

Faith in Action

Money - A high risk activity

James 5:1-6

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But there was one high-risk activity I took 20 odd years ago that I am not sure was worth it, it took its toll in the stress it brought into my life. It was when our children were young. The thing we did was having a light coloured carpet laid in our lounge. Don't get me wrong it looked great. Everybody oohed and ahead and said the right things "Isn't it beautiful." And yes it was, and as far as I was concerned it was going to stay that way. Dirt was banned from the Cochran House.

The kids weren't allowed to eat, drink, move, or pick their nose unless they were standing on the lino. Red cordial was banned; they could have lemon, water or nothing. Visitors were held at gun point at the front door until they had removed shoes, been strip-searched and had their socks vacuumed - just-in-case. And when they had left, I would run around, wet cloth in hand, moping the tiniest blot or blemish.

As time went on it became obvious that the rules had been relaxed. We were losing the war against dirt and spots. To be honest we got sick of taking off our shoes, and so had our visitors. Kids would slip red cordial in to your shopping trolley when you weren't looking, and coffee and Milo stains would mysteriously appear.

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tray of very white paint which had been carefully place on newspaper in the middle of the carpeted floor.

What happened next he had great difficulty in describing. White paint was flung all over absolutely everything! It dripped from his clothes and the hairs on his legs, it clung to his brand new sofa... it ran in rivers down a feature wall he had just papered to perfection.... and yes it sat in large white pools upon his precious carpet that he had spent the best part of his life protecting.

Hey both stood paralysed. She never said a thing (bless her). He was fighting off a stress related coma. At which she said "should I get a damp cloth."

High-risk activities - give me swimming with sharks any day.

Today I want talk about a high-risk activity for Christians. Over recent weeks I have been preaching through James. James is a very practical book and raises issues that we all struggle with, many on a daily basis, like living out our faith, taming the tongue, prejudices, controlling our anger, keeping our priorities right.

Today I am going to continue in James and look at another of his warnings. As we have seen he doesn't beat around the bush, he is blunt and to the point. He may not come across as 'nice', but he does care, and the warning that we are going to look at today is similar to the warning he gives us about anger - in that anger is not wrong, but it is a high-risk activity, it can get out of control so easily. With high-risk activities the chances of failure, damage or injury are a lot higher, some would say inevitable. Sort of like there is nothing wrong with kids drinking red cordial on your nice new light coloured carpet, but realistically you're asking for trouble.

The high-risk activity James raises in chapter 5 is **being rich**. He is not saying it's wrong, but it is dangerous. Let's read to see what He has got to say to the rich. James 5:1-6.

James 5

Warning to the Rich

5 Look here, you rich people: Weep and groan with anguish because of all the terrible troubles ahead of you. ² Your wealth is rotting away, and your fine clothes are moth-eaten rags. ³ Your gold and silver are corroded. The very wealth you were counting on will eat away your flesh like fire. This corroded treasure you have hoarded will testify against you on the Day of Judgment. ⁴ For listen! Hear the cries of the field workers whom you have cheated of their pay. The cries of those who harvest your fields have reached the ears of the LORD of Heaven's Armies.

⁵ *You have spent your years on earth in luxury, satisfying your every desire. You have fattened yourselves for the day of slaughter.* ⁶ *You have condemned and killed innocent people, who do not resist you.*

As I warned James' words are blunt. This isn't very nice language. To give you an even sharper appreciation for how blunt James is, let me read you The Message's version of this passage.

"A final word to you arrogant rich. Take some lessons in lament. You'll need buckets for the tears when the crash comes upon you. Your money is corrupt, and your fine clothes stink. Your greedy luxuries are a cancer in your stomach destroying your life from within. You thought you were piling up wealth. What you piled up is just judgment. All the workers you have exploited and cheated cry out for judgment. The groans of the workers you used and abused are a roar in the ears of the master avenger. You've looted the earth and lived it up, but all you'll have to show for it is a fatter than usual corpse. In fact, what you've done is condemn and murder perfectly good persons who stand there and take it."

Ouch! So what do we do with these harsh verses from James?

One of the temptations when faced with these verses is to look away - to subtly deny that something this harsh could be in our precious Holy Scripture.

Or it might be tempting to say, "Well this is not something he's writing to me about. I'm not rich. I don't have a million dollar home like all those Aucklanders up there, my income isn't above whatever amount you want to set the definition of rich to. (Definition of rich is \$10,000 more than what I'm making.) Rich is out there somewhere."

