



SERMON OF THE WEEK

First Presbyterian Church of Honolulu at Ko'olau

March 5, 2017

"One Direction" (Real Faith for Real People Series)

The Rev. Dr. Dan Chun

James 5:1 *Come now, you rich people, weep and wail for the miseries that are coming to you.*

James 5:2 Your riches have rotted, and your clothes are moth-eaten.

James 5:3 Your gold and silver have rusted, and their rust will be evidence against you, and it will eat your flesh like fire. You have laid up treasure for the last days.

James 5:4 Listen! The wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, cry out, and the cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord of hosts.

James 5:5 You have lived on the earth in luxury and in pleasure; you have fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter.

James 5:6 You have condemned and murdered the righteous one, who does not resist you.

When you hear a Scripture passage like that you think two things: First, boy, that sounds like a downer passage. Second, how is it that Dan got stuck with another hard passage in our James sermon series? How is he going to make sense of this so that I won't feel guilty, or will he make me feel guilty?

Don't worry; I will make sense of it. And in my usual inimitable way, I will start off with a metaphor that will only make sense in the very end when I tie it all up so exquisitely that you'll be amazed.

Here's the preface and since this is Ohana Sunday, which the youth attend some of the services, you are lucky for this opening story.

The top-earning boy band of all time is a British group called *One Direction*. They started in 2011 but officially split up about a year ago.

In January last year it was estimated that their net worth was nearly 400 million dollars! That's 1.6 times more than Taylor Swift, 2.4 times more than Justin Bieber, nine times more than Adele, but alas 30 per cent less than Jay Z (and who knows about Beyoncé). But compared to us, that's about 5,858 times more than the typical American family. (*MoneyNation.com Jan. 16, 2016, Tom Gerencer, One Direction Net Worth*)

Louis Tomlinson was with *One Direction*. Last December he recorded a song with the longhaired American Japanese electronic dance music entertainer/producer Steve Aoki, who is the highest grossing dance artist in North America from tours filling stadiums. The song is called *Just Hold On*, an upbeat song with a catchy hook in it. Are you ready for this? It became the #1 iTunes hit in 40 countries! All at the same time! 40 countries!

When I saw it performed on *James Corden's The Late, Late Show*, I could see why. Aside from Louis being very popular among the girls, people want hope in the midst of challenge when things seem so dark. They want

someone to say to them hold on! Here are some of the lyrics:

"What do you do when a chapter ends? Do you close the book and never read it again? Where do you go when your story's done? You can be who you were or who you'll become. Oh-oh-oh, oh-oh-oh oh, if it all goes wrong. Oh-oh-oh, oh-oh-oh oh, darling just hold on. The sun goes down and it comes back up. The world it turns no matter what. Oh-oh-oh, oh-oh-oh oh, if it all goes wrong. Darling, just hold on."

People in this world want to hear an encouraging word of when it all goes wrong, just hold on. In this song, Louis says "Darling, just hold on." Some have wondered if he is actually singing that to his 43-year old mother, who was suffering from leukemia while he was writing the song. She raised him by herself since Louis was a toddler. Unfortunately she died just four days before Louis previewed the song while grieving on the *X-Factor show*. (Video clip of the song was shown.)

So what does this have to do with our Bible passage? First of all, people are looking for hope. Our James Bible passage talks about people who are suffering, and if you are a person who has assets that can help them, then help them and give them hope. If you don't help them, then James, the brother of Jesus, the writer of our Bible passage, says you will be condemned. Ouch!

Louis Tomlinson is a wealthy, successful millionaire who had success come to him early in life while in his early 20's. But Louis is EXTREMELY generous. He donated more than two million pounds to *Believe in Magic*, an organization that supports terminally ill children. He has been involved with charity work for several years.

For his 23rd birthday, *One Direction* fans joined him in his movement in social action with a donation drive for the Bluebell Wood Children's Hospice where children with a shortened life expectancy are given hope, care, support and dignity.

Tomlinson also uses social media to raise money for the British charity called Niamh's Next Step, to help fund research for Neuroblastoma cancer since in the UK other is no government or NHS funding for this. Ten months ago he also raised money for UNICEF.

