

In the news, Thursday this week:

YOU'VE got to be in it to win it, but you don't have to scoop the pool to whittle the day away dreaming about how you'd spend it.

New house, new car? A little help for your friends? A permanent vacation? A boarding house to save the homeless?

Don't be surprised if there's a far away look in people's eyes today – there's a fair chance they're dreaming about how they'll spend their riches if their numbers come up in tonight's \$70 million Powerball draw.

The jackpot is the largest lotto prize offered in Australia this year and the second largest in Powerball history'

And, according to the official results on Friday morning, there were 3 winners, and each received \$23,333,333.34

What would I have to do, to get a share in that? A regular 12-game quick pick will cost you \$11.15/week. And with that quick pick in your hand, The odds of you winning, are 6,397,300:1. So, by the odds, unless you're really lucky, the chances are, all you have to do, is keep playing those same numbers for 127,946 years, and you should come up with a Division 1 win.... But of course, in that time, you will have spent over \$71M. And while the division 1 prize share this time, was \$23 million, it's often much, much less.....

And so Lotto is the only tax that many Australians are not only willing, but very happy to pay. At least, that's the way it used to be – it used to be all government owned and run. But now,

with gambling becoming privatised, it's becoming more and more, a transfer of wealth from the poorer classes to the richer classes.

Did you know that Australians lose more money from gambling, than people of any other nation?ⁱⁱ In 2011/12, Australians lost over \$20Billion, and that's not counting overseas gambling on the web. And of course, the profits made, by the Big Business of gambling, is usually at the expense of those who can least afford it.

According to an article on theconversation.com.

*“In the western Sydney local government area of Fairfield, for example, which is among the poorest 12% of local government areas in Australia, each adult resident lost an **average** of A\$2340 on the pokies in 2010-11. Across the harbour in Ku-ring-gai and Willoughby, whose residents are among the richest 6% in Australia, poker machine losses were just \$270 per adult.”ⁱⁱⁱ*

*Now, with the odds of winning, being so very highly stacked against those who gamble, why do it? Well, I don't have to tell you, do I – you already know – It's because of the dream – the dream of how much better off I'd be, if I was rich. It's the only chance – even though it's a very slim chance – it's the **only** chance that most people have of instantly jumping, from living the lot of the poor, to living the lot of the wealthy.*

But let us not, for a moment, believe that the poor in Australia, are poor. If you can scrounge together \$11.15 a week for Lotto, or \$40/week for the pokies, you're not one of the world's poor.

But it is the dream, you see – the dream of **most** people – the dream, that life's going to be better if I - have - more.

Somebody once said, "Anybody who believes that 'Money doesn't make you happy', doesn't know how to shop." And there's a little bit of truth in that.

I would suspect that anyone who says, "The poor are happier than the wealthy", have never experienced the physically grinding, gut-wrenching plight of abject poverty... Don't ever try and convince yourself, that the lot of the poor, is better than that of the rich – it's not.

Proverbs 10:15 (ESV)

¹⁵ A rich man's wealth is his strong city;
the poverty of the poor is their ruin.

Proverbs 13:23 (ESV)

²³ The fallow ground of the poor would yield much
food,
but it is swept away through injustice.

And this is just so very true. In a world ruled by the rich, the poor are the easy targets – they're the ones with the quietest voice, and the least defence.

And so, it's pretty plain to see, **why** we dream to have more.

While the gambler's hope, is for the big win:

- The professional, hopes for promotion
- The tradie, hopes for some good overtime

- The salary earner for a pay rise
- The businessman for a good investment, or a good stock-market year
- The farmer prays for rain, because even though it's not a drought, things will be a whole lot better, if we do get a good fall right now
- Or maybe a lower dollar – that's what we need – some higher prices will make all the difference.
- The preacher teaches “Give – Fill the offering box, and God will give back to you, full to the brim, pressed down, and overflowing” – don't think preachers are immune from it.
- Some of us might dream of that rich uncle who might leave us a useful inheritance
- The litigant hopes for a big payout because they stubbed their toe on a carelessly parked pram at the local shopping centre.
- Some how, many of us dream, for a nice little nest-egg, to mysteriously appear.

By the way, “Are you putting enough away in your super fund, so that you can meet your goals for retirement????”

Against this backdrop, James has a word to say to us, today:

James 1:9-11 (ESV)

⁹ Let the lowly brother boast in his exaltation,
¹⁰ and the rich in his humiliation, because like a flower of the grass he will pass away. ¹¹ For the sun rises with its scorching heat and withers the grass; its flower falls, and its beauty perishes. So also will the rich man fade away in the midst of his pursuits.

Out here where we live, we know very well, the scorching heat, of the Queensland sun. If you try to keep a nice garden, or lawn, or grow crops, you know what hot, dry winds and bright sunny days can do to them...

Every flower, has its time. Some are more delicate than others, but eventually every flower falls – eventually every flower loses its beauty, crumbles up and blows away in the wind – Are people any different?

Every - person - dies.

Even the most beautiful people die. The rich die. The poor die. Even movie stars, get old and wrinkly. No matter how much plastic surgery, or Botox they throw at them, eventually, their body gets old and fragile, dies and decays. Dust returns to dust.

