaul this operation from top to bottom.”

Then it hit him.  
He would put his company through a technological revolution  
and go completely wireless –  
24/7 accessibility for everyone.

He thought up a new company motto –  
“This is our life” –  
and had it printed on everything.

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He was set.  
The money started rolling in.  
The business was growing.  
He was successful.

And he was now available to everyone  
**except**  
those who needed him most,  
and whom he needed most –  
his wife, his children, himself, his friends, his God.

When he got in at ten o'clock one night  
his wife was there  
but she'd given up on waiting up for him  
with a specially cooked dinner  
and a bottle of wine to enjoy together.

He said to her, "We can relax now.  
Our future is secure – we're set for life.  
I know the market,  
I've covered every base,  
anticipated everything –  
We've finally got financial security.

And we can finally go on that family holiday  
you've been pestering me about."

But his wife had heard all this sort of talk before.  
In fact she'd grown numb to it.  
And she'd learned not to get her hopes up.  
So at 11:00 that night she went up to bed by herself –  
as usual.

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He was a careful man,  
a planning man,  
even a boastful man.  
But in all his carefulness, planning and boasting,  
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Whereas once it had been as supple as a blade of grass,  
it was now as dry as plaster and as stiff as old cement.  
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Every cigar, every dinner on the run,  
every power business meeting,  
every angry thought,  
every obsession with wealth,  
every self-preoccupied thought had done its work.

Quietly, efficiently, and irreversibly,  
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It's too bad he was dead,  
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People got up to eulogise him.  
Mostly, they talked about his accomplishments,  
because while everybody knew *about* him,  
no one really knew *him*.

"He was a leading entrepreneur."  
"He successfully built a financial empire."  
"He was an innovator in technology."

"We lost a pillar in the business community.  
He knew everybody. This man was a networker."

On his gravestone was the date he was born,  
a dash for his life, the year he died,  
and the following words:  
*Visionary. Innovator. Leader. Entrepreneur.*

And right at the top of these words was the icing on the cake,  
the crème de la crème,  
the man's favourite word,  
the one he'd given his heart, soul and life for: *Success*.

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The man was buried and everyone went home.

Then when it was dark and no-one was around,  
an angel of God was sent to the cemetery.  
Unseen and unheard the angel made his way  
to this man's memorial stone.

There the angel traced with his finger four letters  
that God chose to summarise this wealthy,  
busy, respectable, successful man's life: F O O L.

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I don't know about you, but that story  
and the verse in James that Katrina read before  
scares me a little bit.

As we've been looking at the book of James  
through this series called Faith in Action  
we've seen that James is not one to mince his words.  
And he doesn't beat around the bush here either.

He is direct but not condemning.

He is stark but not cold.

He is passionate but not overbearing.

He is warning us,

like a mother or father might warn their child  
about the dangers of crossing the road.

He wants his hearers to know about the consequences  
of not listening, not heeding the warning.

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You couldn't accuse James of being callous or not caring.

Sure, you could accuse him of being straight up  
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'How to win friends and influence people',  
but you can't fault his heart.

I blame the people he had been hanging around.

Particularly his younger brother, Jesus.

I think that Jesus had a profound influence on James  
and taught him amongst other things,  
about priorities, about what to live for,  
about what true life is all about.

And so James wrote a book, well a letter actually.

A letter to those who were struggling in their faith,  
who were facing persecution yes,  
but were also not living the godliest lives they could be leading.

James the teacher and pastor

has been encouraging them,  
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and then immediately before this passage

he has been warning them

about friendship with the world

over friendship with God,

alongside warning them about judging one another

rather than loving God and their neighbour.

Which is what Rory spoke about last week.

And now James has a further warning.

A stern warning.

One that they, and we, would do well to take note of.

Let me read it to you again,

in light of this context and the story before:

**(SLIDE 9)**

*Now listen, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money." Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow.*

***What is your life?***

*You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. Instead, you ought to say, "If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that." As it is, you boast in your arrogant schemes. All such boasting is evil. If anyone, then, knows the good they ought to do and doesn't do it, it is sin for them.*

There was a question in the middle of his warning,  
a pretty big question.

Maybe you caught it the first time,  
or maybe you heard it that time.

The question is 'What is your life?'

**(SLIDE 10)**

I have read through this passage countless times  
but it wasn't until someone else read it to me  
that I caught that question and started thinking about it.

What is your life?

To the man in our story,  
his life was all about being successful.

About having the best things. About being set for life.

Is that what life is about?

Is that the answer to that question for us?

