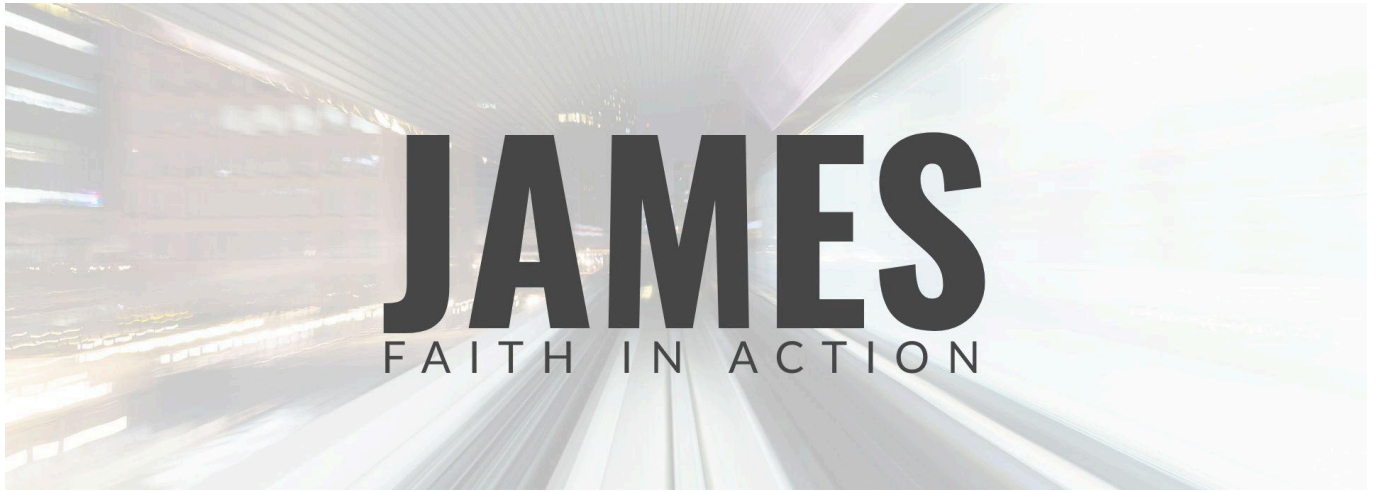




JAMES - Faith in Action

Real Faith is Generous (8/9)

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

CONNECT: What's one practical step you can take to humble yourself before God?

Warm-Up

1. When you were younger, what did you imagine yourself doing “when you grew up”? How close is that to reality now?
2. What's the most random or silly thing you've ever saved up money to buy? Did it feel worth it?

Read James 4:13-17

3. What kind of attitude do the merchants in v.13 show?
4. Why is it dangerous to plan life without reference to God?
5. James says life is like a mist (v.14). What does that teach us about our priorities?
6. How can we include “If the Lord wills” in our thinking without it becoming just a cliché?
7. Why do you think James includes the phrase “*we will live*” in v.15? What does that say about our dependence on God?
8. According to v.16–17, what's wrong with boasting about our plans? How might that connect to sin in our own lives?
9. What are some ways that we could discern God's will when making plans?

Read James 5:1-6

10. Why does James use such strong words for the rich?
11. Look at V2–3. What pictures does James use to show that riches don't last? How have you seen these play out today? What examples of “rotting riches” do you see in our world today?
12. V4 describes withheld wages “crying out” to God. What does this reveal about God's concern for justice?
13. What comfort would this passage have brought to Christians who were being oppressed?
14. Where might we need to hear this as people living in one of the wealthiest nations?
15. How do we guard against hoarding, self-indulgence, wasteful spending, or taking advantage of the poor in a consumerist culture? What practical things could we do when considering our wealth or purchasing something?
16. What role does generosity play in showing real faith in Jesus?
17. Read 2 Corinthians 8:9. How does this verse transform our view of money and possessions?

APPLY: How does remembering Jesus free us to live generously with our plans and wealth?

