

Keeping Eternity in View # 4

James 1: 9-11

In our text this evening James deals with an issue that has likely existed since the very beginnings of civilization: those who dwell in poverty and those who have acquired much wealth. For as long as we have lived there have been differences in social classes, and that is likely to continue, with the gap becoming larger and more prominent. The issue of economic differences is very clear in this passage, but that is not the focus.

James knew that economic status could easily change, and at best, it is temporal. All that we could acquire in this life will be left behind when we leave this world. The real emphasis of this passage is keeping a proper perspective on life. Regardless of our wealth, or lack thereof, we must maintain our faith and keep our eyes on the Lord. Material possessions wear out and decay. Life is brief. One day this life will be over and our relationship with the Lord will determine our eternal destiny.

James does not condemn those who have acquired much; he simply offers sound wisdom measured with caution concerning their wealth. It is not a sin to be wealthy as long as our possessions don't become an idol unto us.

➤ *A teacher had just related to a class of boys the story of the rich man and Lazarus; then he asked, "Now, which would you rather be, boys—the rich man or Lazarus?"*

One boy replied: "I'd want to be the rich man while I'm living and Lazarus when I die." ⁱ

➤ *A bishop of the early church, who was a remarkable example of the virtue of contentment, was asked his secret. The venerable old man replied: "It consists in nothing more than making a right use of my eyes. In whatever state I am, I first of all look up to heaven and remember that my principal business here is to get there.*

Then I look down upon the earth, and call to mind how small a place I shall occupy in it when I die and am buried. I then look around in the world, and observe what multitudes there are who are in many respects more unhappy than myself. Thus I learn where true happiness is placed, where all our cares must end, and what little reason I have to complain." ⁱⁱ

I want to consider the [reminders](#) James presents in the text dealing with the struggles of life and maintaining a proper perspective as we think on: [Keeping Eternity in View](#).

I. The Gladness of Exaltation (9) – [Let the brother of low degree rejoice in that he is exalted](#): This may appear to be a paradox, but those of low degree have much to be joyful about. Consider:

A. The Participant – James refers to the hearer as a [brother](#). He is speaking to those who have accepted Christ as their Lord and Savior, those who have been adopted into the family of God. We must continue to keep this passage in its proper context. James is still dealing with those who are scattered abroad, facing divers temptations. This is directly tied to the opening verses as he continues to offer wisdom for the many difficulties and adversities they face.

- This doesn't need much explanation, but we do need to be reminded of the abundance we have in Christ. Many in this world possess more in material wealth than they will ever need, but they are impoverished spiritually. Regardless of our physical state, the child of God can rejoice in their relationship with Christ!

B. The Position (9) – [Let the brother of low degree rejoice in that he is exalted](#): James reveals the position of the believer, one of low degree. This has the meaning of “*one who does not rise far from the ground; lowly in spirit; humble.*” As I read this passage, I thought of one who is well grounded. Surely those to whom James was writing understood this thought. They had faced much adversity and sacrificed greatly for their faith. No doubt there were times when they were so humbled by circumstances that they contemplated abandoning their faith. They may not have realized it, but their humility was actually to their advantage. It allowed them to maintain their focus on the Lord, continuing to depend solely upon Him.

- We must be cautious that our quest for humility doesn't create pride. Many regard their humility in such high esteem that it develops into pride. However, we need to possess and maintain a heart and spirit of humility. We must remember that through our own strength we can accomplish nothing, but through Christ we can do all things. We must also keep in mind that it is God who has enabled us to acquire all that we possess. Those who are well grounded will not rise far from the ground.

C. The Perspective (9) – James speaks of [rejoicing](#) in the fact that the lowly have been exalted. This too appears to be a paradox, but there is great truth and beauty in the text. [Rejoicing](#) actually has the idea of “*boasting.*” That seems contrary to all we have just considered. How can one remain humble while boasting? Well, that is answered in what we are boasting in. We are to rejoice that we have been [exalted](#). This speaks of “*height, rank, or station.*”

- Are you beginning to make the connection? Those of low degree, *kept low to the ground*, can rejoice (and even boast) of their height, their position in Christ! The world may look upon us and assume that we have somehow missed it, that we have failed to acquire success in this life. The believer knows by faith that nothing could be further from the truth. We have been elevated in Christ. We belong to Him and will one day inherit heaven and all its joy and splendor. Let the world think what they may, we know the truth and have assurance in Christ our Lord.

I. The Gladness of Exaltation (9)

II. The Gain of Submission (10a) – **But the rich, in that he is made low:** James has not shifted to a different audience here; he is still speaking to a brother in Christ. Let's see what he has to say to those who are rich in this life. Notice:

A. The Obstacle – James is now speaking to those who have acquired much in this life. They are wealthy by the world's standards. Financially they lack nothing. They have the ability to purchase anything they desire. He does not condemn their wealth, but he urges them to maintain a proper perspective regarding their wealth.

- It isn't impossible for a wealthy man to serve the Lord, but he must overcome the obstacle of his wealth. Many who possess great riches are tempted to serve their money and possessions rather than the Lord. We know the story of the rich young ruler. He desired to serve the Lord until he found out that he would have to share his wealth. We too must be careful that we don't allow anything to come between us and the Lord. **Mark 10:24-25 – ...Children, how hard is it for them that trust in riches to enter into the kingdom of God! [25] It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.**

B. The Opportunity (10a) – **But the rich, in that he is made low:** As we consider this we must keep in mind that James is implying that the rich man also rejoices **that he is made low**. This speaks of his recognition that his riches cannot extend his life or gain acceptance of God. James knew the difficulty of the rich coming to that realization, but if they did, they had much to rejoice in.

