

Have you ever observed fresh, raw grief?

*I'm never going to forget the first time I witnessed it. Our minister in Dalby died. He had teenage sons. And a wife. And the 2 of them were inseparable. They were one of those couples who – well, they were just made for each other. She was **his** world, and he was **her** world. The only one they loved more than the other, was Jesus.*

But without any warning or symptoms, one day Roy dropped dead of a heart attack... And this was the first time that I'd been reasonably close to someone who had suddenly and unexpectedly died. So I really didn't know what to do. But Robyn and I decided, the best thing to do, was to give the family a short visit that very afternoon, to share in their grief, and to offer any help and comfort we could.

And all we could do was say "We're sorry...". And I put my arms around the widow, to offer comfort.

And I have never seen somebody in such utter, broken grief. ... She sobbed. And she howled. And she howled. And she sobbed... And she clung to me, and her whole body convulsed, with every sob....

Utter, raw grief...

Have you ever seen it? Have you ever felt it??? If not, I want you to picture that grief I've just described....

And this is the sort of grief that James is warning about:
Come now, you rich, weep and howl for the miseries that are coming upon you.

What?????

Isn't **this** more the image we have of the rich??? (Scrooge McDuck, diving into his money bin – WooHoo. It's great to be rich).. Why should the rich be miserable? They've got everything. Everything they need. Everything they want. Not limited by having to work. Not limited by poverty...

No limits. The world is their oyster.

A couple of weeks ago, about half-past 4 on a Monday morning, I got up, and I went outside, and I was looking up at the stars, and I saw the flashing lights, of a very fast moving jet... Not so unusual,, except for the direction it was travelling. It was heading almost due East. And I thought to myself, "Where on earth have you come from, and where are you going???"

*And you know the saying, there's an app for that – well, there **is** an app for that. So I went back inside, and I got my iPad, and opened the app called "Flightradar24", which tracks most civil jets (and some military flights). And up it popped, and it told me what type of jet it was. It was a private Jet – a Dassault Falcon 7X – a 3-engined jet, with a range of 11000km and a cruising speed of 900km/hr.*

And my little app had plotted its course from the time it had taken off, from a little island called "Seychelles", north of Madagascar, about 1500km East of the African coastline.

And I just marvelled at this – that someone could afford, to have their own jet, and to fly 10500km... And they'd be landing in Brisbane, with plenty of time, after a weekend away, to get to work on time.

*And I was just blown away – what kind of wealth would a person have to possess, to be able to treat themselves to such luxuries??? – it boggled my mind... And I sort of suspect, that if **you** could afford to do this, you wouldn't be weeping and howling at the misery of it, would you???*

So, what on earth, is James talking about? - that the rich should weep and howl...

Well, we have to understand how the tables get turned. James is not talking about earthly misery – he's talking about misery, for the coming day of judgment. And on the day of judgment, the rich will be held accountable, for 4 particular sins:

1. The first, is that they have stored up treasures in the last days.

What are these treasures? Well, the examples, are different to the examples that we would use today. In the 1st century, James used these examples as treasures:- riches, garments, and gold and silver.

Riches – the Greek word “ploutos”, means “much” and it meant an abundance of earthly possessions of every kind. An abundance of grain; an abundance of land; an abundance of

cattle... And to have an abundance of these things, was to be “rich”.

Another class of treasures, were garments – clothing... Now we might find this odd, because in your cupboard, you might have 10 or more sets of clothes. If you're like me, you could probably pick up a pair of shorts from Lowes for \$9.95, and get a shirt from Target for \$9.95, and you've got another set of clothes for \$20... But we don't realise so much, that there was no mass-produced clothing back then. Everything was hand-made. Even the fabric itself, was hand-made. Imagine the cost, of hand-making fabric. And only a few people could afford more than 1 set of clothes. And so multiple garments, were an expression of wealth. And of course fancy clothes, of fine linen and dyed in various colours, were only for the very wealthy.

And then of course, there was gold and silver – precious metals, equate to cold, hard cash...

3 examples of stored up treasures – an abundance of possessions (including what we might consider business assets); multiple sets of clothing & fancy cloths; and cold, hard cash.

What would be our equivalent of storing up treasures today?

Riches – an abundance of earthly possessions... Come on – throw a few at me:

- An abundance of grain
- An abundance of land
- An abundance of cattle
- How about: televisions; computers; smart phones; and all sorts of electronic gadgets

- How about several houses; or a big house
- How about ski boats; and fishing boats; and motor cars
- How about a few good horses; and a bunch of good working dogs
- A collection of motorbikes – ah, forget motorbikes – you can spend as much on a pushbike

Riches, are an abundance of earthly possessions.