Do we lie awake at night thinking  
of the potential money that we can earn  
and the lifestyle we can enjoy?  
Or do we lie awake at night thinking  
of the millions of innocent people  
stuck in Northern Iraq? Israel? Palestine? The Ukraine?

Are we concerned with  
getting the big house,  
the boat, the flash car and the latest iphone 6?  
Or are we concerned with reaching out to our neighbour,  
helping those less fortunate than us,  
praying for those who have little.

**(SLIDE 11)**

It is not my intention to make you feel guilty here,  
because wealth in itself is not a bad thing,  
but it's what you do with wealth that matters.  
And whether your money serves you  
rather than you serve your money.

We are blessed and fortunate enough  
to live in a little slice of paradise called New Zealand.

We don't have war raging around us,  
we don't have civil unrest,  
we have beautiful landscape,  
freedom of speech and democracy.

So I am not trying to trick you or con you or convict you.  
That's between you and God.

Plus I am not entirely sure that what you do with wealth  
is at the top of James' priorities here.

I think that he is asking his hearers to stop,  
take a look at their lives  
and realise a few key things.

**(SLIDE 12)**

Number one, you don't know what tomorrow will bring.  
Nobody does.

**(SLIDE 13)**

Number two, life is short.

In fact it seems too short sometimes.

You are a mist that appears for a while and then vanishes.

I've heard it said that this life is like the blink of an eye  
when compared with eternity  
that awaits believers in Christ.

Just the blink of an eye.

**(SLIDE 14)**

And number three, seek the Lord's will for your life,  
and once you know it, do it.

Remember the bicycle illustration  
that has been ringing out throughout this series on James.  
One pedal represents knowing the Word,  
the other represents doing the Word.

You need them both to ride a bike,  
just like you need them both to grow in your walk with Christ.

Know the Word, Do the Word.

What is your life?

I want us to do something now.

I want you to imagine your gravestone.

On it you will have the year you were born,  
so for me this will be 1983,  
then you will have a dash, and then there will be a gap  
for the year you will die,  
as only God knows that.

**(SLIDE 15)**

Focus in on that dash.

That dash represents your life.

All of your decisions, all of your actions,  
all of the way you treat people,  
the way you love God,  
the hard things you went through,  
the lessons you learnt,

the time, effort and energy you gave to others,  
the things you were passionate about,  
and everything else.

That dash is your life.

Just like when compared to eternity  
this life is like the blink of an eye.

So James had a big question for his hearers,  
what is your life,

I have a big question for each of you:

**What are you doing with your dash?**

**(SLIDE 16)**

More specifically,

what are you doing with your dash **today**?

Tough question I know,

but the Bible does not leave us without an answer.

We only need to look at the life of Jesus  
and see what we should do with our dash:

Spend time with our heavenly Father,

look after orphans and widows,

seek to meet the needs of others,

spend time listening to those around us,

teach people God's ways,

live for something higher than ourselves,  
give sacrificially,  
don't compromise on your beliefs,  
believe in a God who performs miracles,  
love your enemies,  
love God, love your neighbours,  
seek God's will for your life.

The list goes on.

Perhaps you are sitting here today and you're thinking of taking  
that first step of following Christ.

Maybe you've been thinking about this for a while but you're still  
not sure about it or what it might mean for your life.

Let me say to you that God understands where you are at and He  
will not force you to do anything.

Can I also encourage you to talk to someone about this and not  
just put it to the side?

It is the most important decision you will ever make.

Perhaps you're sitting here today and you're on that journey of  
following Christ but finding things incredibly tough at the  
moment and you're not sure what to think or believe.

Can I encourage you today and say that our God is a personal  
God who knows what you are going through, who has been  
through tough times, and is there walking alongside you.

Perhaps you're sitting here today and you can say I am seeking to honour God with my life and am seeking his will for me.

Can I also encourage you today and say to you well done good and faithful servant.

Keep at it. Think of the day when you will see Jesus face to face.

So what are you doing with your dash?

I'm going to play a music video now by Casting Crowns.

As you listen to the song take some time to think about where you are at in your life and what you are doing with your dash.

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A letter to those who were struggling in their faith,  
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We are blessed and fortunate enough  
to live in a little slice of paradise called New Zealand.

We don't have war raging around us,  
we don't have civil unrest,  
we have beautiful landscape,  
freedom of speech and democracy.

So I am not trying to trick you or con you or convict you.  
That's between you and God.