PRAY: *Heavenly Father, thank you for reminding us that our lives are a mist, but in Christ we are rich forever. Help us submit our plans to you, trust your will, and live generously with all you've given. Amen.*

TITLE: Real Faith - is Generous

LOCATION: St John's Wishart 9AM

BI: We are called to submit all that we are and all that we have to our gracious God

STRUCTURE:

- Foolish Arrogance - 4:13-17
- Risky Riches - 5:1-6

- A few years ago - I was driving my sister in law's car in Townsville.
- It just started raining, and I was taking it relatively easily
- Until, I was driving around a round about, exiting, accelerating - but then the back of the car lost traction and suddenly I was going sideways!
- Fortunately, I managed to save it - made a note of it and drove a whole lot more cautiously back home!
- And when I got home - my brother told me that he forgot to tell me that the tires were essentially bald and the car didn't have any traction control.
- Thanks brother..
- And I think sometimes the western Christian life can be like this - just cruising around, thinking that we've got this life thing under control...we can lul ourselves into thinking sometimes that we even are self-sufficient and we don't need God, we make plans, we put away savings, and it's usually not until something goes drastically wrong that we actually pay closer attention to our lives and God's sovereignty in them!
- This apparent self-sufficiency and arrogance and forgetting God's sovereignty can lead us to thinking that we need to follow our consumeristic culture with our lives and our finances instead of being Christlike with our resources.
- And that's why James puts these next passages in his letter to the churches.
- To help us remember that we actually can't rely on ourselves and our own resources - we actually need God and God's say so on all that we do.
- And when we do remember God's grace and God's sovereignty and God's generosity - that will allow us to live lives of surrender to him with all that we are and all that we have.

- **Foolish Arrogance**
- Look with me at V13 "Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and make a profit" — ¹⁴ yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life?"
- James interjects his flow of argument to tell a certain group of people to listen up
- And it seems that James is potentially writing to people who might have been travelling merchants.
- That is people who travelled from place to place selling and buying things to make a profit.
- And our English translation flattens out the quote a bit - in the original language, these people were saying "We will go into such and such a town, and **we will** spend a year there, and **we will** trade and **we will** make a profit!"
- Notice the repetition?
- They have such confidence in themselves - don't they?
- We will! Without any reference to anyone, or any thought that someone else might have any other plans - we will!
- But before we point the finger at them, we need to have a good look at ourselves.
- How often do we make plans for our life without making reference to God?
 - We will go on holiday here or there;
 - We will buy a house one day;
 - We will buy that car;
 - We will go get that promotion;
 - We will go into this business;
- We do it all the time!
- And we also do it when we ask other people about their plans.

- One of the most common questions that you get asked as you're approaching the end of school is "What do you want to be when you grow up?" OR "What uni course are you going to apply for?"
- And we ask it of other young people - as if they are the masters of their own destiny!
- I mean - that's what the world tells us, "You can be whatever you want to be!" "Just work hard, apply yourself, and you can do whatever you want to do!"
- Maybe there's a better question to ask!

- There was also a time a few years ago, when all of a sudden my young adult friends were asking the other young adults in our circle "What's your five year plan?"
- Responses were probably something like - get married, start a career, buy a house, finish study, do further study, travel the world...without reference to anyone else!
- Or in a different life and stage - we might ask other people "What are your plans for retirement?"
- We do this all the time!
- James could be writing in the 21st century here!
- If he was writing now - I think he would write something like:
- Come now you who say "today or tomorrow I will go into this uni course...today or tomorrow I will buy that caravan...today or tomorrow I will have kids...today or tomorrow I will get into that career..."
- Yet...V14 "Yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes."
- *There used to be the TV show - 'This is your life' and the guest would be brought on stage, and then Ray Martin would go throughout their whole history, their achievements, bring out their 6th grade English teacher who knew they would do amazing things!*
- *Will - Imagine someone coming onto the set, and Ray saying - this is your life and pointing to steam that's coming off a boiled kettle...*
- That's what James is telling us that we are!
- All our achievements, plans, hard work, life savings - are literally just smoke! Water vapour that's there one moment, gone the next!
- And this isn't brand new information...we can see this in verses such as Ps 90:12
 - "So teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of Wisdom"
- And I'm sure that James has his brother and Lord's words of the parable of the rich fool in his mind here - where the rich man stores up treasure for himself, thinks that he is self-sufficient - only to die the next day. And all his riches will be gone.
- We are a vapor. He is eternal.
- This reality ought to humble us.
- And it ought to remind us that:
 - We aren't autonomous;
 - We aren't eternal;
 - We aren't self-sufficient;
 - We aren't all knowing - or all powerful
 - Only God is!
 - We are utterly dependent on him for everything and we can't do anything without him saying so!
- We are here one day, and gone the next, and then probably forgotten about a few generations later!
 - *I went to Melbourne a few months ago for a conference - and the walk from my accommodation to the conference involved a walk through a grave yard.*
 - *I think it's actually not a bad idea to go for a walk through a graveyard every now and then, because as you look at the myriad of tombstones, you recognise a) just how small you are; b) really how insignificant our lives are; and c) how mortal we actually are!*
- We are mortal.
- So instead of just making plans for ourselves - James writes this:
- V15 "Instead you ought to say "If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that."