He said, about the charity work: "Being my age and being able to be in a position where I can help people out and give opportunities to other people is the most exciting thing to me." (Wikipedia).

Toby, who plays regularly in our 11:11 band, toured with *One Direction* as their guitarist, and confirms that Louis is indeed a good guy.

Though there maybe a lot of snotty entertainers in the world who only think of themselves, and though we might be cynical and say, "they only want tax breaks for their charity," I have to say it is refreshing to see a young successful adult giving millions away instead of having it all centered on himself.

Steve Aoki, the long hair Asian dude in the video (who does swear in his concerts so I am warning you if you look him up), has received recognition for his past philanthropic work within the music and nonprofit communities, including being the 2015 honored of Music for Relief, as well as being honored by MTV Latin America with his CHIUKA AWARD, which

recognizes celebrities who use their influence to develop social projects to bring about social change in the world. He gives money for brain research to help those who have disease or disorders of the brain.

The apostle James is not worried about the Louis Tomlinsons and Steve Aokis of the world. He is worried about people who have resources, who are rich, who don't help others, and who just keep on saving on themselves, spending on themselves, and who do not treat well those who work with or for them.

And James warns them – God is going to get you for your selfish stinginess, or as The Message paraphrase communicates our passage:

James 5:1 And 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.

James 5:2 Your money is corrupt and your fine clothes stink.

James 5:3 Your greedy luxuries are a cancer in your gut, destroying your life from within. You thought you were piling up wealth. What you've piled up is judgment.

James 5:4 All the workers you've 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.

James 5:5 You've looted the earth and lived it up. But all you'll have to show for it is a fatter than usual corpse.

James 5:6 In fact, what you've done is condemn and murder perfectly good persons, who stand there and take it.

But you say, "This passage is not about me. This must be about all those fat cat billionaires I read about – the Bill Gates, the Warren Buffets, the heads of Silicon Valley companies, the people who own oil refineries, so I will skip this passage

cause it ain't about me." But Jesus says, "Nice try. This IS about you."

The fact is: Most of the people in this room are rich compared to the rest of the world. (Feb. 27, 2017, Daily Mail, "America IS the 1%: You need just \$34,000 annual income to be in the global elite... and HALF the world's richest people live in the U.S." by Hugo Gye)

The global median income in the world is \$1,225 a year. Now you understand why half of the world's richest people live in the U.S.

If your combined HOUSEHOLD income makes more than \$34,000 a year after taxes, you are in the top 1% of income in the world. We are a lot wealthier than we think we are. This is reality.

And if we think we are not rich and we always act like we are poor, that is a strange kind of reverse arrogance of "I don't need to be generous in my charity. I don't help people because I need the money more than they."

James is basically saying that we should be generous in giving money to people and in treating all people with kindness. Let's look at the passage again.

The first three verses are warning us that if we just keep our money to ourselves, then it is a waste. It will rust. It will spoil. Sure, money is to be SAVED, but money is also to be SPENT in the name of Jesus to bring them closer to God.

This applies to everyone of all ages. Hey, teenagers, I know you spend a lot of money on yourselves for music, electronic stuff, food, and entertainment. You have allowances. Maybe you work, but we should use whatever funds we have to help others.

My long time friend and colleague, Rick Bundschuh, is the pastor of Kauai Christian Fellowship in Poipu. He's a good family friend of surfer Bethany Hamilton, and helped author her book about her surviving a shark attack where she lost an arm.

Rick has a 15-year old daughter named Allegra. After an HIM conference one year, she told her dad that she wanted to sponsor a Compassion child on her own. At that time it was \$35 a month.

Rick said, "Okay. You could probably handle sponsoring a kid." And then Allegra said, "Oh, no, Dad, I want to sponsor THREE children."

Rick said, "WHAT?! No way!" And he tried to talk her out of it as she was only working part-time at a hot dog stand. But this was not an off-the-cuff emotional decision. It was not a whimsical thing. Allegra was prepared. She did all the math. She told her dad, "I don't need new clothes. I have enough to go to the movies with my friends. I want to do this."

