

JAMES 1:9-11
The Right Kind of Boasting

Have you noticed how there are many UPSIDE DOWN ASPECTS OF Christian FAITH:

- the first shall be last, the last first
- the meek shall inherit the earth
- blessed are you when men revile you for the sake of the kingdom.
- Consider it all joy when you encounter various trials

Those are things that don't make sense according to the world.

In today's passage James adds to the list..

9 But the brother of humble circumstances is to glory in his high position; 10 and the rich man is to glory in his humiliation, because like flowering grass he will pass away. 11 For the sun rises with a scorching wind and withers the grass; and its flower falls off and the beauty of its appearance is destroyed; so too the rich man in the midst of his pursuits will fade away.

Another upside down aspect of our faith

- let the poor exalt in his low position and the rich in his humiliation

Scripture is built on an eternal perspective. Without that, nothing taught in the Bible really makes sense.

We may admire the poetry of the Psalm, the good advice of the Proverbs, the reality check of Ecclesiastes, and the person and work of Jesus displayed in the gospel, but without an eternal perspective, all of those are just words that have no significant consequences.

So what if you are comforted or guided by the words of the Bible if once you die that's it?

Preacher Man – Jered and Katie McKenna (chorus):

when you die, someday soon
they'll paint you up like a clown
no one will remember you sixty years from now
stuck in a box and put in the ground.

One of our great struggles is to figure out if life really makes sense and has any lasting significance. The biblical response is, YES. But for it to make sense we must look at life from an eternal perspective. This perspective doesn't automatically smooth off all the rough edges, but it does provide a fuller context for the trials that we face in this life.

One of the main trials that people have faced throughout history is economic deprivation and the way that money influences us. Ideologies have been built on the idea of wealth and class struggle. The idea of "economic inequality" is all the rage in our culture. The subtle, or not so subtle, utopian idea is that if we just put enough power into the hands of the right people, we can create a world where there are no distinctions such as a lowly position and a high position. These political/social experiments have shown us that the coercive utopians have created a lot of victims in the past 100 years.

James gives a perspective that challenges all of us as he draws our attention to an eternal perspective.

Have you noticed how scripture calls us to boast, rejoice, or exalt in the strangest things –

- our trials
- our lowly condition
- our humiliation
- The cross of Christ

Scripture is so counter cultural that it must be crazy OR IT IS TRUE. Since it is based on the historic reality of the resurrection of Jesus, we can be assured that it's true, but that doesn't make it easy. From the moment that we are given new life by the Spirit of God, we are called to a life that is supernatural. As followers of Jesus Christ we are called to high standards of values, morality, sacrifice, and loving others. That's why we have the Holy Spirit. In addition, we have the scripture – to give us the revealed will of God for His chosen, set apart people There should be a gospel uniqueness in how we invest our lives in terms of our time, talent, and treasure.

V. 9-11 A practical issue of wisdom – eternal perspective

There is no greater servant of Wisdom than an Eternal Perspective. It enables us to navigate wealth and humble circumstances. (C.J. Mahaney)

Motyer: The illustrations of the poor and the rich do no more than drive this lesson home: each is exhorted to see his lot in the light of spiritual reality. To his financial adversities, the poor brother says, 'But how rich I am!' To his earthly glories, the rich brother says, 'But what a wretch I am!' Each keeps life in the perspective of eternity.

If we were to choose between door #1 – the trial of a lowly condition, or door #2 – the trial of wealth, my guess is that most of us would choose door #2.

EX We're like Uncle Max in the Sound of Music – "I love rich people, I love the way they live. I love the way I live when I'm with them."

TRUE CONFESSION – there were times I felt that way when we were in support raising ministries for 15 years.

Both are trials – Dr. Krabbendam – A student once said, "If both are trials, I'd like to choose wealth." Dr. K said, "Remember what Jesus said about a rich man entering the kingdom of heaven. He didn't say that about being poor."

INSIGHTS from the Practical Wisdom of James

V. 9-11

- **Our present condition is deceptive and temporary:** the "low" condition looks low when we don't have the eyes of faith to see our riches in Christ. The "high" position looks high when we don't have the eyes of faith to see our helpless hopeless condition apart from Christ.

Whether we are in the lowly state or the high position, it is temporary. Our days are numbered and then we enter the glorious condition as co-heirs of Christ.

- If our central and defining value isn't the gospel, then we will see ourselves and others in terms of worldly condition.

We assign value, meaning and worth to people based on their circumstance of life and we end up with the identity politics that has overwhelmed our political, social, and educational institutions. When an eternal perspective is gone, and thus the idea of people being made in the image of God is gone, then we're left with temporal worldly definitions of identity.

The BIBLICAL response should look very different from the world's response. One is rooted in eternal values and the other is rooted in the here and now.

- There is a gospel truth that surpasses our earthly situation and gives an overriding perspective to our lives, even to the point of making the lowly boast in their exaltation and the rich to boast in their humiliation.

The gospel should be doing one of two things to our hearts. When we feel lowly in terms of the world's values or circumstances, the gospel should be a source of boasting. When we feel rich (proud, self-assured, superior to others), we should be humbled by the gospel as we remember our condition before God i.e. helpless and worthy of being hated by God.

As Jack Miller put it in his devotional – Saving Grace (Oct 9) "You cannot be happy if all you live for is this world." Whether you are rich or poor, this world alone won't satisfy and bring real joy.

LOWLY MAN (many of the scattered brethren were living in poverty; they were in a lowly condition in terms of their socio-economic condition)

Note that the church is made up of a cross section of the population.

No one would blame the poor man for being discontent in his situation. It is perfectly understandable, yet James doesn't go there.