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I think that he is asking his hearers to stop,  
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**(SLIDE 12)**

Number one, you don't know what tomorrow will bring.  
Nobody does.

**(SLIDE 13)**

Number two, life is short.

In fact it seems too short sometimes.

You are a mist that appears for a while and then vanishes.

I've heard it said that this life is like the blink of an eye  
when compared with eternity  
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Just the blink of an eye.

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And number three, seek the Lord's will for your life,  
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Remember the bicycle illustration  
that has been ringing out throughout this series on James.  
One pedal represents knowing the Word,  
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You need them both to ride a bike,  
just like you need them both to grow in your walk with Christ.

Know the Word, Do the Word.

What is your life?

I want us to do something now.

I want you to imagine your gravestone.

On it you will have the year you were born,  
so for me this will be 1983,  
then you will have a dash, and then there will be a gap  
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as only God knows that.

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Focus in on that dash.

That dash represents your life.

All of your decisions, all of your actions,  
all of the way you treat people,  
the way you love God,  
the hard things you went through,  
the lessons you learnt,

the time, effort and energy you gave to others,  
the things you were passionate about,  
and everything else.

That dash is your life.

Just like when compared to eternity  
this life is like the blink of an eye.

So James had a big question for his hearers,  
what is your life,

I have a big question for each of you:

**What are you doing with your dash?**

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More specifically,

what are you doing with your dash **today**?

Tough question I know,

but the Bible does not leave us without an answer.

We only need to look at the life of Jesus  
and see what we should do with our dash:

Spend time with our heavenly Father,

look after orphans and widows,

seek to meet the needs of others,

spend time listening to those around us,

teach people God's ways,

live for something higher than ourselves,

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don't compromise on your beliefs,

believe in a God who performs miracles,

love your enemies,

love God, love your neighbours,

seek God's will for your life.

The list goes on.

Perhaps you are sitting here today and you're thinking of taking  
that first step of following Christ.

Maybe you've been thinking about this for a while but you're still  
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Let me say to you that God understands where you are at and He  
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It is the most important decision you will ever make.

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Perhaps you're sitting here today and you can say I am seeking to honour God with my life and am seeking his will for me.

Can I also encourage you today and say to you well done good and faithful servant.

Keep at it. Think of the day when you will see Jesus face to face.

So what are you doing with your dash?

I'm going to play a music video now by Casting Crowns.

As you listen to the song take some time to think about where you are at in your life and what you are doing with your dash.

Sunday 20 July 2014

Otumoetai Baptist

What is your life?

**James 4:13-17**

Once upon a time in the not so far away land of Auckland  
there lived a busy, important man.

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He often logged twelve to fourteen hour days at his job,  
and sometimes even weekends.

He joined numerous professional organisations  
and boards of directors  
to expand his contacts and get his name out there.

He listened to business books  
on keeping up with the sharks,  
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on a special CD player in his car  
that sped up the reader's voice  
so he could get through it in half the normal time.

Even when he was not working,  
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He found the forty-hour week such a good idea

that he would often do it twice in a week.

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A beautiful, selfless human being,  
who tried to slow him down,  
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and remind him that he had a family.

He knew that his wife and him  
were not as close as they once had been.

That hadn't been his intention.

It's just that, well,  
she always seemed to want *time* from him,  
and that is what he did not have to give.

He gave his time at the office.

He wasn't completely clueless about his family.

He was vaguely aware that his kids were growing up  
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And from time to time they would complain to him  
about the books that he wasn't reading to them,  
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Well, after a while they stopped complaining,  
because they stopped expecting  
that things would be any different.

*I'll be more available to them in six months or so,  
he would say to himself,  
once things settle down  
and I can really give my time to them.*

**(SLIDE 3)**

For a reasonably bright guy,  
he was blinded to the fact  
that things never settled down.  
And anyway, when he felt guilty  
he would often tell himself  
that he was doing it all for them.  
So that they can have a good comfortable life  
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Of course that was a lie.  
He would have lived this way  
even if he didn't have a family.  
He was after success  
and having money and a wealthy lifestyle  
was the indicator of success to him.

He knew that he wasn't taking the best care of his body.  
Too many late nights,  
eating too much takeout,  
scoffing down protein bars  
and energy drinks during the day.

His doctor told him  
he had some pretty serious warning signs –  
high blood pressure, high cholesterol, excess weight –  
and told him he needed to cut down  
on the fatty food and get into some exercise.