But Rick pushed back, "You need to keep supporting these children all the way through your college! You can't start sponsoring and just drop the kids. You'll have to support them all the way through the children's graduation."

Allegra said she would work every summer to sponsor her Compassion kids, and she'll work LONGER hours in to afford it. She kept her promise.

Ten years later, and in fact just two weeks ago, Allegra got married, and she is still sponsoring her three Compassion kids! She said she is using some of the money from her wedding to make sure those children will continue to be sponsored. (We older people often have lost that joy of generosity!)

You see, when it comes to giving, there is only **one direction** where we should be heading. For the follower of Jesus, it is the one direction towards generosity. The more we know Jesus, the more we should be generous. We should not be getting stingy.

Our recent church survey showed that 45% of you give 10% or more of your income to ministry! With another 27% giving 5 to 9 percent! That's all great!

It is not always easy or fun to be generous. Sometimes you give to help people but gratitude is not returned, but we still need to have generous hearts. If people don't thank us, that is about them. It doesn't have to describe our hearts of wanting to help. We shouldn't do it to be thanked.

I normally give food not money to the homeless on the street. Once I saw a homeless woman on the street, and I offered her an extra sushi tuna roll I had, but then she threw it back in my face! Not everyone has been hit in the face with a tuna roll. That's now on my resumé. Some get slimed, I got tuna-ed. I guess not every one likes tuna rolls!

Once I offered to buy coffee for a homeless lady, so I went into a 7-11 store, bought the coffee, and gave it to her. Then she said, "Do you think I could have French Vanilla instead? 7-11 has a great French Vanilla." So back into the store I went to get her a French Vanilla.

I didn't get mad. I didn't think, "Why, that ungrateful wretch!" No, it's part of the fun of being generous. (Well maybe not the tuna-roll story, but the coffee story was fun.)

Yes, we can save money, but at one point do we say it's enough? Don't save up for the last days when it is too late to help or save people. That's what the Bible passage is saying. You can't keep saving money for a rainy day, and then die with all that money but didn't help people.

I remember Tony Campolo telling me the time he was on holiday with his 9-year old daughter. They were on a Grayline bus tour when the bus stopped in front a movie theater. The guide pointed to a side alley where the FBI gunned down the mobster John Dillinger. The guide told them, "When John Dillinger died, after robbing more than one million dollars from banks across the Midwest, he had only 32-cents to his name." Tony's daughter then turned to Tony and

whispered, "Wow! What great timing!"
Tony Campolo, The Success Fantasy p12)

If you can't take it with you, then what will you do with your money? Isn't all of our money God's anyway? We're just stewards. Sure, save money to give to your family. Yet, sometimes by giving your family a lot of money, it only hurts their work ethic.

Or is it possible, the Lord wants us to invest more in His work? When we give money to God it is basically seed money. We are trying to plant more seeds so more will come to know Christ and experience His love and mercy.

That is what James is saying. I know we need to save money for ourselves for a rainy day or for our children, but there has to be a place where we can be generous with others. We can be generous in many ways. First, with our money. It is such a great, great feeling when we are generous with others by giving money to ministry or to charity. Have you ever felt the joy, the jubilation, and the freedom of giving your money freely to others that they might be helped? What stops us from being generous?

I think there is a little voice in us – maybe a parent's voice or an uncle or an aunty who says, "Don't give your money away. They don't need it. They'll squander it. And what if you need it? What if there is a nuclear holocaust and all the ATM machines are down?" Fear cripples our generosity. And sometimes, those voices are not from God.

But I don't think it is just fear that cripples our generosity. I think sometimes it is that we are isolated. You have heard people say that we would be more compassion-ate towards people of different orientation, religion, color, or culture than ours IF we actually have friends like them. When we don't interact or have friends of people who are different or disenfranchised, we tend not to be generous toward them, so it is a vicious cycle.

People who have never talked to a homeless person might tend to not be generous with them.