What good,,, is money to any of us, when we're dead?... "Oh, it'll be my children's inheritance"... Hmm... There is a **greater** inheritance for you, **and** your children.

V⁹ Let the lowly brother boast in his exaltation
When the New Testament talks about "brothers", it's talking about Christians, alright. Let the lowly Christian, boast in his exaltation.

By the standards of our society, you might be lowly – a nothing – a nobody:

- you work at a menial job;
- you have very few assets;
- no prestige;
- you certainly never went to the right school – your parents couldn't afford it;
- half your income goes in rent;
- your car is covered with Kangaroo damage;
- You can't afford to run an air conditioner (even on a 45°C day)
- and your staple diet is chicken and rice – not because you like it – but because it's cheap.....

By community standards, you may be thought of as lowly... but as a Christian, in Christ, you have something to boast in...

The **world** might see you as a nobody – **you** might see yourself as a nobody.... But in Christ, we are exalted. The creator of the universe – the ruler of the heavens and the earth – The Lord God Almighty... chose you as His child – how great is that???

Ephesians 2 says that God has **raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus**,... not because we're good – not because we're such fantastic people, and so deserving... He does it in His grace and His mercy – He takes nobodies, and lifts us up.

And it's not only the poor – the rich too. When they put their faith in Jesus, the rich and the poor, are elevated to this place of honour.

And so, in James, the phrase is, “The rich brother – the rich Christian boasts **in his humiliation**”.

You see, to **become** a Christian – to believe in Jesus – means that we have to come to the end of ourselves – we stop trusting in our own ability; our own power; our own provision; our own resources,,,, And begin to trust completely in Christ.

And let me tell ya, it’s much more difficult, for a rich man to come to this point, than a poor man. When you **know** you’re a nobody and that you have nothing, well it’s a relatively small step to realising, “I need Jesus”.

But the rich: Well **they’re** used to having everything they need. They have this horrible thing called, “Self-sufficiency” and “self-confidence”. They have their own resources – they have pride in their power, and their prestige, and they have every confidence in their future....

And for someone to give up this self-determination – this self confidence – the pride of who they are and what they have, and what they’ve achieved – well that’s a big thing....

It’s a humiliation – a **humbling** of one’s self....

Until we humble ourselves, and realise that we are nothing, our hearts aren’t ready, to be made right. And so we have to come to an end of our selves, to trust only in Jesus.

The only thing in life, that has any eternal significance, is a life emptied of pride, and surrendered to Christ, so that He can lift us up, with Him, to the heavens...

Do you hear what James is saying? He's not just saying "You can't take your money with you when you die" – he's saying something much more profound than that...

In the context of his discussion on faith (that we talked about last week), and standing firm, through the time of trial – of holding on to our faith (for all that we're worth) – when we hold on to that faith, we are being perfected – lacking nothing, because Christ is our everything...

This is Godly wisdom.... Worldly wisdom has confidence in money, stuff and resources... Godly wisdom has confidence, in the only thing that matters – salvation through Jesus Christ our Lord.

And so the outcome:

The flower falls, its beauty perishes..... So also will the rich man fade away in the midst of his pursuits.

Have you ever noticed that? The rich, seem to always have pursuits.....

They've always got something happening. Somewhere to go; Something to do; Something to build, or something to buy. Something to enjoy. Another property to develop. Another toy to play with.

They've always got another project – If it isn't managing what they have, it'll be planning 'the **next** thing' ...

The rich have their pursuits – their sports – their hobbies – their trips away – their luncheons social functions...

The poor don't have these same pursuits – their priorities are just to keep a roof over their head, and food on the table for another week...

And the rich will continue in their pursuits, until their time runs out.

I'm reminded of the parable Jesus told in Luke 12:

¹⁶, "The land of a rich man produced plentifully,
¹⁷ and he thought to himself, 'What shall I do, for I have nowhere to store my crops?' ¹⁸ And he said, 'I will do this: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods.

¹⁹ And I will say to my self, "Self, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry." "

²⁰ But God said to him, 'Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?'

21 So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God."

Do you get the punch-line there? I believe it's the same point that James is making – Don't put your confidence in money or stuff – be rich toward God...

We have a choice to make – be involved in our own pursuits, or in God's pursuits.

If you're poor, be rich toward God, and rejoice in the faith that you have.

If you're rich (which by the way, most of us are [by world standards, anyway]) – If you're rich, let your pursuits be Godly pursuits. Don't involve yourself with the worldly pursuits that the rich generally follow, be rich toward God.

There is only one thing, which is of any eternal value – a faith that endures – a faith that perfects us, as we are readied for glory.

Questions?

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ⁱ • *Suzanne Simonot* • *Gold Coast Bulletin* • November 12, 2015 12:00AM

ⁱⁱ <http://theconversation.com/who-wins-from-big-gambling-in-australia-22930>

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Martin Young is the lead investigator on ARC Linkages Project LP0990584: Gambling-Related Harm in Northern Australia, a project co-funded by the Northern Territory Community Benefit Fund (which is raised via a tax on pokie-gambling in pubs). In addition to his SCU position, he is an Honorary Fellow at the Menzies School of Health Research, Darwin, and a Visiting Fellow, Fenner School of Environment and Society, ANU.