Or the third option - to stand still, don't get all pious or defensive and in the midst of the discomfort, be prepared to learn what it has to teach.

The truth is that Scripture is not always "nice". The bible is filled with passages that confront instead of comfort, passages that disturb and unsettle, that rattle our cage. And to ignore passages like this one is to deny the reality of the book we deem to be the word of God, and if we do that we turn it into something less than what it is.

So we are called to the uncomfortable task of engaging with this text and learning as best we can what it has to teach us about our faith.

As I have said before, chances are that this letter was written by Jesus' little brother. We are less certain about the early Christian community it was written for. But based on what James writes about, we do know something of their struggles. This was a

community, struggling with division, with favoritism – especially for the rich, with gossip and slander, and with the over-spiritualization of their faith. And so James could be called a bossy book – there is no high theology or deliberations about who Christ is, like Romans and Hebrews - but instead James gives specific, practical, concrete instruction to a community about what they should and should not be doing as Christians.

Our faith as Christians is not just sitting in our nice churches debating spiritual things, but being Jesus out there in the community. It is incarnational – living out our faith in our practical and concrete action – and yes intimately connected to the material world. And part of that material world has to do with our material goods - such as money and our stuff. And James has some very challenging words to say about those who have money.

Look again at the Words of the passage:

- *Weep and groan with anguish because of all the terrible troubles ahead of you.*
- *Your wealth is rotting away, and ... will eat away your flesh like fire.*
- *Hear the cries of the field workers whom you have cheated of their pay.*
- *You have spent your years on earth in luxury, satisfying your every desire. You have fattened yourselves for the day of slaughter.*

James cares

Those are incredibly harsh words, we don't know the tone in which James would have spoken these words, it seems like he might have been angry, certainly there is strong emotion - and in that emotion lies the key to grappling with this passage.

One truth that I am sure you have all discovered, is that you only really get angry/emotional with people with whom you are in relationship with - whether it be business, friendship, family, or otherwise. If you don't care you tend not to get emotionally involved.

James cared, James was a pastor, he was caring for a bunch of people who he knew and wanted to make sure that were caring for each other. This was the essence of the early church. The first Christian communities are described in the Acts in which *"All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their property and possessions and divide them among all according to each one's need...so there was no needy person among them"*.

Right from the beginning, embedded in Christian community, is the idea that we are mutually dependent and responsible to and for each other and that we share and use our material goods in the service of building up community. And because of this,

what we choose to do with our “stuff” matters. It’s more than just an issue of economics, but of commitment and integrity in living out our faith.

James condemns the rich in these verses for two things.

1. One is for gaining their riches by oppressing and cheating their workers out of their wages - thus building their own wealth on the backs of those who have less and taking what little their workers have. Here in NZ we have laws that protect this from happening too much. But I think we do need to challenge business owners that business is not just about profit but also about the workers welfare. Nigel Latta’s recent series addressed some of these issues. Paying a living wage as opposed to a minimum wage also starts to address these issues.
2. The second thing he condemns them for is more subtle. James writes “*Your gold and silver are corroded*, (as you know Gold and silver doesn’t rust, he is using hyperbole here, exaggerating to illustrate a point) He says that this rust and the luxury and the pleasure that you have lived with through the years, which all sounds very nice, but actually it *testifies against you*, it is evidence of what you have not done, you have spent your wealth on yourselves, not others.

When Gay and I were in Israel earlier in the year we spent a few hours at the Holocaust museum in Jerusalem. It was a moving and emotional time. It is hard to imagine what it would have been like to live through that time. But in the midst of that persecution where a few people who used their position and resources to help those suffering.

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In the movie, there is this emotionally charged scene near the end where the war has ended and he is getting ready to leave the factories. He is surrounded by the men and women whose lives he has saved and they present him with a gold ring with the inscription “*He who saves one person, saves the world entire.*” But he can’t take it in. As he looks around, he breaks down and begins to repeat over and over “I could have done more”. And he begins to name the price of the ring, the car that is about to transport him away, and his other belongings and with each price he says “that would have been one more person. And another. I could have done more. Why did I buy that? That could have been one more person.”

Play clip. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=49aQb7VZ6F8>

What we choose to do with our material goods as individuals and as a society matters. And it goes far beyond economic fairness. It is part and parcel of recognizing our shared relationship with others, and James in this passage shows us that it touches on the integrity and faithfulness with which we live out our faith as Christians.

