

THE FULL FAMILY CHURCH

DATE : 26 October 2008

**MESSAGE : JAMES SERIES (6) –HOW TO DEAL WITH YOUR WEALTH
(final)**

For the past few weeks we have been with James, the brother of our Lord Jesus who wrote this letter to the Christians in Europe.

Last week we read in chapter 3 how he reflected and meditated on the words of our Lord Jesus when we pointed out that we were all called to be serviceable in His Kingdom. As well as our great obligation and honour to bring the truth to those that have not come into the faith yet. And that all we who represent that truth will have to give account for that one day. It thus has to do with obedience.

Yet, James reminded us that we should consider the words that come out of our mouths carefully, as those same words praise the Lord but those words can also bring someone, like you and I, created in the image of the Lord, to a fall. James also uses the words of the Lord Jesus regarding the consequences should we step into that trap.

Today we get to the last chapter in this letter of James. We read from chapter 5:1-16.

This is a mouthful to close this series because James touches a lot of issues. Issues that the Lord also dealt with during His ministry here on earth.

How many of us are content with what we have? Most of us are healthy, we have clothes to dress us with, we have food to eat and a place to stay.

I'm not referring to a house in the most affluent neighbourhood. Neither am I referring to wardrobes stacked with designer's clothing. Also not going out for dinner every evening at the most expensive restaurant, or to have a private chef at our house. I am referring just to be content with what we have.

Have you noted how many worries rich people have? They stress about their investments and shares, about the value of their properties that see-saw, about what clothes they should wear for this or that important function - because I cannot be seen in the same outfit twice. They experience panic at the end of a financial year, because they have to swing money to sidestep the Receiver.

All these matters focus our attention on the material things of our daily lives. They become the most important things in our heads. The more we earn, the more we want. Later on we chase material things more and more. We work

harder and harder. No, let me put it this way: we work less clever, in stead of more clever. At the end we only focus on wealth, comfort, luxury and boasting our income.

This is precisely what the Lord Jesus warns us against when He speaks about the rich in the Gospels. That it will be easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter into heaven.

We need to understand what the Lord means with this association. The eye of the needle is not the needle that we are familiar with. This is not a needle with which you would sew. The needle He refers to here is the small door in a huge city gate of the old Biblical city's walls. In those times cities all had thick strong walls built around them to protect the people inside against invaders. At sunset the doors were closed. When you arrived at the city's gates after sunset the large gates would not be opened. Only the small door in the gate would be opened. To enter the door one had to bend down to be able to enter. It was impossible for a camel to enter through that door. That small door was referred to as "the eye of the needle".

Now Jesus says that it will be easier for a camel to enter through that little door than for a rich man to enter into heaven.

Why would Jesus say such a thing? Did He have a problem with people who worked hard and earned their income, or if they where wealthy? No. In fact, Jesus never had a shortage of finances Himself when He was here on earth. A group of affluent widowers joined Him and His disciples and financed His ministry to such an extend that He and His disciples could focus on what they had to do. In today's terms one can almost say that the women financed Jesus' ministry. They financed the meals, accommodation as well as sundry expenses.

But the warning Jesus and James pose in this letter is that chasing material things here on earth will take your focus away from God. One becomes in control and obsessed with your own life. To such a degree that we would not have need for Him to surprise us with His goodness. Our health, our daily food, our friends, the love of your life, all those so called little things; those are things we later won't see. We take them for granted. As if it has to be that way. And one day when we don't have them anymore, we want to buy them with our money.

This is the reason it is important to also make money a part of your relationship with the Lord. How do we do that? In bringing our love offering to Him with excitement and thankfulness. So, be excited when the offering basket comes around, because it is a part of your faith work to be able to honour Him with your earnings. To honour Him in the first place with your love offering.

Remember, Jesus says that we are not standing under the Law anymore. We therefore do not have to donate a tithe (one tenth) to the church. Jesus fulfilled

the law therefore we don't have to succumb to the old laws anymore. He paid the price for it.

But we now have a responsibility on us. The Lord clearly says: ok, I know that you cannot keep the law. I will fulfil it; also the offers and tithes. I now leave it up to you. Come on; show me how serious you are about the Royal Law which is supposed to be written in your heart.

This means that if you are blessed with a good business deal, or you experience joy in your life, then it is the right thing to do to thank the Lord for it, as He was the one who gave you your talents, health, the energy and discernment to earn that joy. Then we say thank you. We do that in prayer, through a life of thankfulness, by telling others about His goodness as well as by showing it tangibly through our love offerings we bring Him. Not only a few cents that we have spare. But an amount that our good Giver, Our Lord, our Daddy, the King, deserves.

This is why I do not sign a debit order in favour of the church at the bank to give a set amount per month. Because the Lord blesses me every week in another way. And I cannot attach a set amount to that. Also because a debit order goes off at the end of the month and I am unaware of it. No. I love to bring my love offering to the Lord myself and to say to the Lord, "Here is my offering, Lord. Thank you so much for what You do for me every day."

James further refers to, and it is important, how this selfish kind of wealth can deter us from our tracks. He says that we can later become so covetous, that we cannot see the sun shining on anybody else. We are even prepared to obtain it in an evil way. We will even consider murder.