What about garments? What's the equivalent today?

- Designer clothes
- Italian suits
- Expensive watches
- Expensive sunnies
- Brand-name cosmetics and expensive hair-do's
- High-priced footwear...

What about silver and Gold?

- Cash under the mattress
- \$ in the bank
- a share portfolio
- Jewellery – diamonds & emeralds & pearls..
- How about a healthy superannuation fund
- A managed share fund
- Bonds
- Bullion

All these things are treasures. And we all have some of them, don't we. How do we know, if we have too much? Because most of us never feel that we have too much do we.

James says: **5** Come now, you rich, weep and howl for the miseries that are coming upon you. ² Your riches have rotted and your garments are moth-eaten.

³ Your gold and silver have corroded, and their corrosion will be evidence against you and will eat your flesh like fire.

He's describing, having so much stuff, that we don't even use it...

- Clothes in the cupboard that don't get worn-out, because the moths eat them first.
- Gold and silver that tarnish, because we don't even need it. The last time you had the silver teapot out, was to polish it, to clean the tarnish off. And you haven't used it since.
- Grain that has started to rot, because you've stored it for too long. You didn't need it.
- Houses that fall into disrepair, because you're not living in them.
- The tyres go flat on the car or the motorbike, or the pushbike, because it's just been sitting in the shed, doing nothing.

Or, we can start looking at it from an eternal perspective – none of these things last – they are not of eternal value.

And James is warning the rich. You've had more than you needed, and you have stored it up. And here we are – we're living in the last days. This is not a time for storing up wealth.

Jesus said ^{Matthew 6:19} **"Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal,²⁰ but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in**

and steal. ²¹ For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

The rich are those who have much more than they need. Are there any rich people here?

I'm rich. Robyn and I, we're rich. We are so rich:

- We have enough meat in our freezer, to feed us for about 2 months.
- We are so rich, we have a bedroom in our house, and most nights, nobody sleeps in it. We just keep it there, just in case, somebody comes to visit, we can say, here's your room.
- We are so rich, I have a freezer that I fill with kangaroo mince, and I don't even bother eating it – it's for the dog.
- We are so rich, every year, we can stop working for a few weeks, and go somewhere, and sit down and do nothing. (we call it a holiday)
- We are so rich, sometimes, we don't even bother cooking for ourselves. We go to a place where someone will come to our table, and ask "What would you like to eat?" And then, they go and cook it for us, and bring it to us. And we pay them and leave, and we don't even have to do the washing up.

We are rich. Is anyone else here rich?

It's a scary thought, isn't it? By world standards, we are all, rich.

And even though we are rich, let's not store up our treasures. We are living in the last days. Let's use our wealth, to store

up treasure in heaven. Instead of storing up stuff – whether we consider it personal stuff, or business assets – let's not store it up – let's use it, for the building of God's Kingdom.

2. The second thing James condemns the rich for, is fraud.

I reckon, the most common fraud committed by the rich, is to pretend that they're **not** rich.

A wealthy family moved to a new city. But they didn't want people to know they were rich. So, they told the kids that they were poor. "We really don't have much," they told them. "Others are much better off than we are". On the first day of school the teacher asked the children to write a paragraph about themselves. The young boy wrote, "I am poor, my father is poor, my mother is poor...our maid is poor, the man who flies our jet is poor..."¹

When we're rich, to pretend that we're **not** rich – that makes us a fraud.

The end of June, is when the rich **always** pretend they're poor. The rich may obey the **letter** of the law, but certainly not the spirit of the law, when they can live a lavish lifestyle, and yet pay little or no tax.

The example that James gives, is the rich didn't treat their workers fairly – especially seasonal workers. You see, back then, most people were living hand-to-mouth. And workers were paid their wages daily, because each day, they only earned enough to see them through that day. And when wages

were fraudulently withheld, they suffered – they had nothing to buy their tucker with, the next day.

Look at Clive Palmer, bignoting himself about how rich he is, and then he lays off staff, and it's not even certain that they're going to get all their entitlements.

And so, even if we are rich, let's be fair. In fact, let's be generous. You know, often it is those who are wealthy, who look for every little opportunity they can get, to make sure that "what's theirs", stays "theirs"... And if we're rich, let's not be like that. Let's pay what we owe, and let's be generous.

3. The third thing the rich were condemned for, was for living in luxury and self-indulgence.

What comes to mind for me, is a story Jesus told, about a rich man, and a beggar named "Lazarus".