Note what James doesn't say: << Envy those who have more.>> << Despise those who are rich, tear down the system;>>

James gives a radically different WISDOM perspective on how we respond to our situation in life.

- True contentment comes not in being great in this world, but in being great in the company of angels and in the household of God and such is the case of all who are adopted into His family. "The lowly is to understand that he has sufficient consolation in his adoption alone, so as not to grieve unduly for a less prosperous state of life." –Calvin

The lowly man is told to do something that we normally tell our kids to avoid – "BOAST". He is to boast or glory in her exaltation; that he is lifted up.

The lowly man is not to boast in his poor condition, but in his exaltation that comes in his condition IN Christ.

What are the benefits of that condition?

PEACE WITH God

ETERNAL LIFE WITH God

AN ETERNAL HOPE

The true identity of a believer IS NOT in his or her social or economic condition, but it is in Christ. The Christian is one who belongs to a heavenly realm. One day that spiritual reality will be revealed. (Col 3:4) That is the truth that gripped the early church and enabled believers to endure, thrive, and impact the culture. Our earthly status is deceptive and says very little about who we really are as believers.

HOW DOES THE LOWLY MAN BOASTING IN HIS EXALTATION GLORIFY God? –It shows that God, not things, is his treasure.

- Contentment in a lowly condition is the glory of the Christian and of God when the heart is rejoicing in all that God is for us in Christ.

RICH MAN- Make no mistake, by the world's standards everyone in this room is RICH.

(This could apply to anyone who excels in honor, dignity, or in any other external thing i.e. who may be prone to evaluate his / her worth on a success – fail basis. EX: beauty, intelligence, athletic ability, artistic ability, moral virtue, etc)

THERE IS A DANGER TO RICHES – they keep you from humility – We must be intentional about remembering Grace. That is the most important time to repent – when you're reaching your goals and blessings are coming. Meet the good times with repentance. The essence of sin is to substitute yourself for God, or put something else in his place

The rich man could look at his situation and could become so satisfied with the gifts that he has, that he forgets the giver. The rich Christian could easily delight in his riches, rather than realizing that God has surrounded him with things that will ultimately pass away.

Rejoicing in being a servant of Christ is the glory of the rich Christian when the heart is rejoicing in all that God is for us in Christ.

EX: Philip Humber

<https://www.nbcsports.com/chicago/white-sox/why-philip-humber-could-never-recapture-his-perfect-game-magic>

April 21st 2012 Philip Humber, pitching for the Chicago White Sox, threw the 21st perfect game in baseball history, He only had 16 victories in his career and that was his first complete game.

Now I mention this because Philip Humber is an earnest Christian man and a wise man. After his accomplishment, he tweeted: Jer 9:23-24

"...nothing to be compared to knowing God. And then added the reference, Jeremiah 9:23-24, which, as you may remember, reads:

"Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom, let not the mighty man boast in his might, let not the rich man boast in his riches, but let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the Lord who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth. For in these things I delight, declares the Lord."

That is exactly what James was saying, though James also reminds us of the deceptive and temporary quality of our lives in this world. Friends, we must note how foolish it is to devote our hearts to find our meaning in something so soon to be lost. Philip Humber learned about that too.

Since his perfect game in 2012, he lost his position with the White Sox – he simply didn't pitch well enough – was picked up by the Houston Astros, soon lost his position with them, played 2013 in the Oakland A's minor league system, in 2014 was playing in South Korea and was finally cut by that Korean team. Philip Humber, quite literally, had his one day in the sun! He didn't have to wait until his death to lose what he had; he's still a young man and has already lost it.

So far as fame and fortune and boatloads of money are concerned, his grass has already withered, his flower has already fallen, and his beauty has already perished. As a rich man – so far as the world measures wealth – he has already faded away in the midst of his pursuits. But, we might imagine that Philip Humber is someone who understands very well that what he has lost is a mere bauble in comparison to what is his in Christ. When he was rich he boasted in his humiliation – that he was a sinner saved by grace – and now that he is in a relatively lowly condition he can very happily boast in his exaltation!

The hidden pressure for the lowly man or rich man is trying to build or maintain a reputation before God.

One may struggle with feeling like a loser because worldly success never came. The other may feel the pressure of having to prove that his success wasn't a fluke. That's what happened to Humber. Every game after that perfect game was filled with the pressure of showing he wasn't a fluke.

Have you ever felt that way? Trying to prove you're not as bad as you look or that you're actually as good as you look.

Don't we try that with God?

STOP IT and believe the GOOD NEWS that Jesus IS as good as He looks and through faith IN HIM we are given a perfect record before God.

James is assuming belief in Christ on the part of his readers, so he doesn't lay out the teaching of salvation by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone the way Paul does in several of his letters. So let me bring some clarity as we prepare for the Table...

Faith is a "trust transfer"

We admit that our faith has been in something other than God – typically in ourselves, in our best efforts. We admit that and then we transfer that faith from our own good works and place it in Christ alone. We embrace the central realities of the gospel which teaches us that we are bigger sinners than we dare admit, but through Christ we are more loved and forgiven than we dare imagine.

The ABC's of a Trust Transfer –

A - Admit that you can't save yourself and that you need grace – That means there is GOOD NEWS FOR YOU

B- Believe that Jesus is the only Wisdom and Savior who can forgive your sin and heal your heart

C- confess to God that you want to trust Jesus as your savior and Lord.

As we COME TO THE TABLE we see that this passage from James 1 is a **POINTER TO Christ**

Jesus was rich and became low.

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 through His poverty might become rich. 2 Cor 8:9

	Then as one despised he became exalted. Love for him is kindled as we see how he gave up riches to become poor for us, so we might be rich in HIM.