- If it's God's will, then we will do this or that AND ONLY THEN.
- Did you notice the fact that James writes "we will live"
- It's only if God says it that we will wake up tomorrow!
 - *There's the song 'the sun will come out tomorrow' sung by the happy orphan Annie...*
 - *Well - if we take God at his word here through James - MAYBE NOT! Maybe it won't come out tomorrow for us! Maybe God will demand our lives back for himself!*
- Well when we get this reality in our heads and in our hearts, then we will cast ourselves on God's will for everything instead of our arrogant boasting...//
- When James writes about what we should say - it's not like these are the magic words...but remember - our speech is so often the window into our hearts, and so as we plan, we ought to submit ourselves to God's plans for us!
- And this isn't just a fatalistic type resignation - it's not just saying "Oh well, whatever will be will be. Can't change it" - and not do any planning or anything like that..
- But again, we ought to pray that our plans will fall into alignment with HIS plans for us.
- That's what we pray in the Lord's Prayer - 'Your will be done'
- That's what we see Jesus Pray in the garden of gethsemane even through tears of anguish - "yet not my will, but yours be done!"
 - Even going to the cross for our behalf!
- V17 "So whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin"
- If we omit God's will or design from our planning - for us it is sin.
- If we ignore the sovereign King over all creation and instead just boast in our own plans - for us it is sin.
- He is the God who knows us and knows what's best for us - and has saved us from Sin, for us to live for him, not just for ourselves!
- And we are to live for him with not just our plans, but also our riches!
- **Risky Riches**
- This next section from 5:1-6 is some of the harshest words in the whole book - which are reserved for the rich!
- It's debated amongst commentators who James is actually talking to - is he talking to Christians who are wealthy...or the wealthy non-christians...or what?
- Given the context of the scattered early church - it makes most sense that this is still written to Christians who weren't necessarily wealthy and it's written for their comfort.
- The main point being - that the rich who take advantage of the poor and hoard their wealth, are going to be judged.
- James isn't saying that wealth is necessarily BAD in and of itself, but the rapid gaining of it at the cost of others, can be poison!
- Ch 5:1 "Come now, you rich, weep and howl for the miseries that are coming upon you. Your riches have rotted and your garments are moth-eaten. Your gold and silver have corroded, and their corrosion will be evidence against you and will eat your flesh like fire. You have laid up treasure in the last days"
- Rich - weep, wail and howl.
- Again - intense language here!
- And the basis of the mourning is that the riches have come to nothing!
- All of the riches that someone owns - will eventually fade away. Turn to dust.
 - The riches? Gone
 - The ball gowns - the fancy suits - eaten by moths;
 - The silver and gold? Corroded.
 - That new car? Corroded. Crumbling.
- And James is so sure of the future crumbling state of these riches and wealth - that he puts it in the present tense!