If you carefully consider this, it has very little to do with material things. Have a look at what people do in love triangles. They will do everything in their power to destroy a relationship through lust, lies and even by killing the person who is in their way. And this only to get the love of that other person exclusively for themselves. Love that they were not supposed to have in the first place. This is not the way the Father intended it to be. You cannot buy love. Well, you can, but that is prostitution. Love is like water: it takes the shortest route down hill. If it does not run across your estate, then your ground was not on the right spot for that water. Then that water was not meant for you. Move on. Make another plan. Get your own water. Not that of your neighbour or your friend's or girlfriend's.

James also refers to something that is close to my heart and that is the way we treat our workers. You can be nice and friendly with your workers. You can create the most wonderful atmosphere at work, but if you do not remunerate them fairly and justly for the work that they do for you, you cannot be worth of their trust.

There is an old saying: "Pay peanuts and you'll get monkeys."

If you earn large incomes in your business, spending left and right – your house is in the best neighbourhood, your body shows that you live in the land of milk and honey – and then there is a huge problem. Especially if your workers are suffering because of a poor income. Your workers are the extension of the health of your business. If they are suffering, your business is suffering.

Those workers lay down their lives to put you in a favourable position. Pay them a decent wage; a wage they deserve. Because if you do not look after them decently, they will not be loyal to you.

There is another saying: "If you want loyalty, get a dog." People work to earn a salary. If not they would have worked for charity.

And yes, to be a Christian does not imply that you have to do everything for others for free. The reason we are earning an income is in the first place to look after ourselves in order that we will be able to work and to refresh ourselves.

The second reason is to earn money so that we can finance the Lord's Kingdom here on earth. It is our privilege to be able to that.

If you are not paying your workers fairly, you are not only robbing them from their self-esteem and what is rightfully theirs. But you are also making them bitter and rebellious. And! You are stealing from the Lord. Because those workers should also be able to bless the Lord with their earnings.

James says from verse 7-11 that we should persevere in this principle. That we have to be very cautious about falling in love with money and material things. There is nothing wrong with money. Money is a means to wonderful things. But when we develop a love for money, then our loyalty lies at the wrong place. And love for money, is the root of all evil. This is what James refers to. He says we have to remember these things and we have to stand steadfast in this principle. Also when we are suffering. No matter at what cost.

If we make mistakes we should not moan and groan when things go wrong. Then we deserve it. That is the lesson we should learn. And unless you and I learn that particular lesson, we will have to learn it over and over until we get the message and do what is right. But when we suffer when we do the right thing, in other words when we experience hardship for the sake of the truth and honesty, we have to realise that the time of hardship will not remain forever. A day comes when the suffering will end.

Then James speaks in verse 12 about taking an oath. Neither I nor James makes a doctrine out of it. But he says that if you tend to vow too easily to prove your word, people will later not believe you when you speak the truth. Therefore it is better to merely say, "yes", or "no". Your deeds, after you have spoken your

“yes” or “no” will prove whether you are someone who loves the truth. Whether you can keep to your word.

This verse actually deals with lying. When you lie, you are not part of the truth which means that you will not be able to claim the Lord’s protection. Then you take yourself out from under His protection. The Lord can only dwell in truth. When there is a lie, He cannot be there. He leaves this environment because He hates non-truth. This is just not the place God likes to hang out. And if you are not under His protection you have to take what comes your way. It’s your choice. Truth and honesty keep you under the protection of the Lord.

In the penultimate part of this wonderful letter, James deals with prayer. Surely the most important thing in our lives apart from our rebirth.

He says that when you suffer, you should pray. Bring your suffering to the Lord. Not to moan and groan in His ears, neither to blame Him for punishing you. The Lord does not punish people here on earth. We punish ourselves when we act foolishly and move out from under His protection for us. But when we then approach Him in humbleness to rest in His goodness and protection and to look for wisdom, the Lord can work a miracle.

He also refers to sick people and how we as the church and the Body of Christ should take care of them.

In fact, James gives us the winning method of how we should obtain the best results in this matter. He says, and I believe he got this example from Jesus and His disciples, that when someone among you is sick, call for the church leaders and visit that person.

Fair enough, but if we don’t know that you are not well, how can we visit you? That also applies for our brothers and sisters in need. And I am not merely referring to spiritual needs. I also refer to the need of food and the soul, when we have relationship challenges, when we are having a hard time studying or challenges at work. This is the family; the place where we are to take care of one another. This is not the place where we need to buy face or to impress one another. This is not the kind of fine weather love the Lord expects of us.

There are how many people that visited this church on a regular basis. Where have they gone today? Can it be that they do not have the conviction of their hearts to speak up and say that they are having a hard time?

Please help! I made a bad choice now I am in trouble.

Please help! I took a chance and it did not work out.

Please help! I’m not making it.

Where are we then? Or is it easier for us to only look after a little group of old people where we can be seen, or where we can soothe our consciences?

I am not criticising the wonderful work that is being done among the old people. Do not misunderstand me. But what I am asking is what are we to do about the people who use to come to this church and have since disappeared along the way?