"You are to be more envied than anyone I know," said a young man to a millionaire. "Why so?" responded the millionaire. "I am not aware of any cause for which I should be envied." "What, sir!" the young man exclaimed in surprise. "Why, you are a millionaire! Think of the thousands your income brings in every month!" "Well, what of that?" replied the millionaire. "All I get out of it is my food and clothes, and I can't eat more than one man's allowance, and wear more than one suit of clothes at a time. Even you can do as much as I can, can't you?" "Ah, yes, but think of the hundreds of fine houses you own, and the rentals they bring you." "What better am I off for that?" replied the rich man. "I can only live in one house at a time; as for the money I receive for rents, why, I can't eat or wear it; I can only use it to buy other houses for other people to live in; they are the beneficiaries, not I." And then, finally, after a little more discussion, the millionaire turned to the young man and said: "I can tell you that the less you desire in this world, the happier you will be. All my wealth can't buy a single day more of life—cannot buy back my youth, cannot procure me power to keep off the hour of death; and then what will all avail, when in a few short years at most I must lie down in the grave and leave it all forever? Young man, you have no cause to envy me."

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- Many today are placing their faith and trust in things that will not last or stand before God. The rich trust in their riches; the proud trust in their works; the educated trust in their wisdom; the wicked trust in their unbelief. If one knows the truth, having accepted Christ as Savior and trusts solely in Him, they have much to rejoice in. He alone can provide salvation, and salvation through Him is the only way to gain eternal life.

I. The Gladness of Exaltation (9)

II. The Gain of Submission (10a)

III. The Guarantee of Completion (10b, 11) – As James concludes this thought, he offers a reminder regarding the end of life. Regardless of our achievements in this life, each of us will face the end of life one day. We will all complete the course that has been set before us. Consider:

A. The Brevity of Life (11) – *For the sun is no sooner risen with a burning heat, but it withereth the grass.* James speaks of a common phenomenon that all are familiar with, the rising of the sun. He knew that all had experienced the sun rising in the morning and heat bearing down before midday. All had witnessed the tender grass withering under the scorching sun. Early that morning it was healthy and vibrant, but quickly it began to wither and die.

- We all know well that life on earth is brief at best. The longer we live the quicker time passes. It doesn't seem that long ago that we were children wondering if we would ever be able to drive, and now we wonder where time has gone. Life is brief, and we must maintain a proper focus while living here on earth. We only have one opportunity to live our lives for the Lord. *Jam.4:14 – Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away.*

B. The Vanity of Life (11) – *For the sun is no sooner risen with a burning heat, but it withereth the grass, and the flower thereof falleth, and the grace of the fashion of it perisheth:* Here we find a very practical and pointed illustration. We all have witnessed the beauty of flowers in the summer. As they grow and bloom we enjoy their beauty. Pretty flowers are one of the most beautiful things on earth. However, we have also witnessed flowers that were once beautiful dry and wither away. The blooms turn brown and ugly and drop from the stem. Something that once brought joy is now cut down and cast aside.

- The principle here is that much we place value and emphasis on is temporal. Many today spend most of their time and energy on things that will not last. We could build the finest home in all of Surry County, but eventually it will need repair. We can spend all our time and money on striving to stay young and beautiful, but eventually age will take its toll and begin to show. James

knew that much emphasis was being placed on vanity. We must ensure that our lives are lived for the Lord and in light of His holiness, seeking to please Him above all else.

C. The Certainty of Life (10b, 11b) – because as the flower of the grass he shall pass away. [11b] so also shall the rich man fade away in his ways. James speaks of the inevitable for all who dwell upon this earth, regardless of what they acquire in this life. Just as the grass withers and the flowers fade and fall away, so too must all come to the end of life. The rich man's riches will not keep him from the clutches of death, nor will the beggar's poverty. The fact is we are all going to die unless the Lord comes back pretty soon.

▪ I thought of the rich man that Jesus spoke of. Luke 12:16-20 – And he spake a parable unto them, saying, The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully: [17] And he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits? [18] And he said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods. [19] And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry. [20] But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided? One life will soon be past; only what is done for Christ will last. He alone can save our souls and provide eternal life. I pray that our focus is on Jesus with a desire to serve Him faithfully with the life we have been given.

There is certainly application for those who are lost in this passage. I have to ask: What are you trusting in when this life is through? We all have an appointment with death. One day this life will be over and we will all face God. Do you know for certain you will go to heaven when you die? Have you trusted Christ as your Savior?

Christian this passage has much to say to us as well. What is our main priority in this life? Where do we devote our time and energy? Are we using what God has blessed us with in a way that pleases Him? Do we desire to serve the Lord and please Him above all else? If not, we should. Whatever the need is, I urge you to seek the Lord.

ⁱTan, P. L. (1996, c1979). *Encyclopedia of 7700 illustrations : A treasury of illustrations, anecdotes, facts and quotations for pastors, teachers and Christian workers*. Garland TX: Bible Communications.

ⁱⁱIbid

ⁱⁱⁱ *Faith, Love & Hope: An Exposition of the Epistle of James*.