So he stopped going to the doctor.  
Told himself that *there will be plenty of time for that,  
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He wasn't completely selfish.  
I mean he gave some money to charity.  
Well, he told his wife to give some to them  
whenever they came and knocked on his door.  
And he did think that one day  
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But for now he'd concentrate on the business at hand,  
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He was a prideful man,  
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One day he hit the jackpot.  
The big kahuna.  
The one he was waiting for!

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The chief operations officer of his company  
came to see him.  
“You won't believe this,  
but things are booming,  
so much that our supply can't keep up with demand.  
It's a miracle.

This is our chance to catch the mother lode.  
If we catch this wave we'll be set for life.  
But it will require major changes.  
To keep up with the demand  
we'll need to work longer hours  
and overhaul this operation from top to bottom.”

Then it hit him.  
He would put his company through a technological revolution  
and go completely wireless –  
24/7 accessibility for everyone.

He thought up a new company motto –  
“This is our life” –  
and had it printed on everything.

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He was set.  
The money started rolling in.  
The business was growing.  
He was successful.

And he was now available to everyone  
**except**  
those who needed him most,  
and whom he needed most –  
his wife, his children, himself, his friends, his God.

When he got in at ten o'clock one night  
his wife was there  
but she'd given up on waiting up for him  
with a specially cooked dinner  
and a bottle of wine to enjoy together.

He said to her, "We can relax now.  
Our future is secure – we're set for life.  
I know the market,  
I've covered every base,  
anticipated everything –  
We've finally got financial security.

And we can finally go on that family holiday  
you've been pestering me about."

But his wife had heard all this sort of talk before.  
In fact she'd grown numb to it.  
And she'd learned not to get her hopes up.  
So at 11:00 that night she went up to bed by herself –  
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But in all his carefulness, planning and boasting,  
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Every cigar, every dinner on the run,  
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every self-preoccupied thought had done its work.

Quietly, efficiently, and irreversibly,  
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Even though he was in control of the business world  
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it turns out he wasn't even in control of his own pulse.

His wife woke at 3am and he was still not beside her.  
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She touched him on the shoulder  
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Panicking, she felt a sick feeling in her stomach  
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It's too bad he was dead,  
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Then came his memorial service  
and the plaudits came thick and fast.  
People got up to eulogise him.  
Mostly, they talked about his accomplishments,  
because while everybody knew *about* him,  
no one really knew *him*.

"He was a leading entrepreneur."  
"He successfully built a financial empire."  
"He was an innovator in technology."

"We lost a pillar in the business community.  
He knew everybody. This man was a networker."

On his gravestone was the date he was born,  
a dash for his life, the year he died,  
and the following words:  
*Visionary. Innovator. Leader. Entrepreneur.*

And right at the top of these words was the icing on the cake,  
the crème de la crème,  
the man's favourite word,  
the one he'd given his heart, soul and life for: *Success*.

**(SLIDE 7)**

The man was buried and everyone went home.

Then when it was dark and no-one was around,  
an angel of God was sent to the cemetery.  
Unseen and unheard the angel made his way  
to this man's memorial stone.

There the angel traced with his finger four letters  
that God chose to summarise this wealthy,  
busy, respectable, successful man's life: F O O L.

**(SLIDE 8)**

I don't know about you, but that story  
and the verse in James that Katrina read before  
scares me a little bit.

As we've been looking at the book of James  
through this series called Faith in Action  
we've seen that James is not one to mince his words.  
And he doesn't beat around the bush here either.

He is direct but not condemning.

He is stark but not cold.

He is passionate but not overbearing.

He is warning us,

like a mother or father might warn their child  
about the dangers of crossing the road.

He wants his hearers to know about the consequences  
of not listening, not heeding the warning.

He wants them to understand  
why he is saying these things to them.

He is pastoring them.

You couldn't accuse James of being callous or not caring.

Sure, you could accuse him of being straight up  
and I don't think he read the book

'How to win friends and influence people',  
but you can't fault his heart.

I blame the people he had been hanging around.

Particularly his younger brother, Jesus.

I think that Jesus had a profound influence on James  
and taught him amongst other things,  
about priorities, about what to live for,  
about what true life is all about.

And so James wrote a book, well a letter actually.

A letter to those who were struggling in their faith,  
who were facing persecution yes,  
but were also not living the godliest lives they could be leading.

James the teacher and pastor

has been encouraging them,  
prodding them along,

giving them practical advice

and then immediately before this passage

he has been warning them

about friendship with the world

over friendship with God,

alongside warning them about judging one another  
rather than loving God and their neighbour.

Which is what Rory spoke about last week.

And now James has a further warning.