Luke 16:19 "There was a rich man who was clothed in purple (a very expensive dye) and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day (alright, the picture of luxury and self-indulgence).²⁰ And at his gate was laid a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores,²¹ who desired to be fed with what fell from the rich man's table. Moreover, even the dogs came and licked his sores.²² The poor man died and was carried by the angels to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried,²³ and in Hades, being in torment, he

lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham far off and Lazarus at his side. ²⁴ And he called out, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the end of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am in anguish in this flame.' ²⁵ But Abraham said, 'Child, remember that you in your lifetime received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner bad things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in anguish. ²⁶ And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, in order that those who would pass from here to you may not be able, and none may cross from there to us.'

The rich man, lived in luxury and self-indulgence, while the beggar on his door-step, wished he could just get the scraps off his table.

We don't have beggars in our country, because our welfare system helps some of our most vulnerable members of society, to do OK. Even they, could be considered "rich" by world standards... Have you ever wondered, why so many people are trying desperately to get into our country? Because in every way, including financially, they know, they will be far better off here, than almost anywhere in the world... So we don't even have beggars.

If we want to open our eyes to the poor, we have to begin acting globally, and begin being generous with our wealth, globally. We have to begin caring about people, who we'll

never even meet – the beggars who have no food; no shelter; no clothes...

Even if we are rich, let's not waste it on ourselves, with our extravagant lifestyles. Let's use it, to be generous to those who have nothing.

James says to the rich, “**you have fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter...**”

Alright, The Day of The Lord, is coming. Let's not fatten ourselves up for it. Let's be generous to those who have nothing.

4. And the 4th thing the rich were condemned for, is condemnation and murder, of the righteous.

Let me give you 2 examples from the Bible – one is the best king that Israel had. And the other is the worst king that Israel ever had.

King David, was supposed to be at war, but he stayed at home. And when he looked out from his rooftop, he saw Bathsheba having a bath, and she was naked, and very beautiful. And even though she was another man's wife, he wanted her. And to cut a long story short, he eventually had her husband (a man of honour) killed, and David took her as his wife.

Then there was King Ahab. And Ahab wanted the vineyard that belonged to Naboth. It was close to Ahab's palace, and he wanted to turn it into a vege garden. But Naboth would not

sell it to him. Even though he was offered good money for it, he didn't want to sell it.

So, Ahab goes and has a bit of a sook, and his evil wife (Queen Jezebel) says "What's wrong with you?" and he tells her what's happened. And she says "Aren't you the one who governs???" Don't worry about it, honey. I'll get it for you."

And she hatches an evil plot to wrongly accuse Naboth, and he's stoned to death. And then she says to Ahab, "Go and take possession of your new vineyard."

The rich, often develop, a sense of entitlement, where because they can **afford** anything they want, they feel they should be able to **have** whatever they want. And if anybody stands in their way, they use the courts – they use the laws of the land to their favour – they may subvert the laws of the land. And for some, they may even murder... All from a sense of self-entitlement – "I can have it". "It's my right". "You're not going to use it anyway. I'm going to put it to great use." A sense of "entitlement", that lets them walk all over people.

But even the very act of **hoarding** wealth, is wrong, because it deprives the poor, of their very lives.

So, even though we might be rich, let's not walk over those who are not. And let's care about the lives of the poor....
OK...

Come now, you rich, weep and howl for the miseries that are coming upon **you**.

Let's get real about this. Wealth, can be a particularly strong obstacle to discipleship. It is very hard for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of God – let's not downplay this. It is very hard, for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of God. It's very hard, but it **is** possible.

As disciples of Jesus:

- Because we are rich, we have so much more we have to give up.
- Because we are rich, we have so many distractions – the world can seem so pleasurable, that our hearts are set in this world, and not the Kingdom of God.
- Because we are rich, we rarely take account of the added responsibilities we have as God's children – responsibilities of fairness, and care and compassion and selfless generosity...

Let's get real:

- If we're storing up treasure in the last days, woe....
- If we're frauds – if we hide our wealth, or take advantage of people – woe...
- If we live in luxury and self-indulgence – woe...
- If we walk all over the poor, or act with a sense of “entitlement” – woe...

Don't be happy about being rich. Be sad. But if we are rich, let's be rich, like our Heavenly Father is rich. Let's use our wealth, to be rich in good deeds and rich in honour, and rich in love, and rich in being a blessing to others.

It's hard for the rich, to be disciples of Jesus, but with God, it is possible.

Questions:

ⁱ Rev. Glenn Gunderson, First Baptist Church, Pomona, California in www.holwick.com