In our services each Sunday we make this sharing aspect of our life visible in a small way. We take up an offering. We here at OBC, we try not to make too big a deal of the offering, there is no “offering sermon” as in some churches, we just simply pass around the bags as a tangible way to share our resources as a Christian community. Some of us put money in the bag, others do it through A.P’s or online banking. This is a small representation of what we are called to do as Christians - what the uncomfortable words of James call us to recognize - that we are mutually dependent and responsible to and for each other and that what we do with our “stuff” matters.

So is James against wealth? Does he think all money is evil? Of course not! But let’s face, it is a high risk activity and James is aware of that.

And being a high-risk activity, he wants to warn his readers—who are living out in the world and coming in contact with the wealth it has to offer—not to envy wealth and those who possess it, as James knows it will corrupt most who strive after it.

Being rich is a high-risk activity.

Bill Gates said about wealth, “*It’s easy to get spoiled by things that alienate you from what’s important.*” I am not sure what Bill was referring to as important, but for Christians, whether living in the first century or the twenty-first century, that something important is our relationship with God and our relationships with our neighbours. Money rarely brings you closer to God or your family, but it can easily do the opposite.

Should we just try to be poor our whole life then? Maybe more of us should try to live simpler, but I don’t think that is James’ main point. What we all need to do is make our goals in life what they ought to be. They ought to be about how to get closer to God, how to serve Him better, how to work for Him, how to be a better parent or husband or wife or neighbour or friend. Those should be our goals and the focus of our mind and our effort and then how much money we have or don’t have is irrelevant.

Pray

Money will come, money will go. But our relationship with you Lord is eternal. The work we do for you, and how we use the gifts you have given us builds eternal rewards, rewards that will never spoil or fade. Lord set our mind and heart and time and energy on seeking after you. Amen

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5 Look here, you rich people: Weep and groan with anguish because of all the terrible troubles ahead of you. ² Your wealth is rotting away, and your fine clothes are moth-eaten rags. ³ Your gold and silver are corroded. The very wealth you were counting on will eat away your flesh like fire. This corroded treasure you have hoarded will testify against you on the Day of Judgment. ⁴ For listen! Hear the cries of the field workers whom you have cheated of their pay. The cries of those who harvest your fields have reached the ears of the LORD of Heaven's Armies.

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As I warned James' words are blunt. This isn't very nice language. To give you an even sharper appreciation for how blunt James is, let me read you The Message's version of this passage.

"A final word to you arrogant rich. Take some lessons in lament. You'll need buckets for the tears when the crash comes upon you. Your money is corrupt, and your fine clothes stink. Your greedy luxuries are a cancer in your stomach destroying your life from within. You thought you were piling up wealth. What you piled up is just judgment. All the workers you have exploited and cheated cry out for judgment. The groans of the workers you used and abused are a roar in the ears of the master avenger. You've looted the earth and lived it up, but all you'll have to show for it is a fatter than usual corpse. In fact, what you've done is condemn and murder perfectly good persons who stand there and take it."

Ouch! So what do we do with these harsh verses from James?

One of the temptations when faced with these verses is to look away - to subtly deny that something this harsh could be in our precious Holy Scripture.

Or it might be tempting to say, "Well this is not something he's writing to me about. I'm not rich. I don't have a million dollar home like all those Aucklanders up there, my income isn't above whatever amount you want to set the definition of rich to. (Definition of rich is \$10,000 more than what I'm making.) Rich is out there somewhere."

Or the third option - to stand still, don't get all pious or defensive and in the midst of the discomfort, be prepared to learn what it has to teach.

The truth is that Scripture is not always "nice". The bible is filled with passages that confront instead of comfort, passages that disturb and unsettle, that rattle our cage. And to ignore passages like this one is to deny the reality of the book we deem to be the word of God, and if we do that we turn it into something less than what it is.

So we are called to the uncomfortable task of engaging with this text and learning as best we can what it has to teach us about our faith.

As I have said before, chances are that this letter was written by Jesus' little brother. We are less certain about the early Christian community it was written for. But based on what James writes about, we do know something of their struggles. This was a

community, struggling with division, with favoritism – especially for the rich, with gossip and slander, and with the over-spiritualization of their faith. And so James could be called a bossy book – there is no high theology or deliberations about who Christ is, like Romans and Hebrews - but instead James gives specific, practical, concrete instruction to a community about what they should and should not be doing as Christians.