A stern warning.

One that they, and we, would do well to take note of.

Let me read it to you again,

in light of this context and the story before:

**(SLIDE 9)**

*Now listen, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money." Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow.*

***What is your life?***

*You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. Instead, you ought to say, "If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that." As it is, you boast in your arrogant schemes. All such boasting is evil. If anyone, then, knows the good they ought to do and doesn't do it, it is sin for them.*

There was a question in the middle of his warning,  
a pretty big question.

Maybe you caught it the first time,  
or maybe you heard it that time.

The question is 'What is your life?'

**(SLIDE 10)**

I have read through this passage countless times  
but it wasn't until someone else read it to me  
that I caught that question and started thinking about it.

What is your life?

To the man in our story,  
his life was all about being successful.

About having the best things. About being set for life.

Is that what life is about?

Is that the answer to that question for us?

Do we lie awake at night thinking  
of the potential money that we can earn  
and the lifestyle we can enjoy?  
Or do we lie awake at night thinking  
of the millions of innocent people  
stuck in Northern Iraq? Israel? Palestine? The Ukraine?

Are we concerned with  
getting the big house,  
the boat, the flash car and the latest iphone 6?  
Or are we concerned with reaching out to our neighbour,  
helping those less fortunate than us,  
praying for those who have little.

**(SLIDE 11)**

It is not my intention to make you feel guilty here,  
because wealth in itself is not a bad thing,  
but it's what you do with wealth that matters.  
And whether your money serves you  
rather than you serve your money.

We are blessed and fortunate enough  
to live in a little slice of paradise called New Zealand.

We don't have war raging around us,  
we don't have civil unrest,  
we have beautiful landscape,  
freedom of speech and democracy.

So I am not trying to trick you or con you or convict you.  
That's between you and God.

Plus I am not entirely sure that what you do with wealth  
is at the top of James' priorities here.

I think that he is asking his hearers to stop,  
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Nobody does.

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I've heard it said that this life is like the blink of an eye  
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And number three, seek the Lord's will for your life,  
and once you know it, do it.

Remember the bicycle illustration  
that has been ringing out throughout this series on James.  
One pedal represents knowing the Word,  
the other represents doing the Word.

You need them both to ride a bike,  
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Know the Word, Do the Word.

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I want us to do something now.

I want you to imagine your gravestone.

On it you will have the year you were born,  
so for me this will be 1983,  
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Focus in on that dash.

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an angel of God was sent to the cemetery.  
Unseen and unheard the angel made his way  
to this man's memorial stone.

There the angel traced with his finger four letters  
that God chose to summarise this wealthy,  
busy, respectable, successful man's life: F O O L.

**(SLIDE 8)**

I don't know about you, but that story  
and the verse in James that Katrina read before  
scares me a little bit.

As we've been looking at the book of James  
through this series called Faith in Action  
we've seen that James is not one to mince his words.  
And he doesn't beat around the bush here either.

He is direct but not condemning.

He is stark but not cold.

He is passionate but not overbearing.

He is warning us,

like a mother or father might warn their child  
about the dangers of crossing the road.

He wants his hearers to know about the consequences  
of not listening, not heeding the warning.

He wants them to understand  
why he is saying these things to them.

He is pastoring them.

You couldn't accuse James of being callous or not caring.

Sure, you could accuse him of being straight up  
and I don't think he read the book

'How to win friends and influence people',  
but you can't fault his heart.

I blame the people he had been hanging around.

Particularly his younger brother, Jesus.

I think that Jesus had a profound influence on James  
and taught him amongst other things,  
about priorities, about what to live for,  
about what true life is all about.

And so James wrote a book, well a letter actually.

A letter to those who were struggling in their faith,  
who were facing persecution yes,  
but were also not living the godliest lives they could be leading.

James the teacher and pastor

has been encouraging them,  
prodding them along,

giving them practical advice

and then immediately before this passage

he has been warning them

about friendship with the world

over friendship with God,

alongside warning them about judging one another

rather than loving God and their neighbour.

Which is what Rory spoke about last week.

And now James has a further warning.

A stern warning.

One that they, and we, would do well to take note of.

Let me read it to you again,

in light of this context and the story before:

**(SLIDE 9)**

*Now listen, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money." Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow.*

***What is your life?***

*You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. Instead, you ought to say, "If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that." As it is, you boast in your arrogant schemes. All such boasting is evil. If anyone, then, knows the good they ought to do and doesn't do it, it is sin for them.*

There was a question in the middle of his warning,  
a pretty big question.