- And the rusted and hoarded many dusty riches will be a testament to the owner and they will be judged - the riches will eat their flesh like fire.
 - *Again - that's why I think it's good to walk through a graveyard every now and then!*
 - *Because you see tombstones that may have cost an extravagant amount of money - that once was a testament to their wealth and status in the world... but they have been corroded by the weather, broken by the wind, knocked over by people - and underneath them is just a rotted corpse - which has no need for all that money, gold, garments, wealth.*
- The hoarding of wealth is not on - because it will all perish and it deprives others of the means of life in society!
- Those who consume, consume, consume - will be called to give an account for how they used what God had given them. And will be judged!
- And it's the same for those who extort the poor.
- The cries of those who have been taken advantage of is heard by God.
- Again - this unjust treatment of the poor - of the people who don't resist, who don't have the means to resist is labelled as murder by James!
- V4-6 "Behold, the wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, are crying out against you, and the cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord of hosts. You have lived on the earth in luxury and in self-indulgence. You have fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter. You have condemned and murdered the righteous person. He does not resist you."
- What a comfort this must have been for those in the early church who may have been unfairly treated by land owners and by the rich?
- What a comfort this must be for Christians today who are living in poverty? Or those who have been treated unjustly by employers who just want to make a profit for themselves.
- The cries of the poor are heard by the Lord of Hosts - or the Lord of Angels! The Lord of All!
- He will have the final say on the oppressor.
- But the reality is, is that we in the west are so financially well off - generally, there are exceptions!
- But for us here living in SE Queensland in Brisbane are in the top 5% of wealthy people in the whole world!
- This passage from James 5 I think is less for our **comfort** but It **should prod** us a bit!
- We live fairly comfortable lives and we live in a culture which applauds wealth:
 - *Yesterday a house just up the road went up for auction, and I had a bit of a sticky beak.*
 - *But what I saw made me almost physically sick.*
 - *There were the real estate agents in their fancy suits...and people driving up in their fancy cars, BMWs, Jaguars, Mercs,*
 - *The agents were doing their job - getting people just to bid that little bit more incrementally...squeezing every last cent out of the bidders - getting them to borrow more and more beyond their means...*
 - *And the 5 bedroom place in Rochedale eventually went for \$2.12million and the champagne flowed.*
 - *Meanwhile, we have people without homes lining the Brisbane river...people struggling to make ends meet...retirees on the pension living on less and less in comparison to the cost of living...*
 - *And that house? It's going to be bulldozed one day or brought down to its foundations. Those cars are going to rust and be gutted for parts or cut up, those suits are going to probably go to landfill*
- We also live in a culture that is wasteful with money and possessions:

- *It's estimated that about 5.3 million tonnes of perfectly edible food is thrown out every year in Australia alone. This could feed roughly 25 million people for a whole year!*¹
- *It's estimated that Australians threw out \$1 billion worth of unwanted gifts in 2024*²
- *And In total - Australians are estimated to pay \$4.8 billion dollars on Credit Card interest and fees!*³
- This is the culture that we live in! A consumeristic, wasteful, and wealthy society
- And in this culture - we can be at risk of joining it as Christians instead of being salt and light in it!
 - I know that I am definitely at risk of it! I know that I have bought into the myth of needing all the stuff!
- So what can we do?
- Here are a few off the top of my head:
- Instead of just purchasing stuff quickly, we can have a look at how it was manufactured. How that brand treats its employees, how ethical the treatment of the whole line of workers is. Organisations like Baptist World Aid can be really helpful in looking at these things!
 - We could see if we could purchase things from social enterprises!
- If we are in leadership positions in the workplace with people under us, we ought to treat laborers fairly, and generously - as a bare minimum!
- ALSO
- Instead of spending the maximum amount of money on the top tier of stuff, we could settle for less and give the rest away to a charitable organization?
 - Instead of just consuming - we should also just ask the question - Do I really need this?
- Instead of save save save we could be radically generous and trust that God will provide what we need.
 - Giving to organizations that help those in need!
- And again - I'm preaching to myself here!
- And you might be thinking: Oh this is all just social justice stuff. Or this is all just an added extra
- But no - this is all here in James.
 - Our riches will rot;
 - Our treatment of the labourers is known by God.
- But it's also deeply embedded and rooted in the Gospel:
- Paul writes in 2 Cor 8:9 "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich."
- Do you know how rich you are in Christ? The blessing that it is to be in a relationship with him secure and for eternity? Even when we were completely undeserving?
- He was the one who humbled himself from the glories and riches of heaven, to become a person...Born in a stable, worked as a lowly carpenter, lived in other people's homes - he didn't own one!
- And he died the death of a slave on that cross.
- And through his poverty on our behalf, he has given us great forgiveness and redemption and reconciliation to God for eternity!
- No earthly riches can compare to what we have in Christ!
 - "And can it be that I should gainAn interest in the Savior's bloodDied He for me who caused His painFor me who Him to death pursuedAmazing love how can it beThat Thou my God shouldst die for me"
- What a wondrous story.

- It's so wondrous that even if our bank accounts were drained, houses gone, stuff gone - we would still be rich beyond compare.
- And that story compels us as recipients of his grace - to go and do likewise
 - Submit all that we are in our lives to his perfect and Good will -
 - And submit all that we own in our riches and stuff - giving it all to God for his glory.