Our faith as Christians is not just sitting in our nice churches debating spiritual things, but being Jesus out there in the community. It is incarnational – living out our faith in our practical and concrete action – and yes intimately connected to the material world. And part of that material world has to do with our material goods - such as money and our stuff. And James has some very challenging words to say about those who have money.

Look again at the Words of the passage:

- *Weep and groan with anguish because of all the terrible troubles ahead of you.*
- *Your wealth is rotting away, and ... will eat away your flesh like fire.*
- *Hear the cries of the field workers whom you have cheated of their pay.*
- *You have spent your years on earth in luxury, satisfying your every desire. You have fattened yourselves for the day of slaughter.*

James cares

Those are incredibly harsh words, we don't know the tone in which James would have spoken these words, it seems like he might have been angry, certainly there is strong emotion - and in that emotion lies the key to grappling with this passage.

One truth that I am sure you have all discovered, is that you only really get angry/emotional with people with whom you are in relationship with - whether it be business, friendship, family, or otherwise. If you don't care you tend not to get emotionally involved.

James cared, James was a pastor, he was caring for a bunch of people who he knew and wanted to make sure that were caring for each other. This was the essence of the early church. The first Christian communities are described in the Acts in which *"All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their property and possessions and divide them among all according to each one's need...so there was no needy person among them"*.

Right from the beginning, embedded in Christian community, is the idea that we are mutually dependent and responsible to and for each other and that we share and use our material goods in the service of building up community. And because of this,

what we choose to do with our “stuff” matters. It’s more than just an issue of economics, but of commitment and integrity in living out our faith.

James condemns the rich in these verses for two things.

1. One is for gaining their riches by oppressing and cheating their workers out of their wages - thus building their own wealth on the backs of those who have less and taking what little their workers have. Here in NZ we have laws that protect this from happening too much. But I think we do need to challenge business owners that business is not just about profit but also about the workers welfare. Nigel Latta’s recent series addressed some of these issues. Paying a living wage as opposed to a minimum wage also starts to address these issues.
2. The second thing he condemns them for is more subtle. James writes “*Your gold and silver are corroded*, (as you know Gold and silver doesn’t rust, he is using hyperbole here, exaggerating to illustrate a point) He says that this rust and the luxury and the pleasure that you have lived with through the years, which all sounds very nice, but actually it *testifies against you*, it is evidence of what you have not done, you have spent your wealth on yourselves, not others.

When Gay and I were in Israel earlier in the year we spent a few hours at the Holocaust museum in Jerusalem. It was a moving and emotional time. It is hard to imagine what it would have been like to live through that time. But in the midst of that persecution where a few people who used their position and resources to help those suffering.

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In the movie, there is this emotionally charged scene near the end where the war has ended and he is getting ready to leave the factories. He is surrounded by the men and women whose lives he has saved and they present him with a gold ring with the inscription “*He who saves one person, saves the world entire.*” But he can’t take it in. As he looks around, he breaks down and begins to repeat over and over “I could have done more”. And he begins to name the price of the ring, the car that is about to transport him away, and his other belongings and with each price he says “that would have been one more person. And another. I could have done more. Why did I buy that? That could have been one more person.”

Play clip. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=49aQb7VZ6F8>

What we choose to do with our material goods as individuals and as a society matters. And it goes far beyond economic fairness. It is part and parcel of recognizing our shared relationship with others, and James in this passage shows us that it touches on the integrity and faithfulness with which we live out our faith as Christians.

In our services each Sunday we make this sharing aspect of our life visible in a small way. We take up an offering. We here at OBC, we try not to make too big a deal of the offering, there is no “offering sermon” as in some churches, we just simply pass around the bags as a tangible way to share our resources as a Christian community. Some of us put money in the bag, others do it through A.P’s or online banking. This is a small representation of what we are called to do as Christians - what the uncomfortable words of James call us to recognize - that we are mutually dependent and responsible to and for each other and that what we do with our “stuff” matters.

So is James against wealth? Does he think all money is evil? Of course not! But let’s face, it is a high risk activity and James is aware of that.

And being a high-risk activity, he wants to warn his readers—who are living out in the world and coming in contact with the wealth it has to offer—not to envy wealth and those who possess it, as James knows it will corrupt most who strive after it.

Being rich is a high-risk activity.