Let me get back to James' proposed method of prayer to bring about healing in the Body of Christ.

He says we should visit the sick. Then we need to take oil and anoint that person as a group. After that we should pray for that person.

Now James states it clearly the 15th verse of this chapter, that many diseases we contract are the results of sin in our lives. Let me qualify immediately! All diseases do not come our way because of sin! Jesus Himself said that when He healed a blind man. Sickness come and goes because we live in a fallen and sinful world. God does not want us to be sick. He will never punish someone by imposing an illness on anyone. Never! He is our Father and He loves us. He does not walk around with a flu injection and say: "Ok, you were disobedient. Now stand still. Zap! Take this flu or cancer or whatever!" No! Never! God does not and will never do that!

Yet, there **are** certain diseases that cross our way because of sin. What sin is that? This is when we trespass or violate the laws of nature. When we eat irresponsibly, drink too much, or do not obey the law of chastity we will inevitably have to face the consequences.

Now it is important that we should have insight in these things. An alcoholic can only be helped once he/she realises that he/she has a problem. If the person is in denial, he/she will go down without realising that he/she has a problem.

When the leaders of the church go to pray for that person one should remember that it is not an inquisition. It is not a commission of enquiry to find the person guilty and to condemn the person. James himself says that when we as believers pray for that person, God **will** forgive that person his/her sins. This is an important thing to remember. Jesus is the One who gave His blood to redeem us from our sins. Now we, in the Name of Jesus, (His representatives here on earth) have the right to appeal on the Blood of Forgiveness. We intercede for that person. Can you see how powerful that is? What great responsibility we have?

That is why it is so important that we should repent our sins to one another. That means that we should tell some whom we can trust about those things nobody knows of. That we should trust someone not to run off to the world and tell everything. Then we should pray together with that person. The Lord Jesus says that when two people agree on something, it will happen. In this way we should carry one another's burdens.

Find someone to whom you can be accountable. Someone who earns your respect and trust and who is willing to carry your burdens with you. This is not an opportunity to moan, groan and gossip. But an opportunity to build up, to encourage, to be able to say, "You know, I care for you, in the same way Jesus cares for you, and I think what you are doing in your life right now, is not good for you. On account of the Word you might have to consider doing it this way or that way." Not to judge someone, but to help. In a loving way. To walk the walk with that person, even when it becomes uncomfortable.

James closes this wonderful letter for us by pointing out that we have a great obligation to care for one another. Not to spy on each other. To care!

In verses 19 & 20 he says that when we help someone to get back on the right road again ... in other words if we help someone to restore or get into a relationship with the Lord, we prevent that person going to eternal death.

Yes, Jesus said that if your Name has been written in the Book of Life, He will not allow you to go lost. But we can pretend to one another to be reborn with evidence of many tears. Pretence is not truth. It is a lie. And God does not want anything to do with that. That is not true rebirth. Yet, it is not for us to judge whether someone is truly reborn or not.

Even when someone committed suicide, neither you nor I have the right to judge that person. You were not there when that person went through his/her darkest hour. So keep quiet. If you want to say something, convey love and comfort to the next of kin, and tell them about God's amazing love. As well as the fact that we earthlings do not have the vaguest idea of how great God's love is.

I never ever want the people in this church to point to fingers to people who die, to other churches or what they do. Don't gossip about them or slander about them. This is exactly what Paul refers to when he quotes Jesus' words in Corinthians during the last supper (Holy Communion). If we speak against the Body of Christ (our brothers and sisters in Christ), we are guilty of division against the Body. This is the breeding place of lies, disunity and lovelessness. That is why Paul says, we eat and drink judgement over ourselves when we take communion after we have been slandering the Body. That is why so many among us die too soon and even get sick. Can you see? We have then left the perfect will of the Lord. Then we are open for all evil that comes our way.

No! Let's focus on unity and the love of Christ who keep us together. Not only in our church but also in the larger church of our Lord Jesus Christ here on earth.

We should never be so arrogant to assume that we will all live in the same place of honour in heaven. Jesus says, "In the house of my Father are many dwellings." This indicates that we will not live in the same hotel or hostel in heaven. When we read in Revelation in the New Testament about the way in

which the heavenly city is designed, it becomes clear that there will be certain houses or living places that will be closer to the throne of God than others.

You and I as Christians would surely want to occupy the best real estate in that city. But the way in which you and I regard our relationship with the Lord Jesus, our obedience in the way we live out the Royal Law will determine how close to God's throne we will live.

People who have never taken the decision to give their hearts to the Lord, in other words, those who have never accepted Jesus as their personal Saviour, will not enter heaven. Their address will be the eternal fire. But if you helped someone to accept the Lord, to change their address from hell to heaven, you will receive an award in heaven. Salvation happens in an instant. It happens that moment when that person, in faith, believes the Lord Jesus without any tangible proof.

Let's listen to what James says here. Let us set our steps here on earth on the way to our heavenly address. Our time here on earth is shorter than we might ever realise. Let us live in such a way that we take masses of people with us to that glorious place in the eternal presence of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Amen.

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