Maybe you caught it the first time,  
or maybe you heard it that time.

The question is 'What is your life?'

**(SLIDE 10)**

I have read through this passage countless times  
but it wasn't until someone else read it to me  
that I caught that question and started thinking about it.

What is your life?

To the man in our story,  
his life was all about being successful.

About having the best things. About being set for life.

Is that what life is about?

Is that the answer to that question for us?

Do we lie awake at night thinking  
of the potential money that we can earn  
and the lifestyle we can enjoy?  
Or do we lie awake at night thinking  
of the millions of innocent people  
stuck in Northern Iraq? Israel? Palestine? The Ukraine?

Are we concerned with  
getting the big house,  
the boat, the flash car and the latest iphone 6?  
Or are we concerned with reaching out to our neighbour,  
helping those less fortunate than us,  
praying for those who have little.

**(SLIDE 11)**

It is not my intention to make you feel guilty here,  
because wealth in itself is not a bad thing,  
but it's what you do with wealth that matters.  
And whether your money serves you  
rather than you serve your money.

We are blessed and fortunate enough  
to live in a little slice of paradise called New Zealand.

We don't have war raging around us,  
we don't have civil unrest,  
we have beautiful landscape,  
freedom of speech and democracy.

So I am not trying to trick you or con you or convict you.  
That's between you and God.

Plus I am not entirely sure that what you do with wealth  
is at the top of James' priorities here.

I think that he is asking his hearers to stop,  
take a look at their lives  
and realise a few key things.

**(SLIDE 12)**

Number one, you don't know what tomorrow will bring.  
Nobody does.

**(SLIDE 13)**

Number two, life is short.

In fact it seems too short sometimes.

You are a mist that appears for a while and then vanishes.

I've heard it said that this life is like the blink of an eye  
when compared with eternity  
that awaits believers in Christ.

Just the blink of an eye.

**(SLIDE 14)**

And number three, seek the Lord's will for your life,  
and once you know it, do it.

Remember the bicycle illustration  
that has been ringing out throughout this series on James.  
One pedal represents knowing the Word,  
the other represents doing the Word.

You need them both to ride a bike,  
just like you need them both to grow in your walk with Christ.

Know the Word, Do the Word.

What is your life?

I want us to do something now.

I want you to imagine your gravestone.

On it you will have the year you were born,  
so for me this will be 1983,  
then you will have a dash, and then there will be a gap  
for the year you will die,  
as only God knows that.

**(SLIDE 15)**

Focus in on that dash.

That dash represents your life.

All of your decisions, all of your actions,  
all of the way you treat people,  
the way you love God,  
the hard things you went through,  
the lessons you learnt,

the time, effort and energy you gave to others,  
the things you were passionate about,  
and everything else.

That dash is your life.

Just like when compared to eternity  
this life is like the blink of an eye.

So James had a big question for his hearers,  
what is your life,

I have a big question for each of you:

**What are you doing with your dash?**

**(SLIDE 16)**

More specifically,

what are you doing with your dash **today**?

Tough question I know,

but the Bible does not leave us without an answer.

We only need to look at the life of Jesus  
and see what we should do with our dash:

Spend time with our heavenly Father,

look after orphans and widows,

seek to meet the needs of others,

spend time listening to those around us,

teach people God's ways,

live for something higher than ourselves,

give sacrificially,

don't compromise on your beliefs,

believe in a God who performs miracles,

love your enemies,

love God, love your neighbours,

seek God's will for your life.

The list goes on.

Perhaps you are sitting here today and you're thinking of taking  
that first step of following Christ.

Maybe you've been thinking about this for a while but you're still  
not sure about it or what it might mean for your life.

Let me say to you that God understands where you are at and He  
will not force you to do anything.

Can I also encourage you to talk to someone about this and not  
just put it to the side?

It is the most important decision you will ever make.

Perhaps you're sitting here today and you're on that journey of  
following Christ but finding things incredibly tough at the  
moment and you're not sure what to think or believe.

Can I encourage you today and say that our God is a personal  
God who knows what you are going through, who has been  
through tough times, and is there walking alongside you.

Perhaps you're sitting here today and you can say I am seeking to honour God with my life and am seeking his will for me.

Can I also encourage you today and say to you well done good and faithful servant.

Keep at it. Think of the day when you will see Jesus face to face.

So what are you doing with your dash?

I'm going to play a music video now by Casting Crowns.

As you listen to the song take some time to think about  
where you are at in your life  
and what you are doing with your dash.