Bill Gates said about wealth, “*It’s easy to get spoiled by things that alienate you from what’s important.*” I am not sure what Bill was referring to as important, but for Christians, whether living in the first century or the twenty-first century, that something important is our relationship with God and our relationships with our neighbours. Money rarely brings you closer to God or your family, but it can easily do the opposite.

Should we just try to be poor our whole life then? Maybe more of us should try to live simpler, but I don’t think that is James’ main point. What we all need to do is make our goals in life what they ought to be. They ought to be about how to get closer to God, how to serve Him better, how to work for Him, how to be a better parent or husband or wife or neighbour or friend. Those should be our goals and the focus of our mind and our effort and then how much money we have or don’t have is irrelevant.

Pray

Money will come, money will go. But our relationship with you Lord is eternal. The work we do for you, and how we use the gifts you have given us builds eternal rewards, rewards that will never spoil or fade. Lord set our mind and heart and time and energy on seeking after you. Amen

Communion Philippians 2:5ff

Faith in Action

Money - A high risk activity

James 5:1-6

I like high-risk activities. Although my participation in such things has slowed down as I get older, I still enjoy the feeling of an adrenalin rush through my veins. I don't get much opportunity now but recently Gay and I did do paragliding in the foot hills of the Himalayas when we were in Nepal.

But there was one high-risk activity I took 20 odd years ago that I am not sure was worth it, it took its toll in the stress it brought into my life. It was when our children were young. The thing we did was having a light coloured carpet laid in our lounge. Don't get me wrong it looked great. Everybody oohed and ahead and said the right things "Isn't it beautiful." And yes it was, and as far as I was concerned it was going to stay that way. Dirt was banned from the Cochran House.

The kids weren't allowed to eat, drink, move, or pick their nose unless they were standing on the lino. Red cordial was banned; they could have lemon, water or nothing. Visitors were held at gun point at the front door until they had removed shoes, been strip-searched and had their socks vacuumed - just-in-case. And when they had left, I would run around, wet cloth in hand, moping the tiniest blot or blemish.

As time went on it became obvious that the rules had been relaxed. We were losing the war against dirt and spots. To be honest we got sick of taking off our shoes, and so had our visitors. Kids would slip red cordial in to your shopping trolley when you weren't looking, and coffee and Milo stains would mysteriously appear.

I am sure jumping out of an aeroplane would far less stressful.

Yes I must confess I was a bit paranoid about the carpet. However I am not alone, a while back I heard of another guy who obviously had similar stresses as me. He too had beautiful carpet, which he had protected over the years, and a one stage while he was busy carefully repainting the lounge, his wife was putting a tint through her hair. Somehow, she dropped several blobs of dark dye on to his well-kept carpet.

Now this bloke was normally an understanding and tolerant man, but that day he lost it. He tried to keep it all under control but finally yelled at her "Next time you want to stick that muck through your silly hair, DO IT OUTSIDE ON THE LAWN!"

Having suitably chastised her and extracted a heart-felt apology, he strutted back into the lounge to continue his painting.... accidentally stepping on the side of a very full

tray of very white paint which had been carefully place on newspaper in the middle of the carpeted floor.

What happened next he had great difficulty in describing. White paint was flung all over absolutely everything! It dripped from his clothes and the hairs on his legs, it clung to his brand new sofa... it ran in rivers down a feature wall he had just papered to perfection.... and yes it sat in large white pools upon his precious carpet that he had spent the best part of his life protecting.

Hey both stood paralysed. She never said a thing (bless her). He was fighting off a stress related coma. At which she said "should I get a damp cloth."

High-risk activities - give me swimming with sharks any day.

Today I want talk about a high-risk activity for Christians. Over recent weeks I have been preaching through James. James is a very practical book and raises issues that we all struggle with, many on a daily basis, like living out our faith, taming the tongue, prejudices, controlling our anger, keeping our priorities right.

Today I am going to continue in James and look at another of his warnings. As we have seen he doesn't beat around the bush, he is blunt and to the point. He may not come across as 'nice', but he does care, and the warning that we are going to look at today is similar to the warning he gives us about anger - in that anger is not wrong, but it is a high-risk activity, it can get out of control so easily. With high-risk activities the chances of failure, damage or injury are a lot higher, some would say inevitable. Sort of like there is nothing wrong with kids drinking red cordial on your nice new light coloured carpet, but realistically you're asking for trouble.

The high-risk activity James raises in chapter 5 is **being rich**. He is not saying it's wrong, but it is dangerous. Let's read to see what He has got to say to the rich. James 5:1-6.

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