One of the great things about the trip that our youth and adults went on to City Impact in San Francisco is that it got our people used to talking to homeless people and going to the apartments of the poor to bring them food or support. Talking to them makes us less fearful. Washing their feet made us less fearful. Bathing their dogs gave us a more intimate love of them as people.

I wonder if Louis Tomlinson's heart for cancer victims was due to his mom's struggles with cancer. Makes sense. When we know people who have that illness or weakness, we want to help them.

But generally speaking Christians should be generous with what they have for the disenfranchised, or even the hated or the ones feared. Look at whom Jesus reached out to. There were many of the people groups his community hated – Roman Centurions who were like the Gestapo who ruled their community; the lepers, which years ago for us would have been like AIDS victims, the woman caught in adultery; the woman who had five husbands; the dishonest tax collector Zacchaeus, whose profession oppressed Jews, the Samaritans whom the Jews hated because they were outsiders; and then finally the woman with seven demons – Mary Magdalene who got to be the first preacher of Easter to say, "Jesus Is risen!"

Jesus was in contact with all of those people and was compassionate and generous. Maybe we can live in a bubble and not be compassionate? But can we give knowing it will not be repaid? Have you ever felt the joy of giving to something because of the cause and because it was the right thing to do?

One of the greatest joys I have just before I go on a trip to see my Compassion kids is to shop for them at Target. I normally don't like shopping, but I love shopping

for my sponsored kids—clothes, school supplies, inexpensive watch, or inexpensive jewelry— things they can't afford. I buy towels and kitchen utensils for their parents, if they have parents, and toys and games and stuffed animals for their siblings. They will never be able to come close to repay me. Once when I got to the Philippines I bought a guitar and a soccer ball for my Compassion sponsored boy because I knew he would love those things.

Have you ever felt the joy of being generous? It is a super feeling. You give it because you know it will bring happiness to someone. You do it because of the cause – the mission. Pam and I have given more to ministry this year than any other year in our marriage, for we believe in the cause of getting people to know Christ.

For the Christian it is not give until it hurts, but to give until it feels good. It's a tremendous high when you are generous. But it doesn't have to be generosity of money. It can also be time.

There is someone in our church who regularly would dance the hula for Alzheimer patients. Think on that. She tirelessly went to visit them and share her love for them in dance, knowing full well that in a short time there after they might not even remember her name let alone her dance. That is true generosity and compassion without any expectation of gratitude.

But there is another way we should be generous. It's not so much money but to be generous in how we deal with the people we work with.

James 5:4 Listen! The wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, cry out, and the cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord of hosts.

James is saying, "Some of you guys in the Christian community have not been nice to your fellow employees or your clients." And the killer part of this verse

is that it has reached the ears of the God. He knows! Who do we think we are fooling? He knows how generous or rude or unjust we are to other people.

I remember I hired someone who did work at our house, and this is a company who advertised boldly that it was a Christian company. But the owner was dishonest. He did bad work. He didn't complete the work, and kept the money. When I confronted him with that he said I would have to pay double if I wanted them to finish the project. Not fair. I hired someone else from our church who was a devout Christian, and he did great work to re-do the poor and incomplete work of the other company.

If we are followers of Christ, then let's act like it. Our ministry is our business. Our business is our ministry. And God knows anyway if we are ethical or not, so we need to be consistent. God has the best heavenly surveillance cameras in the world. He knows. Let's be fair to our fellow workers and clients.

Finally, we should also give because we should be aware that people have been generous to us. There have been so many people who have been generous, modeling kindness to me. It's infectious. I want to always live a thankful life for the grace I have received so I need to pass that on to others.

And I am most grateful to Jesus for what He has done for me. We should be generous because the greatest gift is this—that Christ gave up His life for us. James said it this way: "You have condemned and murdered the righteous one, who does not resist you." (James 5:6)

James is talking about innocent people who need our help and we kill them with our selfishness. But I think he is also referring to Jesus, the true Righteous One who was murdered. When I think of what Jesus did for me, then I should be generous with others because of all that He has given me. That is the one direction I should be heading towards.